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Playification of Theatre: Game Play, Ludic Activities and Being Playful in *The Great Gatsby: An Immersive Theatrical Experience*

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My examination of game play, ludic activity and being playful in immersive Gatsby *shows that* Gatsby *is a typical example of the playification of theatre in the contemporary art scene. In using the term 'playification', I refer to the method of incorporating diverse play categories in theatre to motivate audience activity. While much critical attention has been devoted to the controversial nature of active spectating as a practice of audience emancipation, there has been relatively less focus on its play aspect. To develop an understanding of the idea of play in immersive theatre, I refer to the works of Johan Huizinga and Richard Schechner, and apply Schechner's language, which distinguishes play and game in immersive theatre. Moreover, in developing Schechner's vocabulary in the context of immersive theatre, I expand my scope of reference to include the insights of game theorists.*

Immersive theatre has, without a doubt, emerged as one of the most highly sought-out performance styles in the first two decades of the new century. As critics have pointed out, it is due to the conspicuous success of Punchdrunk, based in the UK, that the term 'immersive' was introduced to and became prevalent in the contemporary theatre scene. As a concept that developed in connection with advancements in virtual reality (VR) technologies, performance scholars and media artists interested in VR technology from its infancy approach 'immersion' in the field of VR as being concerned with shaping humans' sensory-guided motor and cognitive activity in a digital environment.[1] This instillation of a sense of place informs the mode of audience experience in immersive theatre. In the productions of Punchdrunk, one of the few pioneers of immersive theatre, people are placed into the scene, transported to another world and encouraged to freely explore the site. For example, *Sleep No More* (*SNM*) invites the masked audience to step inside the performance space and explore the site at will while being only a few steps away from the actors or even being dragged into a one-on-one close-up moment.

Although Punchdrunk claim that the distinct nature of their participatory forms and the unique bodily involvement they provide, as in the case of *SNM*, allow such theatre to offer an intimate alternative to traditional drama, the emergence of the active spectator is not such a new phenomenon in the history of the theatre. Most often, the term 'immersive' has been bandied about as one referencing a return to the

bygone imaginations of theatre-makers in the late twentieth century, including site-specific and living-room performance, promenade theatre, environmental theatre and participatory theatre, while some have considered it to be a hackneyed idea that could go further back, to the medieval period.[2] From this perspective, active spectating primarily denotes audience movement in space, specifically movement across the performance space and audience space, or across multiple viewing positions. While the formal fluidity across different productions makes immersive theatre not only seem like a resurgence of the old forms but also impossible to pigeonhole into a single performance category, the central feature of immersive theatre lies in the complete physical and sensorial involvement of the audience in the performance event.[3] As theatrical experience that places the idea of the active audience at the heart of the work, immersive theatre 'exploits diverse artistic languages to establish an "experiential" audience event via the recreation of visceral experience'.[4] In other words, immersive theatre is about offering a visceral experience via audience engagement with the performance scene.

While much critical attention has been devoted to the controversial nature of active spectating as a practice of audience emancipation, there has been relatively less focus on its *play* aspect. In fact, it is not active spectatorship per se that matters in immersive theatre, but rather *how* the audience interacts with the theatre and *what* immersive experience the audience takes from that interaction. The key factors of immersive theatres are not just the extinct fourth wall, but also the form and the quality of audience activity. All audience members in *SNM* and Blast Theory's *Can You See Me Now?* (*CYSMN*) are 'active' in the sense that they do not have designated, fixed seating and are free to move across different spaces. While the kinetic activity of participants in both *SNM* and *CYSMN* goes against the principle of actor–audience segregation that underlies the orthodox theatre, the form and quality of audience activities in the two performances are dissimilar because of the different play categories they adopt.

Just as in a digital adventure game, the audience experience in the two productions is filled with tension between the order that underlies the exclusive sphere and the player activity that leads to uncertain returns. However, *SNM* uses gaming mechanics that exclude the notion of win or lose, and invites the audience members to play within the darkened performance site with masked audiences by, as in a treasure hunt, 'Trying every door and drawer'.[5] On the other hand, *CYSMN* is a game of chase that could be won or lost depending on whatever free movements the participants make based on the information provided. 'Runners chased after online players, using mobile devices to follow their location live, whilst runners' positions were tracked by satellite and updated in real time on the 3D game area.'[6] The difference in form and quality of audience activities in the two performances implies the difference in how the audience interacts with the productions and what kind of immersive experience they take from respective performances.

This is also the case in *The Great Gatsby: An Immersive Theatrical Experience* (Seoul, South Korea, 2020). First held in York in 2015, *The Great Gatsby* (*Gatsby*), directed by Alexander Wright, is the longest-running immersive-theatre production in

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the UK, and it has been applauded by theatre-goers around the world, including in Seoul (Fig. 1). It is an immersive retelling of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel that reduces the original time frame to one evening. As stated by its producer, immersion in *Gatsby* is related to 'the environment … designed to deliver an all-encompassing experience; from the moment you enter Jay Gatsby's Mansion, you will feel like you have been transported back to the roaring 1920s.'[7] Yet, as Wright makes clear, immersive theatre is about 'incorporating the audience to the plot' for a distinct but shared experience because, for social animals like humans, it is the most natural way of enjoying a performance.[8] Similar to the experience of Nick Carraway in the original *Gatsby* novel, audience members are invited to live out a night of debauchery at Gatsby's lavish party held at his mansion that is excessively decorated in the 1920s style. Under the glamorous lighting and hot jazz, the attendants move through three major performance spaces according to the creator's instruction and have the option to join the cast to dance, explore the space and act out parts of the story in several smaller rooms and spaces.

