

# Immersive Theatre

Engaging the Audience

Edited by

JOSH MACHAMER



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GROUND



The Arts In Society

# IMMERSIVE THEATRE

**Engaging the Audience**

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*Josh Machamer, Editor*



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University of Illinois Research Park  
2001 South First Street, Suite 202  
Champaign, IL 61820 USA  
Ph: +1-217-328-0405  
<http://cgnetworks.org>

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## CHAPTER 4

### **Game/Play: The Five Conceptual Planes of Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More***

*Sara B.T. Thiel*

[G]ame spaces evoke narratives because the player is making sense of them in order to engage with them. Through a comprehension of signs and interaction with them, the player generates new meaning.<sup>51</sup>

In 2011, Punchdrunk and Emursive transformed three Chelsea, Manhattan warehouses into what Ben Brantley calls a “1930s pleasure palace.”<sup>52</sup> This “pleasure palace,” otherwise known as the McKittrick Hotel, is the home of *Sleep No More*, an interactive promenade performance directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle. Punchdrunk’s commercially and critically successful production invites audiences to discover the history of a mysterious hotel through the lens of William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*.<sup>53</sup> *Sleep No More* was initially set to run in New York from February to May 2011; the run has been extended several times with no end in sight, due to high public demand.<sup>54</sup> If adaptations of Shakespeare’s works are a “cultural barometer for the historically contingent process of adaptation,” as Julie Sanders argues, what can the popularity of this intertextual riff on Shakespeare’s ill-fated Scottish King tell us about contemporary American audiences?<sup>55</sup> What can *Sleep No More*’s success help us understand about why interactive performance appeals to audiences steeped in digital entertainment? The overwhelmingly enthusiastic response to Punchdrunk’s distinctive mode of adapting Shakespeare’s work and engaging spectators reveals the need to re-examine the ways in which contemporary theatre audiences desire to take in live performance.

In this chapter, I argue the popularity of *Sleep No More* stems from the success of a similar phenomenon: dynamic story-based video games. According to a 2015 report by the Entertainment Software Association, 42% of Americans play video games

<sup>51</sup> Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Space: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ben Brantley, “Shakespeare Slept Here, Albeit Fitfully,” *The New York Times*, 13 April 2011. Accessed 21 December 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/14/theater/reviews/sleep-no-more-is-a-macbeth-in-a-hotel-review.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/14/theater/reviews/sleep-no-more-is-a-macbeth-in-a-hotel-review.html?_r=0).

<sup>53</sup> *Sleep No More*’s awards include: a Drama Desk Award for Unique Theatrical Experience and a Special Citation for Design and Choreography at the Obie Awards, both in 2011.

<sup>54</sup> “Current Shows: Sleep No More-NYC,” Punchdrunk, accessed December 18, 2015, <http://punchdrunk.com/current-shows>.

<sup>55</sup> Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21.



three or more hours per week; four out of five households own a device used to play video games.<sup>56</sup> *Sleep No More* appeals to a generation of audiences raised on interactive, immersive, story-based video games in which the choices one makes affect the attributes of one's character and the outcome of the story itself.<sup>57</sup> One can see this method of storytelling most readily in games such as: BioWare's *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* multi-part series (2007–2016 and 2009–2014, respectively), Quantic Dream's *Heavy Rain* (2010), and even recently digitized tabletop games such as *Dungeons and Dragons* (first released in 1974).<sup>58</sup> Similar to these games, with their myriad of dynamic choices and consequences, the *Sleep No More* playgoer/game player makes sense of the world as she moves through the dynamic, immersive space.

I suggest that, like a video game, the success of *Sleep No More* is contingent upon the interaction between the playgoer and the multi-layered playing space. Only through experiencing and interacting with the “in-game” environment does the audience come to create meaning and construct the play (or game’s) narrative. In so doing, the audience becomes invested in the game/play by physically participating in the act of storytelling and meaning making.<sup>59</sup> Punchdrunk has created a physically engaging theatre experience, accessible because of its similarities to a familiar digital medium.

