

INTERACTIVE PERFORMANCE:  
THE DIGITAL AGE OF THEATRE

BY

NADYA MAHALATI KHOJA

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this MRP is to explore the nature of Peak Experiences, which Maslow refers to as the combined response of the emotions, senses, intellect and imagination that are often experienced by people who have achieved self-actualization. Using the theatre as an environment that creates meaning and fulfillment, and exploring the relationship between theatrical engagement experiences and digital media experiences, the goal of this paper is to determine how engagement practices between both media can function in harmony, in order to produce the hedonic experiences that Maslow describes. This analysis is done by comparing various immersive theatre companies and interactive design companies who are pushing the boundaries of their fields, and attempting to produce infectious and enlightening experiences in their areas of expertise.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Why do people go to the theatre? Thornton Wilder stated that the theatre is an environment, "...in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being" (1956). It is a place where people go to search for meaning, to connect with a character or with a situation on stage. The theatre is a place where no one experience is identical to another. At least, this was certainly the case a decade ago, however in a recent survey conducted by the National Endowment for the Arts<sup>1</sup>, statistics demonstrate that theatre is one of the art forms that is seeing a very steady decline. In 2002, 12.3% of the population in the United States had attended a non-musical play, but by 2012 that number had decreased to 8.3% (NEA, 2012). Needless to say, the theatre is simply not providing the same meaningful experience as it has in the past. Traditional theatre is just not as popular as IMAX feature films, nor is it as convenient as watching commercial free television on Netflix from the comfort of one's couch. The experience of the theatre seems to have reached a dull peak and no longer offers that sense of enlightenment that Thornton Wilder so enthusiastically described. Is it possible to reignite the sense of meaning that comes from attending a live theatre performance? Can the experience be crafted in a way that awakens the audience and incites mass engagement and increased popularity? Essentially, how does one re-enliven the theatre and make it "cooler" and more widely appealing?

The term "Experience" is one that is very loosely defined. When attempting to comprehend the word, one is presented with a vast range of experience types, each of which has a unique and specific definition. There are life experiences, user experiences, intellectual experiences and embodied experiences to name a few variations (Russon, 2003). In its broadest and most simply stated sense, an experience is a form of encounter. This type of encounter need not merely fall into the physical realm, but it can also be an encounter that is equally emotional as well as spiritual. Experiences, whether an

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<sup>1</sup> The NEA performs surveys of participation in all areas from the arts. In addition to surveys in theatre involvement, they also perform surveys in the areas of film, visual arts and dance.



introspective endeavour- like self-discovery through meditation, or an external projection, which is extended beyond one's internal thoughts- like the experience of being touch, kissed or slapped- all impact a person's emotions, senses, imagination and intellect. There are some instances, when each of these areas are touched upon simultaneously. That form of experience is referred to as a *hedonic experience*, a term coined by Radbourne et al in the essay *The Audience Experience: Measuring Quality in the Performing Arts* (Radbourne, 2009). This is the type of experience that will be explored throughout this paper.

This fusion of spiritual and emotional encounters is what compels human beings to continuously seek out hedonic experiences. Why might being kissed for the first time be considered a hedonic experience? Because in the matter of seconds that it takes for a kiss to happen, a person will experience a rush of lust and happiness, or of fear and disgust. Needless to say, a first kiss has considerable emotional impact. Fear, doubt, exhilaration, joy and adrenaline go into overdrive. Suddenly the individual begins to imagine every possible thing that could happen once the kiss ends. Will it be awkward? Will both individuals sharing the kiss remain together forever? Will there be more kisses? Also, the senses are awakened from the touch of another's lips on one's own, everything goes silent, but at the same time one becomes increasingly aware of their breath, the sound of their heartbeat and their partner's heartbeat. Once the kiss is over, the intellect finally kicks in, and the person begins to analyse the surge of feelings that just occurred, and sorting out what to do next. The hedonic experience that is a result of kissing someone for the first time, reminds mankind just what it is to be human. It is a reminder that although there are moments of pain and frustration throughout our lives, all of that can be plucked away in an instant with a simple kiss. That realization in turn, is a meaningful rush.

The result is a sense of complete catharsis, rejuvenation and excitement from being stimulated simultaneously from such diverse sensations. Such an experience is what Abraham Maslow describes as *Peak Experiences* "...where the creative or cultural experience is expected to fulfill a spiritual need that has very little to do with the traditional marketing plan of an arts organization," (Radbourne 14). It is a type of experience that has the potential of assisting human beings in the discovery of self-actualization, or the desire

to become everything that they are capable of becoming. In other words, hedonic or “Peak Experiences” are those encounters that enable human beings to truly feel *alive*. Without these moments, finding meaning and purpose in life is simply a far away dream. The question here, however, is not how to define an experience, but rather to discover whether a formula for producing such experiences for an audience in the theatre exists.

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The theatre is a prime example of an environment that encompasses and aims to produce hedonic experiences, “...because of it’s highly sensory, symbolic and emotional nature” (Boter 2005). The earliest form of theatre was highly ritual based, and as time has moved forward, the theatre has seen an incredible transformation. The current age of performance art is one that is highly production based, interdisciplinary and avant-garde. Audiences are requiring more constant and consistent access to content. With the ever advancing digital age, technology has increased our access to knowledge by exponential values. People are more used to conventions such as **multiplexing**, and are dividing their attention across a number of platforms simultaneously. The wow-factor that was once easy to attain on the stage is now far less achievable. Theatre creators need to discover new ways to constantly bombard their audiences with information and entertainment, but all the while maintaining consciousness of the curation of such bombardments. This should not be mistaken as a request for creating blockbuster-like productions, but rather an appeal to limit performances to the stage, as the four-walled approach to theatre is no longer an effective method of withholding attention. Audiences need to be immersed in an event, and pulled away from their former role as spectator. For audiences, “...the ability to interact physically with objects and the actors’ bodies is the core of...theatre experience” (Gordon, 2013).

So how does the new generation of theatre practitioners differ from its predecessors? How can this new generation take advantage of the current digital landscape in order to produce live entertainment that beckons audiences old and new? Many theatre

creators have begun to consider the possibility of merging the tactile and the digital to its full potential while maintaining a focus on enhancing their audience variety, and they are achieving this by exploring the integration of new mediums and practices with live performance. These theatre companies are the ones that are broadening their knowledge of the general consumption behaviours and goals of their audience members. In fact, it is these companies who appear to have nearly perfected the formula of theatre that results in mass engagement.

The goal of this paper is to assess the theatre companies that are breaking boundaries and who are creating highly enticing productions for the sake of identifying commonalities and best practices. The factor that differentiates the successful from the mediocre is their understanding of the modern day consumer. In order to produce a performance that is truly hedonic for the audience member, it is imperative to understand the patterns of reception of the audience member in question.

So how does one strive to truly understand the consumer of the digital age? Who do we turn to in order to understand the trends that drive everyday people, and millennia specifically, to engage in a particular encounter? The answer is found in those on the cutting edge of artistic innovation, those who have managed to push the boundaries of the theatre, and redefined the word *performance*. These people are not only practitioners of the art form, but they also include those who devote the vast majority of their time to interacting with, and appealing to the humble citizens of the world. The marketer of 2015 has been renamed the digital marketer due to the imperative technical abilities required for the job. Jeffrey K Rohrs explains how the various means of reaching a consumer in advertising have increased exponentially. He compares the direct and mass media tactics from “Don Draper’s Day”, ie. the 1950s, to today’s ever expanding universe of marketing tactics. In the 1950s you could count every method of reaching the masses on both hands<sup>2</sup>. Now not only do those means still exist, but there are also over 50 new ways to interact with one’s audience. The digital marketer has the responsibility to capture the attention of society through as much media as possible. They must be incredibly organized, observing,

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<sup>2</sup> Appendix 1

and strategic. They must also place considerable effort into understanding the needs of their audiences, and the story being told. Throughout this paper it will become clearer why understanding the underlying principles of digital marketing will assist theatre creators with transforming the very meaning of live performance. This paper will cross-reference a range of theatrical texts, as well as analyze a variety of digital content to attempt at presenting the relationships that exist between both forms of media, and strengthen the suggestion that the theatre can enhance by adapting to the practices of digital marketing and content creation.

Understanding the channels that digital marketers use to reach their audience is only the first step of the process. The next step is understanding the user groups that use each channel. For instance although YouTube, Facebook and Instagram are all platforms within the digital sphere, each one possesses highly unique attributes that render them appealing to different user groups. Many people use every one of those platforms, however some are more drawn to one over the other. As an example, in a survey conducted by the Global Web Index, YouTube was deemed the 'coolest' platform to teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19, with Instagram following as a close second. However among adults, Facebook was deemed the 'coolest' platform on the internet, whereas Instagram ranked remarkably low in terms of 'coolness' (GWI, 2015). The point is that different demographics will respond uniquely to certain factors and tactics. The goal is thus to understand which group a platform or production is being geared towards in order to obtain the best reception. A highly immersive and physically demanding production might be best received by individuals between the ages of 18 to 34, however if forced into a similar production, participants that exceed the age of 65 might generally feel less inclined to attend. This is simply a generalised statement. What ought to be noted is that each individual audience member craves a unique element of the theatre (or digital platform) to experience.

In order to render a live performance as accessible as possible, it is necessary to not only pave as many paths as possible in order to perceive it, but it is also crucial to ensure that each of those paths is paved with specificity and quality in mind.

## CHAPTER 1: The Digital Audience Engagement Ecosystem

It is not easy to capture someone's attention today. There is so much noise and stimulation, that being able to engage a person requires unbelievable skill and dedication (Rohrs, 2013). In the realm of marketing for instance, there exist a supreme number of channels with which to reach consumers. Never has it been so easy to reach an audience than it is in 2015, but it is also far more difficult to make even the slightest impact due to the sheer quantity of channels that exist. In other words, there is more opportunity, but because of that, it is a lot more overwhelming to remain organized when trying to grasp each opportunity. In his book, *Audience: Marketing in the age of subscribers, fans and followers*, Jeffrey K. Rohrs (2013) assesses the various audience types and the multiple barriers that exist in acquiring them. In one section of the book, Rohrs breaks down some of the most frequently used audience channels. Some of these include: The Website, The Email, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Mobile Apps, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google+, Pinterest, SMS, Instagram and Podcasts. Each digital environment also has its own set of rules of engagement. But what is it that each of these systems offers to its users and why do people spend so much time on each of these platforms? Perhaps it is the endless stream of content available and access to continuous knowledge, or perhaps it is the sense of global communication. Maybe it is the possibility of discovering new people and the sense of being discovered, or the fact that they can each be customized to the user's preference. The wider fact is that what many of these platforms have in common is that they have an incredible ability to hold onto our attention.

Take for example the average Instagram user who spends approximately 20 minutes a day on the app (L2Inc, 2015), and less than 3 seconds per photograph. That means that the average Instagram user looks at close to 400 photographs a day.