To develop an understanding of the idea of *play* in *Gatsby*, I refer to the works of Johan Huizinga and Richard Schechner. Huizinga's influential work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1949) approaches play as a thing of its own, and examines the relation of play to culture by analysing its social manifestations through the higher forms of play which are more articulate in form and more diverse in their features (such as a game of chess) than the primitive forms of play that are identifiable among infants and young animals (such as rolling a knitting ball). Of all

Fig. 1 **Lucinda Turner (Daisy) and Craig Hamilton (Gatsby) in *Gatsby*. Photograph from the *Gatsby* official Facebook page, at www.facebook.com/immersivegatsby.**

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his insightful observations, what is important to the central concern of my paper is that Huizinga identifies the rules as 'a very important factor in the play-concept', underscoring that 'as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses'.[9] Huizinga's concept has been shared in the field of theatre and performance. Schechner in *Performance Theory* (2003) refers to Huizinga and demonstrates a profound interest in the centrality of rules in his own theorization of play and game as well. According to Schechner, rules, as one of the basic qualities shared by theatre-related activities such as ritual, play, games, sports, dance and music, set these activities '*apart from everyday life*'.[10] In comparing the two works, I am interested in continuing their idea on the importance of rules in games and applying Schechner's language, which distinguishes play and game in immersive theatre. Drawing on my experience as a *Gatsby* audience member, I suggest that the rules of both the creator and the audience as frames govern the immersive experience. The article aims to contribute to the burgeoning discourse on immersive theatre *as* game to suggest immersive theatre as a practice of *playifying* theatre. Moreover, in developing Schechner's vocabulary in the context of immersive theatre, I expand my scope of reference to include the insights of game theorists including Richard Bartle, Roger Caillois, Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, who have developed useful language that helps refine the ideas of ludic immersion, interactivity and meaningful play in participatory performances. I will apply their languages in unpacking the different kinds of play employed in *Gatsby*, which altogether generate the audience's immersive experience.

Through my own experience of *Gatsby* as a participant, I aim to develop an interdisciplinary approach to audience interaction, immersion and freedom in the contemporary theatre landscape. To this end, I apply Salen and Zimmerman's distinction and illustrate how game play, ludic activity and playful mindset in the immersive event *playify* the orthodox theatre. In using the term *playification*, I refer to the method of incorporating diverse play categories in theatre to motivate audience activity. By intentionally using the term 'playification' instead of 'gamification', I highlight the increased broadness of its focus compared to that of gamification. Playification is more inclusive than gamification in that it embraces both open-ended, non-game behaviours and goal-directed game play. Gamification generally refers to '[t]he application of typical elements of game playing (e.g. point scoring, competition with others, rules of play) to other areas of activity'.[11] The term began to surface at the beginning of the 2000s in the digital-media industry, and it became a popular term in 2011 when Sebastian Deterding *et al.* elaborated upon the concept and established its definition in 'From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining "Gamification"'. According to Deterding *et al.*, gamification is 'the use of game design elements in non-game contexts'.[12] The term strictly restricts 'game design elements' to elements that are 'characteristic for games (rather than play or playfulness)'.[13] By contrast, playification tolerates non-game-related actions, play or playfulness; it embraces activities and mindsets that are not immediately aimed at achieving a game goal, and are only distantly related to obeying game rules. In applying Salen and Zimmerman's categorization of play, I consider playification to involve game play, ludic activities and a playful state of mind within physical spaces.

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In interrogating audience 'liberation' in immersive theatre, Marvin Carlson concludes that the closest model for the reception process of an immersive theatre audience is not actual life but virtual video games. Unlike Rancière and Artaud's characters, they are free to wander and select only within the existing boundaries designed by the producers of immersive theatre, as is the case in a video game.[14] Where Carlson attends to the restraints imposed against the audience's will and hence their 'illusory' emancipation,[15] what interests me is the way in which those limitations create a realm that is distinct from the ordinary and the 'real'. The realm is different in the sense that it has a set of fixed rules that render the otherwise confusing actions orderly and fun. These rules are not a thwarting force against the audience's free action, as has been observed by some, including Carlson, but they instead invite the play element, allow a free activity, and turn the performance into a kind of game.

By analyzing the specific ways in which the audience members *play*, this article considers what it means to be an *active* audience member in contemporary immersive, participatory theatres. The idea of game playing in immersive theatre has been considered previously by scholars such as Rosemary Klich, Gareth White and Rose Biggin.[16] In focusing on the game-play aspects of *Gatsby*, and specifically on audience interaction with the fictional world through rules, the article argues that the various play elements embraced by the concept of playification effectively help us comprehend the audience's immersive experience in *Gatsby*. In doing so, this article helps shed light on *play* as the prominent mode of the audience's experience regarding both form and attitude in *Gatsby*, thus contributing to the scholarship on immersive theatre that has been dominated by contentions over audience agency, emancipation and narrative, to include the idea of *playification*. As the agent of play in immersive theatre is the audience, I draw on my own experience as a *Gatsby* audience member.