Analyzing the ways in which *Sleep No More* playgoers create meaning “in-game,” this essay adapts Michael Nitsche’s “Five Conceptual Planes” from his 2008 theoretical study of three-dimensional video game spaces.<sup>60</sup> Nitsche’s work is appropriate for the purposes of this study, as his comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach asks the reader to consider the ways in which a game’s sound, architectural, and cinematic design effect the player’s ability to make sense of the in-game world. Similarly, *Sleep No More* interweaves media in order to create holistic environment for the spectator.

In part one, I look to the “play space” of the performance. While Nitsche defines “play space” as the physical site wherein “the player and the video game hardware” exist, I introduce *Sleep No More*’s playing space, including the many levels of acclimation each spectator endures before entering the performance. Next, I examine *Sleep No More*’s “rule-based space” in which audiences are simultaneously free to explore, but also restricted in a number of key ways throughout the duration of the play. Part three explores the design of *Sleep No More*: the “mediated space,” in which the audience aesthetically engages the play. The fourth part looks to the “fictional space,” or the “space ‘imagined’ by players from their comprehension of the available

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<sup>56</sup> Entertainment Software Administration, The 2015 Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry, April 2015, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015-ESA-Essential-Facts-2015.pdf>, 2.

<sup>57</sup> According to the same 2015 ESA report 74% of game players are over the age of 18; 54% are over the age of 35.

<sup>58</sup> *Dungeons and Dragons* is now in its fifth edition as of 2014 and was published as a MMORPG in 2006.

<sup>59</sup> While *Sleep No More* is immersive, in that audience members can, and do, become part of the action, they are not agents of change within the world of the play. While Punchdrunk strives to give the audience member the agency to play and discover, they do not give so much agency as to allow the audience to change the events of the play, only their own perception of it.

<sup>60</sup> See: Michael Nitsche, *Video Game Space: Image, Play, and Structure in 3D Game Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 1–21.

images,” by analyzing *Sleep No More* as a work of adaptation.<sup>61</sup> Finally, I analyze *Sleep No More*’s “social space” by examining the broad audience base to which this play appeals, as well as the myriad of audience interactions that occur in and out-of-game. Using Nitsche’s “Five Conceptual Planes” to analyze *Sleep No More*, I argue Punchdrunk owes its commercial success to its interactive video game model that appeals to a broad base of playgoers/game players.

## I. PLAY SPACE: THE HOTEL

Approaching *Sleep No More*’s performance space, one might miss the entire play if not for the line down the block outside of a seemingly abandoned warehouse. There are no markers aside from a small brass plaque posted by the main entrance identifying the building, which cannot be read from the street. Taxicabs pull up curbside, dumping off bewildered patrons who wonder if they have the correct address. Upon entering the warehouse, the audience member is transported to a 1930s hotel; this is the McKittrick. Upon check-in, the front desk clerk hands over the room key: a playing card from a standard deck. The clerk gives the guest instructions to ascend a small flight of stairs and follow the corridor. This hallway, which seems to go on for miles, twisting and turning, intentionally disorients guests, forcing them to lose all sense of direction. A soft jazz tune floats from somewhere in the distance and suddenly a shock of red comes into view through a pair of split curtains. On the other side of those curtains, the world transforms in to a Prohibition-era speakeasy: the Manderley bar.

The bar is a pre-show performance of sorts, acting as a “decompression chamber” that allows the audience “to acclimatize to the world before being set free in it,” as Barrett describes it.<sup>62</sup> The audience becomes accustomed to the environment of the bar, which creates a smoother transition into the world of the performance. As hotel guests belly up to the bar, they are invited to purchase an old-fashioned cocktail and enjoy the entertainment: a three-piece jazz band. After a few minutes, the band takes a break from their set as the emcee, a tall thin man in a tuxedo, approaches the microphone. He calls for everyone with an ace playing card to enter the hotel. Guests holding those “keys” disappear through a hidden door in the corner of the bar. This process continues throughout the rest of the evening. Every fifteen minutes the emcee calls for the twos, threes, and so forth, until all guests have entered the hotel.