The average Facebook user spends almost an hour on the app a day. In fact, social media users between the ages of 18 and 29 spend nearly 10% of their day on various

platforms<sup>3</sup> (GWI, 2015). That's longer than most theatrical productions out there, minus a few exceptions like The Godot Cycle during the Toronto Fringe Festival in 2011<sup>4</sup> by Yes *Let's Go Productions*, and yet the majority of audiences can barely sit through an entire play without inherently wishing for it to end. What can be learned about the contemporary audience member, based on their digital behaviour? Is it perhaps that these social media platforms are supremely offering users the ultimate hedonic experience as defined by Jennifer Radbourne and her colleagues? Does the combined use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat offer what Maslow expresses as a Peak Experience? Although Maslow expressed that a Peak Experience has "...little to do with the traditional marketing plan of an arts organisation," (Radbourne 6) it is possible he also did not foresee the sheer potential of the digital consumerist age. In fact, it seems as though the way the average citizen of 2015 really does find "...a combined response from the emotions, senses, imagination and intellect," is from a combination of digital platforms.

According to Radbourne et al. (2009) in *The Audience Experience: Measuring quality in the performing arts*, a theatrical production must be broken down into four factors, which are: knowledge, risk, authenticity and collective engagement. Once again, considering that their definition of a hedonic experience is a combination of the emotions, imagination, senses and intellect, a relationship between the theatrical experience, and the hedonic, or peak experience becomes more tangible. Understanding that the goal of both spheres of experience (theatrical and hedonic), is ultimately to result in self-actualization, could it not be discerned that the factors that make up each experiential sphere are almost mirror images of one another? The graph below depicts what I propose to be the possible relationship between the hedonic or peak experience sphere, and the theatrical sphere.

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<sup>3</sup> According to the Global Web Index, in 2014, people spent an average of 1.72 hours a day on social media sites alone.

<sup>4</sup> The Godot Cycle in the Toronto Fringe Festival of 2011 ran for 54 hours straight.

<i><b>Hedonic/Peak Experience</b></i>	<i><b>Audience Experience in Theatre</b></i>
Intellect	Knowledge
Senses	Authenticity
Imagination	Collective Engagement
Emotions	Risk

*Table 1*

*Knowledge* is the factor that comprises content research, production and distribution, all of which are processes that require a considerable degree of intellectual stimulation. This subcategory of the audience experience in the theatre encompasses all of the preliminary research that is associated with a play to be performed. This would include the historical context of the story, in order to determine set and costume design, acting style, sound and blocking. Knowledge, as a factor or category, also corresponds to the production and distribution of content, such as tickets, posters, flyers, banners, email newsletters, notices and updates. Knowledge also comprises the elements of a production that cause the audience to think- that is, what knowledge do the actors, directors and writers choose to present to the audience, and what do they choose to withhold?

The second factor is *Risk*. Risk consists of: the degree of consent given by the audience member, the level of uncertainty, and the potential for loss or gain. The result of each one of these categories determines whether the type of risk is negative or positive, and the process for transforming any negative risk into positive risk. The sensation that results from high levels of negative or positive risk are what dictate the type of experience an audience member will have.

Thirdly, *Authenticity* has to do with the believability, consistency and sincerity of a production. This corresponds to the extent that a performance strives to relay a certain

message through the technical, musical and other sensory stimulating aspects that are connected to the production.

Finally, *Collective Engagement* refers to how strongly the audience feels they are connected to, and engaging with the performer or the actor. In theatre, there is often less of an engagement because of the existence of the fourth wall, which suggests that the audience member does not exist. Radbourne et al. expresses that , “...the audience experience could be improved if the performers were to somehow acknowledge the audience’s involvement in and contribution to a production,” (20). Through the acceptance of various rules of conduct, the audience and performers are able to push the boundaries of their imaginations in order to accept given circumstances and practice the suspension of disbelief.

Anne Bogart, a professor in the Graduate Theatre Department at Columbia University, and a practicing Devised Theatre director expresses her own compositional elements for audience engagement and meaningful theatrical experiences in her book *And Then, You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World* (Bogart 2007). These are: context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, content and time. By focusing closely on strengthening such principles, theatre creators can assure a high degree of collective engagement in their productions.

So where does the social media, or the digital experience fit in? Much like the apparent relationship between hedonic experiences and theatrical experiences, digital experiences are simply another relative sphere. To put this into perspective, I suggest the table above with the factors of the digital sphere added.



<i><b>Hedonic/Peak Experience</b></i>	<i><b>Audience Experience in Theatre</b></i>	<i><b>Digital Experience</b></i>
Intellect	Knowledge	Access to Knowledge
Senses	Authenticity	Possibility of Discovery
Imagination	Collective Engagement	Participatory Culture
Emotions	Risk	Customization

Table 2

*Access to knowledge* refers to the fact that the digital atmosphere functions as a means to provide human beings with information on any subject they can think of, within a matter of seconds. It also refers to the potential for global communication, and worldwide interactivity.

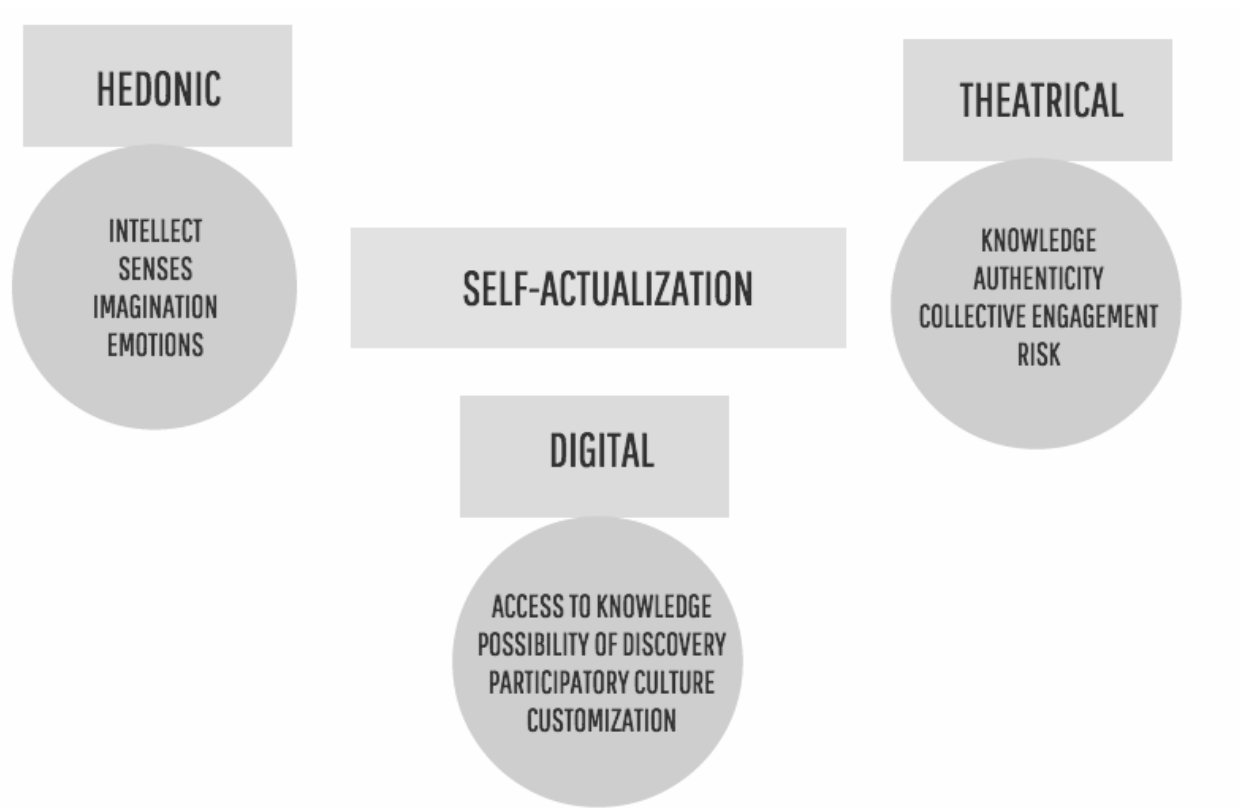
The *Possibility of Discovery* refers to the potential for attention within a certain platform. This can include the possibility of being discovered by others, made possible by the use of hashtags on Twitter and Instagram, or the possibility of discovering new environments and individuals, also through hashtag use or blog content. Whereas *access to knowledge* is the system that presents the information, the *possibility of discovery* is an extension that directs users towards a specific element or piece of content to be discovered.

*Participatory Culture* is the sense of community that is provided with certain platforms. YouTube and Reddit are examples of these digital communities of participation, in which individuals are able to find niche groups within which they are able to interact with other like-minded people. The idea of *participatory culture* is that it provides a give and take relationship with the platform, in which participants are able to contribute to the general intellect.

Lastly, *Customization* is the option of personalization that comes with many digital platforms. People are able to design not only the interface to their own tastes, but the content which is generated, is selected by the individual based on their own desires. *Customization* provides people with a sense of curiosity, flattery and advocacy.

There are certainly some commonalities between tiers, yet the factors remain unique within each category. Upon assessing the various social media channels and the elements that make them so engaging, it seems as though what warrants users to spend so much of their day on such networks are the following conditions: the freedom of speech and right to participate, the nature of customization and personalization, global communication and access to knowledge, and finally, the possibility of discovery and the potential for attention.

In combining the principles that comprise hedonic, theatrical and digital experiences, I propose what will be referred to as the **Digital Audience Engagement Ecosystem**. This ecosystem is somewhat of a dynamic and cross-influential pyramid. Although the ultimate goal is self-actualization, the factors are multilateral and exist within and around each other. The DAEE is a presentation of three different modes of experience as they individually correlate to self-actualization within their contained systems.



*Figure 1*

For the purposes of this paper, however, the focus will be put on the latter- that is on the digital experience structure, and how certain theatre companies are adhering to the principles that comprise it. A selection of contemporary theatre companies and interactive design firms have been selected based on their implementation of the Digital Audience Engagement Ecosystem, as case studies by which to examine the concepts that make up the digital sphere. These companies include: Outside the March Theatre, Punchdrunk Theatre and SE3D Interactive. Each company will be analyzed through the lens of one specific category in order to allow for a more in-depth understanding of the method in question and how it is succeeding in influencing live performances, and where there is room for more influence. The fourth analysis will be a case study of a personalized scavenger hunt created for a unique individual. Through each assessment, the goal is to discover what the similarities in engagement practices are between digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook, and immersive and interactive performances.

## CHAPTER 2: Access to Knowledge- *SE3D Interactive*

The first concept of the Digital Experience Sphere is the idea of *access to knowledge*. *Access to knowledge* refers to the fact that the digital atmosphere functions as a means to provide human beings with information on any subject they can think of within a matter of seconds. It also refers to the potential for global communication, and worldwide interactivity. Facebook is an example of a platform that not only provides the user with indispensable information, but it is founded upon the idea of social interaction. The result is that users become so unavoidably engaged with the platform, that with every click they are taken deeper and deeper into a well of content and communication. According to a study on Online Social Networking and Addiction<sup>5</sup>, Facebook interaction has increased by 566% from 2007 to 2008 (Daria J. Kuss and Mark D. Griffiths, 2011). In the quarter annual report for 2015 by the Global Web Index, surveys have indicated that in 2014, the average time spent on social media has increased to almost 1.7 hours a day<sup>6</sup>.