Play as the experience of rules

Approaching play as 'the thing itself', Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* contends that play is a cultural factor that 'transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action'.[17] While the formal characteristics of play underlie Huizinga's theorization of the activity of play, the qualities of play, such as non-compulsiveness, disinterestedness, spatio-temporal finiteness, orderliness and secretiveness, are latent in his theory, and they combine to give a sense of 'the fun' in playing, which Huizinga sees as 'the essence of play':[18]

> [play is] a free [voluntary] activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to *fixed rules* and in an *orderly manner*. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.[19]

From a performance perspective, Huizinga's emphasis on order or rules as one of play's most essential, positive formal features is noteworthy. *Homo Ludens* makes clear the

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significance of rules in stating that play 'demands order absolute and supreme', that play '*is* order', and that all play 'has its rules';[20] order reigns in the playground and determines what holds in the play-world, which is distinct from 'real' life. The importance of rules is dealt with in some groundbreaking works by game historians and theorists who, like Huizinga, focus on the higher forms of play in their attempt to define the activity of play. Building upon Huizinga, Roger Caillois in *Man, Play, and Games* (1962) argues that play is governed by rules that suspend ordinary laws; it is free, separate in space and time, uncertain, unproductive and against real life.[21] In *Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (1990), Bernard Suits defines play as an activity where 'the rules prohibit more efficient in favour of less efficient means, and where such rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity'.[22] In *Rules of Play* (2004), Salen and Zimmerman contend that rules 'provide the structure out of which play emerges, by delimiting what the player can and cannot do'.[23]

This aspect of play as the experience or acceptance of rules is central to the theory of performance. Picking up on Huizinga's thesis of play and ritual as being indistinguishable in terms of form and attitude, Schechner develops his notion of play in his theorization of performance, a '*Ritualized behavior conditioned/permeated by play*'.[24] Tracing the origin of play behaviour from hunting, Schechner argues that play serves to make 'order out of disorder', and that it is this facet of play, as 'the improvisational imposition of order', that adds to the fun while, in the moment of 'crisis', helping one distinguish ritualized behaviour (including performances) from real actions.[25] Schechner's observation on play as that which 'organizes performance, makes it comprehensible' and thereby adds fun leads to his conclusion that play is not free but 'scripted'.[26] In other words, play is 'patterns of doing'[27] or 'the basic code of the events'.[28] Schechner's view of play as scripted mirrors Huizinga's proposition that play is order, as it has elements of 'tension, poise, balance, contrast, variation, solution, resolution, etc.' that form 'rhythm and harmony' and infuses an imperfect, confusing world with 'a temporary, a limited perfection'.[29] This 'perfection', as opposed to confusion, may be what Schechner refers to as the comprehensible, organized state of performance, consisting of 'consciously "chosen"' behaviours.[30] When the script is lost, play becomes disarranged actions that transgress the field of the performance, and the performance becomes an undecipherable movement pattern. Eventually, the play-world founders and 'real' (imperfect, confusing) life resumes.

Game as frame of game play

What, then, is a game? Huizinga, who is particularly interested in theorizing play in relation to culture, does not offer a specific definition of what a game is. He does not make a clear distinction between game and play, using the two terms alternately sometimes while distinguishing them at other times. As a cultural phenomenon, Huizinga states, play functions 'as a contest *for* something or a representation *of* something. These two functions can unite in such a way that the game "represents" a context, or else becomes a contest for the best representation of something.' Further,

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'Playing is not "doing" in the ordinary sense; you do not "do" a game as you "do" or "go" fishing, or hunting, or Morris-dancing, or woodwork – you "play" it.'[31] Although the non-distinguishment between game and play may be the case in some languages, such as French and German, a brief examination of some important game theorists shows that game and play are not the same. In these conceptualizations, rules feature as a key component of games, a component that administers interaction, and a game is a goal-directed system governed by rules. Chris Crawford surveys five categories of game (board games, card games, athletic games, children's games and computer games) and concludes that a game is a formal system that has explicit rules by which its elements interact and change, thus causing conflicts, and offers a safe way to experience reality.[32] That is, game, with its given rules, is a riskless means of learning social interaction, or, as Schechner puts it, of 'express[ing] their social behavior'.[33] In distinguishing 'formal game' from 'informal game' (or undirected play), David Parlett states that a game, unlike play, has ends and means, as 'winning is the "end" [termination and object] of the game', and that a game proceeds according to 'an agreed set of equipment and of procedural "rules"'.[34] Lastly, Salen and Zimmerman see a game as 'a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome'.[35]

However, it is contradictory to say that play is a 'component' of game since, as Huizinga and his succeeding game theorists have agreed, play is a thing of its own. While acknowledging the expansiveness of the play phenomenon, which, according to Huizinga, 'is older than culture',[36] play in the game context may need to be differentiated from play in other contexts. Here, Salen and Zimmerman's distinction is useful where the wide-ranging term is subdivided into three categories: game play, ludic activity and being playful (Fig. 2).[37] Being playful, as the most inclusive category, relates 'not only to typical play activities, but also to the idea of being in a playful state of mind' – for example, creating nicknames in the spirit of playfully teasing a close friend.[38] Ludic activities involve 'play activities that include not only games, but all of the non-game behaviors', as in the cases of playing on a jungle gym or throwing a frisbee with a friend.[39] Finally, game play is experienced in the case of higher forms of play; as in baseball or football, it includes 'the formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its system through play'.[40] That is, in highly organized play, play is the rule-based interaction or the experience of rules that inform the game system.

