Immersive Shakespeares: Dive into Suspense and Macabre

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Abstract: While Shakespeare's plays are of course not the only reference in immersive theatre, they have particularly interested immersive theatre over the recent years. Triggering new perspectives of scenography and interpretation, immersion has proved to be a way for companies to reimagine Shakespeare's world while keeping the seventeenth-century language alive and "authentic." Quite blatantly, the productions tend to indicate that tragedies, particularly *Macbeth, Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet,* are more regularly explored. Why are these plays more fashionable than others? What are the conventions requested for these theatrical performances? Are these often-ephemeral installations an efficient way to approach Shakespeare's theatre, both structurally and aesthetically? With the help of the archives of the companies, this paper tries to account for the assets of immersive productions in Shakespearean adaptation today.

Résumé : Bien que Shakespeare ne constitue pas la seule référence dans ce domaine, ces dernières années, il a particulièrement intéressé le théâtre immersif. Parce qu'elle offre de nouvelles perspectives de scénographie et d'interprétation, l'immersion s'est avérée une façon pour les compagnies de ré-imaginer le monde de Shakespeare tout en conservant la langue du dix-septième siècle vivante et « authentique ». De manière frappante, les spectacles tendent à montrer que les tragédies, particulièrement *Macbeth, Hamlet,* ou *Roméo et Juliette,* sont plus régulièrement explorées. Pourquoi ces pièces sont-elles plus « à la mode » que d'autres ? Quelles sont les conventions requises par ces performances théâtrales ? Ces installations souvent éphémères s'avèrent-elles une façon efficace de mieux cerner la structure et l'esthétique du théâtre de Shakespeare ? À l'aide des archives des compagnies, cette étude tente de relever l'intérêt que présente le théâtre immersif dans le champ de l'adaptation shakespearienne aujourd'hui.

Keywords: Shakespeare, tragedies, Colab, Rebel and Misfits, Punchdrunk, macabre

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Introduction: All this "Place" is a Stage

While Gareth White writes: "Immersion implies access to the inside of the performance in some way […]" (221), Marcel Freydefont and Catherine Bouko define theatrical immersion as a specific category involving various processes and various audience responses. Freydefont subdivides theatrical immersion into four spatial categories—hermetic loci, playhouses, digital spaces and Augmented Reality scenes, and finally the theatre-within-the-theatre (10)—all of which triggering audience participation in distinct ways. All these spaces however share a common feature: they situate the audience at the heart of the action while favouring their relations in an altogether singular and communal experience. As for Bouko, she focuses on a single immersive theatrical expression including two intertwined approaches: one sensorial, the other dramaturgic. In each case, the "immersant"[1] must be fully receptive.

The notion of immersion should also be assessed in relation to other concepts. In another article, Bouko questions the "interactive" potential of immersive theatre (Bouko 2015: 29). She notes that the two notions—interaction and immersion—seem to have been misused by most critics over the recent years (Sekoff n.p.). Indeed, some of their principles are incompatible. For instance, the way information technology (I.T.) is used in an interactive process or the nature of the spectator's choice which is often computerized and formatted, are entities that theatrical immersion ignores, or considers very differently (concerning the notion of choice at least as we see later in this study). However, whether in interactive or immersive experiences, there is an active participation of the audience.[2] This federative function in par-

ticular will be taken into account in the analysis of the Shakespearean immersive productions discussed hereafter.

If the word "immersion" is not immediately evocative of early modern traditional theatre, it seems however that theatres' architecture, back in the sixteenth century, would initiate the oxymoronic *shared* and *individual* experience because of the audience *participation* in one way or another. Back then, the proximity between the audience and the actors was permanent. The position of the groundlings within the round-shaped open-air theatres, but also in more intimate indoor halls, led to a communication between the actors and the spectators who went in and out the theatre-space, reacted to the actors' words, thus potentially influencing the dramaturgy. Although being physically clear-cut, the separation between the fictive and the real worlds could eventually vanish because of the spaces (acting *vs* listening) encroaching upon each other. As Andrew Gurr explains, the conditions of performance, often disturbed by a number of pests like pickpockets and prostitutes but also by noisy eating habits and by gallants sitting on stage, modified the audience's perception of the dramatic action and their response to it:

