Word Games:

A Critical Analysis of The Usage and Effects of Game Structures in Jamal Harewood's *Word* (2016)

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Introduction

Games and the playing of them have been at the heart of human development from our early hominoid ancestors to our present-day selves. Even now, young children share the same characteristics of play as our primate cousins. Yet, games are not just a form of entertainment but serve as part of the complex systems of communication that have developed alongside our transformation into the most socially conscious animals on the planet.

Never has the notion of the performance of game's been more in the social consciousness then, when in the week of writing, England beat Sweden into the semi-final of the 2018 world cup. Shouts erupted across the country, choruses of 'it's coming home' echoed through the streets. Yet these cheers were met with cries of a very different nature, as in London, members of the LGBT+ community shouted a call to arms for the acknowledgement of their own existence at London's Gay Pride parade. What followed was an inevitable clash of communities as small acts of violence between these groups broke out onto the London streets. The celebrations of two different communities, growing violent in the face of their difference.

These two events, although disparate, share a common link in their underlying psychology and sociology. The notions of community, ritual, crowd dynamics, and the perceived power of the individual that they both share, all be it with different outcomes, provide a timely, starting pistol, for a discussion on the sociological impact of game structures in performance and performance methodologies in game playing.

The performance artist Jamal Harewood uses his work to explore 'identity and race within the community' (Harewood, 2018), he employs game playing as a structural form in his work to create a temporary community on stage, tapping into the audience's capacity for communication to advance his social agenda. His works, *Word* (2016) and *The Privileged* (no date), use similar strategies to embroil their audience within the subject matter, stripping bare their defences and holding a magnifying glass up to their actions. This paper will use Harewood's *Word* as a primary

case study to examine theoretical lenses that provide insight into areas of interactive theatre, with a focus on the notion of games, both the act of playing them and the structures that enable play, as a new form of modern secular ritual.

Chapter One will first try to solidify a definition of what game structures are by drawing on the work of Erika Fischer-Licht, Natasha Lushetich and Mathias Fuchs, Pierre Bourdieu, and Gareth White, with White's *Audience Participation in Theatre* serving as a key text throughout. It will continue by suggesting that the performance game is a form of modern-day ritual by exploring the genealogy of ritual theatre through key practitioners; Antonin Artaud, Jacques Ranciére, & Richard Schechner. It will continue by highlighting how game structures are used within *Word*, drawing from Bourdieu, White, and Jan Murray, using Murray's notion of the procedural author, to re-examine the author's role within the making of interactive performance, before concluding with an exploration of how these different areas coalesce within Harewood's *Word.*

Chapter Two explores the audience's role within the interactive performance*.* It will begin by drawing on my own personal account as an audience member and participant of *Word,* using the research of Dr Philip Zimbardo to discuss free will in human behaviour and how such freedom may be mitigated against by internal and external pressures. It will examine the psychology of crowd dynamics drawing on early research by Gustav Le Bon and Charles Mackay, before exploring recent develops in crowd dynamics with the Deindividuation theory, including the theory's origin in the work of Leon Festinger, Albert Pepitone and Theodore Newcomb, developments by Ed Diener, and finally a critique, as presented in Stephen Reicher's SIDE Model. It will continue by examining the supposed anonymity provided by crowds and how Harewood removes this anonymity with the post-show discussion, before exploring the perceived power of the individual by examining Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment as a case study. It will conclude by exploring how Erving Goffman's notions of frames and his 'definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1986, p. 1) anchor audience behaviour in *Word*.

Chapter Three explores how performance methodologies are used within games, particularly

tabletop roleplaying games like *Dungeons & Dragons*. It begins by exploring the multi-layered role of the audience as a player, player as a character within roleplaying games by drawing on research by Brooks McNamara, and Daniel Mackay, Caroline Heim, Goffman, Ralph Bakshi, Edward Bolme, and David Cook, with Mackay's *The Fantasy Role Playing Game* serving as a key text. It will then explore the notion of games as a simulation of reality drawing on Roland Barthes, Uri Rapp, Schechner, and Gary Alan Fine. It will conclude by exploring how *Word* perverts the expectation of games to create a socially responsive work.

Chapter One: On Game Structures in Performance

Natasha Lushetich and Mathias Fuchs in the introduction to issue 21, Vol 4 of Performance

Research: *On Game Structures* describe game structures as 'the skeleton of all spontaneous,

improvisatory activities that go by the name of 'play'. Their primary function is to anchor social,

economic and ludic behaviours, and to matrix artistic, philosophical and scientific experiments.'