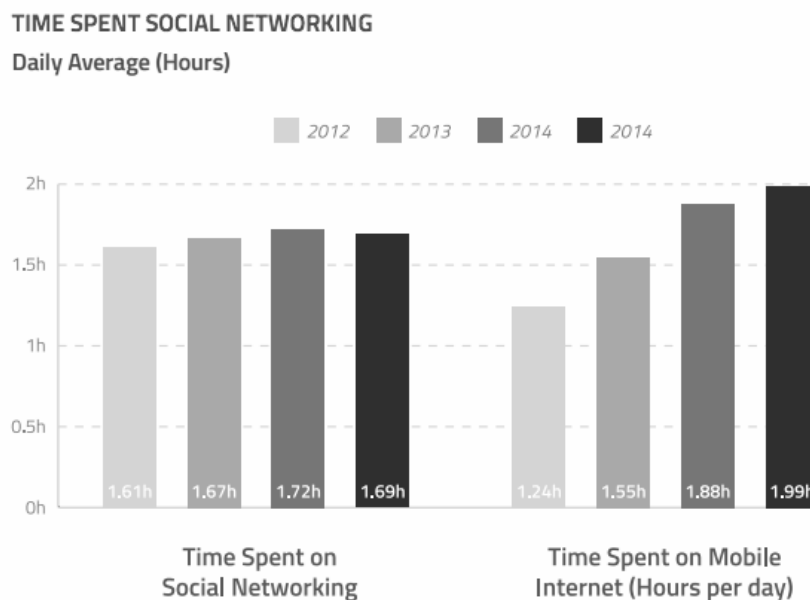


Figure 2

<sup>5</sup> This study performed by the US National Library of Medicine, was an analyses of the impact of Social Media Networks on psychological behavior. The study was not limited to Facebook, but encompassed all Social Media Networks.

<sup>6</sup> GWI Social is where GlobalWebIndex presents the very latest figures for social networking behaviors and engagement levels across 33 global markets.

The fact is that Facebook is highly addictive, and extreme users of the network,

“...showed greater activation of their amygdala and striatum, brain regions that are involved in impulsive behavior. But unlike in the brains of cocaine addicts, for instance, the Facebook users showed no quieting of the brain systems responsible for inhibition in the prefrontal cortex,” (Ghose, 2015).

An explanation of this inability to turn away, is that many individuals experience a strong fear of missing out. A commonly used term for this sensation is “FOMO”, and is often hash-tagged and referenced to on a variety of social media platforms. Essentially, the sheer accessibility of Facebook makes it infectious. This term is used by one of the founders of *SE3D Interactive*, an agency that focuses on creating interactive digital experiences, to express what they hope their projects achieve from incoming audience members.

Due to the nature of FOMO, when the sudden surge of knowledge and constant connection suddenly shuts off, people can feel substantial increases in anxiety and depression. The experience becomes a necessity.

*SE3D Interactive* compares this phenomenon to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and specifically to his definition of Peak Experiences. In one of their projects, *Ace Academy*, the members of SE3D created an interactive experience in conjunction with the Canadian Aviation and Space Museum in Ottawa. Aaron Maclean and Daniel Stopnicki, the founders of *SE3D*, both come from gaming backgrounds, and so their take on interactive experiences is highly based on a sense of play in order to inspire and promote learning and the desire to acquire knowledge.

The project, *Ace Academy* (SE3D Interactive, 2014), immersed audiences into the world of WW1 flight school. Audiences were guided around the space by a digital lieutenant presented on their mobile phones. As participants were guided through the museum and brought to each aircraft, they would gain training on a portion of the aircraft

and uncover artifacts using their phones to assist them. By the end of the simulation, participants put their acquired knowledge to the test in a solo flying test where they practiced aerial reconnaissance and gunnery. The experience made use of motion tracking technology, allowing audience members to use their bodies and their gestures to control the simulation.

When asked how such forms of experience provide audiences with a needed access to knowledge, Aaron explained that the process of “gamifying” the interaction produces an experience that is far more memorable (Maclean, 2015). He expresses that interactions of this nature provide a unique learning experience that engages all learning types. The combination of visual, tactile and gesture based media of interaction, promote stronger retention of the points presented, and thus a more fruitful acquirement of knowledge. The increased learning potential results in higher endorphin production, and heightened learning abilities (Olson et al., 2006). Experiences that provide audiences with such a rich and varied access to knowledge, provoke a strong stimulation of the intellect. This form of discursive response<sup>7</sup> compels audience members to be more analytical of the information being presented, and digest it through multiple means. The combined means of learning results in a more long-term recollection of the given subject.

As a result, the ability of a production to provide the audience with an access to knowledge through interactive means, grants them with a stronger sense of passion towards the given subject. The increase in endorphin production from fully engaging with the information presented, dilutes the feelings that are brought on from the fear of missing out, such as anxiety and depression. Furthermore, the high endorphin production that comes from full immersion in the production, produces a sense of addiction, causing the interaction to become an experience of which to advocate for.

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<sup>7</sup> Discursive response according to Carolyn Michelle, is a distanced and analytical means of responding to a medium.

### CHAPTER 3: Participatory Culture- *Punchdrunk & Emersive Theatre Company*

As explained in Chapter 1, the term *Collective Engagement* refers to how strongly the audience feels that they are connecting with the performer. According to Anne Bogart in her collection of essays entitled, *And Then You Act: Making Art in an Unpredictable World*, a director must focus on a number of compositional elements in order to withhold the audience's attention. These elements when combined, create a formula for theatre that pushes audiences and performers to connect. Once again, the factors are: context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, content and time.

So how does this correlate to the digital structure, specifically in relation to participatory culture? Take YouTube for example. YouTube is not only a video sharing website, but rather the online platform is a virtual space that strongly promotes participation between creators and viewers. The way that users are able to promote themselves and those around them is through constant interaction. It's through the existence of channels and the ability to subscribe to those channels, as well as being able to converse and engage with other "YouTube" celebrities, that individuals are given the opportunity to participate. A person can participate by having a voice in the selection of content that is distributed. One of the most commonly viewed types of videos on YouTube are vlogs. According to Burgess and Green, authors of the book *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (2009), user-generated content and vlogs comprise approximately 40% of the videos on YouTube. Why? Because of the connection that is established between performer and voyeur. And the result is that those individuals who were once viewers, then become contributors to the system as well, thus producing more user-generated content, and so increasing the level of participation and subscription that occurs on YouTube.

When looking to acquire large amounts of subscribers, digital marketers pay very close attention to the factors that make up collective engagement. A very common struggle among theatre creators is the inability to produce content that audiences wish to subscribe to. The main reason being that there is too much friction dissuading individuals from

engaging. In the digital sphere, friction can be so simple as having to click too many times to arrive at the final destination. Margaret E. Roberts uses the term *information friction* to describe the act of “...making access to information less convenient” (Roberts 1). In theatre, the friction as it relates to collective engagement is often due to the fact that there is too much negative risk, whether emotional, physical or monetary. In order to dispel **participation friction**, theatre creators need to ensure that they are inviting their audiences to engage with open arms. In other words, making the ability to participate more convenient.

The practice of Improv grants performers with the ability to participate with agency. The rule “**yes, and**” is one of the basic rules of improvisational comedy. It is a protocol that allows for open-ended possibility. No matter what one actor presents to another, instead of negating it, belittling it, or disagreeing with it, the job of the actor receiving the offer is to say, “Yes, and...”. In doing this, the actor accepts the scenario as it is presented, regardless of where they had initially intended for the scene to go, and then to add to it. Simply stated, it is an invitation to participate with, and further the narrative of the game. When a production extends such an invitation to its audience members, it allows for increased participation, and thus a stronger following of subscribers.

Punchdrunk and Emursive Theatre have been running their production of *Sleep No More* since 2011. In theatre years, this is an extremely long run-time for one show, so naturally the creators are doing something very right. The show is an interactive and immersive production that is currently running in New York City. *Sleep No More* is loosely based off of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, a widely known and easily available play. Since it is such a commonly studied production in high schools, it is very rare that an individual will not know the storyline of the Scottish Play. The show, takes place in a 1930’s era hotel, an environmental context that promotes a high degree of audience participation due to its interactive nature. The performance is very dance focused and there is very little vocal communication during the show. Audience members are given a mask and allowed to wander around the 5-storey hotel that has been transformed into an incredible museum-like set. Participants in the show are encouraged to walk around at their own free will, and



told to follow their curiosity. The focus on developing the participatory nature of Punchdrunk's production is one of the key factors that allows the show to be so successful.

Using Anne Bogart's theatrical structure to evaluate *Sleep No More* and the correlation to digital marketing practices, it becomes evident how important it is to integrate context, articulation, intention, attention, magnetism, attitude, content and time in order to ensure participation on all planes:

1. Context

With the term context, Bogart primarily suggests that the performance in question should comment, to some extent, on current and relevant events. It can also refer to what the story means for the audience in relation to familiar themes. Take for instance the YouTube vlog sensation that was LonelyGirl15 (Burgess, 2009). The vlog was very popular among adolescents from the year 2006 to 2008. Why? Because the context was one that teenagers at the time could strongly relate to. The vlog was told by Bree, a 16-year old angst-filled girl who would share her thoughts and opinions with her massive online following. Audiences could relate to what she was going through and appreciated her openness. Despite its apparent authenticity, the vlog was in fact a hoax and turned out to be a scripted web-series by a group of video producers. Yet their intrinsic focus on context made the vlog very popular among the youth of the time, and the choice of platform provided them with an opportunity to express their own comments directly to LonelyGirl15, particularly because she "...introduced new possibilities for experimenting with and expanding the uses of the vlog form within YouTube," (Burgess and Green, 29). Much like how the platform of YouTube dictates the degree of participation that is warranted, the situational context of *Sleep No More* highly informs how the audience interacts with the actors, with each other and with the space.

Despite the fact that *Sleep No More* is set in the 1930s, the integration of digital technology is quite advanced for a live theatre production. The ticket purchasing process is

predominantly executed online, allowing the transaction to flow with ease. Audiences of 2015 prefer a system that is convenient and effective. Although an online ticketing system may not have been set in place during the 1930s, the context of the show is mirrored in the design style of the website, the checkout process and even the follow-up newsletter. A day before the show takes place, participants receive an email that outlines the rules of engagement for the upcoming evening. Unlike many shows where the only rule is “turn off your cell-phone and don’t leave during the show” which can sometimes leave the audience frustrated with their bladders full, the rules for Punchdrunk’s production although detailed and lengthy, functioned as a means to further increase the level of anticipation for the show. In providing guests with this knowledge, they become informed that the experience they are about to enter is unlike most conventional theatre performances. There is preparation required, and when preparation is required, action and the desire to participate increases. The notice informs the audience that the experience is being designed to ensure complete immersion, without any other distractions taking hold of the audience member’s mind.