> The most obtrusive habits were to be seen in the hall playhouses by the conspicuous gallants who sat on stools on the stage and added comments on the play, and in all the playhouses by the nut-cracking which was a favourite exercise for everybody. […] In fact nut-cracking was the only regular complaint apart from the prologue's customary plea for silence. (278)

Such features are not immediately reminiscent of those of twenty-first-century immersive performance, but at least they attest that attending a play was originally no restful entertainment. If Shakespeare's canon has become a suitable pool for exploratory production—let us but refer to digital or 3D experimentations[3]—this may partly result from the buoyant ambiance inherent to early performances, but also from today's popular knowledge of Shakespeare's major plays that, compared to his contemporaries', demand a constant and challenging renewal of its artistic embodiments.

As the following brief account highlights, the themes developed in Shakespeare's plays have increasingly triggered the interest of companies worldwide over the past decades. In June 2016, for instance, *As You like It* was turned into a promenade performance in Windsor Park, combining immersion, circus and music (Watch Your Head Company). In 2019, the same play was performed in the Abrams Planetarium hemispherical projection dome in Michigan University. The concept was entitled "Shakespeare Under the Stars" and plunged the audience into a highly visual production in a starry environment.[4] Yet, despite this apparent interest for Shakespeare's comedies, the tragedies and histories have recently inspired more recurrently the companies. The famous adaptation of *Macbeth* named *Sleep No More* by Punchdrunk that toured in the world between 2003 and 2019 has definitely engaged a new way of comprehending Shakespeare's theatre today. In 2017, a *Macbeth* "under the Stars" was set in Dubai (Constellation productions / UAE Ministry of Culture). The year after, *Macbeth, Come Like Shadows* (dir. Sean Patrick Higgins and Kelly Hummert, Rebel and Misfits) was performed with a cinematic scope in the dystopian ruins of a Scottish castle. Hummert had already staged a *Hamlet* called *See What I See* in 2016 as part of an Immersive Theatre Project including five Shakespearean plays. Two years later, in France this time, Léonard Matton set a version of *Hamlet* in a former factory well-named "Le Secret" situated in the heart of Paris.[5] Last but not least, *Romeo and Juliet* (Colab Theatre) was also a major performance held in London in 2017.

This non-exhaustive inventory leads us to a first question: why are the companies—whether amateur, academic or professional—so recurrently attracted by Shakespeare's dark plays? This acknowledgment triggers further interrogations that this paper will try to answer while leading the reader to a promenade into some of the productions here above mentioned: are immersive performances sufficiently challenging regarding Shakespeare's drama, both structurally and aesthetically? What are the new audiences' responses when early modern drama is at stake?

Towards a Revival of an Active Shakespearean Audience

The open-air round-shaped theatres of the early modern period—of which we have several copies in the world today[6]—used to entail a dynamic performance in which the audience members had a part to play. Firstly, because some of them were standing close to the thrust platform, if not sitting on it (Gurr 278), they could see the actors' faces very well, and possibly touch their garments.[7] Secondly, as revealed by historians, the actors' partitions could be altered according to the audience's reactions: "It is even possible that some of the more obscure jokes in Shakespeare's plays may be the result of impromptu remarks which became incorporated into the written script" (Hartnoll 81). The actors—more often under the guise of a prologue—requested the attention of all in order to moderate the noisy audience: "Still be kind, / And eke out our performance with your mind" (*Henry V* Chorus 3.0.34-35). Even though the audience was physically present in the playhouse, the Chorus's cue indicates that the most important participation needed from them was mental. Indeed, they had to imagine hard what was not shown by stage decoration nor performed by the actors. Interestingly enough, in Histories like *Henry V* involving many battles, the audience could serve as a make-belief. In scenes that suffered from the absence of number, the "thousand heads" of the audience members (*The Roaring Girl* in Gurr 277) could create the illusion of an army. Thus, early modern theatre was irremediably a shared space within which the success of a play lay on various criteria: the quality of the script and of the actors of course, but also the audience's spontaneous response to both.