(Lushetich and Fuchs, 2016, p. 1) As theatre and live art practice have moved away from the

importance of 'The Author' and the written text, following from Roland Barthes declaration of the

author's death (Barthes, 1987), theatre has opened itself up to more communicatory approaches,

developing a reciprocal relationship between audience and performer, player and referee. Erika

Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Theatre* calls the process of creating this reciprocal

relationship the 'autopoietic feedback loop' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.39) Gareth White in *Audience*

Participation in Theatre discusses this feedback loop, describing it as:

> 'Autopoietic because it is self-generating, an emergent system that arises from
> itself, with only the input of raw materials rather than an exterior guiding hand; and
> a feedback loop because the activity of the spectators, however subtle, becomes
> part of the event, generating the variations in the activity of the performers and
> other spectators that generate more variations, and so on, and produce the liveness
> of the theatre event.' (White, 2013, p.23)

These autopoietic events are rooted firmly in the heart of interactive performance practice

and the genealogy of the genre. Like the event's themselves, the form has changed over the years

due to the 'activity' of its practitioners, developing from what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the

'playing field (an agglomeration of past practices)' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83). Video games, Board

games, and sports share at their core, the autopoietic systems that Fisher-Lichte and White describe

in relation to performance. Michael Billington describes the relationship between the two in the

article *There's Little Difference Between Theatre and Sport* 'Both are public spectacles' he states 'that

reflect society and depend on attracting paying customers. The only real difference lies in the

uncertainty of the outcome. I remember Bryan Cowgill, a former head of sport at Thames Television,

once saying to me: "My problem is that if I go and see Hamlet, unlike a soccer game, I know the result in advance."' (Billington, 2008) If one wished to introduce an element of uncertainty into the theatre, then drawing upon the structure of games would be a useful start. Improvisation, the most unscripted of performance forms was built on the idea of playing games. Keith Johnstone used game playing as an integral part of his theoretical approach to improvisation (Johnstone, 1979) as did the mime, movement, and physical theatre practitioner Jacques Lecoq (Lecoq, 2000) & (Lecoq, 2006)

Performance games, at least in the context of this paper, are those examples that draw on the above ideas of Lushetich and Fuchs as well as Fischer-Lichte's notion of the autopoietic feedback loop. These examples of game structures in performance have drawn from a far-reaching genealogy of performance that is rooted in ritual. The pioneers of this ritualised performance practice, such as Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Richard Schechner among others, sort to use the power of the experience of performance as a transformative tool. In *The Theatre and Its Double,* Artaud discusses how he proposed to conduct his audiences. In order to utilise them as the catalyst for the transformative experience he would 'treat the spectators like the snake charmer's subjects and conduct them by means of their organisms to an apprehension of the subtlest notions." (1938: 81).

Performative ritualism like that of Artaud evolved from the equally performative rituals of religious practices, such as pre-catholic paganism. Richard Schechner in *Performance Theory* charted the evolution of the performative ritual from as far back as the 1500's (Fig. 1)

(Fig. 1)(Schechner, 1994, p. 122)
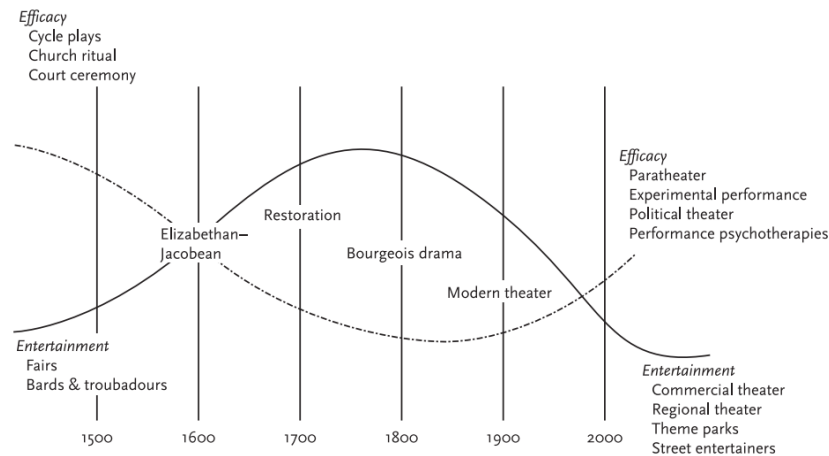
Schechner details the relation between theatre and ritual sating 'Whether one calls a specific performance 'ritual' or 'theatre' depend mostly on context and function. A performance is called theatre or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom, and under what circumstances.' (Schechner, 1994, p. 120) This description creates an arbitrary picture of the relation to performance and ritual, suggesting that, either or, its definition is left to those taking part. He continues, detailing the effects that ritual performance displays (Fig.2) stating that 'If the performance's purpose is to effect transformations – to be efficacious – then the other qualities listed under the heading 'efficacy'' he explains 'will most probably also be present, and the performance is a ritual. And vice versa regarding the qualities listed under 'entertainment' (Schechner, 1994, p. 120)

(Fig. 2) (Schechner, 1994, p. 122)