Figure 3

The most important factor to note about the above guidelines for *Sleep No More*, is the freedom that audience members are given in regards to check-in and check-out times, and the role that is attributed to them. They are not simply audience members, but rather *guests* of the hotel. Finally, the bar and restaurant attached to the hotel seamlessly follows the overall context of the production. Audiences are able to fully grasp the role of “Esteemed Guest” and are encouraged to act in such a way. As such, they feel more compelled to play in the environment, rather than stand on the sidelines and watch the

narrative progress. The production allows for audiences to take a literal step into the story and live within it, giving the illusion that they are entering a completely new world. This is required in order to evoke the highest levels of curiosity from audience members. If they are not curious, they will not be compelled to explore every crevice of the hotel, and as a result, the experience will not achieve the heights it is set out to achieve.

## 2. Articulation

Articulation refers to what is being said or implied in terms of metaphor in the play, but also in the choice of words used (Bogart, 2007). In the case of *Sleep No More*, the use of text is minimal, as the bulk of the performance is dance based. In this case, articulation would refer to the articulation of movement. Was the choreography saying something specific, or were the dancers just flailing around wildly? This layered approach to the creation of meaning allows for a wider range of interpretation. Every audience member is able to understand the communication that occurs between performers through the universal language of dance. The choice of using choreography as the primary means of interaction makes the show substantially more accessible to people of various background. Thus the articulation of meaning has a much farther reach than if every interaction was done solely with text.

Hannah Hart is another YouTube vlogger (MyHarto, 2009) who has a particular gift for articulation. Her ability to communicate intimately with her viewers has contributed to her large online following. Unlike some vloggers on the platform, Hannah Hart takes special consideration in the type of wording she uses when speaking directly to her audience. She is primarily known for her web series *My Drunk Kitchen*, however it is her side channel where she expresses her difficulties in coming out to her family as homosexual, that truly accentuates her gift in articulation. Because of the way that she manages to express herself with such grace, she presents herself as a warm and open individual, inviting viewers to send in their own opinions and comments, which she gratefully receives and acknowledges. It is through strong attention to articulation that artists are able to relay to their audiences that they are open to participation.

In the case of theatre, where people have been conditioned to remain silent and watch from outside the four-wall boundary, it is difficult to invite the audience to ask questions, interact and express their curiosity. A specific moment in *Sleep No More* where the freedom to participate is strongly expressed, was when the tour guide who is first introduced states, “It is those who are most curious that will reap the greatest rewards.” Without such a statement, the conditioning to “not touch” may have overridden the desire to interact with the given surroundings.

Since the production is so highly movement based with limited speech, it is very important that certain messages and invitations be well articulated through movement. In one of the scenes that takes place in the great hall of the hotel, one of the performers walks towards an audience member. His hand is held out towards her, yet he remains a safe distance away from her. As his head slowly inclines to the side, it becomes clear that with his body he is indicating to the girl that he is about to caress her face. This is a perfect example of a movement-based articulation of warning. The girl is given just enough time to choose whether or not to accept the gesture that is being articulated, or to move away. When the touch finally occurs, there is a moment of silence as the guests take in the breach between performer and audience member. In live performance, particularly theatre, breaking the walls and physically engaging with an audience member is a very risky thing to do. It is crucial for consent to be given by the participant, and for there to be mutual understanding and acceptance between actor and spectator.

### 3. Intention

Intention poses the question of *reason*. What is the reason behind the creation? How is this reflected in the performance style as well as in the design choices that are made? How is the director intending for the audience to react?

During the Dark Knight viral marketing campaign (Billington, 2008)<sup>8</sup>, the intention of the experience was certainly to create hype, but more importantly to create advocates for the movie release. In order to create such advocates, the campaign had to give audiences and consumers a first hand taste of what it would have been like to live in Gotham City during the war between The Joker and Harvey Dent. By remaining focused on the overall intention of the campaign, the marketers for the Dark Knight managed to invest extreme detail into the overall design, style and flow of the experience. The result was heightened anticipation for the movie and an even higher level of user-generated content, thus contributing more buzz to the eventual movie release.

Needless to say, intention- whether it is for a marketing campaign or for a theatrical production, is very crucial for producing a greater desire of participation. Directors must focus on the creative intention, but also the value intention of a production. If the intention of the directors for *Sleep No More* was to draw the audience into a 1930's world of blood, lust, revenge and slight inebriation, they were entirely successful. If their intention for increasing the value of their production was to keep audiences coming back, they were also entirely successful. The reason being that in creating an environment that produces an entirely unique experience for every individual that participates, and by forcing each person to partake in the show alone, away from their companions, audience members are not only placed into a situation where they must make their own decisions, but they are also held entirely responsible for the type of show they see. Upon finding one's friends after the show, it is very likely that each person will have participated in the production in an entirely different way.

#### 4. Attention

Anne Bogart states that, "Attention is a powerful tool. It can be used and misused, consciously or unconsciously. The quality and depth of one's attention is ultimately what

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<sup>8</sup> This was a marketing campaign that occurred just before the release of the Dark Knight movie. The campaign sent fans of the franchise on an epic worldwide scavenger hunt that demanded extreme levels of participation and focus.

counts most in every situation. Attention is, after all, one of the few aspects of life that one can control," (52).

The social app Snapchat is the predominant social media platform used by approximately 11% of people under the age of 18 (Lenhart, 2015). The main appeal of Snapchat is that one can capture and share a fleeting moment with their contacts. With a limited view time, and with only one chance at seeing the image or video that was sent, Snapchat demands a very high level of attention to detail, while at the same time testing an individual's level of attention based on the choice in content selection that is shared. If a photograph or a video is not interesting enough, it gets skipped and forgotten for eternity. What's important to observe with the function of Snapchat, is that capturing the attention of millennials requires a lot of effort, and so creating theatre in 2015 and the years to come must cater to a generation that requires attention grabbing content. If the content is not up to standard, the memory of it will not last, but if the content sticks, its memory will loop continuously, just like a Vine video.

The focus that is put into *Sleep No More* highly begs attention. Every element of the show has a specific meaning and place in the overall story. The audience is immediately invited to "be as curious as possible" and take heed of every little detail- from the markings on walls, to the words scribbled in notebooks on random shelves. Important and detail oriented content is scattered throughout the hotel. The creators of the show ensured that at every moment of the show, there is something to captivate and engage participants. After all, attention is the difference between inviting the audience into another world, and hoping to sell them on the idea of another world. The underlying story of Macbeth was able to shine throughout the entire hotel because of the smaller details. An audience member would still be able to understand the world of *Sleep No More* without even interacting with a single performer.

## 5. Magnetism

Anne Bogart suggests that a theatre show must successfully accomplish three things: 1) It must entertain the drunk, 2) it must answer the question *How to live?* 3) And it must answer the question *How does the universe work?*

Looking once again at YouTube, it is without a doubt that the platform fulfills Bogart's requirements for magnetism. The sheer amount of user-generated content has made YouTube the second most widely used search engine after Google<sup>9</sup>. Some of the most popular videos on the site only achieve such traction because of their magnetism. These videos consistently entertain the drunk, like *Scarlett Takes a Tumble* (Freshvids123, 2008)<sup>10</sup>, answer the question how to live, like *Hannah Hart: Coming Out* (Yourharto, 2011)<sup>11</sup>, and how does the universe work like *Double Rainbow* (Yosemitebear62, 2006)<sup>12</sup>.

Upon entering the Mckittrick Hotel, participants are immediately greeted with an absinthe shot. A jazz band is playing, and characters stroll around the environment in whimsical 1930s attire. There is constant sensory stimulation, throughout the entire production, and for the most part, many of the participants are in fact drunk. The prohibition style cocktails, the retro microphones used by the band, and the art deco set invite audiences to immerse themselves in the world that is *Sleep No More*. Carolyn Michelle describes this complete immersion of the senses as a transparent mode of reception, in which the viewer will interpret the experience as a, "...mirror of reality," (Michelle 194). The fictional experience is so vivid and lifelike, that participants can forget entirely that the events unfolding are not in fact a reality.

Michelle also refers to referential modes of response as a situation when the spectator or reader is situated outside of the events, and treating the events as occurrences in "...the

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<sup>9</sup> According to statistics released by YouTube.

<sup>10</sup> The YouTube clip can currently be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=clwTYL1fwJk>

<sup>11</sup> Her series can be viewed at this URL: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3k0fC-iZAzfC4K-aCT7QoA>

<sup>12</sup> This viral video can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQSNhk5ICTI>



wider social/political/economic/cultural/national/international context of production or reception,” (Michelle 194). Much like Bogart suggests that magnetism is a response of *how to live*, a referential reading causes the audience member to view an experience from a slightly distanced perspective in which they are able to question and find answers to all aspects of life. *Sleep No More* raises questions of love, lust, jealousy and revenge, parallel to Bogart’s opinion of what a play must entail- “...a collective confession of a nagging issue related through the theme or story of a play, revealing hubris, pride, folly, or deep-seated fear or shame,” (73). Audiences experience these sensations second-hand through the movements and relationships of the performers, and are thus presented with an image of life’s greatest struggles and successes.

Finally, the deeper question of *how does the universe work* insinuates the need for a greater and more in depth thought process. Carolyn Michelle’s notion of a discursive mode of reception can be described as an analytical and positional mode of response. The question, *how does the universe work* is not a light subject matter, but rather one that requires deep intellectual, emotional and spiritual consideration. Michelle describes this means of interpretation as a tool, “...with which to explore such questions as the media’s role in the construction of ‘cultural citizenship’,” (Michelle 217). This idea of “constructing cultural citizenship” is very relevant to what Anne Bogart talks about in relation to creating art in an unpredictable world. All media and all art is a commentary on social and political norms. Based off of what is viewed in the media; these re-constructed narratives of current events, contribute to how human beings shape their lives. *Sleep No More* begs this question by placing the audience members into situations that sometimes require deep consideration of the greater impact of their personal conduct. Immediately, the world of *Sleep No More* prescribes a very specific set of rules upon all participants. The universe of the show forbids talking, enforces the lack of identity by forcing guests to wear a mask, and dictates where and when your journey begins and ends. The show forces audience members to question the confines and restrictions that society places on its citizens, by presenting the subject in a very realistic and literal way.

The element of magnetism ranges in its ability to cater to the tastes of the simplest and most complex ideas. It is through this element that an experience can become accessible to a very wide range of audiences, and by committing to perfecting the magnetic function of a show, the production in question will not only provide entertainment value for a variety of audience types, but it will also provide meaning.

## 6. Attitude

Attitude encompasses both the attitude of the audience member entering a given experience, as well as the attitude the experience hopes to provoke and inspire. Consider attitude as the business model for an experience. YouTube, Airbnb and Uber all have a very specific business model and attitude in the way they function. It is their openness and flexibility that make these platforms not only accessible, but equally engaging. Users are able to engage with a sense of personal freedom, and generate their own video content, pick their ideal accommodations, and find the best and most convenient ride to a destination of their choice. The resulting attitude for the user entering the experience of the platform is one of full agency - for the potential of option and customization, and the exciting sensation is often one of satisfaction, and an attitude of acceptance and openness.