Once through the door, guests find themselves inside what appears to be an antechamber. Everyone receives a white plastic Venetian-style mask, which they are instructed to wear throughout the duration of their stay at the McKittrick. While donning their masks, the group waits for an elevator to arrive; when it does, a lanky, gaunt bellhop welcomes the group into a large industrial lift. At this point, the playgoer/game player has left the decompression chamber and enters the game/play’s tutorial.

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<sup>61</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics*, 90–1.

## II. RULE-BASED SPACE: THE TUTORIAL

Michael Nitsche defines the “rule-based space” as that which is limited “by the code, the data, and hardware restrictions.”<sup>63</sup> For the purposes of my argument, I adapt Nitsche’s concept of the “rule-based space” to include the “given circumstances” of the performance—the rules by which interaction with the physical world is governed. These rules are delivered in the form of a “tutorial,” similar to that of a complex video game wherein the player is taught, in-game, how to interact with the space. The tutorial is a point of acclimation to the game space: players learn the object of the game, how to perform actions such as run, jump, or shoot, and investigate the new world in which they are presently immersed. Similarly, the elevator ride acts as *Sleep No More*’s official “tutorial,” empowering audience members to become makers of meaning during the performance, while keeping in mind the limitations of the playing space.

Comparable to the way in which a video game player is limited by the hardware on which the game is played (PC, Xbox, PlayStation, etc.), or the game developer’s coding, *Sleep No More*’s audience members are faced with similar restrictions: they are verbally instructed to remain silent while wearing their mask throughout the entire performance. Other than that, each spectator is free to explore the space in whatever way she chooses. However, if an audience member attempts to engage with the space, audience, or actors in some way that is not permissible, the bellhop assures the group a black-masked stagehand will emerge from the darkness and instruct the “player” accordingly.

These stagehands have a similar function to in-game customer support staff for a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) such as Blizzard’s *World of Warcraft*.<sup>64</sup> While many of these in-game staff members work retroactively to resolve problems or player grievances, some may “patrol” the game, looking to correct those who are cheating or harassing other players. Most MMORPG players never recognize the presence of these “game masters”; similarly, most *Sleep No More* audience members take no notice of these sable-clad stagehands who direct players throughout the world of the play while maintaining the game/play’s physical boundaries. These people move in the shadows of the playing space, acting as moving roadblocks for audience members where necessary, without interrupting the carefully choreographed and designed flow of the play. While there are certainly constraints, limits, and borders to the game map and the playing space, the spectator is nevertheless encouraged to explore the detail-rich world in order to progress the story’s plot. In this way, *Sleep No More*’s unfolds uniquely for each playgoer.

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<sup>63</sup> Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces*, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Blizzard describes their own game masters as those who: “wait in the shadows, poised to help when things in your Blizzard gaming experience go awry, and they’re available 24 hours a day” (“What Does a Game Master Really Do?” *World of Warcraft*, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://us.battle.net/wow/en/blog/8501406/what-does-a-game-master-really-do-1-22-2013>).

### III. MEDIATED SPACE: THE MATERIAL WORLD

*Sleep No More* takes place inside three disused Chelsea warehouses made to look like a 1930s Hitchcock-esque Inverness. This is the “mediated space,” which “consists of all the output the system can provide in order to present the rule-based game universe to the player.”<sup>65</sup> In other words: if the “rule-based space” is that which is constructed by an agreement between players and playmakers to stay within the physical borders of the performance, the “mediated space” is the aesthetic form the performance takes. Considering Nitsche’s definition dramaturgically, the “mediated space” is the installation, as well as the ways in which audience members move through space while interacting with the material world of the play.