EFFICACY Ritual	⟷	ENTERTAINMENT Theater
results		fun
link to an absent Other		Only for those here
symbolic time		emphasis now
performer possessed, in trance		performer knows what s/he's doing
audience participates		audience watches
audience believes		audience appreciates
criticism discouraged		criticism flourishes
collective creativity		individual creativity

The historical development of performance detailed by Schechner shows the localisation of

current live art practice within the history of performance (Schechner, 1994, p. 120 – 122), yet

ritualised theatre is grounded in, and relies upon, a shared knowledge of signs and signifiers still

present today. The study of signs and the meaning they possess is known as semiotics, the study of

which can be traced as far back as the seventeenth century with philosopher John Locke using the

term *sem(e)iotike* in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in which he stated:

> "All that can fall within the compass of human understanding, being either, first, the
> nature of things, as they are in themselves, their relations, and their manner of
> operation: or, secondly, that which man himself ought to do, as a rational and
> voluntary agent, for the attainment of any end, especially happiness: or, thirdly, the
> ways and means whereby the knowledge of both the one and the other of these is
> attained and communicated; I think science may be divided properly into these
> three sorts." (Locke, 1963, p. 174)

Signs hold special significance in our society, they have the power to translate a deeper

understanding than mere words. The pattern of the England world cup teams uniform speaks to a

deep-seated collectivism, whilst the pride, black pride, and trans pride flags do much the same,

although from very different points of reference. Each carrying a significance that may go

undetected by those unfamiliar with the shared awareness of those signs. Jacques Ranciére in *The*

Ignorant School Master describes in more detail the process by which we came to use signs 'The

human animal learns everything in the same way as it initially learnt its mother tongue, as it learnt to

venture into the forest of things and signs that surrounded it, so as to take its place among human

beings: by observing and comparing one thing with another, a sign with a fact, a sign with another

sign.' (Ranciére, 1999, p.10).

The semiotics of ritualised theatre are drawn from the shared semiotics of religious practices

such as chanting, usage of religious-like text, and ceremony for example, but as religion has begun to

lose its dominance in wider society, game structures have, in recent years, begun to replace the

shared signs of religion and ritual, with the semiotics of the entertainment industries.

As more people seek meaning without religious affiliation, the semiotics attributed to

religious practice begin to lose they're taken for gospel nature, a new set of signs begins to take precedence, those drawn from cinema, television, video games, and the internet. These new signs are present in all areas of entertainment, such as the applause at the end of a theatre performance, the turning off of the mobile phone in the theatre, and even the encore, but as the entertainment industries have continued to develop, so have the shared signs between theatre and television, an example of this is the inevitable rise in performances using elements of television game shows including *Margaret Thatcher Queen of Game Shows*, Quiz *the Play* by James Graham, Kaleider's *The Money,* as well as Jamal Harewood's *Word* & *The Privileged*. The interactivity that gameshows innately possess, has become more desirable within the theatre, in order to connect with the audience who are seeking more interactive modes of connection

Pierre Bourdieu's phrase of the 'playing field' of past practices is only one part of his description of a game, in *Outline of a Theory and Practice* he describes a game as 'a dynamic relational matrix that waves the tapestry of social reality through the interplay of *doxa* (the ingrained, self-explanatory way of doing things), playing field (an agglomeration of past practices) and *habitus* (the player's system of predispositions' (Bourdieu , 1977, p. 83)

In Bourdieu's statement, *doxa, habitus,* and *playing field* are all facets of the player/audience's known signs and signifiers, that make up their individual approach to the 'relational matrix'. But a performance is not born entirely from the audience's understanding of the available signs and signifies but from the mind of the author or maker of the performance/game work. The piece begins development long before the audience enters the auditorium but it is only completed upon their viewing. How is it that a work that is not completed until an audience is present can ever be developed without their presence?

White explains that 'most performances [...] can not be considered to be fully realised until there is an audience present to watch, listen and appreciate, and to interact.' (White, 2013, p. 29) whereas an interactive work defies this by being 'an event made through the collaboration of artists

and participating audience members' (White, 2013, p. 29). The development of interactive theatre then becomes an act of anticipating future audience collaboration. Often an artist will leave gaps within the structure of a performance to be filled later with audience interaction. White concludes by explaining that 'a significant part of the work [...] consists of creating the structure within which these particular gaps appear, and the work of the interactive performer consists of repeating this structure and allowing the participants to fill the gaps in different ways.' (White, 2013, p. 30).