The directors of *Sleep No More* express that audiences must enter the event with a sense of curiosity. This provokes participants to remain open-minded, and question the unfolding events and their surroundings. Although some restrictions are placed on the guests, there is a lot of room for customization of the experience. It is with such an accepting outlook that the audience will gain the most from the show. One of the most widely known truths about the theatre, and about performance is that there is always room for play, and that those who are more willing to play will often reap greater rewards. The social and easy-going atmosphere of *Sleep No More* inspires guests to explore, and lower their inhibitions, thus leaving them with a sense of satisfaction for having acted on all of their impulses, or a sense of regret if they held back.

## 7. Content

Loosely speaking, content refers to the matter of the show- or the metaphor. Bogart states that it is,

“The meaning or message contained within a creative work as distinct from its container, exterior appearance, façade, form, or style...it is not the form that contains, rather it is the matter contained by form,” (107).

Digital content marketing can be used as an example for understanding exactly what Bogart means by content. When surfing the web, content consumers are not searching for the blog or the container of content. Rather they are searching for a specific topic, or article. Google will then direct the individual to the container that holds the matter they are seeking. In theatre, differentiating matter and form is not as easy. Many producers and directors place a lot of attention on form, which Bogart expresses is the exterior appearance of the show- that is the costume and set design, the lighting, the sound, or simply stated, the production elements of a performance. The matter, or the content, however, are the details in the design. If *Sleep No More* is the tale of Macbeth set in the 1930s, and we know that at one point in the production, Macbeth must sit at his desk, it is not enough to pass by the nearest Ikea and pick up a desk. It is imperative to the overall meaning of the show, that the desk fits the style of the era, and that it depicts a certain element of Macbeth’s personality. It needs to be believable that the desk *belongs* in that show.

*Sleep No More’s* craft in content selection is what makes the production so advanced and so strongly praised. From the hidden notes written in calligraphy that are hidden in teacups along a mantelpiece, to the candy jars filled with treats in the apothecary- every piece of matter selected invited interaction. Messages and parts of the story are literally found in every crevice of the hotel, forcing the audience members to stay engaged and immerse themselves in the environment and in the narrative.

## 8. Time

Time refers to the duration of a single moment, but also the timing of a specific action. Everything is dictated by time in the theatre. The nature of *Sleep No More* demands excruciating attention to timing, since there are multiple scenes occurring simultaneously throughout the entire hotel. However, time for the audience and time for the performers functions very differently. There are no clocks within the hotel, and so audience members have barely any sense of time passing as they move around the space. Timing is also an element that is heavily manipulated in this production. During one particular scene in the great hall, a dinner party is taking place. All members are moving at a similar pace until the actor playing Macbeth enters the room. Everything slows down drastically. The most familiar gestures suddenly become absurdly sluggish, awkward and measured. The elongated duration of every movement forces the audience into hyper awareness of even the slightest gesture that seems too quick. Suddenly, everyone's attention is honed in, and no one can pull their gaze away from what is occurring at the dinner table. Time is an element that holds immense control over the representation of a relationship or event within a performance. The strategic use of time can manipulate the way a message is interpreted. It dictates how the audience member will participate within an experience.

Returning to the example of Snapchat, where every moment is fleeting- a sense of urgency is placed on how people decide to view a given image. When people become aware of increased or limited time, the instinct to participate indefinitely is awakened.

In slowing down the pace of movement in that particular instant of *Sleep No More*, the audience is alerted that something very important is happening, and that increased awareness is required. By manipulating pace, and jumping between tempos, the audience is compelled to actively engage in the unfolding events due to their unpredictability.

A recent study<sup>13</sup> revealed that in 2015, the average human being's attention span is approximately 8.25 seconds. That's less than the attention span of a goldfish, and a significant drop from 12 seconds in 2009. That being said, it is crucial that a theatre production of 3 hours is able to maintain the focus of its audience members. This does not necessarily mean that a shift in movement needs to occur every 8 seconds, but rather by playing with the notion of time and pace, one is able to keep the audience on their toes.

By considering Anne Bogart's compositional factors as they pertain to participatory culture, a theatre creator is able to ensure consistent engagement from their directorial considerations, as well as maintaining an alert and inquisitive audience. Not only does harnessing a participatory culture promote increased interactivity among audience members, but the result tends to be an experience that highly stimulates the imagination. The immersion into the given narrative incites a transparent response for audience members, propelling them away from reality, and forcing their minds to accept the magic of the theatre.

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<sup>13</sup>Found in The Statistic Brain Research Institute's statistics on attention span.

## CHAPTER 4: Possibility of Discovery/Potential for Attention - *Outside the March Brantwood*

Instagram has become one of the most widely used social networks in a very short amount of time. In fact, between the years 2011 and 2014 when Instagram truly began to increase in popularity, youth between the ages of 13 and 17 started to adopt the platform as the primary means of social representation. During that time, over 3 million teenagers abandoned Facebook as their primary tool for social networking (L2Inc, 2011). It's no surprise really, since the platform allows users to follow friends, celebrities and businesses, with the potential for 100% organic reach. Hashtags make it easy to discover other users to follow who share similar interests. They also make it far easier to be discovered by other professionals and trendsetters.

Ever since Justin Bieber's discovery on YouTube, the urgency to create a strong following on visual content apps and websites is growing exponentially. Every single person finally has the opportunity to be discovered by the global figures who matter. A range of small time celebrities are emerging everyday. In fact, many people are even exploiting their pets in order to have a second hand taste of fame<sup>14</sup>.

Conventional theatre offers the same desire. Often audience members crave the opportunity to make eye-contact with a performer, or to be roasted by a stand-up comedian, simply for the opportunity to be isolated from the crowd. People have an incredible desire to be seen as unique and worthy of attention. The resulting feeling is one of catharsis and importance. It also allows for considerable bragging rights, which in turn extend the narrative beyond the contained theatre experience.

Outside the March theatre company's production of *Brantwood* is yet another example of an immersive production that encompasses the factors of a hedonic theatrical experience. Much like *Sleep No More*, this performance was a site-specific, interactive

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<sup>14</sup> Doug the Pug is a dog that has over 400,000 followers on Instagram as of July 2015.  
<https://instagram.com/itsdougthepug/?hl=en>

production. The play took place in Oakville, Ontario, and was produced in conjunction with Sheridan Musical Theatre College. Audience members arrived at Sheridan College and were immediately instructed to put their belongings away in the provided lockers in order to prepare for their graduation. Everyone was handed a graduation robe and beckoned towards the school buses outside, which would take the participants to Brantwood School.

Unlike *Sleep No More*, however, Brantwood was a musical production as opposed to a movement-based show. It told the story of the students from Brantwood High school between the years 1920 to 2020, and followed the self-contained storylines of individual characters.

Audience members are given the opportunity to explore the different classrooms at their own pace, and observe the storylines they found most interesting. A common occurrence in *Brantwood* is that there were a number of moments when actors would attempt to draw a participant away from the main storyline to a separate, and more intimate look at the side storyline. Only through active involvement and participation, are audience members able to take full advantage of the experience. Furthermore, what differentiates *Brantwood* from *Sleep No More*, and which further adds to its ability to incite the chance of discovery, is the fact that the performance simultaneously told the stories of students over the course of 100 years, allowing audience members to understand and engage with the impact that the older memories and stories had on the future characters.

Mitchell Cushman, the director of *Brantwood*, discusses the process of creating immersive performances and how they can be accessible to unconventional audiences. Whereas the conventional audience type is the avid theatre goer, creator or student, Mitchell constantly considers how he can bring in new audience members. He expresses that the possibility of discovery does not only dwell within the performance, but also within its surroundings. What this means is that it is equally important to consider how the location of a particular play can reveal certain unknown aspects of new environments to the guests who are attending, as well as how those environments can be impactful. The creation process of the experience can also open the door to the discovery of new themes

and practices in performance art. Cushman states that every new production is an exploration of an original idea- an idea that has yet to truly be realized and made tangible. Producing such ideas and bringing attention to them, provides audiences with access to more situations of revelation. He expresses that,

“...you hope that with each show, people might come to see something particular but then they’ll come back and see the next thing, and our mailing list has certainly grown with every project that we’ve done,” (Cushman, 2015).

Cushman discussed an upcoming idea for a new project specifically formulated for those audiences who had “never been to the theatre before”. He stated that the production would be an exploration of a range of “first times”. It’s through this method of isolating certain individuals, or groups of individuals, and granting attention to them, that produces what Jeffrey Rohrs refers to as VIP proprietary audiences. Rohrs discusses the process of developing fans, or devotees. He claims that,

“Fans want to express and share their passion for something they enjoy...They have heart-pumping, pulse-racing relationships built on passion- the degree of which is dictated by the quality of their experiences with the person, team or brand in question,” (Rohrs 46).

These VIP audience members are often picked out from the masses and rewarded for their brand loyalty. An example of this being done in mainstream media is when Taylor Swift hand picks some of her biggest fans and invites them to her home for a private concerts<sup>15</sup>. The result is a more loyal fan base that continues to advocate for Taylor. Furthermore, in expressing their sheer adoration of the singer, other individuals hear of her gracious actions, and see her in a brighter light.

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<sup>15</sup> In 2014, Taylor Swift invited a fan and her entire family to her home. Multiple tabloids and news reporters covered the story. <http://www.businessinsider.com/taylor-swift-invited-fans-to-her-home-2014-10>



The same goes for the experience of *Brantwood*. When characters and actors isolate various people throughout the experience, the result is a stronger connection to the overall show. Because everyone's interactions are unique from the rest of the audience's, each person will advocate for the show in a different way. The intense individual moments that are experienced one on one provoke a thirst for more interesting interactions, compelling participants to quickly, but alertly make their way around the school. By the end of the production and among reuniting with their companions, every person feels as if they had the chance at discovering some form of narrative treasure, but at the same time feeling as though there is more possibility of discovery for future interactions with the play.

Overall, the heightened level of intimacy, and the level of authenticity that comes from immersing various senses, results in a high potential for discovery. This notion of discovery envelops not only the potential for attention and possibility of being discovered as audience members, but also the possibility of discovery of new themes and places by the audience. By integrating this aspect of the Digital Experience Sphere into immersive and interactive performances, audience members develop a stronger sense of advocacy and engagement towards the production in question.

## CHAPTER 5: Customization - *Secret Mission Scavenger Hunt*

The fourth component of the Digital Experience Sphere in the DAEE is **Customization**. Customization entails providing a consumer or a participant with a sense of agency by personalizing a particular experience for that individual. In Chapter 4 it was expressed that people crave individuality and originality. They want to be seen as unique in the eyes of those around them. Essentially what human beings crave above all else is autonomy- the freedom to choose how to view a product, a brand or a piece of art for that matter. As the digital age continues to unfold, newer generations are developing a stronger desire for self-construction. Today's youth are realising that they no longer want to be grouped into pre-determined categories, but rather establish their own identities. And major companies are certainly catching on and taking action. Almost everything that is consumed can now be customized to the individual. Look at the user experience process of platforms like Amazon, Netflix and Facebook. Each system has a unique way of catering to the needs of their users. They provide the user with an abundance of choice, but also funnel specific topics to them that meet their needs. The result of all this customization is an increased interest in the brand or platform.

