Immersed in Horror: A Study of the Historical and Contemporary Influences of *Poe's Shadows*

Elizabeth Kurtzman

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Shoshana Milgram Knapp
Amanda Nelson
Katharine Cleland

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ABSTRACT

Though the cinematic genre of horror was not designated until the twentieth century, elements of this genre have appeared onstage since the time of the Greeks. Theatre history is rife with examples of theatrical ghosts and horrors, whose ever-changing representation indicates society's evolving relationship to and expectation for horror onstage. In 2019, Virginia Tech presented the installation *Poe's Shadows*, which combined elements of traditional theatre, original art, and innovative technology to present an immersive experience of Edgar Allan Poe's work. This production was a unique collaborative work that combined the creative labor of both faculty and students, while also invoking past horror theatre techniques and technologies. The properties of the Cube performance space allowed the *Poe's Shadows* creative team to imitate hand-cranked panoramas, magic lantern shows, and shadow plays, while also using sound effects and narration that combined elements of theatrical tradition and ghost shows. By studying the history of *Poe's Shadows*, as well as the reception of the installation, one can see how the theatre's evolving relationship with horror is effected by audience demand and expectation, as well as newly available technologies.

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Shadows

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

Though the horror genre is most often associated with books and films, elements of the genre have been present onstage for thousands of years. Furthermore, studying these theatrical ghosts and ghouls—and how they were represented onstage— can help contemporary audiences understand historical anxieties and expectations. In 2019, Virginia Tech presented the installation *Poe's Shadows*, which combined elements of traditional theatre, original art, and innovative technology to present an immersive experience of Edgar Allan Poe's work. This production was a unique collaborative work that combined the creative labor of both faculty and students, while also invoking past horror theatre techniques such as hand-cranked panoramas, magic lantern shows, and shadow plays, accompanied by with sound effects and narration that combined elements of theatrical tradition and ghost shows. By studying the history of *Poe's Shadows*, as well as the reception of the installation, one can see how the theatre's evolving relationship with horror is effected by audience expectation and newly available technologies.

Dedication

For Jeff and Shelly, for supporting me every step of the way on my bizarre journey. And

for Shawn, Ashley, and all of my Buckskin Mountain family, for being the best neighbors

and family I could ask for.

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Introduction

On October 31st, 2018, visitors to the Moss Arts Center queued up for the chance to listen to a murderer recount the details of his crime. Most of these visitors were familiar with the madman's story, which presented an interesting challenge for this particular event: how does one make "The Tell-Tale Heart" new again? The team behind Virginia Tech's *Poe's Shadows: An Immersive Theatrical Installation* strove to deliver a fresh version of two of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous texts—"The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Raven"— to audiences unfamiliar with his work and those who knew his tales well, using a combination of original artwork, theatrical performance, and new audio technology. Though the production played on a loop for five days, the show itself had a runtime of only fourteen minutes; yet it was the result of months of preparation from students and faculty from various departments and disciplines. The resulting installation, which drew almost a thousand visitors, demonstrates how the marriage of art and immersive technology can reach new audiences, while also paying tribute to the theatrical traditions that came before.

Poe's Shadows followed in the wake of *Shakespeare's Garden*, a theatre installation that was produced in the Cube at the Moss Arts Center in March of 2018. *Garden* used directional speakers and large scrims to immerse visitors in Shakespeare's sonnets and scenes, allowing them to step into each sonnet and experience his words in text and aural form. For their follow-up installation, the production team decided to focus more on the visual aspect of the texts, using the resources of the Cube performance space to add a graphic element to the production. The resultant installation utilized elements of design, technology, theatre, and text to truly immerse the audience in Poe's work and invoke the spirit of the uncanny which is characteristic of Poe.

Though *Poe's Shadows* is an example of immersive theatre, a form that is becoming increasingly popular and commonplace due to the availability of advanced technology, it also features elements of traditional theatre. Immersive theatre offers audience members an individual and engaging experience that not only tells a story, but also invites each visitor to occupy that world as well. This style of theatre—made popular by productions such as *Sleep No More* and *Fuerza Bruta*—has drawn a great deal of attention in the fields of theatre studies and performance studies over the last two decades. Using immersive technology allows even small productions such as *Poe's Shadows* to make a big impact. However, *Poe's Shadows* is not simply an immersive experience: it also follows in the far-reaching, grand tradition of horror theatre. Though the installation's goal was not to frighten visitors—at least, not too much—Poe is considered the master of the macabre and one of the fixtures of the horror genre, so in order to accurately capture his atmospheric style, the production evoked elements characteristic of horror. In this thesis, I will consider how Virginia Tech's production of *Poe's Shadows* follows the traditions of horror theatre by examining the evolution of horrific elements through dramatic history, with a specific emphasis on the changing role of technology in the portrayal of these elements. I will examine and then draw connections between modern horror attractions and immersive theatre to demonstrate how *Poe's Shadows* and similar productions can impact future audiences, utilizing my own research, my observations, and the results of the *Poe's Shadows* audience survey.

In order to address the various genres and traditions at work in *Poe's Shadows*, I divided my research into three chapters. In the first chapter, I explain what horror theatre is by examining the boundaries of the genre and the common characteristics or expectations. To demonstrate how the genre has evolved over time, I focus on the changing role of the 'stage ghost'—a common

fixture in dramatic literature—through a historical survey of theatrical horror. By considering how the representation of the stage ghost has changed with the advancements in technology, one can see how audience expectations have evolved as well. My second chapter focuses primarily on immersive theatre and scare attractions. These productions share traits that appeal to modern audiences who are searching for experiences capable of engaging them in ways that screen-based entertainments cannot. Finally, my third chapter examines *Poe's Shadows* itself. I describe the production and consider how the various elements of the installation reflect or embody certain characteristics of horror theatre, immersive theatre, or haunted attractions. To inform and assist future immersive productions, I also relay the audience's reactions, as reported through the anonymous survey filled out by willing participants, in order to understand which aspects of the installation were most effective and which could be improved upon.

Chapter 1: A Historical Survey of the Theatre Ghost and Ghostly Stage Effects

Horror Theatre

Though live theatre was once the venue of choice to terrify audiences, the horror genre has largely moved to the screen, where big budgets and computer-generated images can create realistic illusions and stomach-turning gore. It may seem unconventional to claim that a genre that many believe originated on the silver screen was once a major part of dramatic history, but ghosts, ghouls, and the uncanny paced the boards and haunted the footlights long before they appeared in the cinema. Elements of horror, a genre marked by the invocation of fear and repulsion through storytelling, have appeared in theatrical productions since the days of Seneca. While horror theatre is not nearly as widespread as it was before the invention of film—except, perhaps, in the month of October— elements of this genre have appeared across dramatic history and have left a lasting impact.

Despite the fact that stories and plays that fit into the horror genre have been appearing for over two thousand years, the actual genre was not formally designated until the twentieth century. According to Kendall R. Philips in *A Place of Darkness: The Rhetoric of Horror in Early American Cinema*, the term "horror movie" was coined by the press for the 1931 film *Frankenstein*. After this point, fans of horror had a vocabulary with which to discuss the genre's themes and characteristics, while filmmakers and writers had conventions to adhere to or to subvert. However, as Philips remarks early on his book, "the elements that constitute much of what we call horror were already present…[and] many of these elements—monsters, ghosts, haunted houses, witches, and assorted evils—were remarkably widespread."[1] These elements had not only appeared in films before 1931, they had also been appearing in nearly every facet of

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[1] Kendall R. Philips, *A Place of Darkness: The Rhetoric of Horror in Early American Cinema* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 3-4.

popular culture since the Greeks. Philips goes on to label these tropes as "horrific elements," a term that I will be borrowing as I examine these familiar elements and their history.[2]

Horror often invokes the past in order to unsettle its audience and to pay tribute to the forebears of these elements. Horror movies frequently feature relics of the past: supernatural creatures are dressed in Victorian clothing, haunted houses are derelict mansions, and modern technology is often rendered useless or ignored entirely. Accessing these relics of the past gives horror its ethos, adding authority to its message and filling its audience with vague dread. These tokens of the past serve as *memento mori*—the reminder that, like those who have come before, we all must die. According to theatre scholars such as Marvin Carlson, theatre is memory; every production is built from the recollections of what has come before and what the audience has already experienced.[3] Theatres—both the place and the profession—are also notoriously haunted, not only by ethereal specters of the past, but by the thousands of performers and performances that have come before. Most plays and musicals incorporate props and costumes that have inhabited other lives, fulfilled other duties.

But just as the props and actors and costumes are all ghosted by past performances, so too are the practical effects used to bring life to the supernatural denizens of the stage. Trapdoors are still employed for mysterious entrances and exits. Scenery still drops in from the fly rail and then zooms out again when the set changes. Theatre technology is oddly cyclical—innovative techniques incorporate or imitate the outmoded technologies that have come before instead of completely replacing those techniques with something new and cutting-edge. This can particularly be witnessed in the role of the "stage ghost"—one of the most popular conventions

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[2] Philips, *A Place of Darkness*, 5.

[3] Marvin Carlson, "Charles Dickens and the Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," in *Theatre and Ghosts* ed. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 28.

of the theatre and one of the most enduring traditions. In his article "The Frighted Stage: The

Sensational Proliferation of Ghost Melodrama in the 1820s," Diego Saglia considers how pivotal

ghosts were onstage and, more significantly, what an important role stage technology played in

the creation and evolution of the spectre:

> But the landmark ghost melodramas…consistently cast the spectre as an antagonist from the dark and distant past…who threatens the lives of ordinary characters and their social environment. Expanding the power of the spectral to infiltrate all levels of the stage, technical effects are key factors in determining the increasingly terrifying threat posed by these apparitions.[4]

By tracing the role that ghosts have played in theatre history and, more importantly, how those

ghosts would have been represented, one can gain a better understanding of the evolution of

horror elements onstage.

Shades of the Bard

It is interesting to note that the two most produced English plays— *A Christmas Carol*

and *Hamlet*— are both ghost stories.[5] Few would consider either of these plays to be a part of the

horror genre, but both feature spirits meant to be frightening or foreboding and, despite being

written hundreds of years apart, both shows would have likely used similar methods to portray

old Hamlet and Jacob Marley. These two theatrical spirits have largely shaped the modern

conception of what a ghost should be, both through their physical representation on stage and

their roles in their respective plays. Though ghosts are by no means the only supernatural beings

that appear in dramatic literature, theatre ghosts have a long and complicated history that

demonstrates how audience expectations and theatre representations have evolved.

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[4] Diego Saglia, "'The Frighted Stage': The Sensational Proliferation of Ghost Melodrama in the 1820s," *Studies in Romanticism* 54, no. 2 (2015): 288.

[5] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 28-33.

Though it is now common and even expected that ghosts should be frightening, that was not the case for ghosts before *Hamlet*. In the Roman tradition, ghosts were utilized as expository devices that set the scene for the audience, recounting the events that have happened before the play and sometimes hinting at what is to come. These explanatory ghosts are often referred to as "Senecan ghosts," after Seneca the Younger, a Roman playwright who famously used ghosts as a device in his two plays about the descendants of Tantalus: *Thyestes* and *Agamemnon*.[6] These ghosts exist merely to deliver expository information, inciting the living to pursue acts of revenge that will overshadow their own shameful actions. They perform their ghostly duties, make dire references to their punishment in the Underworld, and then disappear from the stage.[7] These ghosts were tragic and could induce dread by predicting characters' calamitous futures, but they were not meant to be mysterious or frightening. In fact, it was not until one of the most famous theatre ghosts of all time stalked the ramparts of Elsinore that the precedent for ghosts on stage was truly set.

Though ghosts did appear in Shakespeare's early works, they served a purpose more in line with their Senecan forebears. In *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*—both likely written before *Hamlet*—ghosts make appearances to the main characters. Richard is filled with dread when he sees the ghosts of his victims on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth Field, and, likewise, Brutus sees the phantom of Julius Caesar while he is reading in his tent in Sardis, a vision which he interprets as a portent of his doom.[8] These spirits could be said to affect the action, since they certainly have an effect on the psyche of those to whom they appear. However, whether these

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[6] Susanna Braund, "Haunted by Horror: The Ghost of Seneca in Renaissance Drama," in *A Companion to the Neronian Age*, ed. Emma Buckley and Martin T. Dinter (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013): 427.

[7] Braund, "Haunted by Horror," 428.

[8] F.W. Moorman, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," *The Modern Language Review* 1, no. 3 (1906): 193, 195.

ghosts are real or simply the product of guilty minds under great stress is left ambiguous, since they are not seen or overheard by any other characters.[9] These dread apparitions are omens of the witnesses' doom, but they are not inherently frightening to the audience. On the scale of ghostly evolution, they are but one step past Seneca's vengeful ghosts. But Shakespeare's next ghost would be a whole new animal.

One of Shakespeare's greatest creations, the ghost of old Hamlet, marked a significant change in the representation of ghosts on stage. Unlike its predecessors, old Hamlet is not there simply to provide exposition—this figure builds the tension that prepares the audience for the thrilling action that will follow. In all three surviving editions of *Hamlet*, the ghost's part remains largely unchanged, suggesting that its popularity earned it a continuity not seen in other elements of the script.[10] Unlike Shakespeare's previous ghosts, old Hamlet is witnessed by multiple parties on multiple occasions. As F. W. Moorman points out in his article "Shakespeare's Ghosts":

> Of [the ghost's] reality there can be no question. It is not the ghost of a murdered man appearing to his murderer in the hour of sleep, or in moments of nervous excitement; it is seen, not by the murderer, but by the minister of vengeance, as well as by disinterested persons like Horatio, Bernardo, and Marcellus. Horatio has 'fortified' his ears against belief in the story of the ghost, but no sooner does it appear on the castle platform than all doubts as to its reality are swept for ever from his mind.[11]

But while the audience never doubts that old Hamlet's specter is real, its specific nature is indeed called into question.

Shakespeare's portrayal of old Hamlet's ghost reflected the conflict of Elizabethan England's own struggles with Catholicism and the Reformation. The Catholic church had enfolded the ghostly superstitions of the day into the Church's doctrines on purgatory and the

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[9] Moorman, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 196.

[10] Catherine Belsey, "Shakespeare's Sad Tale for Winter: *Hamlet* and the Tradition of Fireside Ghost Stories," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2010): 2.

[11] Moorman, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 196.

soul in limbo and the ghostly lore in *Hamlet* reflected these long-held beliefs: "That the ghosts of criminals, suicides, or murdered persons, walked the earth after death, that they sometimes entered into compacts with the living, that they appeared at midnight and 'faded on the crowing of the cock' and that at their approach the lights grew dim—all this is a part of a primitive ghost-lore common to most European nations."[12] However, the Reformation introduced the idea that ghosts were not the spirits of dead men, but were instead demons sent to corrupt the souls of men—a danger that Hamlet must consider.[13] What set *Hamlet's* ghost apart was that it engendered fear through its mystery: the characters do not know what it wants or from whence it came.

Though the supernatural was often connected to religion or religious themes, Shakespeare also drew inspiration from other sources.[14] According to Catherine Belsey, Shakespeare was emulating the frightening fireside stories that were common when he was a child.[15] He was clearly familiar with the convention since references to winter tales appear repeatedly in his works, and Shakespeare's mixture of pagan beliefs and Christian doctrine would have been consistent with the tradition of the tales told around the fire. As Belsey wryly states, "No doubt these women mingled residues of popery with their old wives' tales: the flames of purgatory certainly make for compelling narrative. They also make for good theatre, a point that would not be lost on Shakespeare."[16] His depiction of old Hamlet featured traits that were new to the stage, but familiar to his audience. These characteristics had deep connections to the folktales and ghost

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[12] Moorman, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 197.

[13] Moorman, "Shakespeare's Ghosts," 197.