The various quartos of Shakespeare's plays are another proof that the play-scripts were regularly amended according to audience's response. Words and actions would differ from one performance to another depending on the onlookers' commitment. Furthermore, the daylight that made the movements of the actors and of the props visible throughout the performance, limited illusionistic effects and consequently blurred the separation between public and private spaces.

Now, if we look closer at the features of immersive theatre, we can clearly acknowledge how it shares some of the characteristics of the Elizabethan theatre:

> [Immersive theatre] designate[s] a trend for performances which use installations and expansive environments, which have mobile audiences, and which invite audience participation. [It may include] performances that are intensely intimate, […] [some] that allow a little distance between spectator and performance […]. The work may contain a coherent narrative […] or may be […] dream-like […]. There may be [some] kind of technological mediation […] or advance communication with spectators […]. The work may take place in everyday spaces […] or in other found spaces, theatres or galleries. It is likely to be multi-sensory. (White 221)

From one of Josephine Machon's studies, we should also keep in mind the following characteristics: the immersive audience is "physically surrounded by another world. You are intensely aware of your habitat and the details of the space. […] You are upright, active, engaged in action with the artist with whom you share the space […]" (Machon 2013: 55).

Even if all the above-mentioned features were not exactly similar in Shakespeare's theatre, the multi-sensory component of the immersive practice and the impression of a shared experience with the actors were already present. Indeed, even if the audience was not required to touch the actors nor the set, they were so close to the latter—some invading the stage-space, others reacting to the characters' cues, all of them smelling the others around and being disturbed by the close presence of their fidgety neighbours—that they felt to be *within* the show.[8]

Today, immersive theatre often (though not always) invites the audience to walk into different spaces where they do not only witness but also physically take part in the action and may have to make drastic choices.[9] In the Dubai *Macbeth* in 2017, the audience was warned at their entrance: "Do not expect to be seated facing a stage. This is a promenade and immersive production: moving from scene-to-scene, finding random corners of action and corridors of madness." If, as we

have noticed before, Shakespeare's drama needs an active audience, we should wonder how immersion further challenges their response to it. Indeed, the active audience of the Renaissance has progressively been replaced by a more silent one over the centuries. In a traditional theatre experience, "you will sit and wait for the event to begin. […] The lights dim, you become quiet. The curtain [is] raised revealing another world" (Machon 2013: 55). Yet today, there is an apparent renewed need to experience a play from within in order to share the characters' ordeals differently, to grasp possible new meanings of the *praxis*, and to tackle theatrical life in odd and unexpected ways. In this context, Shakespeare's blood plays have undoubtedly triggered an increasing fascination if we consider the productions listed previously. In Shakespeare's time, people would also long for such fascination. Elizabethan theatregoers were attracted by sensational leisure like bear baiting or cock fighting. They enjoyed stories that involved noise, tears and battles even though they were made "[w]ith four or five most vile and ragged foils, / Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous" (*Henry V* Chorus 4.0.50-51). Still, while Shakespearean audiences implication was mental, the immersive audiences' involvement has now become physical.

In plays like *Macbeth,* the macabre is pushed one step further because it is deeply connected with the supernatural, which is an element that is prone to inspire theatrical creativity in spectacular venues. The atmosphere is awe-inspiring. Audiences feel excited by the sense of discomfort that overwhelms them. Such a feeling maintains their attention, compelling them to be on their guard. The notion of insecurity is paramount in an immersive experience. The reassuring and comfortable limits separating the theatrical space from the public one are wiped out. The performance space is everywhere. In *Macbeth, Come Like Shadows* (Rebel and Misfits production), the sense of the macabre was an apparent source of motivation for the company. On its website, one could read:

> Due to the dangerous nature of this piece, we ask that you not touch any of the props. We will be using real weapons and there will be a LOT of

> blood used during the show. We want you to remain clean and safe. (Rebel and Misfits n.p.)

Being immersed in a play eventually reduces the distance between times and places, as was Shakespeare's very purpose in telling stories of the past with the costumes of the present, within a theatrical architecture that mingled the mass and the singular. For Higgins and Hummert, *Macbeth* offered an opportunity to connect the distant story of the Scottish warrior and their own chaotic world. Among the many thoughts that the production planted and invoked, the following questions were raised: "[W]hat can the human soul bear? What splinters it? What can the soul of America bear?" (Rebel and Misfits). Such issues show the extent to which *Macbeth* remains a challenging tool for debate in a collective experience, but it also translates a sense of emergency. This sense of emergency, which expresses the need to struggle against the evils of our time, was already present in early modern days, and Shakespeare used tragedies to share the ambivalent feeling intertwining dread and excitement.