Limiting our scope to game play, which occurs in relation to games specifically, we might as well say that games are frames of game play: play as rules or the experience of rules becomes involved in interesting interaction or meaningful action as rules of the game are followed. In *Frame Analysis*, Erving Goffman developed the term 'frame' to describe how we structure our perceptions of, and manage our behaviour in, diverse situations. Such frames help us understand our experiences by offering assumptions and meaning about them. Thus frames allow us to behave differently according to the circumstances that we are in through 'organizational premises' by which we understand what is going on.[41] When we are in a game system, we come to understand the meaning of game play by experiencing its relation to the game system;

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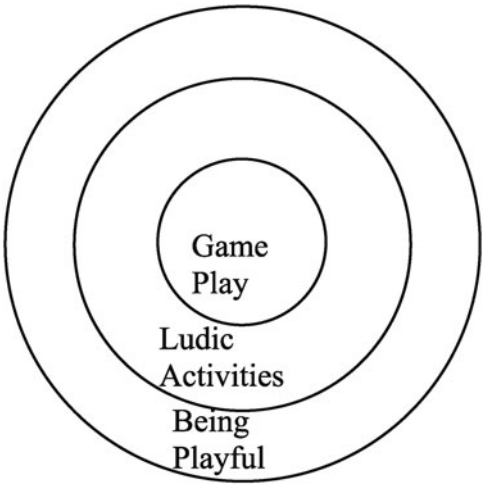

FIG. 2 **Salen and Zimmerman's three categories of play. From Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 286.**

our behaviour involved in game play becomes meaningful action because it follows the director's rules.

Non-cathartic pleasures

The *fun* of playing could then be conceptualized in relation to the experience of rules. There are many elements that make a game fun, and there can be no single universal way to describe why games are fun. Games are fun for different players for different reasons, and game designers emphasize different aspects of their games (story and/or interaction) to provide different kinds of enjoyment. Rules can even exist in diverse forms in different games. Moreover, in games where rules are intended to be the source of fun, they are experienced differently by different players. Some rules can be boring to some people, while the exact same set of rules can be thrilling to others. Whatever the case, rules limit the player's scope of movement and choice.[42] Juul observes that this limitation 'provides an occasion for interesting social interaction' or 'a context for human interaction':

> Since play is normally assumed to be a free-form activity devoid of constraints, it appears illogical that we would choose to limit our options by playing games with fixed rules. Why be limited when we can be free? The answer to this is basically that games provide context for actions: moving an avatar is much more meaningful in a game environment than in an empty space … The rules of a game add meaning and enable actions by setting up differences between potential moves and events.[43]

In other words, limitation based on rules should not be taken literally. Some games are considered fun because of their rules that – far from being mere restrictions against player activity – offer a context for interesting interaction, for creating meaning and

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for meaningful action that contribute to the overall fun of the game. Further, as argued by Salen and Zimmerman, 'The "rules" created by these elements [utilitarian structures of the game system, such as the walls, pathways, doors] make the free movement of play possible':

> Play emerges from the relationships guiding and functioning of the system, occurring in the interstitial spaces between and among its components. Play is an expression of the system, one that takes advantage of the space of possibility created from the system's structure.[44]

Similarly, Schechner contends that, if play is 'patterns of doing', then fun is not synonymous with emancipation; rather, the fun in playing is 'a playing at' something; that is, the scripted actions.[45] Simply put, players can choose to act upon the rules in pursuit of their own fun. There are many sources of fun in a game, and rules comprise part of this fun. I argue that the significant implication of this interdisciplinary understanding of rules and theatre is that there is no hierarchy in rules but only a difference in kind; different rules can exist in clashing forms or in cohesive ways.

Play in immersive theatre

The approach to play as the experience of rules and game as a frame of game play is central to the current consideration of immersive theatre because the distinction implies a difference between conventional and non-conventional theatre in terms of audience activity. Exploring rules as one of the four basic qualities shared by play, game and theatre, Schechner points out that 'the quality and use of the rules' in play differ from those in game and theatre.[46] Play is a 'free activity', meaning that the player's acceptance of the rules is voluntary and not forced; by contrast, a game requires the player's submission to the programmed rules:

> Play is a 'free activity' where one makes one's own rules. In Freudian terms play expresses the pleasure principle, the *private* fantasy world. Ritual is strictly programmed, expressing the individual's submission to forces 'larger' or at least 'other' than oneself. Ritual epitomizes the reality principle, the agreement to obey rules that are *given*. Games, sports, and theater (dance, music) mediate between these extremes. It is in these activities that people express their *social* behavior.[47]

In other words, Schechner sees games, sports and theatre as activities that constitute a continuum ranging from participant rule-creating (play) to participant rule-abiding (ritual); through those activities, partakers demonstrate their decision-making behaviour in conflict situations. Some rules of games, sports and theatre serve as frames that tell the players what must be done while others tell what must not be done (Fig. 3), whereas some rules are established by an invited player, as in play.[48]

Seen in this light, immersive performance events are unique in that there are two kinds of rules set in motion simultaneously – the rules of the individual audience and the rules institutionalized by the director, which together govern the performance in its entirety. While the experience of the director's rules may be what Salen and