[14] Belsey, "Sad Tale for Winter," 3.

[15] Belsey, "Sad Tale for Winter," 4.

[16] Belsey, "Sad Tale for Winter," 11.

stories of the Renaissance and before: tales of dead kings and of fathers seeking revenge, of the walking dead and of malevolent demons.[17] These elements form the core of what have become modern expectations for the ghost story genre, expectations that would have been a revelation for Shakespeare's audience.

Bringing the Dead to Life

Despite the changing role of the ghost onstage, the portrayal of the spirit itself would have been very physical. Both old Hamlet and Marley, despite being written and enacted hundreds of years apart, would have looked very similar. Since ghosts were played by flesh-and-blood actors, the theatre would have relied upon recognizable supernatural conventions to signal the arrival of an otherworldly entity. Ghosts would often appear instantly from a trapdoor, rising from under the stage to the accompaniment of flames, smoke, and sound effects.[18] Because of the steady traffic of demons and ghosts through trap doors, Elizabethans commonly referred to the area under the stage as "Hell." [19]

However, there were some advantages to using flesh-and-blood actors to depict phantoms in the theatre. Despite the plethora of technology and physical effects available to modern audiences, most theatres still rely on actors in make-up to play their ghosts. Sarah Outterson-Murphy directly addresses the issue in "Remember Me: The Ghost and Its Spectators in *Hamlet*" by pointing out that the physicality of old Hamlet was not a drawback, but an advantage. His presence allowed him to affect the actors and—through them—the audience in tangible ways.[20]

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[17] Belsey, "Sad Tale for Winter," 22.

[18] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 34.

[19] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 35.

[20] Sarah Outterson-Murphy, "'Remember Me': The Ghost and Its Spectators in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 34, no. 2 (2016): 257-258.

This juxtaposition of physical presence and suspension of disbelief embodies the contradiction of theatre itself. Outterson-Murphy observes, "In its attention to the Ghost's uncanny physical effects on spectators, *Hamlet* shows how drawing attention to a stage ghost's liminal embodiment can heighten playgoers' response to theatrical fiction itself."[21] Thus through its solid but unsettling presence, Old Hamlet's ghost made an impression upon the theatrical world that still resonates.

The Gothic period, which followed closely on the heels of the clinical Enlightenment period, paid particular homage to Shakespeare and his famous ghost.[22] Theatres of the late eighteenth century had a complicated relationship with spirits, and their depictions of the supernatural were both innovative and derivative. In 1794, the Covent Garden theatre staged *Fountainville Forest*, an adaptation of Ann Radcliffe's popular novel, *The Romance of the Forest*.[23] Radcliffe's novel, like most Gothic romances, was an atmospheric tale of young Adeline, who believes that she is beleaguered by supernatural forces, only to realize that she is actually at the mercy of nefarious, but mundane, (male) forces. In the climactic scene, Adeline believes that she has finally seen the ghost of her father, only to realize that it is a servant approaching to warn her of real physical danger.[24] However, in *Fountainville Forest*, playwright James Boaden boldly chose to make the phantom of her father real. He explained that one can be ambivalent in a novel and create the impression of the supernatural without straying from the rational, but in theatre, one must choose the fantastic. Nathalie Wolfram explains in her article

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[21] Outterson-Murphy, "Remember Me," 270.

[22] Nathalie Wolfram. "Gothic Adaptation and the Stage Ghost," in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*, ed. by Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 53.

[23] Wolfram, "Gothic Adaptation," 46.

[24] Wolfram, "Gothic Adaptation," 51.

"Gothic Adaptation and the Stage Ghost," "For Boaden, giving shape to the false ghost of Radcliffe's novel meant stripping it of its rational pretext and making it—in a sense—real."[25] His choice capitalized not only on the public's growing occupation with the supernatural, but on the possible economic advantage afforded by ghostly spectacle.

In Boaden's production, Radcliffe's heroine Adeline is haunted by the spirit of her dead father, or—as he is referred to in the script—"The Phantom." In the original production, the Phantom was played by two well-known actors: One with a stout figure, but a resonant voice read his lines from offstage, and the other was tall and thin and mimed the part onstage behind a scrim. These two actors and their strange partnership illustrate the gap between practicality and imagination. The Gothic age embraced the supernatural, but it is important to note that the Age of Enlightenment had only just ended and those practical values were still present in peoples' minds.[26] Therefore, those in the theatrical profession had to learn to straddle the line between rational and fantastical.[27]

In the nineteenth century, audiences were ravenous for spectral plays, and improving technologies enabled theatres to eagerly satisfy such demands. In the 1820s and '30s, the profusion of supernatural creatures and themes caused controversy between the "legitimate" and "illegitimate" theatres; the first of which found ghosts and vampires to be too sensational, while the latter eagerly and expertly staged said creatures.[28] However much the mainstream theatres resisted the fantastical, eventually they would come to utilize the tricks employed by the

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[25] Wolfram, "Gothic Adaptation," 53.

[26] Wolfram, "Gothic Adaptation," 50.

[27] Wolfram, "Gothic Adaptation," 60.

[28] Saglia, "The Frighted Stage," 276.

"lowbrow" theatres.[29] Audiences were no longer satisfied with corporal ghosts; they wanted

something more otherworldly on the stage. As far back as 1420, inventors and engineers were

seeking ways to project images into the air and create ghostly effects; some were more

successful than others. [30] These tricks were often combinations of sound, music, or lighting, with

innovative uses of trapdoors or slides that could make ghosts, vampires, and demons "disappear"

instantly from the stage. Most of these tricks are still used, in some form or other, today.

However, other techniques were met with wild enthusiasm, only to quickly pull their own

disappearing act.

One such stage effect was the Pepper's Ghost trick. In 1863, an engineer named Henry

Dircks discovered that angling a mirror toward a sheet of glass and controlling the brightness of

the lighting on either side of the glass could create the illusion that the subject's reflection was

floating onstage. He tried to market this technique to theatres, but the cost of the necessary

remodeling to the stage prevented anyone from taking him up on the offer.[31] But Professor John

Henry Pepper discovered that if the sheet of glass between the audience and the stage is tilted,

the actor playing the ghost can act in the orchestra pit and be reflected onto the stage (*See Figure*

1). The illusion proved incredibly popular and theatres started looking for shows that featured

ghosts. That search led to a theatre-house favorite: Charles Dickens.[32]

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[29] Saglia "The Frighted Stage," 279.

[30] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 35.

[31] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 37

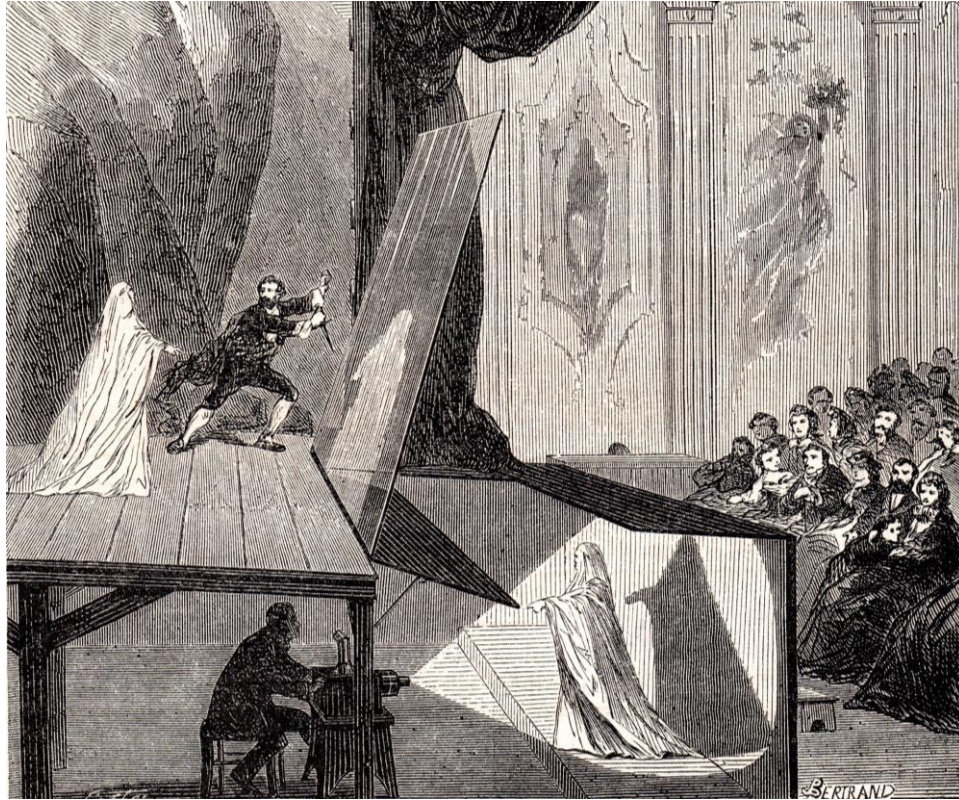[32] Carlson "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 39

Figure 1: Pepper's Ghost in action[33]

In the 1840s, Charles Dickens's work was a regular fixture on the stage, even before his wildly popular novella *A Christmas Carol* was published. Within the first year of its publication, "it had been staged sixteen times in London and New York, a record surpassing that of any previous Dickens work."[34] However, by 1862, Dickens's work had largely fallen out of favor on the London stage. But Pepper needed a ghost, so the Polytechnic Theatre in London staged Dickens's *The Haunted Man* for Christmas in 1862, and it was a sold-out success.[35]

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[33] *Le Monde Illustré*, "Pepper's Ghost stage set up," *Wikimedia* (1862), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peppers_Ghost.jpg.

[34] Carlson "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 28

[35] Carlson "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 40

Despite the popularity of the illusion and the widespread adoption of the technique, there were severe limitations that prevented it from being a mainstay in theatres.[36] The necessary sheet of glass that was installed between the audience and the stage was heavy and cumbersome, and it blocked the sound from the actors onstage, which required the actors to pantomime while a narrator stood to the side of the stage and described the events of the play. Additionally, the "ghost" actor under the stage needed to be well-lit in order to be reflected, which meant that the area under the stage became "unbearably hot," thus forcing the theatres to shorten shows to ten or fifteen minutes.[37] Despite the abundant use of Pepper's Ghost, it had virtually disappeared from the stage by the end of the 1860s. However, despite its disappearance from the stage, Pepper's Ghost is still haunting the entertainment world. It can be seen in movies such as *Metropolis* and *The 39 Steps* and has been most famously utilized in Disney's Haunted Mansion amusement ride.[38]

A New Age for Horror

The dawn of the twentieth century also marked the rise of the cinematic arts, which changed acting and performance forever. The future of theatre seemed uncertain in the face of the silver screen's popularity, but it was at this intersection of theatrical tradition and horror films that the midnight ghost show was born. These "spook shows" combined America's fading interest in spiritualism with its new-found obsession with cinematic monsters.

The roots of the spiritualism movement can be traced to the farmhouse where the Fox sisters first heard the ghostly rappings that would lead them to a lucrative career as spiritual

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[36] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 41.

[37] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 41.

[38] Carlson, "Invention of the Modern Stage Ghost," 42-43.

mediums. Mediums such as the Fox sisters would travel around the country, holding public and

private séances where they would talk to the spirits of the audience's deceased loved ones.[39] The

term "ghost show" was coined at the end of the nineteenth century in reference to the "spiritual

séances" that sometimes accompanied traveling vaudeville or magician shows. These shows

would feature tricks such as levitation, ghostly illusions, and messages from beyond.[40] The tricks

were accomplished through stagecraft, sleight of hand, and misdirection—tools that traditionally

belonged to the magician's trade. Magicians and illusionists were not impressed by these

interlopers. Stage magicians, whose "unwritten code included at least a tacit acknowledgment

that their illusions were accomplished through nothing more than skill and ingenuity, were

angered by those who refused to admit their trickery."[41] So illusionists and traveling magic

shows started to include, on a regular basis, acts that reproduced and therefore refuted the tricks

that spiritualists and mediums performed in their séances, in order to demonstrate that these

ghosts were nothing more than stage trickery.[42]

By the 1930s, America's love affair with spiritualism was ending, but the mentalists who

had perfected the tricks of the séance were still plentiful and in need of new venues. At the same

time, American audiences were falling in love with cinematic monsters. With the release of both

Dracula and *Frankenstein* in 1931, "horror movies" became a cinematic sensation.[43] The

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[39] Beth Kattelman, "Where Were You When the Lights Went Out?: American Ghost Shows of the Twentieth Century," in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*, ed. by Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 96.

[40] Beth A. Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies: America's Midnight Ghost Shows," *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 1 (2010): 26.

[41] Kattelman, "Where Were You," 97.

[42] Kattelman, "Where Were You," 97.

[43] Phillips, *The Rhetoric of Horror*, 2.

elements of horror—the haunted, the depraved, the unknown—had previously been present in

other genres, but now filmmakers had an opportunity to put monsters in the spotlight. Audiences

came in droves. This new era of horror presented a unique opportunity for stage performers as

well. Former magicians and spiritualists seized upon this opportunity to put their skills to work,

taking advantage of the national horror craze and newly available technology to create a new

kind of "ghost show."

The performers—or "Ghostmasters"— would use a combination of sound effects,

direction, and stage technology to keep audiences on the edge of their seats, which would

culminate in a total blackout in the theatre.[44] The ghost shows relied upon more than simple

tricks and technology; good ghost shows needed skilled hosts. These magicians would perform

magic tricks and illusions, but in order to present a truly successful show, they also needed the

skill to craft those tricks around a theme and build tension in the audience, a tension that would

hit its peak right when the blackout would hit.[45] The shows emulated the popular tropes of the

genre, often featuring sets that resembled the laboratories and castles from the Universal horror

films, with a mad scientist host.[46] The midnight horror shows utilized a variety of updated

theatrical technologies to create their illusions. The commercial availability of monster masks—

which had been recently released by Universal—allowed the famous monsters to be "present" at

the horror shows and also allowed performers to do quick, easy costume changes instead of

relying upon heavy stage makeup.[47]

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[44] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies": 25.

[45] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies," 28.

[46] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies": 27.

[47] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies": 28.

The total blackouts, which ended every midnight horror show and lasted only two to three minutes, were made possible by the new electronic lighting that was readily available in movie theatres. Each blackout would begin with multiple photo flash bulbs, which served the dual purpose of blinding the audience and charging the luminous effects in the house.[48] Luminous paint was used to paint frightening skulls, monsters, and ghosts on balloons, poles, and even audience member's faces. In a precursor to the familiar haunted house soundtracks of the modern era, frightening sounds and spooky musical accompaniments were played during the blackout as well.[49] Ghostmasters sometimes even brought a fourth dimension to the show, using physical sensations such as silk threads, wet ropes, or water to startle audiences and draw them further into the experience.[50] These sensory-based accompaniments helped to immerse the audience while also adding to the anxiety produced by the darkness. Interestingly, years later theater owners and film directors like William Castle would attempt to utilize senses such as smell and touch to draw flagging crowds to cinemas. These theater gimmicks were often attached to specific movie releases and then discarded, but they were often effective in driving up ticket sales.[51]

These shows continued for about twenty years, but unfortunately, their popularity diminished during the rise of television and the advent of the drive-in theatre. As the television became a household necessity in the 1950s, theatre attendance dropped. Theatres attempted to combat this loss of audience members by offering widescreen movies and color film: innovations that required new equipment and screens that "closed off access to the stage," which limited the

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[48] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies ": 29.

[49] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies": 31.

[50] Kattelman, "Magic, Monsters, and Movies": 30.