If interactive work is made through the collaboration of artists and participants, then it is the work of the interactive artists to design a structure that allows for audience participatory gaps to appear. Experimentation in structural form then becomes the spine of interactive work. It is here where performance develops itself from the shared semiotics and structural forms of various entertainment practices like video games or game shows. The sheer breadth of shared developments in the theatre, not just television game shows like in *Word*, but also from video games like the work of Blast Theory and Seth Kribel. There are a whole host of entertainment forms that have inspired theatrical practice, even the structures of entertainment borrow, like an autopoietic loop from performance techniques, as highlighted in role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*. Daniel MacKay in *The Fantasy-Role Playing Game* states 'In the role-playing game the rules are but a framework that facilitates the *performance* of the players and gamemaster.' (Mackay, 2001, p. 2)

Creating work within a structural form that allows for audience participatory gaps is called 'Procedural Authorship by Jan Murray in *Hamlet on the Holodeck.* She describes procedural authorship as the process of:

> 'Writing the rules by which the texts appear as well as writing the text themselves. It means writing the rules for the interactor's involvement, that is, the conditions under which things will happen in response to the participant's actions. It means establishing the properties of the objects and potential objects in the virtual world and the formulas for how they will relate to one another. The procedural author creates not just a set of scenes but a world of narrative possibilities.' (Murray, 1999, p. 152)

If the performance's procedural author creates the underlying rules of a performance world then they unlike their non-interactive counterparts, have little control over the denizens of their performance world, the audience/participant. In this regard, they have more in common with the dungeon master of a *Dungeons & Dragons campaign* than a traditional theatre performance writer.

White asks whether 'the procedural author is only in control up to the moment where the procedure creates a gap, at which point an audience participant steps in and take control of the event?' (White, 2013, p. 31) he continues to answer his own question by stating, 'Clearly not. The exchanges that can happen between performer and participant are extremely complex, so that control – and authorship – is shared.' (White, 2013, p. 31)

All of these elements work together in order to create interactive work that draws from the shared semiotics of game structures and game playing. As is the case with Jamal Harewood's *Word*, the structure of which is heavily inspired by television game shows. In Word, Harewood created a participatory theatrical gameshow that 'holds a magnifying glass up to the words we use daily' (Harewood, 2018). Jamal's work is visceral, much of its experience is lost through description and can only truly be experienced in the performative moment. This parallels the content of the performance which according to Harewood, is less about 'what you said, but how you said it' (Harewood, 2018).

A participatory account of *Word* is key to exploring its connections to the areas of theoretical approach raised above. I first experienced *Word* as an audience member at The Showroom, Chichester on November 30th 2017. I entered the auditorium along with my peers, and audience of mostly theatre students, what transpired over that next hour would mean that, as I left that same auditorium I had become a complicity accomplice in – what felt to me at the time – a gross violation of a person's freedoms, an attack on their self by people who treated his as an*other* to their idea of normal.

Jamal stands on stage, black masking tape across his mouth in the shape of an 'X' preventing him from speaking. Two whiteboards oppose each other in the space, a chair behind a table atop

which sits a dictionary. Underneath a few selected seats in the audience are envelopes, on which are printed numbers. The audience enters. Nothing happens.

Eventually, the member of the audience in possession of the envelope with 'One' printed on it is cajoled by their neighbours to open it. They read it, understanding that they have been chosen as the stagehand of the performance. Inside the envelope the script of the next hour, they read aloud their part after taking their place on stage, instructing the other owners of the envelopes to open and enact its contents. A lecturer was chosen to sit at the desk, known as dictionary corner, the first connection to television gameshows utilising the famous dictionary corner from Countdown. I was chosen as the host. The conduit between Harewood's written words within the script and the audience. It is at this point, when the members of the audience take their place as participants that Fischer-Lichte's 'Autopoietic Feedback Loop' begin to gain its friction, as through 'only the input of raw materials' (White, 2013, p.23), the audience, the scripts, the performer, and the props, that the performance begins to gain a life of its own. To deviate from all previous and future versions of this same production. But even in this divergence, the authority of the procedural author is intact, despite his passiveness that is suggested through the semiotics of black tape across his mouth. It is in his words, pre-written, and the gaps he allows the audience participants to fill with their own autopoietic deviations where his 'exterior guiding hand' (White, 2013, p.23) informs our decisions and the decisions of the audience participants before we had even made them.

The structure and semiotics of the game show format, understood by the audience without the need for lengthy instruction were fundamentally key in offsetting and playing into our expectations. My performance of host was drawn from the performances of other game show hosts I witnessed and possessed as part of my semiotic understanding of game shows. The stage design, two whiteboards positioned equidistant from each other to balance the space also created, without explanation, teams. The audience divided into two, one versus the other. It is here, in the separation between the individual and the crowd where our investigation turns to next.