So how does one customize a live interactive performance for a particular person, and what is the risk involved in preparing such an experience, considering that there are so many methods in which customization could occur? Well, Adam Arvidsson expresses that "A consumer's personality can be seen as the peculiar total of the products he consumes" (Arvidsson 278). That being said the customization process of live interaction requires calculated observation of a person's interests and consumer tendencies. In order to successfully create customized experiences for an audience, it is crucial to acquire data about the audience types that are planning on being involved in the given interaction.

The following case study is an evaluation of a participant's experience during a personalized scavenger hunt around the city of Toronto. The goal of the experience was to evoke a hedonic response from the subject, who will from here on be referred to as C.J. The

majority of scavenger hunts and escape games that currently exist are prepared with a pre-constructed formula in mind. The individual is thus seeking out an experience that fits their interests, rather than partaking in one that is constructed for them. For instance, scavenger hunt organizations such as Slixr, Urban Capers and the City Scavenger all have packages detailing the specific type of adventure that the participant will embark on. Escape games have different room types where the puzzles are determined in advance. The formula is not incorrect; it simply isn't personal.

Furthermore, in carefully evaluating an individual, the level of risk associated with an immersive experience can be drastically lowered. This particular case study will highlight where the "Secret Mission Scavenger Hunt" was successful, and where there was a high level of risk due to lack of awareness of the subject's personality.

The process of the case study began with an e-mail being sent to C.J. from a mysterious source. This is what the email looked like:

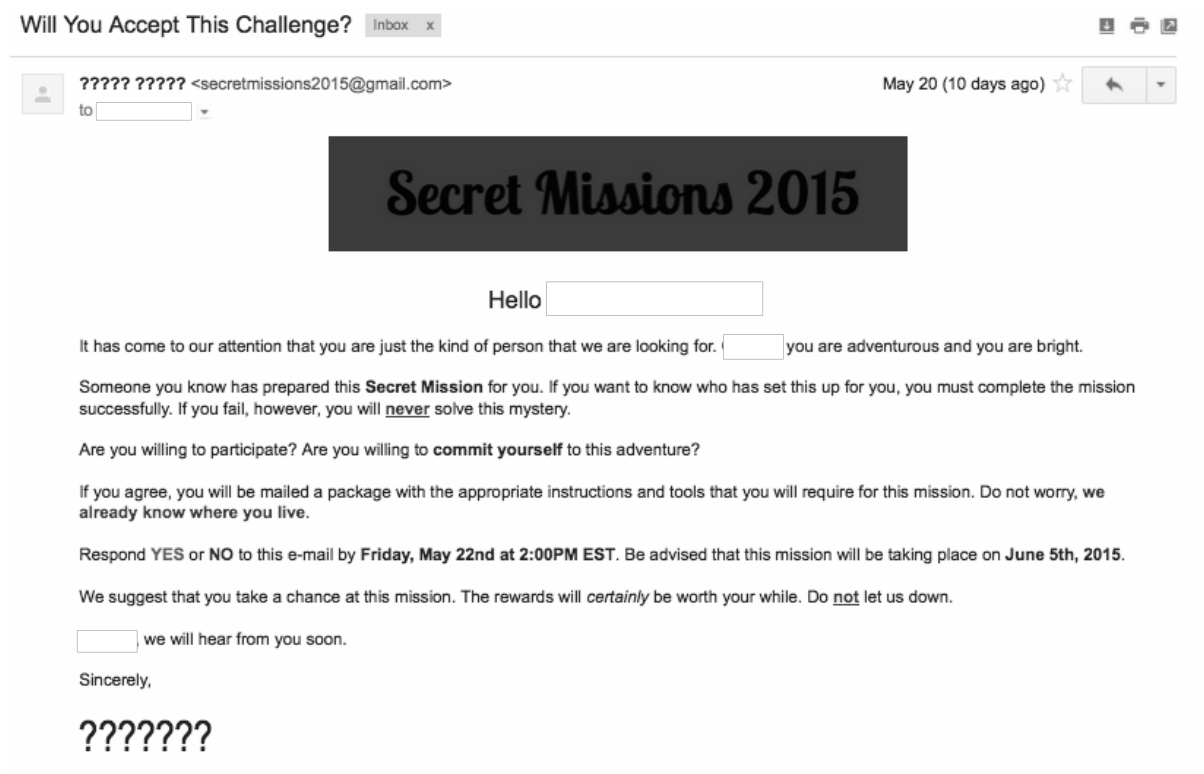


Figure 4

The goal was to create a very realistic role-playing scenario, much like a Live Action Role Play, or LARP, with the hope that C.J., would have instinctively realized that the “Secret Mission” was an exciting and playful opportunity. The email stated that someone she knew had prepared the Secret Mission for her, suggesting that the organization was not a bot, or a stalker, but someone in her existing network. The headline of the email said “Secret Mission 2015” suggesting that the event was reoccurring. A clear deadline to confirm consent to participate was also indicated, alerting C.J. that she still had a choice of whether or not to take part in the adventure.

Once the email was sent, it was just a matter of waiting for the response. When the deadline finally rolled around, however, and still no response was received, it became necessary for C.J. to be contacted directly. Upon learning that C.J. had not in fact had a chance to check her email, it became necessary to strategize another way to reach her and get her consent. A second email was sent to her best friend, who was with her at the time. This was the email to the friend, who will be referred to as Julia.

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Figure 5

Almost immediately after sending the email to Julia, this text message from C.J. arrived.

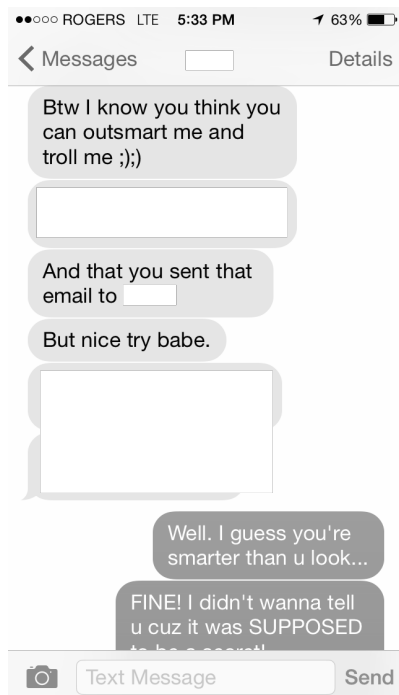


Figure 6

C.J.'s intelligence and intuition had been wildly underestimated. The plan to create a completely secret mission for the participant unfortunately failed. This might have been avoidable had a careful assessment of her tendencies been conducted. Through such an evaluation it may have been discovered that her proclivity to check e-mail was very low, yet her inclination to look at Facebook, Instagram, Reddit and text messages was high. It might have also highlighted that C.J. has a fear of stalkers, and that strange and unexpected e-mails give her anxiety.

The propensity of risk raises considerably for any type of immersive experience without careful deliberation of who the audience is. Here is a breakdown of where the preparation for the experience went wrong, and a risk assessment of the process:

### **The Email:**

Although the e-mail initially seemed foolproof, there are a lot of places where it could have been ensured that the wording was more professional and organized. The main issue with sending C.J. such a sinister message, was that it could have possibly incited a lot of *fear* (the exact emotion Julia felt upon receiving the follow-up email). That was not the hope of the experiment.

When considering the Theatrical Experience Sphere, the element of Risk is very important to keep in mind when it comes to customized experiences. Risk and Customization fall on the same plane along with Emotions, and thus all three factors are highly integrated.

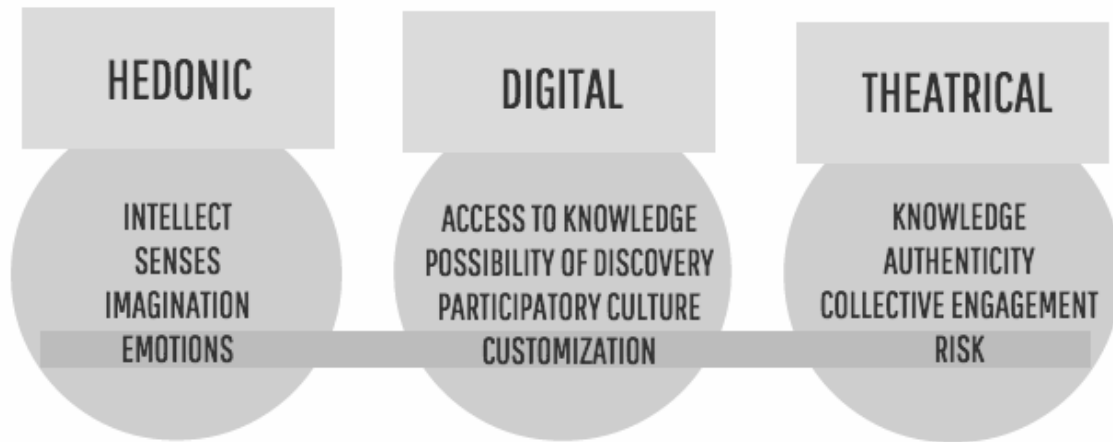


Figure 7

In terms of risk, however, there exists both **positive risk** and **negative risk**. Every experience must be founded upon the principle of **positive risk** in order to guarantee that there is still comfort in the degree of uncertainty.

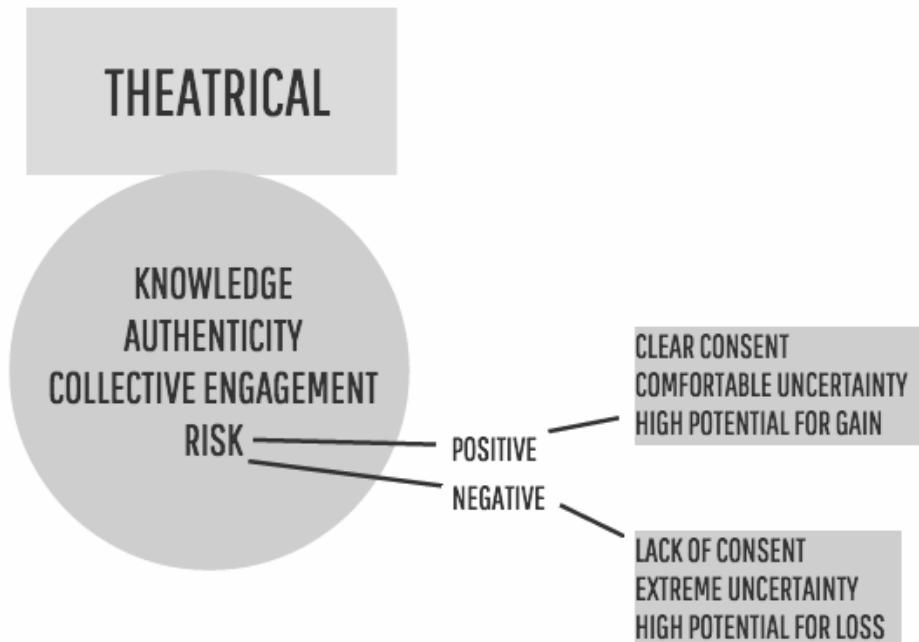


Figure 8

Here is a breakdown of risk, and some important questions to ask when creating an experience, a show or a campaign:

### **Is there clear Consent?**

If ever there is a situation where an individual is placed into an experience against their will, it should no longer be classified as an experience, but rather a kidnapping, or physical and emotional harassment. There must always be consent, otherwise serious liabilities can ensue. In the first e-mail, it is stated that C.J. was selected to participate in a mission, and that further details would be sent to her upon her confirmation and agreement to participate. The second email, however, is far more dictating and does not leave much room for Julia to choose whether or not to assist. This was a huge oversight and explains entirely why Julia was terrified. What if C.J. had a stalker and Julia was forced into this very awkward position? Luckily, C.J. was able to clue-in right away. However, if this experience had been prepared for an entirely unknown individual without any form of personality comprehension whatsoever, the outcome may have been far more dangerous. It is imperative that the participant is always given the option to reject the offer that is made, without any form of negative risk. If there is no option for consent, the experience will immediately possess **negative risk**, which should be avoided at all costs.