[51] Chelsea Rebecca and James Janisse, "Horror Movie Gimmicks," *Dead Meat Podcast*, October 16 2018, https://www.stitcher.com/podcast/wwwstitchercompodcastdeadmeatpodcast/dead-meat-podcast/e/56744049.

number of theatres that could even support traveling ghost shows.[52] Eventually, the shows and

their Ghostmasters disappeared, never to spook audience again. However, elements of these

ghost shows can be seen in nearly every modern scare attraction, including the 2018 production

of *Poe's Shadows*, which will be revisited in my final chapter.

Modern Ghosts

Ghosts and horror stories have become more popular since the end of the midnight ghost

show era, but, for the most part, that popularity has not translated to a rise in horror onstage.

Traditional plays such as *Hamlet* continue to be produced, and every December, thousands of

theatres worldwide present Dickens's *Christmas Carol*. But theatres have largely returned to the

traditional, low-tech production styles that Shakespeare's audience would have recognized. They

may use fog machines or trap doors, but most rely primarily upon costumes and acting to convey

the otherworldly presence of the characters.

One particularly successful modern ghost story is Stephen Mallatratt's *The Woman in*

Black, a play based upon Susan Hill's novella of the same name. The play was originally written

as a low-budget Christmas production for a small theatre in Scarborough, but became so popular

that it moved to the West End's Fortune Theatre in 1989 and has been in constant performance

since.[53] The play relies on simplicity and low-budget tricks for its scares, but those methods have

proven fully capable of terrifying audiences. When *The Woman in Black* opened an American

production in Chicago in 2018, a reviewer for the *Chicago Sun-Times* wrote: "The play itself is

the opposite of cutting-edge, deriving much of its charm from being forthrightly old-

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[52] Kattelman, "Where Were You," 106.

[53] Alex Needham, "The *Woman in Black's* reign of terror," *The Guardian*, Oct 28, 2012.
https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/oct/28/woman-in-black-25th-anniversary.

fashioned."[54] The production features only two actors, a bare stage, and a box full of props, but it still delivers chills using a few clever methods. Lighting and a sound play a major part in the eeriness of the show, as do a few parlor tricks, such as dry ice fog, props moved with fishing wire, and keeping "the air conditioning cooler than might be comfortable."[55]

But one major component of the show's success lies in its variable boundaries. Characters sometimes enter from behind the audience. Fog spills out from the stage into the seats. One of the show's producers, Robin Herford, explains that this uncertainty puts the audience on edge. "The whole theatre is the set. If I'm watching something scary on the telly or at the cinema, you know it's just an image on a flat screen, and you can shut your eyes."[56] By drawing the audience into the performance space—or delineating that space around the audience—the spectators find that they are no longer distanced from the action, but instead a part of it.

The Woman in Black may blur the lines between acting space and audience space, but it is not a truly interactive show. Despite being included in the action, the actors do not touch or speak to the audience members directly. But what happens when they do? What does theatre look like when it is completely interactive?

And why has this immersive theatre become so popular?

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[54]Alex Huntsberger, "'Woman in Black' is brilliantly terrifying at Royal George." *Chicago Sun-Times*, Nov 26, 2018. https://chicago.suntimes.com/entertainment/woman-in-black-review-terrifying-royal-george-theatre-chicago/.

[55] Herford quoted in Needham, "Reign of Terror."

[56] Herford quoted in Needham, "Reign of Terror."

Chapter 2: Immersive Theatre and Scare Attractions

Theatre has always been a somewhat immersive experience. Unlike television or film, the medium of theatre presents no real division between the audience and the actors, since the audience members occupy the same space as the actors, which—as seen in *The Woman in Black*—prevents spectators from distancing themselves from the action onstage, thus making the experience more visceral and immediate. Yet, there is an implicit understanding that the action of the stage should stay safely on one side of the fourth wall. That barrier can be permeable—at various periods in dramatic history, it was expected that the actors might address audience members directly or interact with them. But for the most part, the audiences served as witnesses, not as participants in the action. However, the clear division of actor and witness has blurred with the rising popularity of immersive theatre; a genre that has proven particularly effective when utilized in the realm of horror theatre.

Early Scare Attractions

The midnight ghost shows were the first live entertainment to capitalize on the popularity of horror movies, but they were not the first to immerse their audiences in an intentionally uncomfortable experience. Widening the scope from the ghostly to horror elements in general reveals that people of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a growing fascination with not only the spectral reminders of death, but the physical as well. One of the first "walk-through" horror experiences was Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors. Tussaud's exhibition featured famous figures, alive and dead, just as other wax museums did. However, she offered something unique: using her experiences and the death mask molds gathered during the French Revolution, she created a Revolutionary display to highlight the violent ends of the guillotine's victims, depicting them with their bloody death wounds. As Emma McEvoy explains in *Gothic Tourism*,

"Tussaud did not present the narrative in the mode of tragedy, but in the mode of horror—the reduction to pulped flesh."[57] The Revolutionary exhibit was soon expanded to include wax representations of infamous criminals, ensconced in realistic depictions of cells and execution scaffolding.[58] Significantly, visitors such as Charles Allston Collins described the exhibit through the language of horror, describing the "horrible place" through its smells and sights and implications; that the people depicted there were all the more terrifying for their resemblance to everyday citizens of London.[59]

Madame Tussaud's wax figures represented historical figures and real people, a departure from the theatrical tradition of fictitious characters and stories. The Chamber of Horrors also revealed a growing interest in true crime and murder, one that was also reflected in one infamous venue located in the alleys of Paris. The Grand-Guignol, also known as the "Theatre of Horror," was infamous for its grisly and immoral plays. Though the theatre's reputation for causing physical and mental harm to audiences is largely exaggerated, the grisly contents and macabre themes of the plays were not. These short plays, often featuring dreadful scenes ripped straight from the headlines, disgusted and captivated audiences.[60] The subject matters—primarily concerned with violence, blood, and sex—would seem more at home in modern "torture horror" such as *Hostel* or *Saw*. The Grand-Guignol's material rarely ventured into the realm of the supernatural; instead, the theater dealt with more realistic horrors, usually focused on private revenge and violence. The plays capitalized on the public's fears of disease and madness,

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[57] Emma McEvoy, "Madame Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors: Wounded Spectators, Perverse Appetites and Gothic History," *Gothic Tourism*, (Palgrave Macmillan: 2016), 60.

[58] McEvoy, *Gothic Tourism*, 61.

[59] Collins quoted in McEvoy, *Gothic Tourism*, 62.

[60] Richard J. Hand and Michael Wilson, *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror*, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press: 2002), 3.

depicting the ravages of these dreaded afflictions with gratuitous gore and special effects. They also plucked stories of true crime from the headlines, sensationalizing these violent murders and attacks with dramatic flair.

Much of the Grand-Guignol's reputation sprung from the careful cultivation of the second owner, Max Maurey. Maurey took over the theatre from Oscar Métenier, a former police secretary, who focused primarily on true crime stories and naturalist theatre. When Maurey took the helm in 1899, he began to move away from lower-class crime drama to productions that featured violence both realistic and shocking.[61] This was largely due to the efforts and skill of Paul Ratineau, an actor and special effects designer at the Grand-Guignol for over 25 years.[62] Despite the theatre's small, intimate space, Ratineau's skill allowed him to "develop devices and props that were undetectable to audiences in this small and intimate theatre space."[63] According to Richard Hand and Michael Wilson in their book *Grand-Guignol: The French Theatre of Horror*, what made Ratineau's work truly impressive was his control: instead of producing a theatre of excess, he modeled restraint. His tricks were always done in "the service of the drama" and did not seek to overshadow the play itself.[64] The effects themselves seem almost childishly simple: stage daggers with retractable blades and fake blood in their hilts, strips of flesh colored plaster that could be peeled off like skin, fake limbs switched out for the real thing.[65] The success of these tricks lay in two key factors: the audience's willing suspension of disbelief and careful repeated rehearsal.

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[61] Hand, *Grand-Guignol,*4.

[62] Hand, *Grand-Guignol*, 10.

[63] Hand, *Grand-Guignol,* 9.

[64] Hand, *Grand-Guignol*, 52.

[65] Hand, *Grand-Guignol*, 52-55.

Acting in the Grand-Guignol required a difficult balancing act of convincing dramatic and technical skill. In order for the technical tricks to be effective, they had to be seamlessly integrated into the action onstage, which meant that the actors had to make their movements look entirely natural. As Hand and Wilson note, "If an actor were to peer down at the blade of the knife to ensure it retracted, or conspicuously squeezed the handle of a dagger to eject blood, the effect would be lost."[66] This kind of blending of practical effects and artistry would become the expectation for future horror productions, both on the stage and in other, less delineated performance spaces.

The Grand-Guignol changed hands several times throughout its sixty-five-year history and with each new owner, the focus and content of the plays differed. Most of the proprietors employed the "hot-and-cold" method that Méténier originated, which alternated short horror plays with short comedy plays, theoretically heightening the extreme emotions invoked by both genres.[67] Some owners focused more on effects, others on story. However, much like the midnight ghost shows, it was a formula that could not endure for long, especially in the face of the rising popularity of the cinema and horror films. Films offered less expensive tickets and more varied horror opportunities, with special effects that astonished audiences. The Grand-Guignol struggled to stay open and relevant, but after World War II and the German occupation of Paris, it was never able to fully recover. The theatre closed its doors for good in 1962.

The slow decline of both the Grand-Guignol and the Midnight Ghost Show seem to suggest that the days of horror theatre were numbered. How could shows that relied on sleight-of-hand and rubber props hope to compete with the effects shown on the silver screen? Of

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[66] Hand, *Grand-Guignol*, 53.

[67] Hand, *Grand-Guignol*, 11.

course, there were still occasional ghost plays such as *The Woman in Black* that found success, and some playwrights use horror elements such as ghosts and demons in their otherwise naturalist plays. For example, the Irish playwright Conor McPherson is famous for using the supernatural to highlight issues of familial relationships and personal revelation. In these plays, the ghost of a dead spouse lingers as a figure of guilt or forgiveness, or the devil might appear to play cards in the living room.[68] But these examples are nothing like the gratuitously violent and bloody Grand-Guignol. However, the voyeuristic attraction of the theatre still appeals to audiences today. In fact, it can be found in the gore-filled and gruesome conventions of a new kind of horror theatre: the immersive scare attraction.

Immersive Theatre

The term "immersive theatre" has become so commonplace in modern theatre that it is difficult to track down a clear, universal definition. In its simplest terms, it is a form of theatre that totally encompasses the audience, surrounding them with all aspects of a show: actors, settings, sound, etc. But most immersive shows try to move beyond simply surrounding the audience and instead try to involve them in some way. In his book *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, and Productive Participation*, Adam Alston describes immersive productions as "experience machines":

> Experience machines are enclosed and other-worldly spaces in which all the various cogs and pulleys of performance—scenography, choreography, dramaturgy, and so on—coalesce around a central aim: to place audience members in a thematically cohesive environment that resources their sensuous, imaginative and explorative capabilities as productive and involving aspects of a theatre aesthetic.[69]

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[68] "Conor McPherson," *Playography Ireland* (Irish Theatre Institute).

[69] Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics, and Productive Participation* (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2016), 2.

Though these shows are often treated as escapist productions, in a way they are designed to prevent escape. Immersive theatre completely removes the tentative boundaries between audience and actor and instead comingles the two.

Immersive theatre is not a genre, but a style of theatre—different companies may define it in different terms and use different techniques, which makes pinning it down a particularly tricky endeavor. In order to understand what it looks like, one must examine many examples of what it means to be immersed in an experience. For the purposes of my research, that means looking not only at the theatre itself, but at the spaces outside to see how horror theatre is not constrained by the boundaries of stage or script.

The Art of the Scare

For most people, the encounter with the ghostly in real life will happen around Halloween at their local haunted house. These houses tend to be produced by local theatre troupes or horror enthusiasts, but there are some venues that operate all year as tourist attractions. Visitors roam through these venues in groups and are met with familiar scenes and tropes of scary stories. Instead of being removed from the action, visitors are instead directly targeted by the actors, either physically or verbally.[70] Others may have even encountered the controversial Hell Houses that have copied the Jaycees' business model in an attempt to recruit non-believers and reaffirm Christian community members.[71] Beyond these traditional scare attractions one can find the big-budget hauntings that feature better actors, technology, and special effects. Some of these haunts are so intense that they require safewords and waivers.[72]

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[70] Madelon Hoedt, "Keeping a Distance: The Joy of Haunted Attractions," *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 7 (2009), 40.

[71] John Fletcher, "Tasteless as Hell: Community Performance, Distinction, and Countertaste in Hell House," *Theatre Survey* 48, no. 2 (2007).

[72] Margee Kerr, *Scream: Chilling Adventures in the Science of Fear*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2015), 196.

What draws audiences to commit themselves voluntarily (often eagerly) to experience such a terrifying journey?

The American haunted house—or "scare attraction," as it is often referred to in the business—ranges in production value and fright level. Most Americans are familiar with local amateur haunted houses, which were popularized by the Jaycees in the 1970s, and often benefit local charities or nonprofit organizations.[73] However, the roots of the scare attraction in America reach back to The Great Depression, when parents of local children created simple amateur haunted houses to "distract young pranksters."[74] It was not until Disney opened The Haunted Mansion ride in 1969, however, that the commercial haunting business really took off. In his *Smithsonian* article "A Brief History of the Haunted House," Chris Heller explains that it was not the ride's set-up that primarily caught the audience's attention.[75] After all, carnival dark rides had long "combined trolley rides with scary images and macabre scenes full of automated props, flashing lights, and sounds designed to startle the audience."[76] Instead, it was the quality of the technology that produced these ghosts and illusions that truly amazed Disneyworld visitors.

The Haunted Mansion ride was able to repurpose a familiar effect from a bygone era to create the ghosts and illusions: Pepper's Ghost trick.[77] As described in the previous chapter, Pepper's Ghost fell out of fashion because of the impracticality of its staging—specifically, the heavy glass and the hot lights under the stage prevented the theatres from staging full plays—but these issues were side-stepped in the Disney ride because they had a major advantage: the ghost

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[73] Kerr, *Scream*, 196.

[74] Chris Heller, "A Brief History of the Haunted House," Smithsonian.com, October 28, 2015.

[75] Heller "Haunted House."

[76] Kerr, *Scream*, 112.

[77] Heller, "Haunted House."

"actors" were not real people. The engineers built automated mannequins that move on tracks in

a continuous loop; those scenes are then lit in such a way that their reflections appear on a giant

pane of glass that has been installed between the riders and the scene. As the lights behind the

mannequins are turned on and off, it appears as though ghosts are appearing and disappearing in

the room. The speakers for the ride's soundtrack and narration are on the riders' side of the glass,

so the problem of sound being blocked by the pane is no longer an issue.[78] The technique, which

was discarded in its own time for being too impractical, was suddenly useful again. New

technological devices, in concert with old, were repurposed. According to Lisa Morton, it was

this illusion that made the ride so popular:

> What made the Haunted Mansion so successful and so influential…[was] its use of
> startling new technologies and effects. Ghosts were no longer simply sheets hung in a
> tree, but were instead actual shimmering translucent figures that moved, spoke and sang.
> A witch wasn't just a rubber-masked figure bent over a fake cauldron, but a completely
> realistic bodiless head floating in a crystal ball, conducting a complex séance.[79]

Pepper's Ghost is still used today in scare attractions; a simple internet search yields dozens of

videos instructing proprietors how to use mirrors and projectors to create "ghosts" for their

haunted houses.

Building on the Haunted House

The haunted venue works differently because it does not allow the audience distance or

control, two key components for enjoying written or filmed horror stories.[80] According to

Madelon Hoedt, what sets this genre of horror apart is that visitors to haunted attractions have no

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[78] Pointless Engineering, "Pepper's Ghost Effect—Haunted Mansion Disney Land," YouTube.com, May 26, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qbp_s2AG5ZU&t=2s

[79] Lisa Morton, *Trick or Treat: A History of Halloween*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 102.