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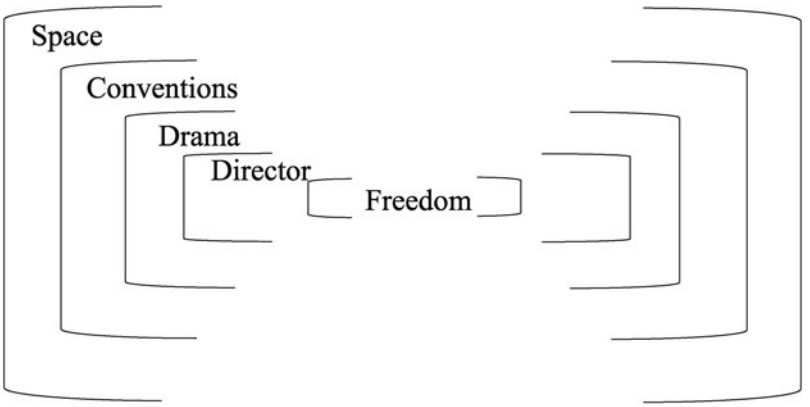

FIG. 3 **Richard Schechner's frames of theatre. From Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 17.**

Zimmerman termed *game play*, the experience of the player's own rules may be seen as *ludic activities*, which include 'play activities that include not only games, but all of the non-game behaviors'.[49]

From a performance perspective, it is in this respect – the imposition of different kinds of rules or play – that ludic immersion in immersive theatre manifests in diverse forms to disparate people, thus leading to experiences intended by the makers of the production and/or in unlikely course led by the participants. The form of ludic immersion the participants experience seems to depend on their character and behaviour, which affect their relation to the rules. When read as games, Bartle's division of players into four types is a useful system for explaining audience personality and the effect of their behaviour on rules in immersive theatres. 'Killers' and 'achievers' are intent on attaining (future) goals while 'socializers' and 'explorers' are dedicated to pursuing (present) enjoyment in the absence of goals.[50] From a performance perspective, it could be said that killers and achievers in immersive theatre are more likely to hold onto the director's rules whereas socializers and explorers are more into enjoying undirected engagement with the fictional world. The significant implication of such a reading is that there is no single approach to ludic immersion. Ludic immersion in immersive theatre derives from game play and/or ludic activities. Moreover, just as in my own experience of the immersive *Gatsby*, players may display multiple kinds of behaviour (for example, behaviour of both the achiever and the explorer) and engage in both kinds of play.

Game play

In immersive theatre, game play or the rules established by the director enable meaningful play for those who are serious-minded about a goal. As Huizinga claims, play 'imparts meaning to the action', though he is unclear about the connection between meaning and play (rules).[51] Building upon Huizinga's idea, Salen and

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Zimmerman conceive meaningful play in a game system to be emerging from 'the process by which a player takes action [makes choices] within the designed system of a game and the system responds to the action', or what occurs 'when the relationships between actions and outcomes in a game are both discernable and integrated into the larger context of the game'.[52] Similarly, in immersive theatre, meaningful play arises through audience interaction that takes place within the frame containing the rules established by the director (which in turn contains within it the rules established by drama and space) (Fig. 4). In other words, meaningful play occurs when a player's decisions fall under scripted options framed by the director and the production responds in such a way that the response is integrated into the larger context of the performance or the overarching story. Throughout the immersive retelling I attended, multiple game play activities were afforded to immerse the audience into Gatsby's world.

In immersive events, all players are affected by the rules of space and time; actions are meaningful to the experience of *Gatsby* only when they are performed within the spatio-temporal frame set by the director. Just as Gatsby's guests secretly enjoyed gin and cocktails against the prohibition of alcohol within the spatio-temporal world of the party, the audience of the immersive *Gatsby* can play within the physical bounds of the venue in a given time. The kinetic movement of the individuals is primarily limited by the floor design, which transforms the Grevin Museum in Seoul into Gatsby's extravagant residence, wherein the adapted story unfolds in three different places. Following Rosy Rosenthal's instruction, the audience must leave the drugstore and move up the stairs to the ballroom on the second floor, the centre of which is where the actual party unfolds and the major events of the plot are staged. In every nook and cranny of the main lounge and in multiple side rooms that function throughout the two acts as Gatsby's study, bedroom and drawing room, and as Daisy's dressing room and George's garage, different pieces of the story that reveal the incidents and emotions behind the major events are simultaneously enacted during the main action. The two kinds of space (the centre of the main lounge and the

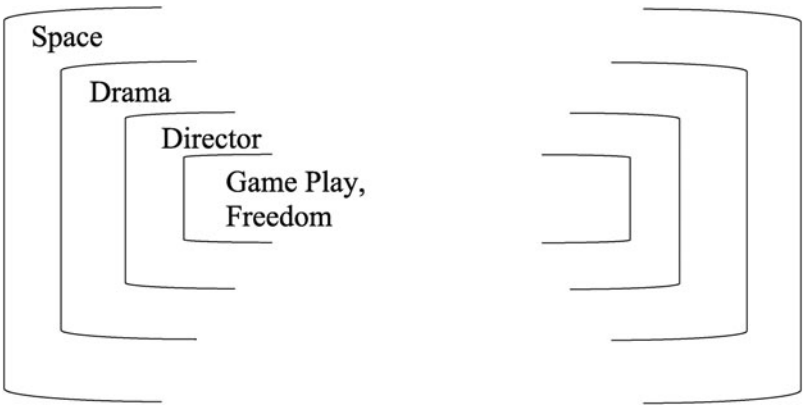

Fig. 4 **Frames for killers and achievers in immersive theatre.**

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smaller spaces) thus operate as spatial embodiments of the theatre's main plot and subplots. In terms of time, the decadent party starts at 8 p.m. (while you are asked to arrive thirty minutes earlier) and ends around 10:30 p.m.