Once inside the performance space, the spectator is set free to investigate the installation and seek out the story for herself. Audience members receive no explicit instructions or narrative to follow other than the initial tutorial guidelines. Nevertheless, Barrett and Doyle curated the performance space in order to guide the audience through the story, using sound, light, and architecture strategically, careful to avoid dictating individual journeys.<sup>66</sup> Like the design of a complex game map, the player is encouraged to experience the space and story at her own pace while taking cues from the space’s design. For example, in the *Mass Effect* trilogy, players move about The Citadel, a central in-game hub with a detail-rich map. Each section of the Citadel houses various populations of non-player-controlled characters. Players explore the Citadel and speak to these characters, accepting quests that help advance the game’s plot. Similarly, *Sleep No More* audience members explore the thoroughness of each room’s unique design, such as the hospital, the taxidermist, or the Macbeths’ home, and follow different characters on quests to learn the details of the McKittrick’s inhabitants.

Although audience members can follow a menagerie of characters throughout the hotel, they are also free to carefully inspect the detail-rich installation room-by-room if they so choose. Spectators can open crisp handwritten letters or inspect the antique contents of private closets; they can sit and read one of the dusty books on the shelf; they can listen to a record on a Victrola if they so desire. Similar to the ways in which players of *Fallout*, a long-running survival game series, search buildings for spare loot and information about the game’s plot, many *Sleep No More* audience members spend the majority of their time digging through trunks and closets to fully comprehend the extensiveness of the installation. In so doing, playgoers engage with the immersive 1930s design in a tactile and olfactory, rather than merely a visual or aural way.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Nitsche, Video Game Design, 16.

<sup>66</sup> Maxine Doyle notes she and Barrett have included many “signifiers in place to lead the audience, to give them more clues, not to follow a narrative but in a really simple way to indicate where action is going to happen or where there’s going to be some big shift. Whether that’s through lighting changes or music changes, using all the conventions you find in theatre but using them to give the audience cues so that there is some information to help them crack the puzzle. It’s all visceral and emotional; we don’t really give them any intellectual clues” (Machon, (Syn)aesthetics, 91).

<sup>67</sup> Felix Barrett founded Punchdrunk in 2000 in an effort to create theatre that empowered audiences to make interpretive decisions about the performance while determining the nature of their physical experience at the theatre. When Maxine Doyle, co-director and choreographer of *Sleep No More*, joined Punchdrunk in 2003, the company began producing the kind of work for which it has become well known. Coming from a background in dance, Doyle’s central frustration with performing on a proscenium stage is that the dance felt too distant from the audience, rather than immediate and visceral. Barrett and Doyle’s

While the immersive quality of *Sleep No More* draws many spectators into the world of the play aesthetically, there are nevertheless hosts of literary and cultural echoes that are not explicitly referenced during the production. It is only through understanding *Sleep No More* as an adaptation that we can fully comprehend the ways in which audiences make sense of the play's story. *Sleep No More*'s film noir World War II aesthetic, paired with the game playing experience of the performance, collide within the cultural memory of the audience as they attempt to untangle the McKittrick's history.

#### IV. FICTIONAL SPACE: THE ADAPTATION

*Sleep No More* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*. This interactive and adaptive performance not only offers audience members the opportunity to engage with the playing, rule-based, and mediated spaces of the play, but also imaginatively engage with the multi-layered fictional world as well. Nitsche's defines "fictional space" as that which lives in the player's imagination based on information provided by the mediated space. For the purposes of this essay, I adapt the idea of the "fictional" or "imagined" space to be the variety of source texts that ghost *Sleep No More*.<sup>68</sup> Throughout Punchdrunk's performance, theatrical, literary, and historical worlds interweave, intertwine, and collide in a mash-up of cultural echoes.