[80] Hoedt, "Keeping a Distance," 37.

control over the medium.[81] Instead, visitors are completely submerged in a horrific situation and then released into the mundane "real world." This physical juxtaposition is more effective at producing catharsis in the spectators than their simply reading or watching horror would be. Hoedt's theory provides a possible explanation for immersive horror's ability to frighten audiences more effectively.

On the surface, haunted attractions simply present thrill-seekers with the opportunity to be the star in their very own horror film. However, unlike a horror film or horror theatre, most haunted houses do not present a narrative; at best, the venue may use a theme, one often connected either with a familiar popular genre of chilling culture (such as 'zombies' or 'mad scientists') or with the location's real or imagined frightening past.[82] Much like other forms of immersive theatre, scare attractions do not delineate a separate space for "audience" and "actor." Instead, scare attractions immerse their guests completely and thus "obliterate…boundaries, surrounding their audiences with actors, props, costume, sound, and light, focusing on stage effects as opposed to a more traditional narrative."[83] According to Hoedt, the focus in these haunts is to evoke "emotional responses," as opposed to a careful plot or idea.[84] But that is not always the case—especially beyond the Western world.

Margee Kerr, a sociologist who works for ScareHouse in Pittsburgh, spent a year traveling the world to investigate the ways that people scare themselves and why they seek these experiences. During Kerr's research, she took a trip to Japan to investigate how horror and fear

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[81] Madelon Hoedt, "Staging Hell: Performance and the Horror Genre." *Interdisciplinary Humanities* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2016).

[82] Hoedt, "Keeping a Distance." 37.

[83] Hoedt, "Staging Hell," 10.

[84] Hoedt, "Staging Hell," 10.

are treated in a culture so different from the US. She encountered a variety of haunted house "types"—some obviously recreating the American style of scare attractions and others completely different. In one amusement park, she rode a haunted train car that was a "perfect example of old-school dark rides," such as those that preceded The Haunted Mansion ride.[85] She also encountered an attraction in the same park that was an "audio haunt." Kerr describes the experience as being particularly immersive in nature; not only were her headphones filled with "disturbing sounds" such as "heavy breathing, a woman screaming, a baby crying… [ending] with a pair of fading footsteps and the bang of a door," but the haunt also synced up these sounds to other sensory stimuli, such as lightning or shaking from the floor or walls.[86] The Japanese venues also put more emphasis on story-building and assigning the participants with agency. In the Daiba Horror School, a scare attraction located in Tokyo, visitors were required to read a detailed story before entering, which included a quest to defeat the ghost and save a child. In addition to this unique set-up, visitors to the haunt did not simply walk the halls and face a series of stationed actors or special effects; instead, the Daiba Horror School featured a single female actor in the role of a traditional Japanese ghost, targeting the guests and following them until they made it to safety.[87] Despite its simple set-up, the experience was more effective in scaring Kerr than any one of the high-budget haunts she had visited before.[88] What makes this experience so different? It could be the interactive element: guests are a part of the story, with a role to play in the outcome. Or is it the idea that they are being personally targeted? After all, this is a personalized experience, with each visitor getting an individual ghost or monster.

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[85] Kerr, *Scream*, 112.

[86] Kerr, *Scream*, 113.

[87] Kerr, *Scream*, 123-129.

[88] Kerr, *Scream*, 129.

Other staged haunted houses are created to provide a different kind of scare for their audiences. In the last twenty years, a counter-presence has become a staple for haunted houses: the Christian "Hell House." The usual denizens of the haunted house genre—ghosts, monsters, zombies, etc.—are replaced by demons, depictions of sins, and visions of hellish punishments. These depictions can run the gamut from cheesy preaching to offensive stagings of abortions to scenes of sinners being tortured in hell. Usually, the tour would end by offering the guests a chance to enter a "heaven" scene and an opportunity to be "saved." According to John Fletcher, author of "Tasteless as Hell: Community Performance, Distinction, and Countertaste in Hell House," Hell Houses are "not (or not only) about promoting the love of Christ to unbelievers but (also) about provoking in believers a properly Christian attitude of distaste for the world in general."[89] In this particular form of scare attraction, it is not the fear response that is valued, but instead, it is the sense of community: a reinforcing of community values and boundaries.

Theatre as Haunted House

Though scare attractions skirt the boundary of traditional theatre, they are sometimes able to amplify the immersive experience by setting their shows in found spaces. Of course, there are issues inherent in site-specific installations as well. Mike Pearson and Cliff McLucas of the performance company Brith Gof refer to this issue as the "host and the ghost."[90] According to McLucas, created spaces are complicated by "the relationship between place and event. The host site is haunted for a time by a ghost that the theatre-makers create. Like all ghosts it is transparent and the host can see through the ghost."[91] The Grand-Guignol was itself located in an

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[89]Fletcher, "Hell Houses," 324.

[90] Frances Babbage, "Heavy Bodies, Fragile Texts: Stage Adaptation and the Problem of Presence," in *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*, ed. by Rachel Carroll, London, England: Continuum, 2009.

[91] McLucas qtd in Babbage, "Heavy Bodies," 15.

old converted convent chapel. It retained much of its original architecture and decorations, including two large angel statues that hung over the audience, religious murals painted on the ceiling, and ground-floor boxes that resembled confessionals. The juxtaposition of the sacred and profane would not have been lost on the audience. By establishing the Theatre of Horror in a "deconsecrated chapel," the proprietors heightened the sacrilegious nature of the plays, and problematized the morality and violence of the stage material.[92]

According to Frances Babbage, the host-and-the-ghost tension exists not only between the production and the site, but between the play and its source material as well.[93] Much like Carlson's theory that every theatre production is haunted by the productions that have come before, this host-versus-ghost theory maintains that every adaptation will be haunted by the audience's familiarity with the original text. It is appropriate then that the postmodern *Macbeth* adaptation *Sleep No More* takes one of history's most haunted plays and transforms it into an immersive haunted house experience. The production company Punchdrunk is known for adapting famous plays into immersive experiences, but *Sleep No More* is by far their most successful endeavor.[94] The use of *Macbeth* is particularly appropriate, since it is a play that is haunted, not just by the ghosts on stage, but by the tragedies that surround it; tragedies that have made theatre denizens refuse to speak its very name.[95] Punchdrunk has used this to their advantage; the production features not only the familiar characters thrust into new settings, but

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[92] Hand, *Grand-Guignol*, 30-31.

[93] Babbage, "Heavy Bodies," 16.

[94] Deirdre O'Leary, "Ghosted Dramaturgy: Mapping the Haunted Space in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More*," *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* 12 (2013): 65.

[95] If this superstitious rule is violated, an elaborate ritual of spinning in circles, spitting and reciting particular lines from *Hamlet* is used as a remedy. See O'Leary 68.

combines those references with characters and places from the Gothic novel *Rebecca*,[96] the

Hitchcock film *Vertigo*,[97] and the victims of the Paisley witch trials.[98] Punchdrunk's director,

Felix Barrett, originally conceived *Sleep No More* as a Hitchcockian version of Macbeth, and the

resulting production is a patchwork of the famous director's films.[99] The characters travel freely

through the 99 rooms and five floors of the converted warehouse in a carefully choreographed

dance, pulling audience members in and out of their scenes.[100]

The impact of Punchdrunk's popular productions do more than simply demonstrate the

power of immersive theatre; they demonstrate how vital dramaturgy itself can be to a production.

The meticulous consideration of everything from the history of the occupied space to the objects

associated with the psychology of the characters can create the tapestry of a production. These

details may not always be noticed—in a production like *Sleep No More*, it is impossible to

catalogue them all—but they can instead create an atmosphere that can give a production like

this one its distinctive life. Furthermore, deliberate choices such as the dark ambience and the

use of masks for the patrons can heighten the nightmarish disorientation of the audience.

As O'Leary notes, the Venetian masks make the visitors part of the show itself. These

masks transforms audience members into "both the heroes/heroines of this Gothic setting but

also the ghosts."[101] The masks worn by the audience are meant to encourage the audience

members to let go of their trepidation and participate in the action, but they also serve to increase

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[96] O'Leary, "Ghosted Dramaturgy," 77.

[97] O'Leary, "Ghosted Dramaturgy," 79.

[98] O'Leary, "Ghosted Dramaturgy," 84.

[99] Andrew Eglinton, "Reflections on a Decade of Punchdrunk Theatre," *TheatreForum* 37 (2010): 52.

[100] O'Leary, "Ghosted Dramaturgy," 64.

[101] O'Leary, "Ghosted Dramaturgy," 78.

the interiority of the experience.[102] By amplifying the audience's exterior stimuli and isolating

them through the use of masks or costumes, these productions can move beyond simply inspiring

audience members to consider what they have watched and instead force them to process their

feelings on a deeper level. This total immersion heightens the feelings of catharsis when the

audience is finally released from the warehouse to the mundane streets of New York City.

But even before the company turned *Macbeth* into a haunted house, they were

experimenting with the master of horror himself: Edgar Allan Poe. In 2007, the company staged

The Masque of the Red Death, an immersive experience that combined elements from nine of

Poe's most famous stories, staged in the Battersea Arts Center. As in *Sleep No More*, the

audience dons plain white masks and moves freely through the center, choosing to follow certain

actors or to peek in on different scenes. This particular performance was largely dance and

movement-based, as opposed to plot-driven, and focused on delivering more one-on-one

experiences with audience members, thus increasing their 'interactivity.' However, one common

complaint from this experience was that much of Poe's stories were lost in the company's

aesthetic and atmospheric focus.[103] But for some audience members, that was not a detracting

factor, but an advantage.

Frances Babbage addresses the issues of both site-specific installations such as the ones

for which Punchdrunk has become famous and the issues of stage adaptation in general in her

essay "Heavy Bodies, Fragile Texts: Stage Adaptation and the Problem of Presence." *The

Masque of the Red Death* was criticized for its fragmentary nature; the production was a

"labyrinthine installation" that allowed visitors to roam the halls freely, observing bits and pieces

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[102] Eglinton, "Reflections," 51.

[103] Karen Fricker, "The Masque of the Red Death," *Variety.com*, Oct 9 2007, https://variety.com/2007/legit/reviews/the-masque-of-the-red-death-2-1200555475/.

of scenes, but no coherent story was presented.[104] The production did use *The Masque of the Red Death* as its framing story, with each room representing themes or ideas from Poe's various plots, but there was very little text involved. If actors were playing specific Poe characters, their intended identity was often unclear. Instead, they appeared to be modeling Poe-esque characters, such as the consumptive bride or his "deranged heroes."[105] This installation focused on creating the "unquantifiable 'spirit' of the material."[106] While this sort of adaptation could be beneficial for fans of Poe such as Babbage, the audience, without knowledge of Poe and his works to ground them, could be lost in the labyrinth. The removal of his text also reveals a "cavalier disregard" for Poe's own ideologies: "An effective 'plot', for Poe, is one where 'no one of its component parts shall be susceptible of removal without detriment to the whole.'"[107] Dissecting his works to reassemble a new creation would have been anathema to Poe.

How can a production team use space, design, and technology to evoke the spirit of Poe without sacrificing his text? Though the creative team at Virginia Tech also sought to create an immersive installation based on Poe's works, they were dealing with different constraints and priorities. They had a small amount of space and time to work with, as well as a much smaller budget and target audience. The show that would become *Poe's Shadows* chose to go in a different direction: by focusing on the text and then using the technology available to them to bring that text to life.

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[104] Babbage, "Heavy Bodies," 11.

[105] Babbage, "Heavy Bodies," 16.

[106] Babbage, "Heavy Bodies," 17.

[107] Babbage, "Heavy Bodies," 17.

Chapter 3: Screen-Based Entertainments and *Poe's Shadows*

Through all of the various incarnations and permutations of horror plays and scare attractions, horror theatre has evolved to fit the expectations of audience while also incorporating technology. As can be seen in the example of Pepper's Ghost effect, some productions and venues have found ways to repurpose tricks that were once considered outdated, but could be better utilized with more modern technology. Theatrical organizations and productions are constantly searching for new ways to reach audiences and to incorporate multimedia into live shows or installations. Besides offering the audience a multi-faceted form of entertainment, integrating new technology with traditional theatrical story-telling offers collaborators an opportunity to experiment with format, while also giving artists and designers a chance to explore different perspectives.

It was this desire to explore the opportunities afforded by collaboration and cross-discipline experimentation that inspired the creators of *Poe's Shadows* at Virginia Tech. Members of the School of Performing Arts, the English Department, the School of Visual Arts, and the Institute for Creativity, Arts, and Technology worked together over the space of several months to design and create the various artistic aspects of the installation, marrying the parts into a cohesive and entertaining presentation that ran for five days in the Moss Arts Center on the VT campus. This immersive theatrical experience combined aspects of theatre, sound composition, design, literary research, and digital technology in order to provide the audience with a new way to experience two of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous works: "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Raven." This installation was approximately fourteen minutes long and played on a loop throughout the day, admitting small groups every quarter hour. Though it was located on the Virginia Tech campus and the majority of the attendees were students and university employees,

the event was open and free to the public. From its premiere on October 31st, 2018, until it closed

on November 4th, 2018, nearly 1,000 visitors passed through the installation.

This immersive experience began as soon as the audience entered the door. Inside, a large

circular screen, or cyclorama, took up most of the Cube, with ample walking space around the

outside. The walls and back of the cyclorama were washed in shifting shadows like bare,

reaching tree branches. As the audience's eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, the ambient night

noises filling the space were replaced with the hushed tones of a female voice, speaking the

famous first lines of a familiar poem:

> Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
> Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
> While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
> As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
> ' 'Tis some visiter,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door —
> Only this, and nothing more.'[108]

"The Raven" was read by three different student actors each taking a stanza and building upon

the momentum of the previous performance. Their voices were accompanied by the sounds of

shutters creaking, ravens cawing, and fluttering wings, sounds that seemed to travel through the

Cube. At the end of the fourth stanza, after the reader spoke the famous "Nevermore" for the first

time, the lights around the cyclorama dimmed, and red lights came up the inside of the

cyclorama. The red lights pulsed and illuminated the stools arranged inside of the circle, while

voices urged the viewers to step inside of the cyclorama.

As the lights continued to throb and the viewers took their seats, a male voice filled the

circle, declaring in precise tones, "True! --nervous --very, very dreadfully nervous I had been

and am; but why will you say that I am mad?"[109] Thus begins "The Tell-Tale Heart," and soon

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[108] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven," (1845), lines 1-6.

[109] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Tell-Tale Heart," (1843), 1.

after the narrator's story starts, the red lights fade out and a moving panorama of images scrolls across the cyclorama. The artwork, which was hand-drawn and then rendered into animation by Meghan Dee, contains some images that are lifted right from the story, while others are more evocative and instead reflect elements from other Poe tales. The images are mostly static and black and white, but there are also some subtle movements within the pictures, as well as spots of thematic color. Much as in "The Raven," sound effects accompany the narration, such as creaking doors, footsteps, and the beating of "his hideous heart," a noise that not only grows in volume, but surrounds the audience on all sides.

As the villainous story comes to its end and the last glimpse of a skeletal hand travels off the screen, the dimly illuminated branches from "The Raven" reappear outside the cyclorama, accompanied by the croaking of ravens and the echoes of "Nevermore." The audience follows the voices outside the circle, listening as the actors' words increase in urgency, culminating in a chilling unison chorus of "Shall be lifted—nevermore!" Wingbeats and the sounds of cawing birds fill the air, then fade away into ambient noise as the audience is left in the dark to consider what they have seen and heard. It was at this point that the front doors to the Cube would open and a docent would gently lead the audience from the space, while stragglers were urged on by a few pointed remarks from "The Raven" performers. Visitors to the installation found themselves making the jarring transition of moving from that space of physical and emotional darkness into the stark normalcy of campus life.