Hearts Beating in Unison with Tragedies

The various recent immersive productions of Shakespeare's plays have shown how the concept particularly fitted tragedies and how they appealed new audiences. In the following part, we shed a light on macabre and suspenseful scenes of three immersive adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies to reassess the adequacy between them, and to explore audiences' experiences.

Sleep No More

Despite key publications about *Sleep No More* (Koumarianos and Silver; Machon 2018; Prudhon 2018), it is impossible to avoid mentioning here this renowned adaptation of *Macbeth* that has influenced many other promenade productions since. The various scenes of the play were choreographed and mimed in an often impressive way that held "erotic and aggressive elements in breathless tension" (Koumarianos and Silver 169). First, the murder of Duncan was done

with a pillow and showed the king painfully struggling to escape from his doom. If such a scene is not unusual in a Shakespearean play (Desdemona is smothered to death in *Othello*), the proximity between the immersant and the actors in an intimate and dark room strengthened the tension. Later, when the macabre reaches its climax in the original play, i.e. when Lady Macduff and her children are slaughtered (4.2), Macbeth and the pregnant Lady Macduff danced a violent *pas-de-deux* whereby Lady Macduff ended smashed against a wall and was raped by her aggressor. The audience members did not know how to respond: both the regicide and the assault on Lady Macduff aroused a sense of distress among them who felt unable to intervene in time because they had not anticipated the actions. Such scenes definitely question the usual norms of spectatorship, the latter being no longer simple observers but witnesses and, in this context, potential accomplices of a murder. The word "immersant" acquires its full meaning: immersants are *in* the performance, and because of this *role* they have been endowed with, they take part in the action, whether it is a delightful or a dreadful one. In *Sleep No More,* the immersants had to wear a white mask (as is often the case in Punchdrunk's productions), which deleted their differences and made them feel effectively *inside* the tale under the cover of anonymity. Yet, it seemed that they had no real choice but to let Macbeth follow his murderous plan, which undoubtedly raised ethical dilemmas. Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle of Punchdrunk explain how the actors' bodies and dances in this kind of context help build up the sense of communion even when such communion is sinful. "A whole passage of Shakespeare can be condensed to one word through [a] movement," Barret says (Machon 2011: 97), which means that the spell of the narrative is not broken because suddenly the "audience" becomes aware of where they are and of who is around them. "The experience of the ineffable is something which is so present in [Punchdrunk's] work […]. The intangible suddenly becomes tangible, felt, present on a haptic level" (Machon 2011: 98). Such horrific experience explains part of the success of *Sleep No more,* and of immersive *Macbeth* more widely, because a scene whereby the audience encircles the action, feels it and

even takes a malicious delight in attending its gore, were common features of early modern performance. Immersive and Shakespearean performances meet and match. The aim of immersion in that case is to "[empower]" the audience: "They're physically involved with the piece and therefore it becomes visceral" (Machon 2011: 89).

The empowerment that Punchdrunk seeks has however been questioned by some critics: "*Sleep No More* 'immerses' its audiences in a paradoxical practice: we write our individualised plotlines in our own movements, but are constructed within the spectacle as realist voyeurs, watchers, and readers, not agents" (Worthen 96). We rather claim that the ambivalent position of the audience particularly befits a play like *Macbeth* that attracts the attention *because* there is blood, sex, violence, power struggles, battles and crimes. Onlookers are fascinated when watching them, knowing that they will never be the direct victims of those horrid acts. The gore has never ceased to be fashionable overtime in the media; theatre is no exception. With Shakespeare, Punchdrunk responds to the 'audience's obscure expectations.[11]