Despite the interactive and viscerally evocative nature of *Sleep No More*, W.B. Worthen calls the play "'text-based' in a surprisingly imaginative, surprisingly literal way."<sup>69</sup> Taking *Rebecca*, a Gothic novel, and *Macbeth*, a Jacobean drama, as its central sources, *Sleep No More* interweaves these texts, each with a rich literary and performance history of their own. *Rebecca* is Daphne du Maurier's 1938 reworking of Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel, *Jane Eyre*. Since its initial publication, the novel has undergone many adaptations and re-workings of its own, including Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 Academy Award winning film starring Laurence Olivier. Hitchcock's adaptation, along with the compositions of Bernard Herrmann, inspired the environment, atmosphere, and design for *Sleep No More*.<sup>70</sup>

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collaboration allowed them to focus on storytelling through gesture and physical expression, free from the confines of the proscenium (Machon, (Syn)aesthetics, 89–90). Working toward audience empowerment and performer proximity to bring a unique experience to both actors and spectators, Punchdrunk "rejects the passive obedience usually expected of audience members," so that boundaries between spectator and performer are constantly in flux ("Company," Punchdrunk, accessed 14 September 2015, <http://punchdrunk.com/company>).

<sup>68</sup> Marvin Carlson defines "ghosting" as a fundamental characteristic of live performance because of the ways in which memory is so deeply connected to embodied experience (6–8). Discussing site-specific performances, Carlson suggests theatricalized spaces simultaneously project ghostings of their non-theatrical historical associations (13;131–64). Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>69</sup> W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare Performance Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 130.

<sup>70</sup> While Herrmann composed music for many Hitchcock films, he did not write *Rebecca*'s score.

While *Sleep No More* employs the entire dramatic arc of *Macbeth*, along with most of the play's central characters, Barrett and Doyle added a considerable number of characters and spaces more suited to du Maurier's world.<sup>71</sup> Barrett and Doyle weave these sources and their precursors together in such a way that *Sleep No More* becomes a complex intertextual pastiche.

Barrett and Doyle's scenic installation is also ghosted by a number of cultural and historical echoes simultaneously. The spectral figures that populate *Sleep No More* make audiences feel as though they intrude upon a private haunted world. Each room carries its own set of signifiers, imparting various ghosting effects upon the audience. The historical background of the bloody, gruesome trauma of World War II echoes the events of the play, especially in the hauntingly empty hospital ward: the dead have awoken from their beds and gone for a stroll about the hotel. The bloodied sheets of the Macduff family home leave the audience with the uneasy feeling of entering a horrific homicide in a film noir murder mystery. The lively dance floor and free-flowing liquor in the ballroom is reminiscent of a gathering in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *West Egg*. One feels like Nick Carraway of *The Great Gatsby*: a voyeuristic outsider looking in at the events unfolding before him. Hecate's rave-like prophecy session calls to mind the history of the former Chelsea clubs littered throughout the area, many of which were condemned by New York police in 2010 as safe-havens for drug dealers.<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps most interestingly, many video game players, bloggers, and critics have drawn comparisons between the experience of *Sleep No More* and similarly structured story-based such as the first two installments of 2K Games' *BioShock* series (2007–2013).<sup>73</sup> These survival horror games, first-person shooters inspired by Ayn Rand's Objectivist philosophy, are set in a frightening underwater dystopia of human mutation and lavish Art Deco design. The common comparisons between *Sleep No More* and games such as *Bioshock* and *Shadowgate* (1987) stem from *Sleep No More*'s interactive performance style as well as its Hitchcockian design aesthetic.<sup>74</sup>

While the mediated experience of *Sleep No More* can be intimidating to spectators without any experience in this kind of interactive performance, audiences are not thrown into the wild without a map. Rather, they find themselves dropped into the performance of a play adapted from Shakespeare, anchored in a design world inspired by the cinematic styling of Alfred Hitchcock, utilizing an interactive interface similar to that of video role-playing and survival games. Barrett and Doyle weave all of these styles together in the hopes that this immersive experience appeals to all individual spectators in a myriad of ways.

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<sup>71</sup> For example, the Manderley bar is named after the estate in du Maurier's novel. Audience members are also invited to purchase an "add-on" to their ticket called "SLEEP NO MORE as Maximilian's Guest." Maximilian, of course, is the "proprietor" of the McKittrick Hotel, named for du Maurier's character in *Rebecca* (played by Olivier in the Hitchcock film).