Poe's Shadows provided its visitors with a rare chance to be active participants in a journey through darkness. In the modern era, people are not presented with many opportunities to unplug from their devices and focus their attention, except perhaps in movie theaters or live theatres. But these forms of entertainment require passive acceptance from the audience; all they

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must do is remain seated and watch the action play out before them. *Poe's Shadows*, like other immersive productions, gave the audience some agency to move as they wished. But the medium of "The Tell-Tale Heart" also hearkened back to other screen-based entertainments—film seems an obvious parallel, though the static images and limited animation are not overly similar to modern cinema. Instead, the style and form of the cyclorama animation bears more resemblance to other screen-based media that date back hundreds of years ago, putting *Poe's Shadows* in company with some "magical" forms of entertainment.

Moving Panoramas and Crankies

Like its antecedents in horror theatre, *Poe's Shadows* took advantage of advanced technological tools to imitate a form of technology that has been nearly forgotten: the crankie. These hand-cranked panoramas used shadows and simple illustrations to tell stories, much as *Poe's Shadows* projected black-and-white illustrations onto a cyclorama screen. According to The Crankie Factory, crankies ranged from small children's toys a couple of inches across to large panoramas that could be at least eight foot tall.[110] Though the crankie is the most obvious technology imitated in *Poe's Shadows*, it is not the only screen-based entertainment that would have been present in Poe's time.

Over two hundred years before the advent of film in the 1890s, crowds were being entertained by the magic lantern. This device looked and operated similarly to a slide projector: images were painted on glass slides, which were slid into slots in front of the lantern's lens and thus projected onto a wall or screen.[111] These magic lantern shows were used for entertainment

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[110] Sue Truman, "Moving Panorama History & Related Art," The Crankie Factory (2019): www.thecrankiefactory.com.

[111] BFI, "Charles Dickens and the Magic Lantern," YouTube video, 1:44, British Film Institute, Dec 15, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omuDMHj0TZY.

and storytelling, education and religion, spiritualism and séances. Projectionists might present

their material to crowds of hundreds of people or in a family home to a few children.[112] Though

the medium is often assumed to only produce static images, in fact the more complex magic

lanterns could produce a rudimentary form of animation. A well-trained projectionist could use

multiple slides exchanged very quickly to make it seem that elements of the picture were moving

against a static background. Specialty lanterns might use multiple lenses to produce layered

images that could appear to move, or slides that had special moving parts.[113]

    Magic lanterns could even be combined with actors to produce early "ghost shows," like

those seen in Étienne Gaspard Robertson's Phantasmagoria in the early eighteenth century. In a

formula that would be become widely used by Ghostmasters nearly a century later, Robertson

would use utter darkness and showmanship, in combination with multiple magic lanterns

projecting images upon actors and smoke to delight and terrify Parisians. [114] His methods were so

successful that they would later be reproduced by various companies around the world and

would flourish in America throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.[115] These

technically complicated and terrifying shows provided audiences with a new kind of immersive

experience, one that predated the haunted attraction. The phantasm shows revealed Americans'

growing appetite for all things ghostly, which would, in a few decades, come to a head with the

rise of spiritualism and, near the end of the century, with the traveling ghost shows. But these

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[112] "Magic Lantern," 5:09

[113] "Magic Lantern," 2:09

[114] Barber, X. Theodore. "Phantasmagorical Wonders: The Magic Lantern Ghost Show in Nineteenth-Century America." *Film History* 3, no. 2 (1989): 73-86. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814933. 73-75.

[115] Theodore, "Phantasmagorical Wonder," 78.

phantasm shows were not the only screen-based entertainment that found popularity in America at the time.

Shadow plays—which involved placing puppets or actors between a screen and a light source, while an audience watches from the other side—had been around for hundreds of years. Most people are familiar with a rudimentary version of shadow puppets, created with hand shapes in front of a light source directed at a wall or screen. However, historically, shadow plays would have been more complex. Different forms of these plays, which often used articulated, movable puppets accompanied by music or narration, had been a story-telling device in China since around 1000 A.D., while similar methods appeared in other countries such as India and Egypt.[116] It is unknown when these shadow plays travelled to Europe and the Americas, or how widespread their impact might have been, but comparable shadow puppetry sometimes accompanied the moving panoramas that were so popular in the nineteenth century.

Moving panoramas[117] were long backdrops or pictures that were moved using geared machinery.[118] These painted canvases were wound onto a spool and then unwound slowly across an open space or proscenium for an audience's perusal onto a second concealed spool.[119] The moving panoramas were often accompanied by related exhibits or events that blurred the line between stationary art and theatre.[120] These moving panorama shows were always supplemented with a lecture from a narrator—or "cicerone"—whose showmanship and panache would be

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[116] Matthew Isaac Cohen, "Playing with Shadows in the Dark: Shadow Theatre and Performance in Flux," in *Theatre in the Dark*, ed. by Adam Alston and Martin Welton, (Bloombury: 2017), 196.

[117] From the Greek pan [all] and horama [view].

[118] Though few panorama canvases survive to this day, some were reported to be upwards of *four miles* long.

[119] Ralph Hyde, *Panoramania!: The art and entertainment of the "all-embracing" view*, (London: Trefoil Publications: 1988), 131.

[120] Hyde, *Panoramania!,* 132.

echoed by the Ghostmasters nearly a century later.[121] But the moving panorama was not limited to these exhibition hall attractions; there were also small versions of the panoramas, marketed as children's toys and measuring only a few inches tall.[122] These domestic versions were likely the inspiration for the hand-made "crankies" that are being produced and exhibited online and at events known as "Crankie Fests" around the country.[123]

The role of 'crankies' was a vital part of the development of *Poe's Shadows*, both regarding the design of the media and the role that they played in Poe's own time. According to the *Poe's Shadows* program, the installation was created with the intention of "examining the concept of 'shadow' through text, image, and sound…The project is inspired by Poe's texts themselves and by nineteenth century crankies." This art form was characterized by the use of an "illustrated scroll…unwound in a circular fashion, revealing images that complement a spoken story or song."[124] The Poe collaborators chose to emulate the crankie's story-telling method by using the Moss Art Center's cyclorama screen: a circular standing screen that is sixteen feet tall and measures thirty-two feet in diameter. Using the four programmable Digital Projection HIGHLite projectors, each with a resolution of 1920 x 1200, they realized they could cast 'shadows' on the screen to tell Poe's stories. The end result was a "mesmerizing" modern interpretation of Poe's work, one that combined elements of antiquated technologies: the stark black and white figures of shadow plays, the subtle color and animation of magic lanterns, and the large-scale presentation of the moving panorama, complete with dramatic narration.

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[121] Hyde, *Panoramania!,* 133.

[122] Hyde, *Panoramania!,* 151.

[123] Truman, "Moving Panorama History."

[124] Nelson, Amanda. *Poe's Shadow* Program.

Casting Shadows

The titular shadows referred to Poe's many allusions to darkness, both literal and figurative. His poems and stories, which were filled with ominous foreshadowing and macabre atmosphere, explored the blackness of men's souls and took place in shadowy houses or on gloomy nights, making it particularly appropriate material for the theatre. In the essay "Harnessing Shadows: A Historical Perspective on the Role of Darkness in the Theatre," Scott Palmer explores the relationship between the theatre and the darkness it requires, investigating how a form of entertainment that once took place in any available light now relies so heavily on the darkness. He quotes Robert Edmond Jones as he begins: "How shall I convey to you the meaning of shadow in the theatre—the primitive dread, the sense of brooding, of waiting, of fatality, the shrinking, the blackness, the descent into endless night?"[125] In the conventions of traditional theatre, darkness is a signal and a behavioral cue; when the lights go out, the audience should be silent and "gaze into the more brightly lit stage space."[126] When the conventions of defined space (and the defined roles that they imply) are disregarded, the disruption can lead to uncertainty for the audience. Which, sometimes, is exactly the point. By immersing the audience in darkness and removing those strict barriers of "actor" and "witness," productions can induce tension that makes the viewer feel more involved. The blackouts of the midnight ghost shows were particularly effective for this reason; audiences were left unprepared for what might happen next and unable to orient themselves. In that blackness, the smallest touch or sound was amplified by the imagination.

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[125] Scott Palmer, "Harnessing Shadows: A Historical Perspective on the Role of Darkness in the Theatre," *Theatre in the Dark*, ed. by Adam Alston and Martin Welton, (Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017): 38.

[126] Palmer, "Harnessing Shadows," 38.

Poe's Shadows, besides its rather literal use of darkness, also exists in the shadow of the shows that have come before it—the horror plays, the immersive haunts, the midnight ghost shows. The goal of the project was to immerse the audience in the text, acclimating them to the cadence and the vocabulary of Edgar Allan Poe, and thus heightening the experience. Though the goal of *Poe's Shadows* was not necessarily to frighten audiences in the same way that a scare attraction might, it did seek to evoke the same tension and unnerving anticipation that Poe was so famous for. By combining his words with carefully cultivated sounds, lights, and visuals, the team hoped to instill that feeling of the uncanny in the audience.

Presenting Poe

Unlike Punchdunk's *Masque of the Red Death, Poe's Shadows* was meant to immerse the audience in the text, and so most of Poe's work remains intact. There were passages cut for time and clarity, but much of the production planning centered on the idea of highlighting Poe's original language. In an effort to acclimate the audience to Poe's language and diction, the production team made the choice to open and close the installation with "The Raven." The first half of "The Raven" played immediately after the audience entered, before they moved into the cyclorama. Three actors—a nod to the three witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*— performed the poem, taking turns speaking the verses, while accompanying sound effects played on the Cube's array of speakers. The most noticeable of these sound effects were the cawing of ravens and the sound of wingbeats. Due to the directional speaker system, the sound designer, Tanner Upthegrove, was able to make the wingbeats sound as if they were traveling around the space, flying past the visitors, while the ravens' croaking echoed around the Cube.

This soundscape bore an unintentional resemblance to the aural haunt that Margee Kerr experienced in Japan. Though *Poe's Shadows* did not rig up light cues or physical sensations to

accompany specific textual clues, the poem was accompanied by a changing light plot. The team chose tree branch gobos for the lights, which cast shifting shadows on the floor—a technique created by switching back and forth between the various lights on the plot. The silhouettes cast by the gobos illuminated the area outside the cyclorama, as well as the back of the screen, with shifting purples and blues. During this reading, the audience members were free to roam anywhere in the space that they wished. Halfway through "The Raven," the recording of the actors transitioned into the ambient noise recording that had been playing when the audience entered. The audience was then guided by recorded directions from the performers to enter the circular screen. These directions were not explicit, but instead were simple and ambiguous phrases such as "In here!" and "This way." The light plot also created a red glow inside the cyclorama, while dimming the lights outside the circle.

After the audience members had a chance to move inside the cyclorama and find seats, the lights went out and the animation began. Dee's illustrations, which were mostly in black-and-white with some subtle animation, traveled slowly from left to right across the circular screen, until they came full circle back to the gap where the audience entered and exited the circle. The images moved in a slightly jerky fashion, in order to better emulate the hand-cranked look of the moving panorama that the project was meant to imitate. The music that accompanied the narration and sound plot was a dramatic string composition that opened with a sting upon the reveal of the title card. As the title card traveled around the screen and the music faded into the background, the actor's narration began. For this piece, the production's directors, Amanda Nelson and Natasha Staley, cast one male actor in order to better emulate Poe's murderous narrator, whose presence is one of the most chilling aspects of the story. He opens his tale with

the command that the audience note "how calmly I can tell you the whole story."[127] Though this calm does not last through the end of his tale, his disturbingly matter-of-fact explanation juxtaposes with the violence of the acts he commits. Poe employed unreliable and murderous narrators in other works, such as "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Black Cat." Telling the macabre stories from this angle required the audience to sympathize with the devil, as it were, and to see the violence with the murderer's eyes and hear his justifications for his actions.

As the narration unfolded, various vivid sound effects were incorporated. Upthegrove used some sound effects that simply provided an atmospheric touch to better immerse the audience, such as a doorknob creaking or a clock ticking. But other sound effects were designed to unnerve or even disgust the audience. For instance, when the narrator dismembers the old man's corpse, the sound plot featured a splashing and sawing effect that drew groans or nervous laughter from the audience members. Much as in the Grand-Guignol, the use of atmospheric music was discarded in favor of sound effects that would drive the plot and draw reactions from the audience. The most effective sound effect—and one that several guests mentioned verbally or on their surveys—was the beating of the heart. As the narrator declared, "there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury," the audience was able to both hear and feel the maddening beating of the heart and the ticking of the clock.[128] Using the array of 140 spatialized speakers positioned around the Cube, the sound of the heartbeat traveled around the circle until it seemed to surround the audience, causing one audience member to

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[127] Edgar Allan Poe, quoted in *Poe's Shadows*, October 31, 2018.

[128] Poe, quoted in *Poe's Shadows*.

remark that it "gave an actual vibration."[129] Being enveloped, not only in the narrator's words, but in the sights and sounds of that story immerses the audience even further into the crime.

Figure 2: Eye and lantern with color.[130]

"The Tell-Tale Heart's" moving panorama was chiefly in black-and-white, but it did incorporate spots of narratively significant color, such as the blue of the old man's eye and the orange glow of the lantern (*See Figure 1*). These muted colors often bled into the animation gradually, appearing fully only when the animation had nearly finished its circuit around the screen. The illustration incorporated subtle moving animation, such as the thump of an illustrated heart or the turning of an elaborate doorknob, which emulated the moving parts of the magic lantern, with their static background and simple movement. Like the colors, these animations were often unnoticeable at first, but as the illustrations traveled around the cyclorama, the

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[129] Elizabeth Kurtzman, "*Poe's Shadows* Survey," October 2018.

[130] Meghan Dee, "The Tell-Tale Heart," *Poe's Shadows*, October 2018.

viewers would start to pick up on them. One of the most frequent responses to the installation was that it was "mesmerizing," and the animation played a major role in that response.[131]

Methods for Collecting Data and Audience Reactions

In order to understand the installation's impact on the audience and to better plan for the next collaborative project, I designed surveys for the audience to complete after their emergence from the show. We set up a table with paper surveys and pencils, as well as a display with a QR code and link to the online version of the survey.[132] The two most surprising aspects of the feedback collection was that we had such a high response rate—we received almost 350 survey responses—and only 31 of those responses were collected from the online survey. Perhaps because of the relatively short runtime of the show or because of the immersive nature of the installation, people were eager to talk about their experiences. Filling out the survey seemed to be a decompressive activity, one that helped audience members acclimate again to the outside world.

In an effort to make the installation truly immersive, we strove to provide the audience members with agency. The Cube is, as the name suggests, a cubic room without any twists, turns, or hallways, which measures 48 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 32 feet tall. In such a relatively small space, there was not much worry that the audience could get lost or end up in an area they should not be in. Our intention was to avoid giving the audience specific directions for viewing: using light cues and the directional speakers, we provided "suggestions" for optimal viewing, but did not mark a path or explain how the installation would work. What we discovered almost immediately was that the guests wanted more direction. The most common

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[131] Kurtzman, "Survey," 2.

[132] A QR code is a matrix barcode that users can scan with their smartphones to access online content.

negative feedback on the surveys was that they did not know where to go. One audience member wrote, "During the Raven, my confusion about where to stand took away from the experience" and another agreed that "the instructions for where to go can be a little clearer because the group that went in at the same time as my group were confused, as were we."[133] By the second day of the show's run, the attendant in the installation space had been instructed to offer the audience members a short explanation about what would happen and where they may want to move.