Romeo and Juliet

In 2017, set in an abandoned warehouse that is the Colab's home, the immersive performance of *Romeo and Juliet* entitled *Montagues and Capulets* promised the audience they would not be mere onlookers but active participants. The participants could "[join] in the fight scenes with rubber pipe lagging standing in for swords" (*Everything Theatre*), and were promised: "the more you engage the more you get from the experience" (Colab's Website). Immediately after entering the warehouse, participants were requested to choose between being either a Capulet or a Montague: "It's part Shakespeare, part *EastEnders*. Juliet delivers her balcony speech smoking a cigarette […], while Father Lawrence wears a cashier's green eyeshade and distributes simulated acid tabs at the masked ball" (*Everything Theatre* Review). Since the plot was supposed to unfold in the 1990s, the rave culture was deeply present as a backdrop to most situations, such as the masked ball. Yet, despite the announcement that participation would be a mere

option for the spectators, the plot and the script (only five percent Shakespeare's text) could not be altered by the sudden intervention of the public. If such partial immersion might have entailed frustration first, it however relieved the most anxious participants. Still, they were very close to the action that took place among and not in front of them.

The space was really well furnished and decorated: Father Lawrence's chapel was mounted on a platform behind an enormous lit crucifix. Side rooms held the respective gang headquarters of the two families. Movement was permanent. The public constantly rushed down and upstairs; noises and voices resonated from various rooms, which however sometimes prevented the lines from being clearly heard, as in more intimate scenes (Romeo writing his love letter to Juliet). As in *Sleep No More,* the intention here was to make the audience feel better concerned by the Shakespearean characters and ordeals. It even strengthened their sympathy for the house to which they belonged, whether the Capulet or the Montague, and could even beget a feeling of physical communion. Modern costumes and sets incorporated both immediacy and proximity within the space shared by the cast and the onlookers, while they also accentuated the ambiguous separation between reality and fiction.

Undeniably, *Romeo and Juliet* is a play that has been so often adapted by various media (e.g. Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, 1996) that theatre needs to reinvent its codes if only to show how the star-crossed lovers' tragedy still expresses the passionate turmoil of young generations. Immersion is a way to push the limits of representation further. Hence, the Colab's purpose was to encourage participation while sparing their audience possible feelings of disgust, unease or incomprehension that fight scenes and a final stage strewn with corpses might arouse. The rave-party context was particularly appropriate to create a sense of community for the younger audience who easily identified with the heroes of the tale and felt involved in the action. The Colab's strategy managed to fuse Shakespearean traditional audiences' and contemporary immersants' demands for if the former

were requested to "sit and see" (*Henry V* Chorus 4.0.52), they—just like our contemporaries—were eager to move and talk, i.e. share an experience.

Hamlet

Finally, with *Hamlet, See What I See* (Rebel and Misfits), Kelly Hummert aimed at challenging Chicago and New York's daring immersive creations. As a regional theatre, St-Louis would be the "trailblazer" in adapting a tragedy, notably because most of the original text was kept. Hummert said: "I believe immersive theatre […] is going to push our theatrical art form forward" (Semko n.p.). The play was set in a modern era, at the Barnett on Washington in Grand Center, and a special emphasis was made on the women's roles—Gertrude and Ophelia (performed by Hummert)—because of the female involvement in the company. One by one, the participants were led through little corridors and secret rooms where the story was performed before their eyes. Most of the time, the actors asked the viewers a piece of advice or played a game with them. No restriction was given. The viewers' engagement had to be maximum even if they could answer their cellar-phones, chew gum during the show, even take Snapchats, Instagram, and use their Facebook. All of these were not incompatible with their feeling to be involved in the heroes' actions. Hummert added: "I want people in my room, […] and I want people racing to follow Hamlet because they're so fascinated by what he's doing […]. I want them to feel comfortable in this world doing so" (Semko). If the word *comfort* might sound rather improper when attending a play like *Hamlet,* its implication in the immersive context was however much different. Because immersion literally shakes the "comfort" zone of the audience, the latter's experience is not submissive. If they cannot really alter the plotline and are, irremediably, led to witness the hero's doom, they may however be given the impression that they can thwart the natural course of the action. The Shakespeare tragedy no longer sounds as the remote tale of a Danish prince; on the contrary, it is a story in which the protagonist's ordeal is directly recognizable, never disconnected from today's society (so prove Snapchats, Instagram and

Facebook), but rather intimately part of it, authentic to the point that it may almost look ordinary.