<sup>72</sup> Diane Cardwell, "Police Close Sister Clubs, M2 and Pink, in Chelsea," *The New York Times*, April 19 2010, accessed December 21, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/20/nyregion/20club.html>.

<sup>73</sup> Cyriaque Lamar, "Sleep No More=LARP+Shakespeare+ Absinthe+ Orgy Masks," *io9*, November 13 2011, accessed December 10 2015, <http://io9.com/5859100/sleep-no-more--larp-%252B-shakespeare-%252B-absinthe-%252B-orgy-masks>.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

## V. SOCIAL SPACE: THE AUDIENCE

In the final section of the chapter, I explore the ways in which Barrett and Doyle's distinct form of storytelling engages players in the "social space," defined by Nitsche as interaction among players in-game.<sup>75</sup> While Nitsche's understanding of "social space" applies to MMOs, such as *World of Warcraft* or *Battlefield*, the "social space" of *Sleep No More* is the world inhabited and controlled by the play-going game players outside the actual game/play space. Using Richard A. Bartle's taxonomy of game players in order to explore the ways in which Barrett and Doyle's immersive environment appeals to a broad play going/game playing base, I argue *Sleep No More* is a commercial success not only because it appeals to spectators on multiple sensory levels, but also because of the ways it relocates the social space.<sup>76</sup>

According to Bartle's taxonomy, there are four broad types of game players: Socializers, Achievers, Explorers, and Killers. Socializers are those "for whom the greatest reward is interacting with other people, through the medium of the virtual world."<sup>77</sup> One would think Socializers would not find *Sleep No More* to be an enjoyable experience considering spectators are barred from verbally engaging during the play. What's more, it is difficult for groups or pairs to remain together throughout the course of a performance. Due to this aspect of the performance, Michael Billington has criticized Punchdrunk for robbing the theatre of its sense of community, placing emphasis on the individual journey.<sup>78</sup> What Billington fails to note is that the communal experience, if absent "in-game," takes place once the play has concluded in person and online.

After the play ends, Socializers re-convene in the Manderley bar to piece their experiences together, learning what they missed and sharing what they discovered. One can hear similar conversations happening between individuals who play through the *Mass Effect* trilogy as they attempt to learn how the in-game choices of their friends altered gameplay, resulting in a fundamentally different gaming experience. Similarly, Socializers who attend *Sleep No More* alone inevitably find themselves on their phones afterward: calling, texting, Facebooking, Tweeting, Instagramming, and Snapchatting friends who have been to the show, or perhaps inviting those who have not.<sup>79</sup> While individuals may not be sharing the play going experience in the moment, a sense of community remains and is even expanded upon due to the wide reach of social networking platforms. Admittedly, inside the McKittrick Hotel, the focus is on the individual journey; however, the communal experience is merely re-located so that it occurs outside the performance space, not unlike single-players role-playing games.

Maxine Doyle notes: you "don't have to be an experienced theatregoer to play the game [because *Sleep No More*] is multidimensional in terms of what people can tune into"; considering Bartle's three remaining player types, it becomes clear the

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<sup>75</sup> Nitsche, Video Game Spaces, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Richard A. Bartle, *Designing Virtual Worlds* (San Francisco, CA: New Riders, 2003), 130.

<sup>77</sup> Bartle, *Designing Virtual Worlds*, 130.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Billington, "The Masque of the Red Death," *The Guardian*, 4 October 2007, accessed December 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2007/oct/04/theatre>.