Though giving the audience agency seems to be a vital part of immersive theatre, perhaps it is simply the illusion of agency that works best. In most scare attractions, the visitors can move at their own pace, but they have a clear path to follow and actors to shepherd them in the proper direction. On the other hand, *Sleep No More* offers a truly immersive experience, allowing their audience members the opportunity to roam wherever they wish and interact with the set and props. The key to this kind of freedom may lie in the proper preparation of the audience, with an orientation beforehand or written instructions, such as Kerr encountered in the Daiba School. The use of masks in Punchdrunk's productions may also be instrumental in lowering audience self-consciousness and encouraging them to take risks and make choices.

Regardless of the success of the free-roaming nature of the installation, the overwhelming response to the production was positive. The most common replies to the question of how they felt as they moved through the installation was "Mesmerized" and "Excited" (*See Figure 2*). The survey also presented them with the option of writing in their own descriptions, and the words that appeared with the most frequency were words that imply immersion, such as "engrossed," "surrounded," "immersed," "engaged," and "captivated." One audience member commented that they "Love immersive theatre," while another added: "It gave me goosebumps and kept me

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[133] Kurtzman, "Survey," 24, 28.

engaged the whole time." However, the cranking motion of the panorama and the immersive nature of the installation caused some people to describe the experience as "dizzying" or disorienting.[134]

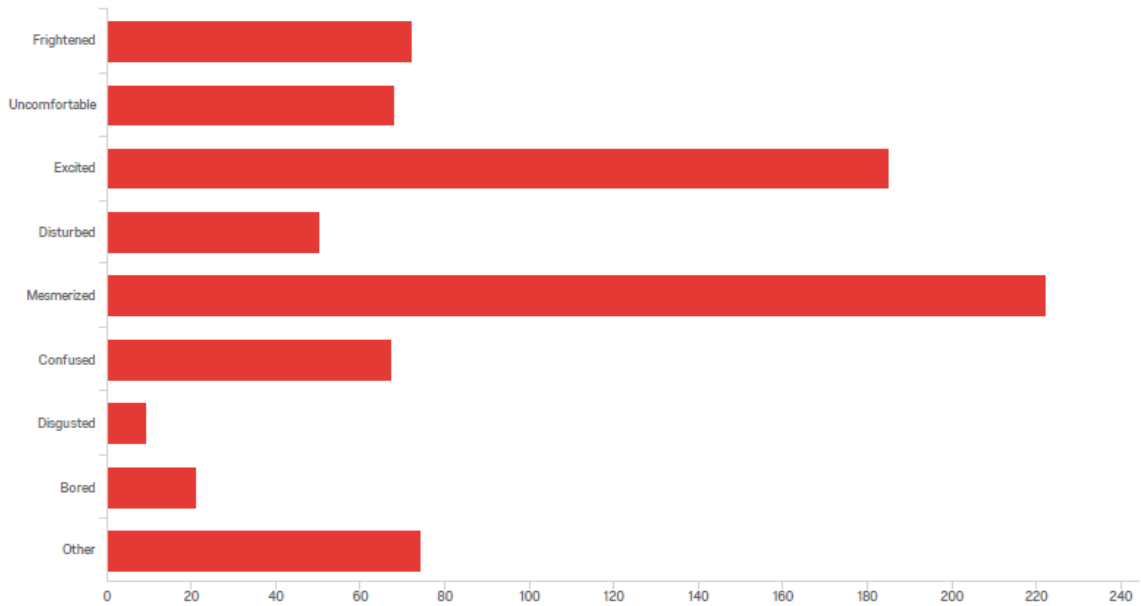Q3 - As I moved through Poe's Shadows, I felt (choose all that apply):

Figure 3: Audience Response[135]

According to the survey feedback, over ninety percent of the audience had read at least some Poe in their lifetime, though only twenty-five percent of those responders claimed to have read most of his work. The survey responses also noted that nearly all of the audience members (96%) had no trouble following the plot of the "Tell-Tale Heart"; is this because of *Poe's Shadow's* clear delivery of the text, or because the installation was ghosted by the familiarity of the story?

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[134] Kurtzman, "Survey."

[135] Kurtzman, "Survey," 2.

Conclusion

People's appetite for horror has, if anything, increased within the last few decades. Scare attractions such as ScareHouse and Dent Schoolhouse are attracting thousands of visitors every year, and extreme haunts such as Heretic, a Los-Angeles based attraction that uses safe-words and personalized, one-on-one experiences to terrify willing individuals are becoming more popular and mainstream. In *The New York Times* article "Business is Boo-ing! The World of Extreme Haunts," Nicole Pajer explains that "These shows put their participants, typically a single member at a time, in intense physical and psychological situations, placing them inside their own real-life horror film." These participants are sometimes willing to pay thousands of dollars for the experience, an experience that gives them the opportunity to be the focal point in their own scripted story. Much like Kerr's experience in the Daiba School House, these attractions offer a one-on-one experience that participants find cathartic. As Kerr states in the *New York Times* interview, "People…feel like they are challenging their fears and learning about themselves and that is inherently rewarding."[136] Horror theatre, in all its many forms and incarnations, still has something to offer audiences.

Though attractions such as this are too extreme (or expensive) for most audiences, there is clearly some appeal in immersing oneself in an unnerving or uncanny experience. Several *Poe's Shadows* visitors remarked positively upon the "atmosphere" of the experience and one response even claimed that he or she found it "therapeutic."[137] Some audience members returned for a second visit throughout the week and brought their students or families. Of course, not everyone enjoyed the experience: some found it boring, others thought it had *too many* elements

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[136] Nicole Pajer, "Business is Boo-ing! The World of Extreme Haunts," *The New York Times*, Oct 10, 2018.

[137] Kurtzman, "Survey," 25.

happening at once. Specific technical effects, such as the noise or the movement of the images upset visitors or made them feel dizzy. It is possible these visitors suffered from motion sickness or that they are unused to the jerky hand-cranked movement of images that would have been familiar to audiences of the original moving panoramas. Regardless, it is something to be considered when the next installation is planned.

One of the survey questions asked audiences which author they would like to see produced next by the Virginia Tech team. Of the 146 written responses, nearly 30 requested other horror writers, such as H.P. Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson, or Stephen King. But the other replies, which ranged widely from Romantic poets such as Byron and Shelley to modern children's literature such as *Harry Potter* and *The Magic Tree House*, demonstrate that people are interested in immersive theatre in many capacities. This kind of installation offers obvious advantages to theatre companies or schools such as Virginia Tech who are interested in engaging audiences in intellectual and emotional experiences, while also presenting classic texts to new audiences. However artists may use these immersive experiences, they would do well to remember that this style of theatre pays homage to a long line of historical techniques, creative innovation, and good old-fashioned scares.

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Poe Responses

## Q2 - Have you read Edgar Allan Poe's works before?
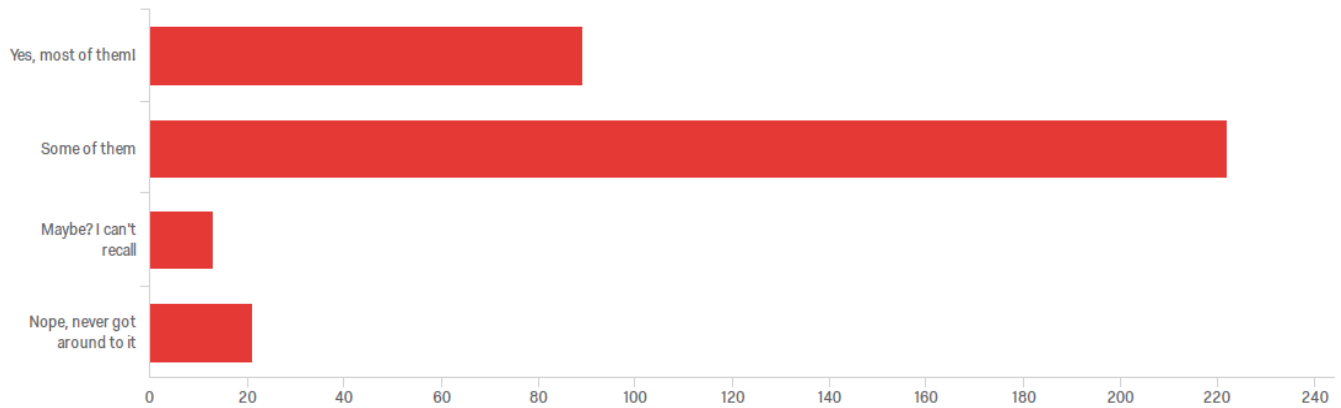
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Have you read Edgar Allan Poe's works before?	1.00	4.00	1.90	0.73	0.53	345

#	Field	Choice Count	
1	Yes, most of them!	25.80%	89
2	Some of them	64.35%	222
3	Maybe? I can't recall	3.77%	13
4	Nope, never got around to it	6.09%	21
			345

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

Q3 - As I moved through Poe's Shadows, I felt (choose all that apply):
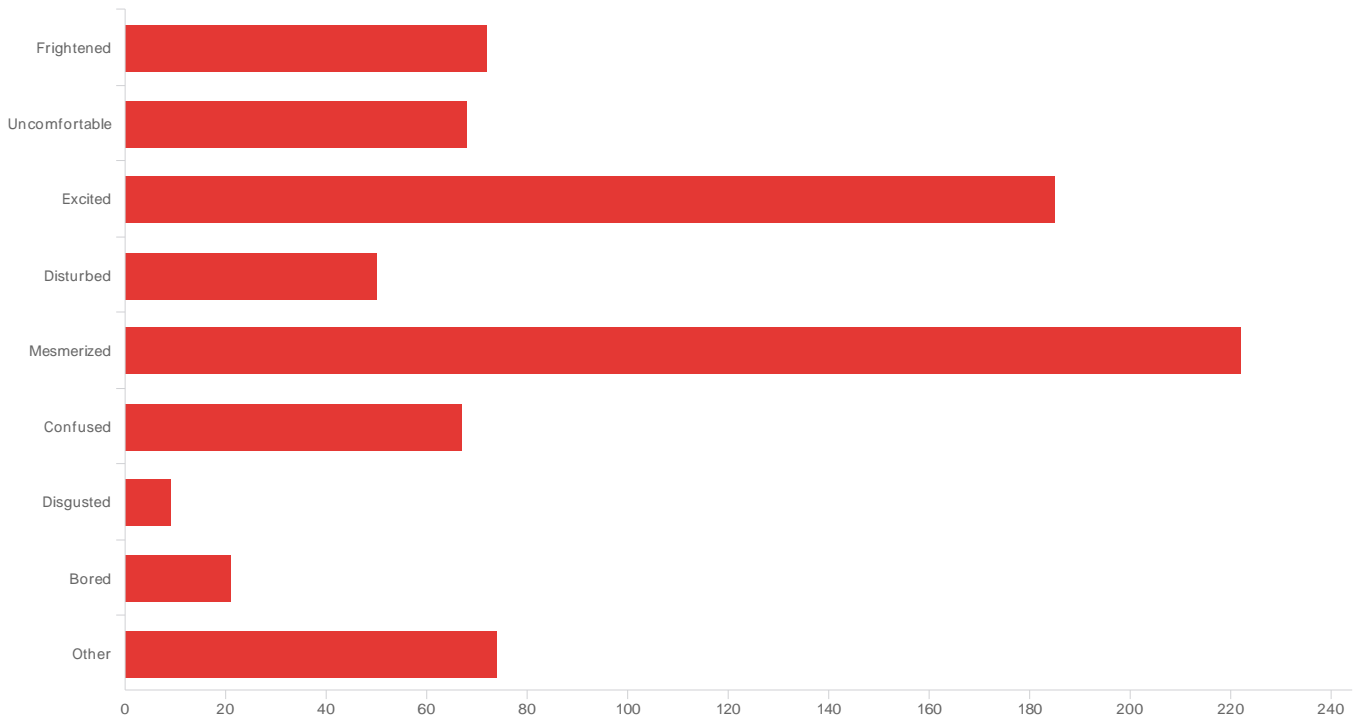
#	Field		Choice Count
1	Frightened	9.38%	72
2	Uncomfortable	8.85%	68
3	Excited	24.09%	185
4	Disturbed	6.51%	50
5	Mesmerized	28.91%	222
6	Confused	8.72%	67
7	Disgusted	1.17%	9
8	Bored	2.73%	21
9	Other	9.64%	74
			768

Showing rows 1 - 10 of 10

Other

Other

Very interested

Happy

Impressed

Engrossed

Intrigued

Exhilarated

dizzy

Immersed

It was really hot in the room

A bit distracted from the words too

Disoriented

Surrounded

Curious

Intrigued

Impressed

So happy!

Immersed

Intrigued

Engaged

Anxious

Engaged/ Intrigued in how the story was unfolding

Pretty good

Entranced, waiting to see how it would continue

Interested

Entertained

Intrigued

Engulfed

Dizzy

Curious

Startled, Interested, Piqued

Curious

Didn't know where to go

Curious, intrigued

What fun!

I remembered

Relaxed

Rushed

Dizzy (In a good and bad way)

Intrigued

Interested

Stoked

Weird

Dizzy

Haunted, delighted

Happy

So cool

Sometimes I didn't go where to go to follow the voice

Visually stimulated

Uncomfortable in a good way

Somewhat jittery motion in video amplified this discomfort

Curious

Curious

Content

Dizzy

direction to chairs?

A little dizzy

Entertained

Dizzy

Engaged

But in a good way! Like Poe's poems are supposed to!