Chapter Two: On Participatory Audiences

Homo sapiens throughout history have relied upon social groupings for safety, security, and shared resources. Even now social groups organise around specific characteristics of the individual's that make them, such as the case of the LGBTQ+ community at London's Gay Pride, and the supporters of the England football team. Does belonging to a community group make the individual more prone to acts of violence, or is it the innate tendency of the individual, regardless of the community? Human beings, as part of our psychology, have the capacity for free will, to choose from various possible outcomes unimpeded by external pressures. Yet the choices we make, from the plethora we have available, are often mitigated against by other internal and external factors and pressures. Free will is dependent on these factors and the control they have over us. Our free will is contextual, or at the very least, our will may not be as free as we first assume.

Dr Philip Zimbardo orchestrator of the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment states, in an interview with Guy Kawasaki titled *Ten Questions with Dr Philip Zimbardo*, that 'Most of us fail to appreciate the extent to which our behaviour is under situational control, because we prefer to believe that is all is internally generated. We wander around cloaked in an illusion of vulnerability, mis-armed with an arrogance of free will and rationality.' (Kawasaki, 2018)

The clash between the externally and the internally generated forces that vie for control over our will are presented quite clearly in *Word*, as it sets multiple scenarios that seem to test whether or not the audience-participant will, in the heat of the moment, fight against or fold to those pressures. Pressures such as the assumed will of the procedural author, to stick to or divert from the script. Or the pressures of competition, for the audience to win the game at all costs or to choose to lose and retain their personal sense of morality or even to choose not to play altogether. Even the setting of the performance, the theatre auditorium, comes with its own rules set by hundreds of years of continued adherence. The weight of these external pressures is constant, but the majority of the time they go unnoticed.

At the climax of the performance, I wrote – per Harewood's pre-written instructions in the script – the letters 'N I G G E R' in white marker on his exposed chest, the winning word in a game of hangman, in which the titular figure, the hanged man represented by a stick figure, was also etched in white marker on Harewood's exposed chest. It was not easy for me to write that word, or draw that image, but the *ease* of which I did seems unimportant with the knowledge of the outcome that I *did* do it. I asked myself at the time why I had decided not to betray those abhorrent instructions. I felt a villain in front of a participatory audience that was all too willing to shout those same letters a moment before, the role of Host, that positioned me as an individual in front of a crowd felt deeply exposing.

In order to explore the many factors that affect the decision-making processes that led to the scenario where it was seemingly permissible to shout racial epiphytes at a shirtless, voiceless, black man, as well as to write that same word upon his chest, we must turn our attention to studies on human cognition. *Word* presents two different scenarios where decisions made by the audience may be in some way influenced by their surroundings. The first is the role of the individual, and the perceived power of given roles, the second is the role of the dynamics of a crowd on the decision-making process of individuals within that same crowd.

Crowd dynamics, as a branch of social psychology, is incredibly bored and slow moving. Stephen Reicher in *The Psychology of Crowd Dynamics* states that even 'The second edition of The Handbook of Social Cognition (Wyer & Srull, 1994) has no entry in the index under 'crowd'' (Reicher in Hogg and Tindale, 2007) he goes on to decry the lack of research into the field 'Indeed, within a discipline that often views literature from a previous decade as hopelessly outdated, the little reference that is made to such research still tends to focus on Gustave Le Bon's work from a previous century (Le Bon, 1895).' (Reicher in Hogg and Tindale, 2007)

The most modern delineation of the ideas first presented by Le Bon in 1895 is known as deindividuation, a theoretical concept that gained widespread attention in Ed Diener's

Deindividuation: The absence of self-awareness and self-regulation in group members, in which he explains how individuals, when part of a crowd, can become capable of acts that rational individuals would not normally be capable of (Diener, Lusk, DeFour, & Flax, 1980), such as an audience shouting the N-Word at a black performer.

The clashes of violence between LGBTQ+ groups and football fans detailed in the introduction, provide a 'real world' example of such acts in practice, where normally impermissible behaviour becomes normalised in a crowd. Pictures of a young woman standing atop an ambulance attempting to break the windscreen (Fig. 3) after the world cup match gained national attention, for this very reason. Such acts were seemingly acceptable, but upon reflection, the perpetrators of these acts, and the acts themselves are deemed unacceptable by societal standards, in a similar way to my own reaction to my conduct during *Word,* at the time seemingly permissible, but upon reflection deeply regrettable.