<sup>79</sup> The hashtag #sleepnomorenyc is used on Twitter by past and prospective audience members looking to share information about their experiences.

commercial success of an interactive play like *Sleep No More* is due, in part, to its facility in engaging multiple playing styles.<sup>80</sup> Achievers are those who like to complete “defined goals, thereby progressing their character through the world’s built-in ranking system.”<sup>81</sup> While *Sleep No More* has no official ranking system or list of accomplishments, the Achiever playgoer/game player aims to see every room, scene, and character while witnessing every plot point throughout the duration of the performance. Bartle’s third player type is the Explorer, whose “joy is in the discovery.”<sup>82</sup> For this player, “increasing their knowledge about the way the virtual world works” fulfills their in-game desires.<sup>83</sup> As I have discussed above, there are a plethora of rooms, characters, and minute details for these Explorers to find throughout the entire performance. In this way, *Sleep No More* as a simultaneously staged and immersive installation is an ideal performance experience for the Explorer. Finally, Killers are those who seek to “dominate others” in-game.<sup>84</sup> For a performance like *Sleep No More*, this may mean Killers push their way to the front of every crowd in order to get the best view of the action, or they may sprint through the labyrinthine halls of the McKittrick in order to “best” fellow players. Killers are always looking for ways to put themselves ahead of the pack, literally and figuratively.

*Sleep No More*’s commercial success relies largely on its appeal to Bartle’s four broadly defined player types, who are each likely to become repeat ticket buyers for varying reasons.<sup>85</sup> The Achiever, interested in “completing” the story, may attend the play several times in order to make certain they have witnessed everything there is to see. Socializers bring friends with them in order to broaden the social sphere of the game while Explorers return hoping to discover more about the world, the story, and the rich details that make up the immersive installation. Part of the joy for the Killer is to dominate other players, so they bring uninitiated guests with them for their repeat performance viewings. Similar to the ways in which complex story-based possess what players call “re-play value,” the re-watch value of *Sleep No More* to a broad range of playgoers/game players ultimately leads to its commercial viability.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Machon, (Syn) Aesthetics, 92.

<sup>81</sup> Bartle, Designing Virtual Worlds, 130.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>85</sup> *Sleep No More*’s financial viability can be inferred from its high rate of sold-out performances along with its large capacity and ticket prices. In the second half of December 2015 alone, over 50 percent of the performances were sold out, not including the New Year’s Eve Masquerade performance. With a nightly capacity of 300–500 “guests,” and ticket prices ranging from \$80–\$120 (before special “add-ons” like a champagne table), *Sleep No More* continues to prove a worthwhile investment for *Sleep No More*’s production company, Emulsive. Founded in order to fund *Sleep No More*’s New York production, Emulsive has reportedly set records as the “highest costing Off-Broadway show in history at somewhere between the \$5 and \$10 million dollar mark,” according to a 2014 Forbes report. Hollie Slade, “Meet Emulsive, The Company Behind ‘Sleep No More,’ The Off-Broadway Production That’s Been Sold Out for Three Years,” *Forbes*, March 19, 2014, access December 18, 2015, <http://www.forbes.com/20sites/hollieslade/2014/03/19/meet-emulsive-the-company-behind-sleep-no-more-the-off-broadway-production-thats-been-sold-out-for-three-years/>

<sup>86</sup> After the initial visit to the McKittrick Hotel, patrons are consistently invited back to rediscover the hotel or, perhaps, investigate what they may have missed during their last visit. Part of the temptation for repeat ticket buyers is the fact Punchdrunk continues to add new elements to the production itself. For example, the hotel proprietor, “Maximilian,” sent a telegram invite out for an April Fool’s Day “remix” performance of the play. The telegram specified that first time guests were not permitted to join this event; only *Sleep*

## VI. CONCLUSION: THE CRITICS

With four year's worth of extended performances in New York, the commercial and critical success of Punchdrunk's *Macbeth* adaptation tells us contemporary audiences, steeped in digital technology, desire a participatory play-going experience as well. *Sleep No More* finds its success with audiences searching for new and innovative ways to engage with Shakespeare, live performance, and one another. As such, an interactive performance like *Sleep No More* points to the need for us to reconsider the seemingly impermeable boundaries between "game playing" and "play going" in the digital age.

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*No More* veterans were able to rediscover the performance all over again. This invitation is compelling to all four of Bartle's player types. The e-mail went out on 16 March 2012, and the performance was sold-out within days.