Though the majority of the action took place in the main hall, the audience moved with the story, even outside for the burial of Ophelia. The outdoor context suddenly drew an obvious link with Shakespearean performance and the audience felt the palpable emotion of the actors. The similarity with the Elizabethan space became even more vivid when some onlookers viewed the closing swordfight from the balcony, offering a fascinating perspective on the fight choreography. The octagonal platform on which the final scene was performed looked tremendously alike early modern apron stages.

Concluding remarks: immersing in Shakespeare, uniting times

With *Hamlet, See What I See,* the macabre was probably not as disquieting as in other immersive Shakespeares, like *Sleep no more* but also like *Macbeth Under the Stars* (Dubai, 2017) featuring an all-female cast whose promise was to surround the audience and make them feel closer to the hero's madness to the point of suffocation. Because of their plot, the tragic momentum of immersive *Romeo and Juliet* or *Hamlet* targets different disturbing emotions. A participant of *Hamlet, See What I See* remarked: "I found the deconstructed script delightfully enigmatic and the forced focus on the visceral impact of the story completely captivating […]." Words like "visceral" and "captivating" immediately summon others: immersive experience that "bleeds into the real world" (Machon 2013: 55) and Shakespeare.

Adapting early modern drama is nothing new: stage professionals have long perceived in Shakespeare's themes and structure a fantastic embodiment of their own times (Prescott 269-284). But the various examples tackled above prove that, by re-inventing the codes of performance, immersion offers a new critical insight and expands the participants' imaginative effort. To be part of the show is more attractive and more challenging in an era when video games, 3D cinematic-experiences, always push the fourth wall further away. Twenty-first-century audiences' flickering attention needs constant stimulus.

They seldom endure watching a three-hour-long play uttered mostly in iambic pentameters.[12]

Hence, most immersive productions delete part of the text or transpose it into modern and technological languages. The words are replaced by images, action and dances during which the participants are led into new rooms so that they themselves remain constantly in motion, both physically and cognitively, their brain needing to be permanently solicited.

Furthermore, immersion and Shakespeare's tragedies naturally match because they both request multiple loci, complex installations, and tensed experiences whereby the public has the opportunity to observe the characters and grasp their motivations. Immersion provides Shakespeare's works with what was absent in the past and what the cinema has offered since, yet with non-theatrical devices: the realistic incarnation of a place.

While penetrating the unexpected locus to live an immersive experience, the onlooker possibly excavates the hidden side of a play. Indeed, tragedies still hold veiled secrets and hidden nooks that mazy buildings may enable to unlock. Such exploration implies the audience's suspension of disbelief, just as in Shakespeare's time. Yet, immersion involves an unconditional surrender from the participants who feel exhausted when leaving the building. The past and the future of a text fuse through this tacit agreement. Immersion deletes time-gaps, erases the sense of unfaltering conviction that we know all of Shakespeare. Indeed, because we have been *inside* the plot and because, like an Elizabethan audience, we have heard the lines of doomed heroes, we feel they belong to our own environment.

Finally, should we assert that immersion is a more appropriate way to approach Shakespeare's theatre, structurally and aesthetically, in our societies today? Assuredly, immersion invites new audiences to approach Shakespeare's drama from a more subjective angle despite the collective experience they are often plunged in. The recent performances have also proved how they efficiently explored Shakespeare's depth further. Tellingly, early modern drama more and more (co)

responds to pluri-culture and mass-productions; Shakespeare's works have evolved with the new generations for the latter to continue feeling attracted by the classics. The multi-media also use this material: "Scholars have explored the potential of new virtual locales for innovative, interactive teaching, and comparative research and pointed to some of the meanings generated when 'Shakespeare' is produced and consumed in digital form [for instance]" (Rumbold 313).[13] Furthermore, drama becomes more "participative" because of the citizens' need to feel more involved in the very process of creation: "[T]he aim of an immersive and participative theatre [is to] confer on the spectator a particular place that increases his/her artistic sensitivity" (Weber 3. My translation).