(Fig 3, https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/world-cup/england-world-cup-fans-sweden-celebration-ambulance-ikea-bus-stop-london-win-a8437026.html)

Charles Mackay in *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* states that 'Men, it has been well said, think in herds; it will be seen that they go mad in herds, while they only recover their senses slowly, and one by one.' (Mackay in Mcpahil, 1991, xxii). Yet this view has been questioned, particularly by Leon Festinger, Albert Pepitone and Theodore Newcomb in *Some Consequences of Deindividuation in a Group,* who were the first to offer a theory of deindividuation, one that Ed Diener would develop. They arguing that crowds allow individuals to be 'more free from restraints, less inhibited, and able to indulge in forms of behaviour in which, when alone, they would not indulge' (Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcome,1952:382). Unlike Mackay's suggestion that madness drives a crowd, Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb suggest that it is the lack of restraints that allow such behaviours. Yet Diener's development of deindividuation from Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb is critiqued by Reicher in his Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects or (SIDE model). Reicher's SIDE variation seeks to rebuke previous assumptions by suggesting that the loss of self, as purported by Diener and those before him, were not present. Clark McPhail in *The Myth of The Madding Crowd* suggests that:

> 'human beings [...] control their own behaviour by means of self-instructions regarding the achievement of their goals and objectives. Individual behaviour is not controlled by crowd minds or crowds; it is not controlled by predispositions or tendencies to behave; it is not controlled by norms or social relationships.' (Mcphail, 1991, p. xxxiii)

He continues by explaining how behaviour is rather self-instructed than controlled by external groupings:

> 'Individuals control their behaviour by self-instructions, often by telling themselves to do what is proposed or required by the small groups of family, friends, or acquaintances with whom they assemble, and sometimes by telling themselves to do what is proposed by larger political, sports, and religious groups who have organized the gathering or who are attempting to organize sequences of action within the gathering.' (Mcphail, 1991, p. xxxiii)

If crowds and audiences do not 'go mad in herds' as Mackay and others suggest but retain their individuality 'by self-instruction' (Mcphail, 1991, p. xxxiii), then the actions of the audience participants of *Word* become even more important, it suggests as if the capacity for action was always present, but allowed to surface because of the supposed anonymity presented by the crowd.

Yet, the particular audience with whom I was a member of, were not strangers, where anonymity would be assured, but peers of a university theatre degree, where members of the audience knew each other well.

This supposed anonymity, even amongst known groups, is similar to the supposed anonymity of the internet, particularly in online-games where an avatar takes the place of the user in the digital world, allowing them to act as, or through this avatar, yet through IP Addresses and other forms of digital identification these supposed anonymous activities are indeed not anonymous.

Harewood tackles this supposed anonymity by orchestrating post-show discussions as part of the performance. Unlike similar post-show discussions, it is not between audience and performer, but the audience and themselves, Harewood doesn't partake in the discussion, instead, it is curated by a member of the venues team. The venue manager of the performance I attended began the discussion by leading us into a side room before announcing that, 'The space is yours for the next hour, there is paper and some markers in the centre of the room if you wish to leave Jamal any messages'

These reflective post-performance discussions are an integral part of Harewood's performance event. Here the audience-participant is freed from any instruction, they can discuss the past hour, not as a member of an audience group, but as an individual affected by events as a member of that group. It is a place where the participants may face their own uneasy choices. I remained uncharacteristically quiet for the majority of the discussion. Whilst the group were justifying or attacking the usage of racial epiphytes during the show, I was still trying to digest and make peace with my own decisions, foremost my choice to write in white marker on his bare flesh. I tried to self-rationalise it in many different ways:

1) The instruction within the script was to write the word if shouted out, therefore the show required it to happen in order to reach its desired conclusion.

2) The script was written by Harewood himself, and in writing it as an instruction, he gave me his permission.

3) As a performer, Harewood must have expected this outcome.

None of these options felt adequate enough to explain why I could do something so abhorrent. I couldn't bear to think that I would be capable of such action outside of the scenario of the performance event. Just as the dynamics of a crowd may impact on the choices of the individual, so did the circumstances of my position of host. That of perceived power. The authority that was given to me, as host, in order to direct the performance, may have altered my behaviour on stage. In order to better explore these phenomena, we can turn to research on the psychological and social effects of perceived power.

The Stanford Prison Experiment conducted in 1971 by Dr Philip Zimbardo was an infamous psychological experiment on the effects of perceived power. Funded by the U.S Office of Naval Research, the experiments aim was to explore the power relations between guards and prisoners in Naval facilities, an archived version of the official website for the experiment explained that Zimbardo 'wanted to see what the psychological effects were of becoming a prisoner or prison guard. To do this, we decided to set up a simulated prison and then carefully note the effects of this institution on the behaviour of all those within its walls.' (web.archive.org, 2018)

Although the experiment has come under heavy critique from academics like Dr Peter Grey and Thibault Le Texier for its scientific validity and unethical practices, particularly around the area of informed consent, it is for that very reason why it works as an additional case study to parallel *Word*.