### **What is the degree of Uncertainty?**

It goes without saying that risk is only considered risk because there is some degree of uncertainty. This uncertainty can provoke a number of mixed emotions. Fear, excitement, anxiety, dread, hope, and invigoration are some examples of feelings associated with uncertainty. If one were to consider the range of uncertainty as a spectrum (not to be confused with the uncertainty principle in physics) rather it should be assumed that at one end of the **Uncertainty Spectrum**, there is Loss, which suggests negative risk, and at the other there is Gain, which encompasses positive risk. Naturally there are a lot of factors that determine the type of risk and level of risk that people are willing to undertake. In fact,



Elke Weber, a psychologist at the University of Columbia developed a model called *Domain-specific risk propensity*. This model suggests that everyone has a unique risk propensity in each of the five categories: financial, health/safety, recreational, ethical and social. In an experience such as the one that was created for C.J., all five of these domains must be taken into account.

### **Financial:**

Judging by the email that was sent, there was no clear indication that any financial risk could occur. For the most part the email implied that everything had already been taken care of. There is also mention that the “rewards will *certainly* be worth the while”. Therefore, Financial Uncertainty can be placed relatively close to the positive end of the spectrum.

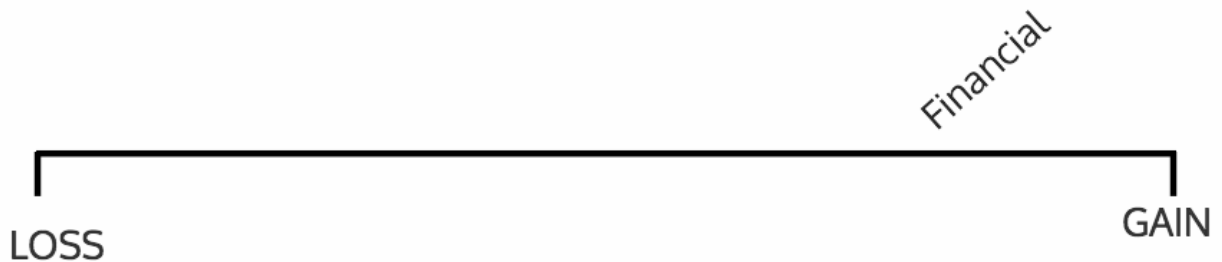


Figure 9

### **Health/Safety:**

There really is no indication whatsoever of health or safety risk in the email. The words “commit yourself”, “mystery”, “chance”, “adventurous” and “bright” are used very suggestively, and due to the lack of specificity in the type of mission that has been set into place, there is certainly a high level of uncertainty as to whether or not there will be any form of physical exertion. However, there is still no direct suggestion that there *will* be any

physical exertion or health risk either, thus although the level of uncertainty is high, it cannot be fully discerned as to whether that uncertainty will be for the better or for the worse. Since it is less likely that someone will gain any form of health factor in a secret mission, health and safety is closer to the Loss end of the spectrum. Granted, it is still relatively unclear whether health/safety is even a factor that will be affected at all, and so it is placed only slightly closer to the Loss end.



*Figure 9.1*

### **Recreational:**

Since this Secret Mission is highly recreational in design, it is tricky to determine how to measure recreational uncertainty. The main concern upon receiving the above email is that the entire thing is a hoax. In that case, the level of recreational uncertainty would fall very close to the Loss end of the spectrum. By assessing the wording of the email, it is hinted that the mission will reap considerable rewards, and that C.J. was selected because of her “adventurous and bright” state of being. This use of wording informs the reader that there is potential for enjoyment, and that the adventure in question has been somewhat catered to C.J. specifically. With this in mind, there is certainly a higher potential for recreational gain. That being said, the follow-up email comes off as panicky and threatening. The wording is demanding and frantic, and thus an immediate sense of

suspicion is highly likely. Because of the second email, the level of recreational uncertainty takes an immediate shift on the spectrum.



*Figure 9.2*

**Ethical:**

There is not much hint of any ethical uncertainty in the first email. Aside from the mention of a “somebody” who has prepared the mission, the primary ethical dilemma that C.J. may have faced, would have been her own desire to find out who was behind the email and address that individual directly for their suspicious behaviour. With the second email, there is a bit of a power shift, because the ethical uncertainty all depends on C.J.’s confidence in accusing the sender directly, and the likeliness that the sender would confess. There is always the possibility that the sender can lie, however this simply breaches further ethical dilemmas. The realistic nature of ethical uncertainty in this situation is certainly a gain for C.J., however basing the position entirely on the email format, and judging by C.J.’s specific history (general fear of secrecy and of being contacted by unknown people), the level of ethical uncertainty falls very close to the Loss side of the spectrum. It would not have followed C.J.’s moral code to partake in a mission that evoked fearful memories and emotions.



Figure 9.3

**Social:**

Finally, there is the question of social uncertainty. Social uncertainty is also tricky, because every individual responds differently to social situations. There are some people for whom social situations spur extreme feelings of anxiety and frustration. Others may thrive in social situations and seek out encounters with unknown people. Once again, the email states that C.J. is “adventurous and bright” and that she was selected as the perfect candidate for the mission. Judging by this wording, it is appropriate to assume that C.J. is a social person. The statement “if you fail, however, you will never solve this mystery” suggests a potential for social loss. In other words, there will be no interaction with the individual who created the mission, thus placing C.J. in a state of confusion, but also forever socially vulnerable to the person who created the mission. C.J.’s level of commitment to the mission, as well as her wit, would determine the level of social uncertainty. Because this is a factor that is greatly in her control, the possibility of social gain is relatively high.



*Figure 9.4*

### **What is the potential for Loss or Gain?**

Upon assessing the above five domains of uncertainty, one can then move on to the next question, which is that of the potential for Loss or Gain. It doesn't take much to quickly realize that the spectrum clearly indicates a higher potential for Loss, which further suggests that the type of risk that is outlined by the email, is in fact negative risk.

Once again, this is based solely on the assessment of risk from the email. The next part of the experience was the package delivery.

### **The Package:**

At the point of the package delivery, the fact that the mission was taking place was no longer a mystery, however what that mission entailed was still a secret. The package was mailed to arrive two days before the mission took place. The envelope was mailed to C.J.'s address, with no indication of a return address. Everything in the envelope was handwritten. There was an itinerary which outlined the specific times that she would need to arrive at each location. Also included in the package was one transit pass to facilitate travel around the city, two life lines, to help her in the event that she could not solve a clue, and a statement notifying her of the first location.