Moreover, in immersive theatre, the audience members engage in a play of 'mimicry' as they step into the imaginary world created by the director.[53] In fact, the play starts before the show, when the participants begin pondering their attire for the occasion upon the director's request, which encourages them to dress up according to 1920s fashion. Although this dressing up was not mandatory, the request made me look through my wardrobe and start playing days before the curtains went up. This play of costume searching is an interesting instance that started at my home days before the actual performance, which means that it happened beyond the frames of the *Gatsby* game. While this costume searching could be said to have formed no action directly meaningful to my immersive experience of *Gatsby*, the scavenging act prepared me to become directly involved in meaningful action shaped by the director. Through the act, I was playing a spin-off game of *Gatsby*, a game of finding a 1920s dress, that prepared me to fully engage in the play of mimicry within the frames of *Gatsby*.

Showing up at the performance venue on time with the invitation (ticket) that gives entrance to the show is a tacit agreement to actively engage in this type of role playing. Opening the doors of Gatsby's drugstore, each audience member becomes a part of 1920s New York as Gatsby's guest who is looking forward to a night of boozing and dancing. Conversations with Lucille, Rosy, George and Myrtle constantly reminded me of the roaring twenties and the world of Gatsby, of which I became an integral part. Such play of mimicry, or the '[r]ole playing and make-believe play',[54] is the unchangeable rule of *Gatsby*. Submitting to this rule offered me no sense of restraint that Carlson noted, but rather a sense of agency in making my presence meaningful in a realm that is distinct from the 'real'. The rule of make-believe rendered Grevin Museum into a non-ordinary space where rule-observing actions are relevant and pleasurable whereas non-conforming, ordinary actions are meaningless and confusing. The rule of mimicry administered interaction between participants and actors, between participants and participants, making the otherwise disorderly actions orderly and comprehensible. That is, the participants demonstrated their 1920s persona through the role playing and the play-acting was a means of expressing possible social behaviour in Gatsby's world.

A professed feature of immersive theatre is audience movement directed toward finding theatricalized pieces of the story (action or spectacle) embedded or hidden at different spots in the venue, as in a treasure hunt or a scavenger hunt unaccompanied by any adversary or merit. This activity of finding interesting scenes could be read as a game that combines *agôn* (competition) with *alea* (chance),[55] where moving actively (and sometimes moving first) is an advantage to finding the scenes, and that advantage is also independent of the player, as it is the performers that select who will be invited to the smaller rooms. Upon entering Gatsby's drugstore, Lucille informed the audience members that they would have the opportunity to accept offers to follow other people (guests or cast) to explore the smaller rooms to seize the chance to

perform a scene, bear witnesses to an event or exchange words with the characters, 'if you are lucky'. The more you willingly consent to the unknown invitations to visit the side rooms by Gatsby, Tom and Daisy during the show, the more opportunities you have to live out diverse experiences as Gatsby's guest. In my case, the chance of being invited to the rooms seemed to depend on *where* I had been standing in the main lounge at certain *moments* because the cast pulled aside groups of people in certain locations in order not to interrupt the main action unfolding in the lounge.

The greatest 'reward' of *Gatsby*'s *agôn–alea* play is found in the one-to-one moments where I was pulled aside by chance and Tom and Jordan created room for unpremeditated conversations or interesting actions. The chance of being invited to such an interaction does not depend on an audience member's acting skills or will; if it is suggested that you engage in a scene, you should actively surrender to it for your own good. The one-to-one moments are particularly impactful because, once you actively yield to the offers, you are likely to become more intimate with the characters; the more you follow the rules of the game and fall within the frames of game play, the more meaningful action you perform, and the more your chances of having fun. Helping Tom cheer up Myrtle and storming into Gatsby's study with Jordan were intimate interactions I attained both by initiative and by chance. Being in a scene with the characters led to further conversations at intermission and after the show, as if we had temporarily become good friends.

Ludic activities

In immersive theatres, there is also the possibility of using individual audience's rules as a frame that does not contain the rules of the drama and the director (Fig. 5). The participants who are eager to explore and socialize follow their own rules within the given space, rather than the conventions of the epoch or existing theatre forms. The frames of space and individual play are tighter than those of drama and director.

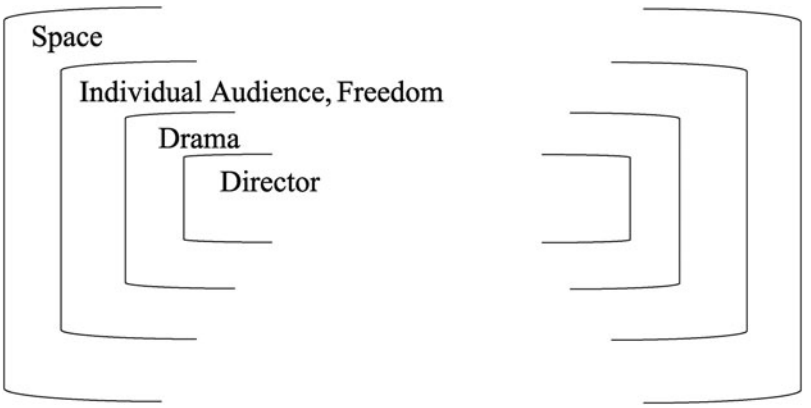

Fig. 5 **Frames for socializers and explorers in immersive theatre.**

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The rules of the player will contain the rules of space, just as 'the wildest avant-garde work will be framed by space, sometimes literally interstellar space'.[56] Play becomes what individuals do within the space of the performance. The realm of freedom is intricately related to the rules established by individual players, and it is wider than it is in the case of game play. Hence the event becomes a performance intervened in by the audience; depending on how the audience members move and discover scenes and react to those scenes, each performance becomes unique.