The audience participants of *Word,* although consenting to be present by their purchasing of a ticket and turning up to the venue, were not given the choice to verbally consent to be an active participant in the work. The full parameters of the event were left unknown to them, much like the participants of the Stanford Prison Experiment. Allowing the audience opportunity to try to fathom

the desire of the researchers, and to act accordingly to that supposed desire, instantly corrupts the results of any scientific research. Dr Grey in a blog post critiques the Stanford Experiment for allowing it's participants opportunity to guess, and act accordingly to, the supposed desires of Dr Zimbardo, he states that 'Any characteristics of an experiment that let research participants guess how the experimenters expect or want them to behave are referred to as *demand characteristics*. In any valid experiment it is essential to eliminate or at least minimize demand characteristics. In this experiment, the demands were everywhere.' (Psychology Today, 2018) *Word,* unlike the Stanford experiment*,* does not provide this opportunity during the performance only at the end in the post-show discussion, allowing the actions of the participants to be minimally affected by the desire of the procedural author.

The core of the Stanford Experiment was the relationship between the guards and the power they had over the prisoners, as perceived by the prisoners. The effect this perception of power had, on both the guards and the prisoners is comparable to the perceived power of the audience member who is selected to play the host in *Word*.

The Stanford News Service detailed the experiments examination of the power of roles stating:

> 'Zimbardo's primary reason for conducting the experiment was to focus on the power of roles, rules, symbols, group identity and situational validation of behaviour that generally would repulse ordinary individuals. "I had been conducting research for some years on deindividuation, vandalism and dehumanization that illustrated the ease with which ordinary people could be led to engage in anti-social acts by putting them in situations where they felt anonymous, or they could perceive of others in ways that made them less than human, as enemies or objects," Zimbardo told the Toronto symposium in the summer of 1996.' (news.stanford.edu, 2018)

Our perception of these roles is often based on many cultural, political, social, economic, and other factors, that control how we as individuals act towards certain people and events. Theorist Erving Goffman in his book *Frame Analysis* details how these different factors can be seen as a series of 'frames' through which individuals experience the world. Goffman describes frames that are not

naturally occurring in nature, as being part of the 'Social Framework', which he describes as

providing a:

> Background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being. Such an agency is anything but implacable; it can be coaxed, flattered, affronted, and threatened. What it does can be describe as "guided doings," These doings subject the doer to "standards," to social appraisal of his action based on its honesty, efficiency, economy, safety, elegance, tactfulness, good taste, and so forth. (Goffman, 1986, p. 22)

The Audience-participants in *Word* occupied what Goffman calls the 'Involvement Frame' this is where, according to Gareth White, 'the audience and performer occupy the same space, physically and imaginatively, and the audience have become participants with a significant influence over the course of the action.' (White, 2013, p.32). In the Involvement Frame the audience *become* a performer without necessarily having agreed to do so, arguably stepping up on stage to play the role of host is an admission of agreement, but as the Stanford Prison Experiment suggested, those given orders, such as to step on stage, are quite likely to do so, whether they feel a desire to or not. Goffman uses the phrase 'the definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1986, p. 1) to describe this phenomenon, this definition acts as an agreement spoken or otherwise between the many participants of an interaction, about what they are all engaged in and what should or can happen (White, 2013, p. 34)

Through this unspoken agreement, Goffman states, 'the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured.' (Goffman, 1969, p. 21) By stepping up onto the stage as host, I became complicit in the unspoken agreement of 'the definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1986, p. 1). Power, however fickle was given to the persona of the host and agreed upon by all. The extent of this power, however, was always in flux, numerous times during the performance, audience participants with whom I do not have a positive relationship outside of the performance space did not acknowledge the power assigned to

the role I was performing and tried to disrupt my delivery of that role. Our interpersonal frame became the most prominent frame in the performance, rather than the performer as authority frame that the majority of the audience had agreed upon as the definition of the situation.

White describes the relationship between Frame and power stating, 'Frame is always to some extent a matter of power, that those who are able to control the definitions of a situation are able to control what is talked about and how it is talked about, what is done or not done, what is decided, what action is taken.' (White, 2013, p. 35) the altercation between myself and the audience members for whom the interpersonal frame was most focused, is an example of the audience's ability to not partake, to step away from their pre-assigned roles, even that of an audience member. Goffman observes that 'the central understanding [of the theatre is] that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on the stage' (Goffman, 1986, p.125) and yet, as white concludes, 'Action undertaken by a participant in the interaction is to be taken as part of their presentation of their 'real selves'' (White, 2013, p.36).

Using game structures in a performative context allows for audiences to become, for a short period of time, someone else. It allows them to play a character, and the usage of this character allows the makers of interactive performance to truly resonate with an audience participant, they don't just watch, they experience, and through this experience the real power of performance games takes hold.