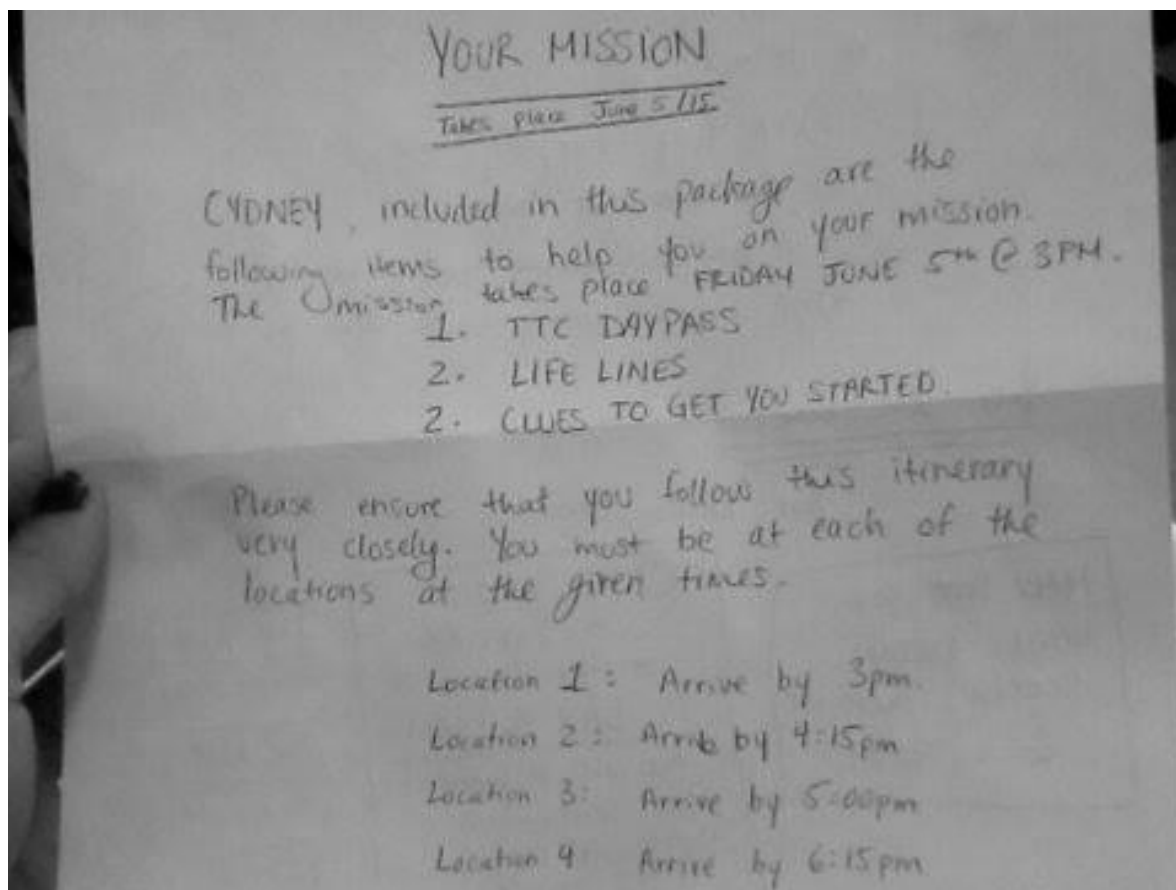


Figure 10

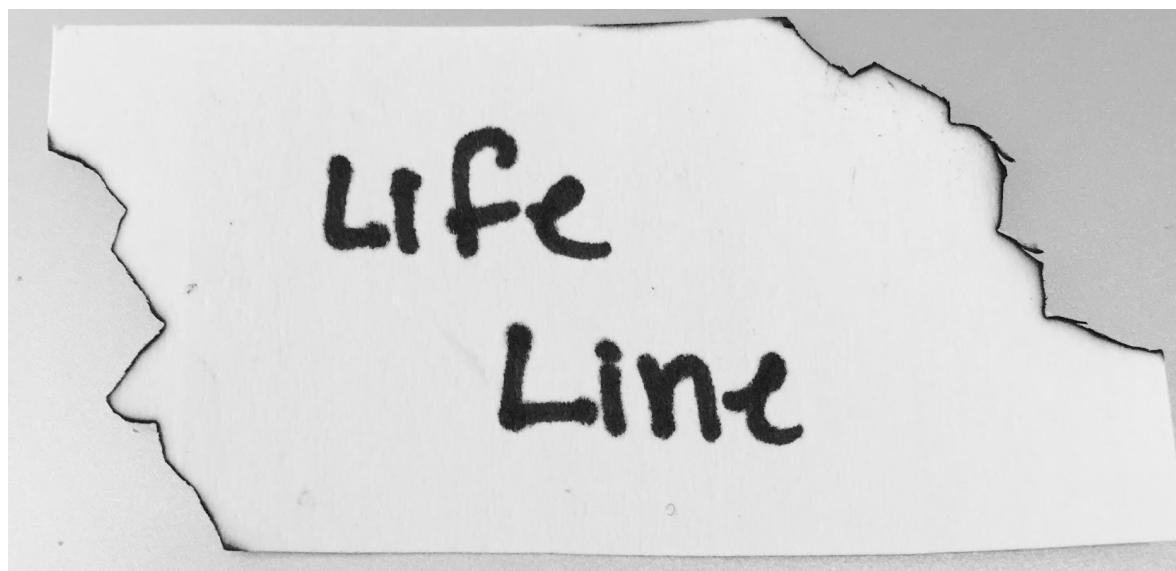


Figure 11

The package further enforces the customized nature of the scavenger hunt. The envelope was specifically addressed to C.J., and the handwriting added a more personal touch.

There are many services that exist to increase the sense of mystery with this kind of experience. Re-mailing services exist to send letters anonymously from different countries<sup>16</sup>. In fact, there are also anonymous e-mail senders which get forwarded from a different IP address, and free anonymous text message services as well<sup>17</sup>. The reason for making the process anonymous and mysterious, once again reinforces the notion that the participant is being singled out from a crowd.

Although the email portion of the experience did not go as planned, the customization factor of the scavenger hunt highly made up for it. Why does customization work so well? It promotes **curiosity**, **flattery** and **advocacy**. Human beings are self-absorbed creatures, and just like it states in the chapter on the possibility of discovery, they crave the feeling of uniqueness and originality. An example of where personalization in the digital marketing world takes place is through the process of blogger outreach and post pitching. Many marketers will attempt to increase the SEO of their company's website by pitching to large amounts of bloggers, requesting that they write an article with a link to their company's site. These marketers will often use a mail-merging<sup>18</sup> service that will quickly and effectively e-mail hundreds of bloggers with the same drafted e-mail. The problem is that people realise almost immediately when a letter, email or phone call has not been customized. As a result, more of these services are implementing the ability to customize a series of data points in a drafted e-mail, or in a recorded messaging system in order to make it seem like the receiver is being singled out from the crowd. **Curiosity** is triggered when a message is directed to a person specifically, **flattery** occurs when an acknowledgement is made in regards to past work, or a compliment is paid to the individual on a specific aspect of that work, and finally **advocacy** occurs as a result of

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<sup>16</sup> An example of an anonymous email service is: <http://rapidremailer.com/>

<sup>17</sup> An example of a previously existing anonymous SMS service is: <http://www.sendanonymoussms.com/>

<sup>18</sup> Yet Another Mail Merge is an example of a free mail merging software that easily sends a drafted email from Google to 100s of people in a matter of seconds.

curiosity and flattery, compelling the receiver to vouch for the company, the experience or the sender, and, “...share- that is, amplify- content or experiences that interest them personally or professionally,” (Rohrs 31).

The scavenger hunt prepared for C.J. incited curiosity when she received both the e-mail and the package, which resulted in an increase of excitement for the scavenger hunt. It also incited flattery when she saw the contents of the package, and understood the level of effort that went into the creation of the mission. Throughout the mission, flattery increased as she discovered that each location had been catered to her specific interests. The final result was advocacy for the creator of the scavenger hunt, and consistent sharing of the experience with her network, thus placing the experience in high regards of those she spread the word to.

Customization is an excellent way to ensure that an experience produces heightened levels of excitement and engagement. People are far more likely to invest themselves fully into an encounter that plays to their specific interests. Furthermore, the point of the matter is that the current generation is accustomed to getting whatever they want, whenever they want it. By ignoring their demand for personalization, there is a risk of losing potential audience members, and producing events that promote negative risk. Finally, customized experiences afford the audience with a sense of agency, thus providing them with the feeling of freedom and choice. They feel empowered that they either have the ability to choose how to experience an event, or that they are unique enough to have an experience crafted to their interests and needs.

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## Conclusion

The theatre is an environment that people go to in search of meaningful experiences. It is meant to be an environment that entertains and unites people, and that reminds individuals of what it is to be human. With the changing digital landscape, however, people demand a much more constant and consistent stream of content, and thus establishing the magic that once existed within the theatre, requires far more focus and attention to detail. In order for people to come closely within reach of self-actualization, there needs to be a stronger attempt at designing an experience that produces meaning.

The Digital Audience Engagement Ecosystem is a structure that presents the three experience spheres, which are the hedonic experience, or Peak Experience sphere, the theatrical experience sphere and the digital experience sphere. Each one functions cohesively within the ecosystem, and each aims to ultimately produce a meaningful experience that results in self-actualization. The digital experience sphere is based off of the experiential patterns of some of the most popular digital platforms available, such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. By integrating the factors that make up the digital sphere with both the theatrical and hedonic spheres, the idea is that one is able to produce an interactive or immersive theatrical experience that produces an overall feeling of self-actualization. By exploring the four factors through a number of interactive performances, one can determine the level of engagement that results from their combined practice. SE3D's *Ace Academy* provides the audience with a wide access to knowledge, Emursive and Punchdrunk's production of *Sleep No More* creates a sense of participatory culture, Outside the March's *Brantwood* depicts the importance of the possibility of discovery, and the *Secret Mission Scavenger Hunt* assesses the importance of a carefully thought out customization process.

Each factor contributes to an experience that audiences can advocate for, and share across their networks. The goal of such experiences is additionally to render the art form *infectious*. By being mindful of digital marketing techniques, and attention to consumer

patterns and demographics, live performance has the potential to grant audiences with consistently enriching experiences.

Overall, the goal of this paper is to highlight the relationship between the psychology of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, specifically to that of Peak Experiences, along with the engagement goals of the theatre, and the marketing practices and channels in digital media.

By cross-referencing the factors from each experiential sphere, live performance creators can work towards creating more immersive and meaningful experiences that remind society once again of what being human really is.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1

**TABLE 5.1** The Marketing Tactics of Don Draper's Day

<i>Direct Media Tactics</i>	<i>Mass Media Tactics</i>
Events	Outdoor
Direct Mail	Signage
Catalogs	Print
Telemarketing	Radio
	Television

56

**TABLE 5.2** Today's Ever-Expanding Universe of Marketing Tactics

<i>Direct Media Tactics</i>	<i>Mass Media Tactics</i>
Events	Signage
Direct Mail	OOH* (Outdoor)
Catalogs	Print
Telemarketing	Radio
Direct Fax	Television
Email	Infomercials
IM (Instant Messaging)	Video Games
SMS (Short Message Service)	Internet Relay Chat
MMS (Multimedia Messaging Service)	Websites
Automated Voice Messaging	Chat Rooms
RSS (Really Simple Syndication)	Organic Search
Social DM (Direct Messaging)	Online Display
Push Notifications (via Mobile Apps)	Paid Search
OTT Messaging Apps (i.e., Snapchat)	Landing Pages
	Microsites
	Webinars
	Affiliate Marketing
	Online Video
	Blogs
	Podcasts
	Contextual Advertising
	In-Game Advertising
	Wikis
	Social Networks
	Mobile Web
	DOOH (Digital Out of Home)
	Behavioral Advertising
	Social Advertising
	Virtual Worlds
	Widgets
	Twitter

(continued)

**TABLE 5.2** (continued)

<i>Direct Media Tactics</i>	<i>Mass Media Tactics</i>
	Mobile Apps
	Location Based Apps
	SlideShare
	Instagram
	Pinterest
	Vine

## GLOSSARY

**Multiplexing:** The conventional definition of multiplexing is to describe a means of integrating multiple analog and digital signals into one signal transmitted over a shared medium. A more overarching definition would be funneling multiple channels into one source. The example of people who are becoming more accustomed to multiplexing, indicates that they are better at splitting their attention across various channels, and are more used to focusing on multiple areas.

**Yes, and:** This is one of the basic rules of improvisational comedy. It is a protocol that allows for open-ended possibility. No matter what one actor presents to another, instead of negating it, belittling it, or disagreeing with it, the job of the actor receiving the offer is to say, "Yes, and...". In doing this, the actor accepts the scenario as it is presented, regardless of where they had initially intended for the scene to go, and then to add to it.

**Digital Experience Sphere:** This sphere reflects the 4 factors that influence the engagement of social media platforms and includes the access to knowledge, the possibility of discovery, the participatory culture and the nature of customization that various digital platforms offer.

**Theatrical Experience Sphere:** This engagement sphere highlights the 4 factors of a theatrical experience as defined by Jennifer Radbourne et al in the paper *The Audience Experience: Measuring Quality in the Performing Arts*. They include: knowledge, authenticity, risk and collective engagement.

**Hedonic/Peak Experience Sphere:** This engagement sphere highlights the 4 factors of a hedonic or peak experience as defined by Jennifer Radbourne et al in the paper *The Audience Experience: Measuring Quality in the Performing Arts* in relation to Abraham Maslow's definition of self-actualization in the hierarchy of needs. They include a combination of: emotions, sense, intellect and imagination.

**Participation Friction:** Participation Friction is a term used to describe the difficulty that exists in participating with an immersive experience. It is an extension of the term *information friction* which describes the when information is made less convenient to access.

**Positive Risk:** Positive risk refers to risk that has a high potential of gain. For instance if an individual were to purchase a lottery ticket and the odds were that 1 in 2 was a winner, naturally the potential for gain is relatively high. Thus the risk of buying the lottery ticket is quite positive.

**Negative Risk:** This is the opposite of positive risk and refers to an experience with a high potential for loss. For instance if someone were to throw a person's wallet into a ferocious lion's den, the potential for loss of that wallet is very high, and thus the risk of procuring the wallet is very negative.

**Uncertainty Spectrum:** The Uncertainty Spectrum is a bracket of risk and it describes the degree of uncertainty that exists within a given experience. If the level of uncertainty is high, the risk is more commonly negative, however if there is a low level of uncertainty, the risk factor is generally more positive.

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