However, since the rigid rules of the director are in motion (embedded/lingering) throughout the given time and space, the co-presence of the audience's rules and the director's rules render the audience's play not highly formalized game play but a less formal ludic activity. Within the architectural space and time, the play activities of socializers and explorers freely bounce between the rules established by themselves and the rules set in motion by the director:

> *Ludic Activity*: Think of bouncing a ball against a wall … In experiencing the play of the ball, the player is playing with structures such as gravity, the material identity of the ball, the architectural space, and his or her own physical skill in throwing and catching. To *play* with the ball is to play with all of these structures, testing their limits and boundaries, finding ways of moving around and inside them.[57]

To *play* with(in) the world of *Gatsby* is, like playing with a bouncing ball, to play with the architectural structures, moving around and inside them, by which the player can test the limits and boundaries of the physical space. The entire process of rambling along the walls of Gatsby's mansion at liberty is a play with the material textures of the site; that is, with its limitations. It is a play that arises when limitations emerging from architectonics are accepted and the erected boundaries are treated as if their existence were reasonable. With no map to refer to, the immediate visual information of the given spatial structure in front of me was the primary rule to my play with the compositional influence of the space. Encountering the stairs heading upward, I accepted its materiality and moved up to find the main lounge where there were more limitations to be tried; encountering a door standing on the corner of the lounge, I took advantage of its structural characteristics and pushed it open to discover Gatsby's study. The act of embracing the limitations emerging from the presence of walls, stairs or doors, and reflecting their physicality in my self-designed course of exploration, was experienced more like a play with the formal effect of the space. That is, the act of walking through the choreographic influence of the space was not merely a practice of relocating my body or helplessly subjecting my body to it but a play with the proprioceptive and kinaesthetic experience of entering the building and moving through its sensory rooms. This entire process of physically navigating the museum set speaks of how audience freedom could be understood as an opportunity to explore the constraints imposed by the director. As Ian Bogost observes,

> The power of games lies not in their capacity to deliver rewards or enjoyment, but in the structured constraint of their design, which opens abundant possible spaces for play … Play, generalized, is the operation of structures constrained by limitations … Instead of

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> seeing freedom as an escape from the chains of limitation, we should interpret it as an opportunity to explore the implications of inherited or invented constraints.[58]

The co-presence of rules set by the audience and the director, or the presence of audience freedom, differentiates ludic activity from game play in that in ludic activities there is no objectively assessable or quantifiable outcome. Throughout *Gatsby*, the audience involve in the fictional world as a character of that imaginary world. While this may be regulated by the director, as described above (a person living in the 1920s, coming to the party as Gatsby's guest), there is sometimes room for individual improvisations. Such play of 'mimicry' by which the player becomes 'an illusory character oneself, and of so behaving',[59] is possible in *Gatsby*. Upon entering Gatsby's drugstore, the audience members are greeted by early arrivers; that is, the actors who turn out to be Jordan, Lucille, George and Myrtle. As the characters strike up conversations with the arrivals and start asking questions, the attendants must make quick decisions on whether they are going to maintain their original identities or whole new personas. They are in the position of establishing the rule (the persona) by which they will interact with the entire event. You can agree to the director and be Gatsby's guest living in the 1920s, or disagree with this and be whoever you wish to be. I retained my name, job and address, which shocked Lucille, as she could not understand how I was able to come all the way from Seoul to New York by subway. My fellow companions argued with Jordan that they were in the twenty-first century while she was only an illusion in a show.

Such instances of improvisations also represent the pertinent problem of breaking the rules of *Gatsby*. While my partners respected the director's design by actively participating in their dialogue with Jordan, their established rule was geared toward challenging it by arguing with Jordan about her illusory quality. Although the actor was adept at dealing with the verbal duel, Jordan's continued confusion over their 'nonsense' seemed to provide the participants the pleasure that their rule is at play and thus they have a degree of control over the scene. The moment evidences the fact that play 'exists *because* of more rigid structures, but also exists somehow in *opposition* to them'.[60] Similar cases emerged in the above-mentioned spatial exploration, specifically in moments when I attempted to challenge the architectural structures in a way that they were not intended to be used for. Of all of these, an interesting instance happened when I moved down the stairs to the drugstore using the stairway that was installed for the single purpose of leading the participants up to the main lounge at the beginning of the performance. As I opened the door that was supposed to stay closed once the room was evacuated, I found Lucille, who warned me to go back upstairs because the store was nearly caught yesterday for not respecting Prohibition. As such, reversing my route by using the stairs and doors in unexpected ways provided me the opportunity to have a one-to-one moment with Lucile, who, in dealing with my challenge to the rigid structures, revealed hidden stories of Gatsby's mansion.