Interested

Interested

Dizzy

Dizzy

Captivated!
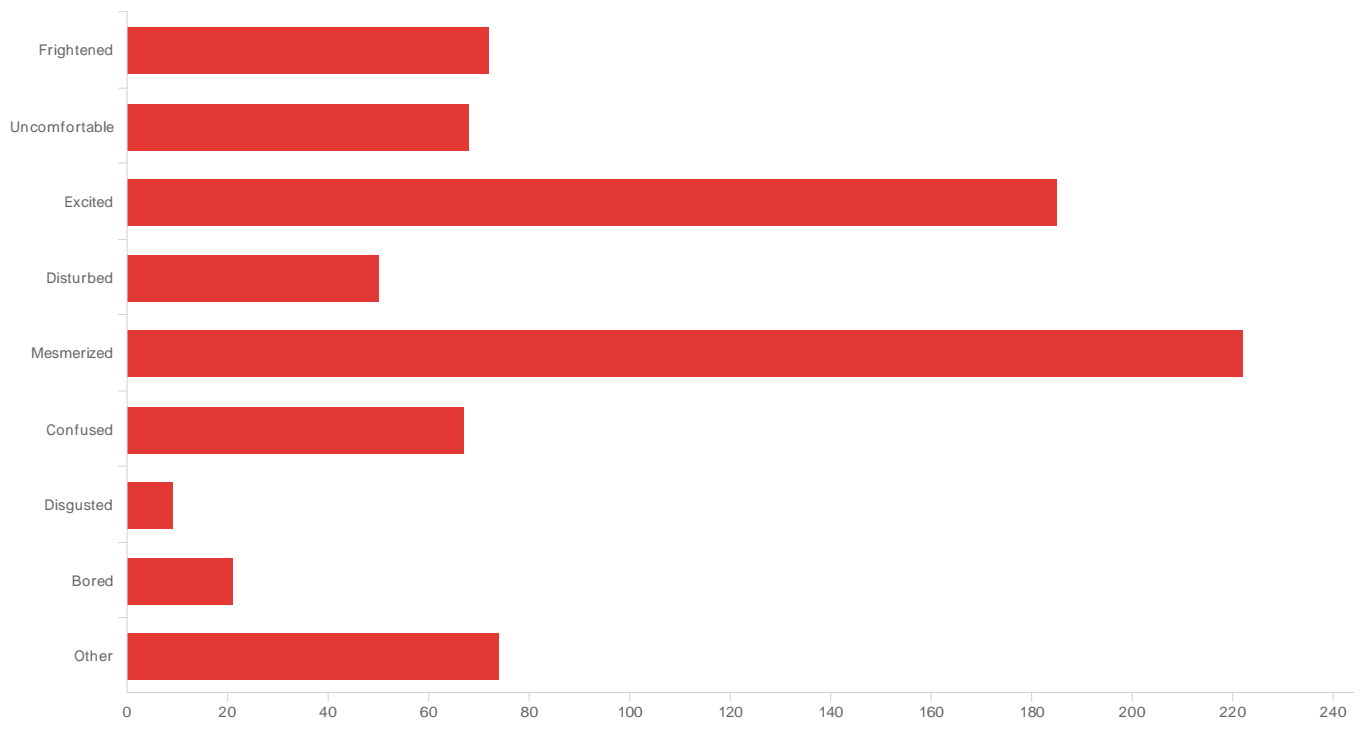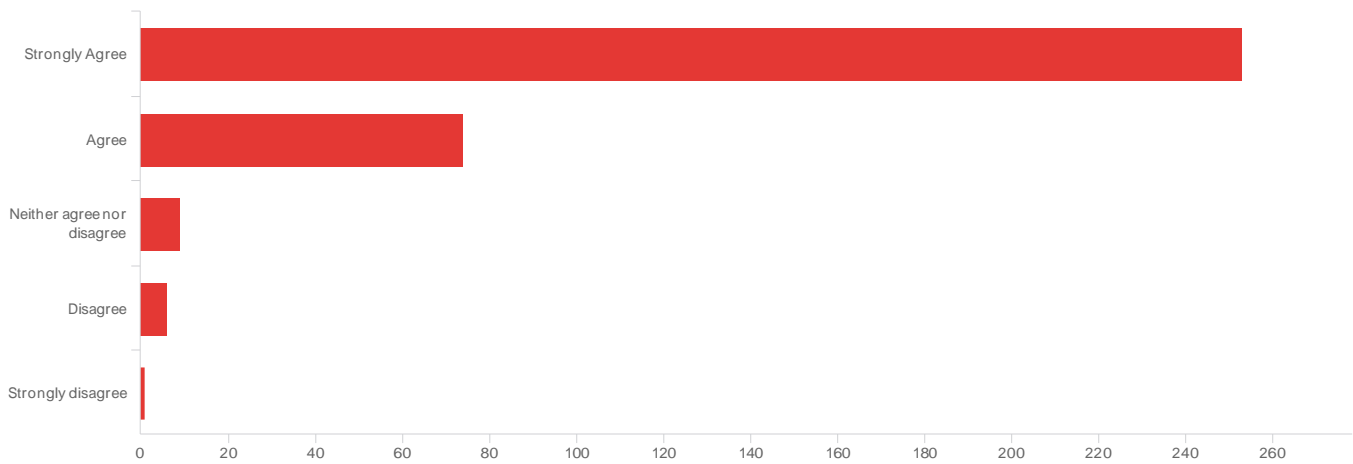
Interested

Engaged

On Edge

Fascinated

Interested

SPOOKY!

Interested

Waiting for more

60

Q4 - I was able to follow the story in "The Tell-Tale Heart."

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I was able to follow the story in "The Tell-Tale Heart."	1.00	5.00	1.33	0.64	0.41	343

#	Field		Choice Count
1	Strongly Agree	73.76%	253
2	Agree	21.57%	74
3	Neither agree nor disagree	2.62%	9
4	Disagree	1.75%	6
5	Strongly disagree	0.29%	1
			343

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Q5 - Did the cyclorama (the circular screen used for "The Tell-Tale Heart") make you feel trapped or claustrophobic?
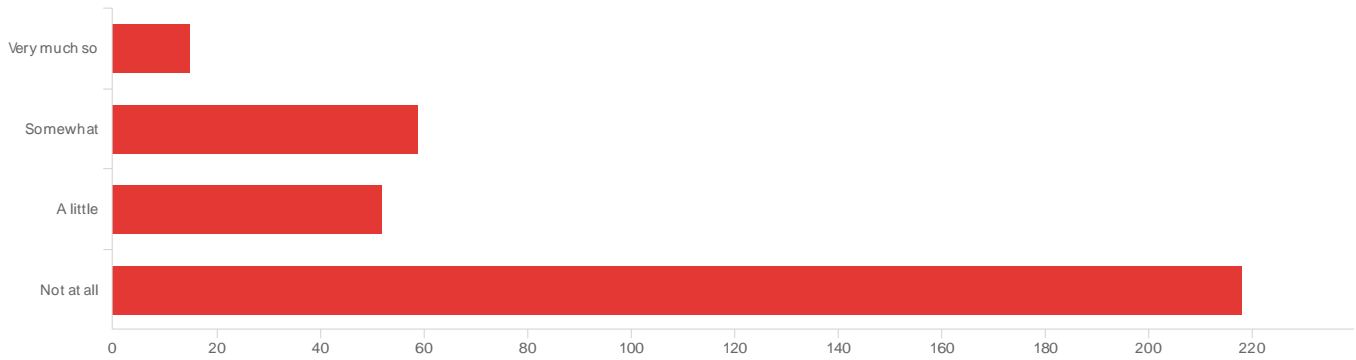
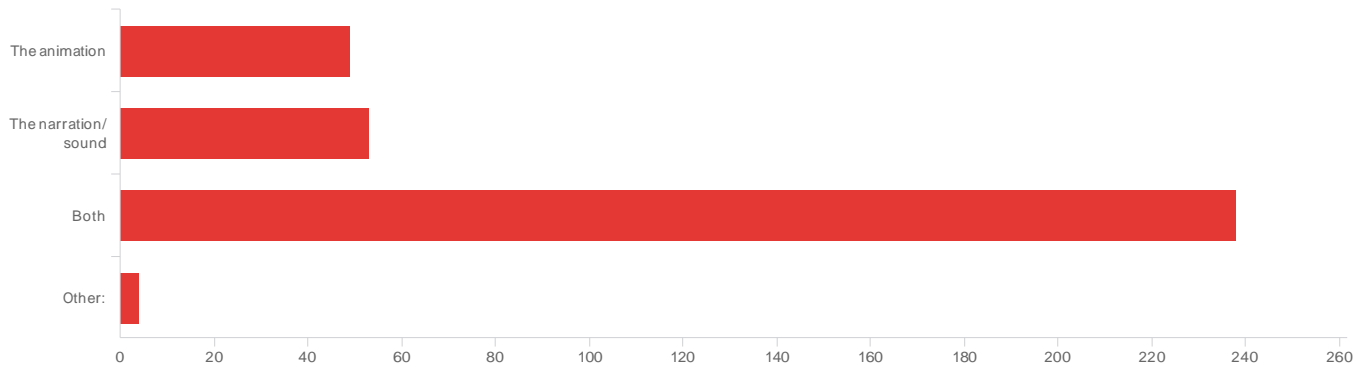| #	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Did the cyclorama (the circular screen used for "The Tell-Tale Heart") make you feel trapped or claustrophobic?	1.00	4.00	3.38	0.92	0.84	344

#	Field		Choice Count
1	Very much so	4.36%	15
2	Somewhat	17.15%	59
3	A little	15.12%	52
4	Not at all	63.37%	218
			344

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

Q6 - During "The Tell-Tale Heart," my focus was on:

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	During "The Tell-Tale Heart," my focus was on: - Selected Choice	1.00	4.00	2.57	0.74	0.55	344

#	Field		Choice Count
1	The animation	14.24%	49
2	The narration/ sound	15.41%	53
3	Both	69.19%	238
4	Other:	1.16%	4
			344

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5
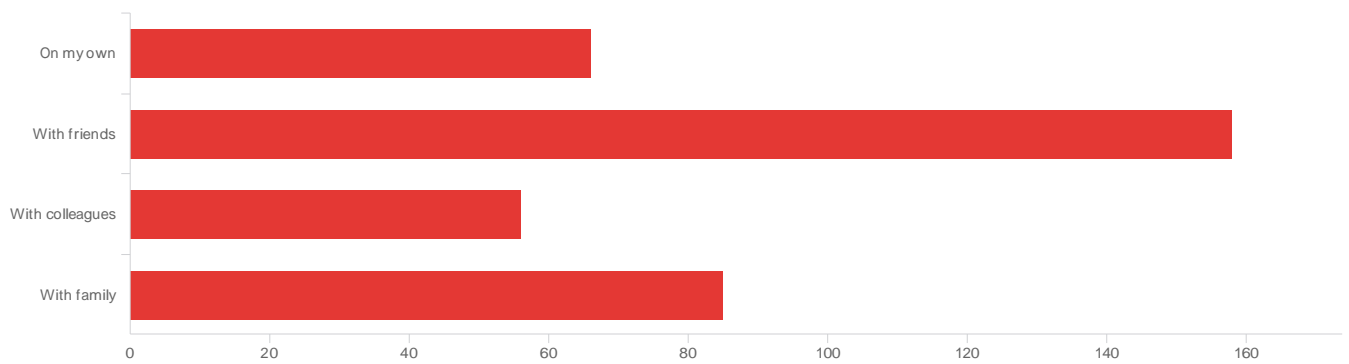
Other:

Other:
The sounds: Couldn't look, made me dizzy
It was really interesting. I liked that the images continued moving/ beating along with story even though it was past the action
Actor voice
The simultaneity of the 2 medias made me want to tune each out alternately to focus attention

64

Q7 - I came to Poe's Shadows:

#	Field	Choice Count	
1	On my own	18.08%	66
2	With friends	43.29%	158
3	With colleagues	15.34%	56
4	With family	23.29%	85
			365

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

# Q8 - Please tell us how frequently you attend or use the following forms of entertainment:

Legend:
- Plays/ Musicals
- Movie Theaters
- Poetry/ Book Readings
- Scare Attractions (Such as haunted houses/ corn mazes/ etc
- Escape Rooms
- Audio Books/ Radio Plays
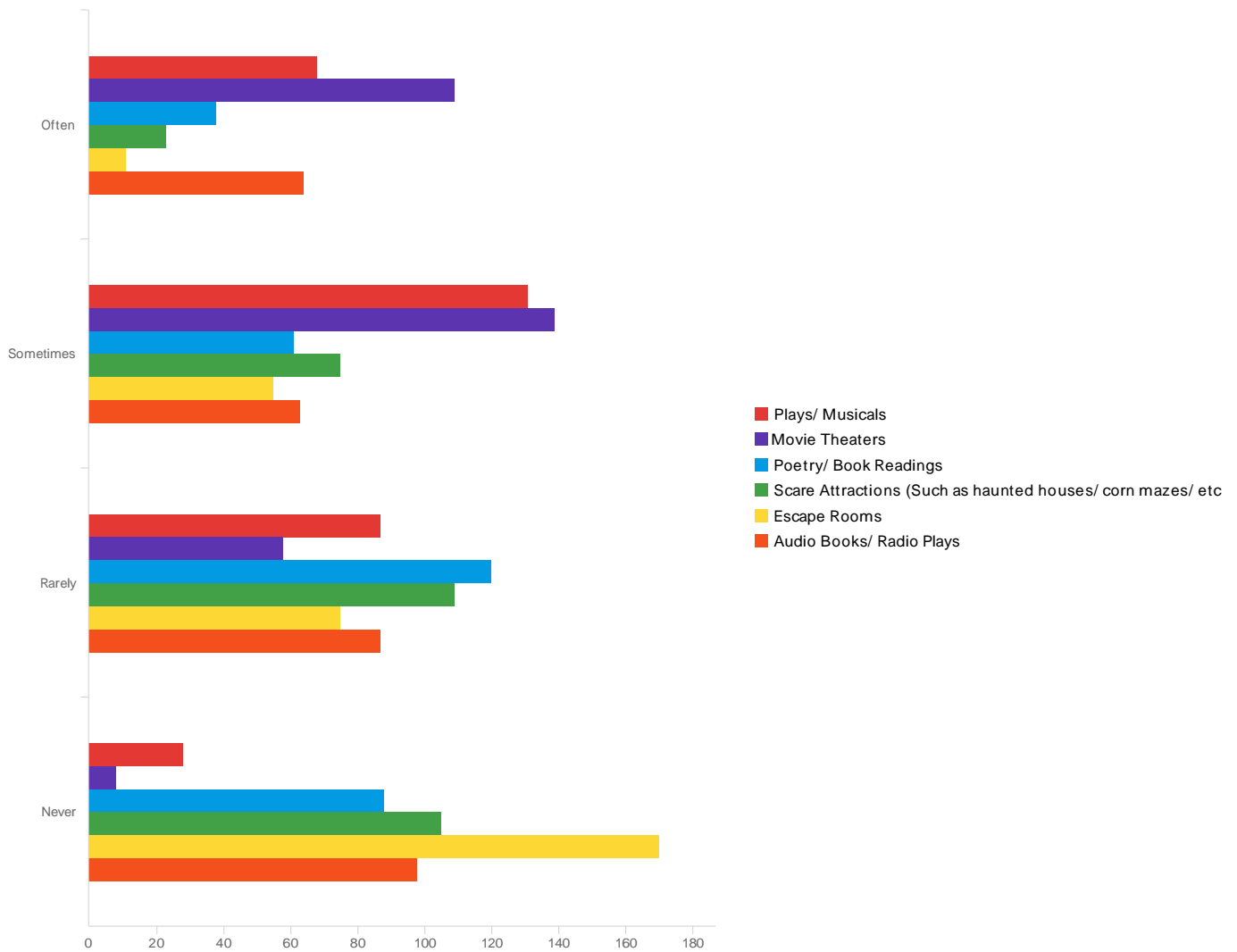
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Plays/ Musicals	1.00	4.00	2.24	0.89	0.79	314
2	Movie Theaters	1.00	4.00	1.89	0.79	0.62	314
3	Poetry/ Book Readings	1.00	4.00	2.84	0.98	0.95	307
4	Scare Attractions (Such as haunted houses/ corn mazes/ etc	1.00	4.00	2.95	0.93	0.87	312
5	Escape Rooms	1.00	4.00	3.30	0.88	0.78	311
6	Audio Books/ Radio Plays	1.00	4.00	2.70	1.12	1.25	312

#	Field	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
1	Plays/ Musicals	21.66%	68	41.72%	131	27.71%	87	8.92%	28	314
2	Movie Theaters	34.71%	109	44.27%	139	18.47%	58	2.55%	8	314
3	Poetry/ Book Readings	12.38%	38	19.87%	61	39.09%	120	28.66%	88	307
4	Scare Attractions (Such as haunted houses/ corn mazes/ etc	7.37%	23	24.04%	75	34.94%	109	33.65%	105	312
5	Escape Rooms	3.54%	11	17.68%	55	24.12%	75	54.66%	170	311
6	Audio Books/ Radio Plays	20.51%	64	20.19%	63	27.88%	87	31.41%	98	312