Because everyone can become the "actor of the theatrical moment" (Weber 4) Shakespeare's dramaturgy sounds even more appropriate in immersive contexts. He, who praised the stage as a space including the singular within the universal ("*Totus mundus agit histrionem*") and knew how his art was ephemeral ("Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage / And then is heard no more" [*Macbeth* 5.5.24-26]), would probably have congratulated immersive initiatives. And indeed, his intentions are respected there: first, immersion singles out the spectator, asking him/her to take part. Second, each immersive event is unique: venues change, actions vary according to the audience's response. The paradox however is that through the constant reinvention of acting conventions, Shakespeare's plays are preserved, never on the wane: "[A] play [by Shakespeare], for all that it carries the rhetorical and ideological force of an enduring stability, is *not an object* at all, but rather a *dynamic process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users" (Kidnie 2). However radical immersive Shakespeares may be, they have proved how *dynamic* their dramaturgy is.

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[1] On the word "immersant," see Davies in Prudhon (2020: 34).

[2] Interactivity is defined according to four levels: "navigation, *participation,* conversation and collaboration" (Bouko 33; Dickson 563).

[3] See Doran's cooperation with Intel Pentium in his production of *The Tempest* in 2016 (RSC) or the exploration of our world through Hamlet's psyche in an all-computerized set (*Hamlet's Lunacy,* Crew and Platform 0090, 2019).

[4] The website of the Michigan Theatre department invited the audience to enjoy "a star show on the Abrams Planetarium hemispherical projection dome" while listening to "the live performance of Shakespeare's [play]."

[5] The play, rechristened *Helsingør*, was a success as the audience really felt enthused by this novel experience in which they had been quite unexpectedly "*spec*-actors." The term "spec-actor" is used in the title of a French headline (Toulemonde n.p.). This portmanteau word is made of "spectacle" and "actor" but also of "spectre" and "actor," best fitting *Hamlet.* The word "spectator" is however not fully appropriate in the context of immersion since, by definition, to be a spectator—i.e. to look at—implies physical inactivity as Jacques Rancière underlines, "first, to look at is the opposite of 'to know'. […] Secondly, it is the opposite of 'to act'. […] To be a spectator means being separated from one's capacity both to know and to act" (8. My translation).

[6] The New Globe Theatre, London; Allen Elizabethan Theatre in Ashland, Oregon; Hardelot theatre, Condette, France; Schwäbiscsch Hall and The Globe Theatre in Neuss, both in Germany; a pop-up replica of Shakespeare's Globe, Sidney, another in Odessa, Texas.

[7] See the description of the audience by one of the characters, in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*: "Within one square a thousand heads are laid / So close, that all of heads, the roome seems made, / As many faces there (fill'd with blith looks) / Shew like the promising titles of new bookes (…)" (1.2. in Gurr 277).

[8] See Eric Dunnum's *Unruly Audiences and the Theater of Control in Early Modern London*, and the Chorus in *Henry V* who repeatedly asks the audience to stay put ("sit and see" [4.0.52]); the Prologue to Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon*: "The Charmes of silence through this Square be throwne, / That an un-usde Attention (like a Jewell) / May hang at every eare, […] These wonders sit and see" (1-3).

[9] "Emphasis on going along an individual path and choosing what to look at is intended to be a liberating freedom rather than a constricting one—but choice paralysis could be a barrier to immersion" (Biggin 91 in Prudhon 342). //

[10] "Elizabethan audiences clapped and booed whenever they felt like it. Sometimes they threw fruit. Groundlings paid a penny to stand and watch performances, […] the fine rich people paid the most expensive ticket price *to*

actually sit on the stage. The place was full of pickpockets and prostitutes […]. Theatre was not only a major social occasion; it could often feel like a competition for attention" (Tichenor n.p.).

[11] In Punchdrunk's adaptation of the play, the numerous references to other artistic trends, especially to cinematic productions also explain its success: Hitchcock's films, the film noir, Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, Christopher Nolan's *Inception,* the TV series *Lost*, and even the Haunted Mansion in Disneyland experience.

[12] "The popularity [of Punchdrunk] stems from the success of a similar phenomenon: dynamic story-based video games" (Thiel 61).

[13] She mentions a list of various paramount works in the field such as Richard Burt's introduction in *Shakespeare after Mass Media* (2002), to name but one example.