On the other hand, directionless audience behaviours that are at odds with the director's intent evidence the importance of rigid structures or rules in playing the performance. In *Gatsby*, the director's rules are inherently related to the 'penalty' by

which the participants are directly punished for activities that could disrupt the production itself. Specifically, socializers and explorers who find joy in participation by means of their own rules may face sanctions against their 'private fantasy' because of the creator-imposed rules. At the most basic level, although fashionably late comers can enter by 8:20 p.m., guests arriving later than that have to wait until the intermission to join the event and may be interrogated by Gatsby for being late. As I started to ramble toward the side rooms right before George sang 'Let's Fall in Love' at the very beginning of the show, I was halted by George and instructed to pay attention to what was about to happen on the main stage. It turned out that the moment was important because it functioned as an introduction or a formal welcoming of the guests to the theatre event. Such sanctions remind one of the fact that '[t]he play of a game … is only possible because of rules'.[61]

The most memorable ludic activity in *Gatsby* comes from the Charleston dancing, which plays 'with the physical sensation of vertigo'.[62] This play of 'ilinx', as it is termed by Caillois, is provoked by various physical activities, including dance, which stir insidious giddiness such as the waltz or encourage the body to surrender to pleasurable torture through convulsive movements.[63] Joining the Charleston crash course led by Daisy and Jordan, it did not take long for the waving of the arms and swinging of the legs to the 1920s jazz song 'Sing, Sing, Sing' by Benny Goodman to intoxicate the senses to pleasurable vertigo (Fig. 6). This is experientially different from cases in which the audience merely spectates the dancers dancing at a close distance, as in *SNM*, where the dance number at the end of the show wraps up the immersive experience.

Active audience being playful

The biggest difference between the spectators of orthodox theatre and the participants in immersive theatre is that players in an immersive work have something at stake, which is the decision whether they will pursue their own rules or those of the creator, or both. Further, we can say that to be an active audience member in a contemporary immersive scene is having the ability to make choices. The choices relate not only to kinetic movement but also to the decisions one has made about pursuing the creator's rules and/or their own rules, and at what moment.

One may argue that the sheer presence of scripted options that function to push the designed event along represents a pressure against one's freedom to make choices. However, all choices that we make in our life are limited by several options, but we still feel this to be, or we call it, freedom – mostly those options are against trespassing upon another's right to life and freedom. Within the boundary drawn by the options, we are all free. However, when it comes to immersive theatre and audience emancipation, some suspicious critics focus on their ability to destroy the rights of others for the sake of their own 'freedom', which is not the kind of freedom we know, pursue or secure.

We make the choice to enter an immersive theatre (nobody forces us to, and we buy the tickets ourselves); we make the choice to follow the designer's rules and/or our own rules; we can choose to follow the existing rules, pursuing our aim for achievement; our

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FIG. 6 **The Charleston scene in *Gatsby*, South Korea. Photograph from Mast Entertainment official website at http://mastent.co.kr/sub01/view.php?it_id=1573442699&ca_id=10&page=1&sort1=&sort2=.**

decision to depend on our own rules could bring us the opportunity to explore a world set apart from our ordinary life and make temporary best friends (the characters); we can choose to break the rules established by the creator, assuming that we will be deterred from doing so at some point. In immersive theatre, we are free to try and take actions, and the consequences of our decisions cannot be said to hinder our free choice. Hence we can safely say that the overall manner of audience activity in *Gatsby* is 'being playful' with orthodox theatre. Just as much as we are 'being playful with words when we create nicknames for friends', or '[b]eing playful while walking down the street means playing with the more rigid social, anatomical, and urban structures that determine proper walking behavior',[64] participants enter the immersive event with a playful state of mind and find free movement within the more rigid rules of the director that delimit the parameters of proper or acceptable audience behaviour.

Conclusion

The overlap between immersive theatre and games has inspired notable attempts to describe the multidimensional art form through game studies. Applying Roger Caillois's distinction between *ludus* and *paidia*, Rosemary Klich observes that the nature of immersion and engagement in immersive theatre alternates between reward-oriented *ludus* and aimless *paidia*, between rule-abiding *ludic* pleasure and instinctive *paidiac* enjoyment. Rose Biggin takes a cue from Amyris Fernandez's

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serious, high-goal-directed telic and playful, low-goal-directed paratelic modes of play along with Bartle's (1996) division of player personality into four types and concludes that immersive experience cannot be forced by designers, but can only be facilitated or made possible.[65] As represented by Klich and Biggin, the attention to this point of its game-like aspect contextualizes immersive theatre as a kind of game, as a case against the clear binary between *paidia* and *ludus*, between narrative and epistemic immersion.

The introduction of game theory has led to more refined accounts of immersivity in the contemporary experimental scene,[66] and has thus far offered a clearer description of what it means to be active as an audience member and how interaction contributes to audience experience. Such explorations of contemporary immersive art forms could be complemented by an understanding of both game studies and performance studies of the concept of play in relation to theatre. My examination of game play, ludic activity and being playful in the immersive *Gatsby* shows that *Gatsby* is a typical example of the playification of theatre in the contemporary art scene. Audience participation in *Gatsby* is different from happenings that represent 'the real break between orthodox and "new" theater' in terms of the fact that it includes goal-directed game play that is intricately related to meaningful play.[67] It is also different from gamification because it allows for player activities that hardly resemble game play and are remotely connected to enabling meaningful play.

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