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Q9 - What is your connection to Virginia Tech?
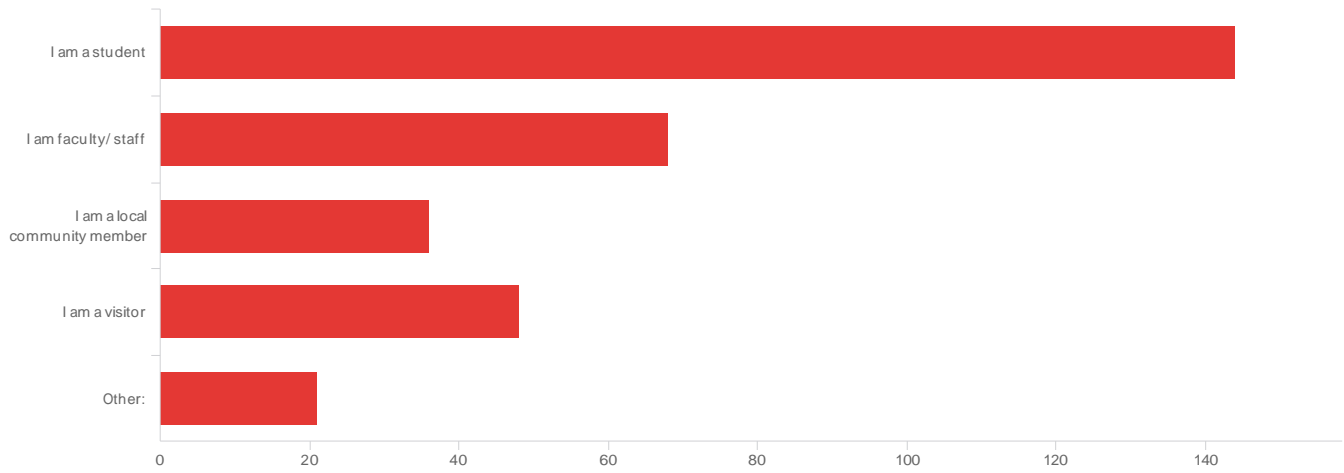
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your connection to Virginia Tech? - Selected Choice	1.00	5.00	2.16	1.32	1.74	317

#	Field	Choice Count	
1	I am a student	45.43%	144
2	I am faculty/ staff	21.45%	68
3	I am a local community member	11.36%	36
4	I am a visitor	15.14%	48
5	Other:	6.62%	21
			317

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Other:

Other:
Alumni/ Family
Alumni
Family

68

Other:

GTA

Graduate

Daughter of faculty

Alum

Alum

Family of Faculty

GTA

Family member is faculty/ staff

My dad works here

Husband of staff
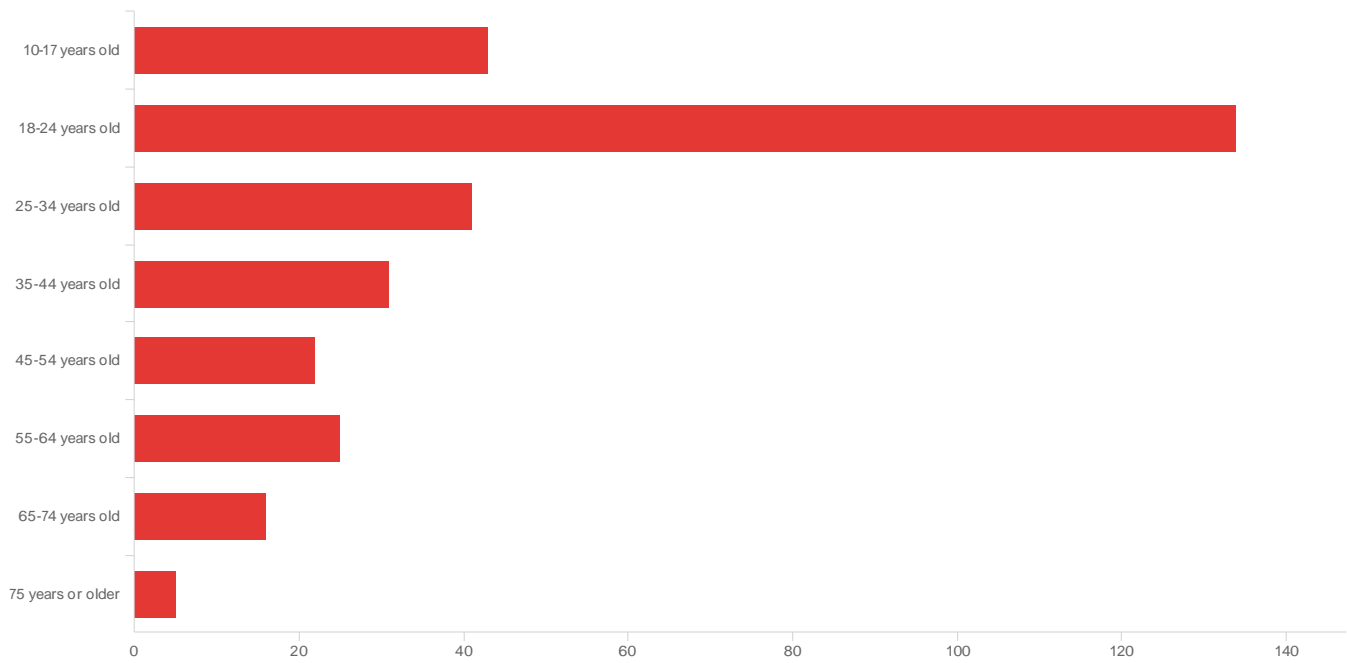
son/ student

Dad works here

Alum

family

Football game BC

Family

Faculty at Roanoke College

Alumni

Q10 - What is your age?

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your age?	1.00	8.00	3.06	1.80	3.25	317

#	Field		Choice Count
1	10-17 years old	13.56%	43
2	18-24 years old	42.27%	134
3	25-34 years old	12.93%	41
4	35-44 years old	9.78%	31
5	45-54 years old	6.94%	22
6	55-64 years old	7.89%	25
7	65-74 years old	5.05%	16
8	75 years or older	1.58%	5
			317

Showing rows 1 - 9 of 9

70

Q11 - Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

Jack London

Robert Serfese

Mary Shelley! Shirley Jackson-- "We Have Always Lived in the Castle" or Walt Whitman

Canterbury Tales!

Harry Potter

Walt Whitman

Jules Verne

Renee Gladman

HP Lovecraft

I'll leave that to the experts :)

My little Pony

Dickens, Stephen King

Borges

HP Lovecraft

HP Lovecraft, Sylvia Plath

Murakami

Dr. Seuss

Nikki Giovanni

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Stephen King

William Burroughs

Some beat poetry!

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

Dr. Seuss

Sylvia Plath

Something less disturbing

Stephen King

Island of the Fay/ Black Cat

Milton!

CS Lewis

Robert Louis Stevenson

Shel Silverstein

Alice in Wonderland/ "The Wind in the Willows"

Dorothy Parker

Edna St. Vincent Milly

Stephen King

Dylan Thomas, Fern Hill; Gerard Manley Hopkins, God's Grandeur

Kurt Vonnegut

Works from the Pseudopod Podcast

Dr. Seuss

Emily Dickinson/ Sylvia Plath

Can we see Shakespeare again?

Shirley Jackson!

Octavia Butler/ Walt Whitman

F Scott Fitzgerald

A Dream Within a Dream

Thomas Ligotti

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

JK Rowling

The Black Cat

Sylvia Plath

Aesop's Fables?

Alice in Wonderland

Hemingway

More women and folks of color!

John Donne, Milton. Doris Lessing

Dr. Suess

Local writer--Lee Smith or Lucinda Roy

Robert Frost, Dr. Seuss

Fitzgerald; Maya Angelou

Mark Twain

Something fantastical, e.g. C.S. Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia or a short story by Tolkien

Maya Angelou

Stephen King

John Donne

Cormac McCarthy--The Road

Emily Dickinson

Dr. Seuss

Please do Robert Frost's poems,, they flow so musically. I think it would be so cool to hear them out loud. Or the Cask of Amatillado.

Tolkien, Dostoevsky

Jules Supervielle, Joy Harjo ("13th Floor" and other poems)

Ursula Le Guin

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

John Donne, Milton

Jules Verne

Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, Shelley

Moby Dick

Stephen King

Robert Frost

Howl; L. Hughes poetry; Yeats' 'Second Coming'

Hemingway

Virginia Woolf, Toni Morrison, Faulkner

Night Before Christmas

stephen king

Dickens!

Emily Dickinson

Atwood

Pablo Neruda

Fitzgerald

Rick Riordan

Shakespeare & Night Before Christmas

Lovecraft, TS Eliot, Sylvia Plath

Byron - bicentennial of Don Juan coming up

More Poe

Alfred Noyes "The Highwayman"

Emily Bronte

Twain, ee cummings

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

Not sure- but I'll visit regardless!

Some serene poems!

Milton

Jules Verne

Shakespeare

Faulkner, Hemingway

Ambrose Bierce, H.P. Lovecraft, C.S. Lewis

Kurt Vonnegut. Hunter S. Thompson

Arthur Conan Doyle

maybe Langston Hughes

Tolkien; Aesop; Grimm's Fairy tales

Robert Frost

Anne Rice/ Stephen King/ Ray Bradbury/ Dean Koontz

Shel Silverstein

The Great Gatsby

Gilman Yellow Wallpaper

Emerson

Lee Smith

William Blake

Night Before Christmas/ Shakespeare

Mark Twain

Kurt Vonnegut

Samuel Beckett

Dr. Seuss

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

Frank Herbert

Shakespeare

Shakespeare

Hemingway

Dr. Seuss

HP Lovecraft

Dickens!!!!

JK Rowling or Robert Frost

HP Lovecraft

Fitzgerald; I think an adaption of The Giving Tree would be cool

Shakespeare

Any authors focusing on adventure or horror

Lovecraft (more suspense/ horror writers)

Fahrenheit 451

Stephen King

Austen! Bronte sisters!

Shakespeare

The Yellow Wallpaper; Flannery O'Conner short stories

Lewis Carroll

Mark Twain

Isaac Asimov

Chickamauga

Author of the "Magic Tree House" series (for kids)

RM Rilke--The Diana Elegies!

Are there any other authors' works you would like to see us adapt?

William Shakespeare

Stephen King; maybe some of his short stories?

Stephen King

Vonnegut? I'd come to this for pretty much any author tbh!

C. S. Lewis, O. Henry (Gift of the Magi), Hans Christian Anderson

Yes.

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

Awesome! Loved this! Great work!

Amazing work. Thank you for sharing :)

Loved it, was properly spooky! Can't wait to see what's next!

Spooky and atmospheric! Loved it!! ♥

I really liked it! (8 years old)

Loved it. Perfect for around Halloween and a good job of communicating the "Vibe" of Poe's works through the use of multi-media. Immersive. A+

Beautiful Illustrations! Really enjoyed it

Wonderful work!

This was so amazing and fun. I learned a lot and really enjoyed the experience.

6 years old--filled out with help from father

Loved it.

Really enjoyed the cyclorama

Put a flashing lights warning next time!

Interesting!

This is a really cool idea. Love immersive theatre

add something scary

Great work!

Really cool! I loved Tell Tale Heart but thought that the Raven could use a bit more animation. Thanks!

Loved it!

It was very well done!

Thank you! This was wonderful!

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

Halloween-y!

Was way cooler than expected

I really thought the circular screen was a great way to experience the "Tell-Tale Heart"

The audio directions were somewhat confusing. It was unclear where we were suppose to go

I think the instructions for where to go can be a little clearer because the group that went in at the same time as my group were confused, as were we. Besides that, it was great!

Outstanding!!

Thank you!

This was fantastic! Thanks so much for adapting these works.

Go Amanda!

Yay!

I was creeped out by EVERYTHING. At least it wasn't real. (Also included a drawing of an evil Raven)

This was a really neat experience!

I LOVED it sooo much. The circle was a little laggy and caused me to become dizzy with a headache.

This is a superb way to introduce and read a poet's works. I'd love to see many more works that add visual to the excellent sound effects of the Cube.

It was very interesting.

Nice job. V. spooky.

More light changes in center

Fantastic! Giving the Raven a female narrator gave ti a different charge. And hearing the Tell-Tale Heart read aloud made it fresh and new again.

fun and creepy :)

Loved the animation!

It was great!

Thanks for doing this!

Less was more. I think I would have enjoyed more restraint in the voice acting and more atmospheric textures in the Tell Tale Heart audio track versus the straightforward foley. Overall tho, great work! Would be great to see this approach to some less well-known pieces of lit.

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

It was very interesting and mysterious

It was nice

I absolutely loved being a part of this process and seeing the final product was amazing!

The audio effect was very immersive!

I enjoyed the loud beating that gave an actual vibration

Thanks for this special approach. I still have a dizzying sensation in my head. It was good.

It was fun, it would be cool if they did something like an escape room of the Tell-Tale Heart.

Excellent Work!!

AWESOME

Slightly confused for directions. Still good tho.

Focused on narration over sounds. Recommended to friends and family. Thanks!

I enjoyed it. The screen shake was a little much

Cleverly done. Enjoyed it.

Loved the novelty of an immersive theater experience. Enjoyed this more than traditional theatrical version that I saw.

Thanks!

Beautiful Artwork. Loved walking around the cyclorama. Therapeutic!

I loved how it seemed a lot of different students were involved in the different areas of the exhibit.

Fantastic readings of the poems

REALLY COOL!!

It was really cool.

It was a great experience and I would love to see what comes next.

Keep up the spook!

It was great!

I loved how the sound moved around the circle and how we could move too.

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

Thank you very neat

It was really good but I wasn't sure what to do

Great job! No idea what to expect coming in!

Impressive and impactful!

Really enjoyed it--congrats!

Your adaptation of the story was fabulous! "The Raven" needed the same treatment. Please turn down the sound. The readers were great! Thanks for asking!

It was cool

Very interesting

Super cool!

Very enjoyable. Would be interested in longer exhibit too. Sound effects = very immersive

Amazing work

The voice acting and visuals were very sharp. I would have benefited from much slower pacing--even if that meant focusing on only 1 work. Thank you for this unique experience!

Very cool, liked that it was short(ish), though would have been fine with 20ish minutes

it was great

So cool!

It was great!

Thank you!

Wish it was more assimilation

9 years old

This was super cool!

Great mixture of media

What a neat experience! Not sure if splitting up "The Raven" was effective or not vs keeping it all together

Super Cool

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

Wonderful

Loved it, thanks!

I was a voice in it!

cool

Great Job!

Creative and fun experience. I enjoyed it!

It was kind of confusing whether we were supposed to keep walking around the outside of the space or just sit in the space as soon as we walked past the opening.

Thank you! Well done.

It was great!

I loved it!! ♥

It gave me goosebumps and kept me engaged the whole time

Maybe the outer circle area could have more light movement on the floor. But even without any more it's great.

It was really cool!! I'm glad that I decided to attend

The jitterness of the scrolling was distracting and it made my eyes tired. Consider what the scrolling will look like when put on that giant screen.

Loved it

Loved the shadow-puppet style of animation. Thanks!

Enjoyed it.

Great experience!

when you stand outside the thing i got confused didn't know what to look at

Great production, very impressed

Use more dynamic range? Much softer sounds, most of the time--then loud to startle. Walking by mid-high speakers at ear/ eye level breaks the 4th wall. Use upper floor/ levels -- move ??? directions.

I loved it! I am a HS teacher and feel my students would love it too.

Loved the artwork!

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

Creepy cool!

Great work!

Amazing! Well done!

V cool - thx

So glad I came!

I loved it!

Very nice work!

Play w/ temperature and smell

Raven was confusing

Unique and entertaining. Enjoyable! I really enjoyed it!

I'm female, however I think The Raven needs a male reader

Very good! Thank you!

it was super cool

During the Raven, my confusion about where to stand took away from the experience. VERY cool though

Loved it!

I am a child

Good experience.

This was fantastic! Great production.

Disappointed with dramatic interp!

Love it--keep going! Amazed! Delighted and amused, especially by the woman's voice giving instruction: Get out!

Great work!!

Really interesting, loved the narration with animation

It was cool. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Fun! Should advertise earlier/ more widely.

Please feel free to add any additional comments about your experience with...

Thank you!

Awesome!!

Thanks for the experience

I liked the spooky atmosphere and the lighting.

This exhibit was amazing! It was well paced and very engaging

Wonderfully well done and imaginative!

Bit lova, but good

Wished the Raven was flying/ visible outside the circular screen/ and Lenore too!

Thank you

It was really great! I came to experience it twice.

very cool!

Great experience!!

I loved it! I hope all my students attend! :)

It would have been neat to see pictures projected on the outside of the walls during the Raven as well.

It was very loud

good.

End of Report