Chapter Three: On Performance Structures in Games

Just as interactive performances, in a similar fashion to Fischer-Lichte's feedback loop, borrow the structures of games to facilitate interaction between artwork and audience. Games also draw from elements of performance to expand its narrative potential and also to connect its audiences with the game world. This latter form of connection, between the participant's and the game world, is most recognisable in video games, particularly role-playing games like *The Elder Scrolls* series, and role-playing video games analogue counterparts like *Dungeons & Dragons.* Brooks McNamara in the forward to The Fantasy Role-Playing Game, calls the game world 'The Imaginary-entertainment environment' which she describes as 'the fulcrum point that connects the role-playing game to many potential popular-entertainment forms' (McNamara in Mackay, 2001, p.xiii). Role Playing, or entering into a false reality as an invented persona and acting according to that persona, is the process by which the participant becomes part of the imaginary-entertainment environment. David Cook in the first edition *Players Handbook* for *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* describes this process, stating that 'the player adopts the role of a character and then guides that character through an adventure. The player makes decisions, interacts with other characters and players, and, essentially, 'pretends' to be his character during the course of the game' (Cook in Gygax, 1989, p. 9) this process is startlingly similar to the process of a dramatic play, indeed Paul MacKay explains in The Fantasy Role Playing Game 'if the word "game" is replaced with "activity", it also describes a dramatic play.' (Mackay, 2001, p. 4).

The process of playing a role in a dramatic play, or indeed any other form of performance, is not solely the occupation of the performer. The audience too partakes in the playing or roles, or as Caroline Heim in *Audience as Performer* put's it 'the come together to play a role – that of the audience (Heim, 2015, p. 2). *Word* uses the notion of role-playing quite literally, asking members of its audience to perform the roles of stage manager, host, and dictionary corner. In creating a performance that allows for this kind of role-play, Harewood, as a procedural author, takes on a role

akin to a *Dungeons & Dragons* gamemaster. Ralph Bakshi creator of the role-playing game *Wizards*,

describes the gamemaster as 'akin to [...] a director. The gamemaster takes care of the scenes,

coordinates the movements of the villains and extras, and manages the plot line of the story... The

players are entirely dependent on the gamemaster for their knowledge of the situation. It's the

gamemaster's job to provide them with the data they need to build a picture of where their

characters are (Bakshi in Bolme, 1992, p. 8) *Word* plays out much in the same way to a game of

Dungeons & Dragons, but unlike the fantasy setting most commonly associated with role play, *Word*

utilises the imaginary-entertainment environment of game show. Bakshi mentions that 'The players

are entirely dependent on the gamemaster for their knowledge of the situation.' (Bakshi in Bolmei,

1992, p. 8) his usages of 'situation' is startlingly similar to Goffman's notion of the 'definition of the

situation' (Goffman, 1986, p. 1) the unspoken agreements between all those involved in a situation,

performance, or indeed role play. If what Baskshi suggests is true, that the players (and in *Word*'s

case, the audience-participant) are dependant on the gamemaster (or procedural author) for their

knowledge and therefore definition of the situation, then to what extent do they have freedom to

make choices, if certain choices are more weighted by the external and internal pressures of the

individual and the very construction of the imaginary entertainment environment by the

gamemaster.

Edward Bolme in *Ralph Bakshi's Wizards* explains that 'the players are responsible for

deciding their [characters'] actions' (Bolme, 1992, p.8) but these actions are only the begging of a

process. Those actions, once decided, are set out into the imaginary entertainment environment, in

response, Bolme continues that 'the gamemaster describes the changes in the situation caused by

the characters' actions. This interchange of information is the pulse of the role-playing game. The

gamemaster describes the world, the players describe their characters' actions, the gamemaster

describes the changes, etc.' (Bolme, 1992, p. 8). The changes, as reported by the gamemaster, are

chosen from either the gamemaster's imagination or from a pre-existing series of results which are

unknown to the player. In *Word*, the changes caused by the audience-participants actions, were pre-

existing within the script, in my role as Host, I did not have to invent, as a dungeon master would, a change in the imaginary entertainment environment as all results were already detailed. What was not detailed as a potential result, and therefore a possible option, was for the Host to not draw upon Jamal's chest.

If a performance that uses the structures of a role-playing game, that of world, action, and change, provides no such suggestion as to the possibility of a choice (to not write the N-Word on an exposed black man), then no such option could be considered. I was unable to choose, as no such option was present in the script. The choice I made was dependant on not only myself but the actions of all those around me, including Harewood's procedural text. Mackay suggests that 'Role-playing games have no single protagonist upon whom the fate of the story depends.' (Mackay, 2001, p. 166) instead, we are all responsible, including the procedural author.

The question then becomes what does the procedural author or the gamemaster desire, as it is their world the scenarios and actions take place in. A game of *Dungeons & Dragons* is primarily a source of entertainment, but *Word* has more socially engaged aims. It attempts to do something, to get the audience to question the way in which we use language to subjugate others. What Harewood does by using game structures is create a roleplaying game where the audience-participant can experience these events through their character, rather than experience them as an anecdotal experience of the performer. *Word* is not only a game-performance on the usage of racially charged language but a simulation of such, designed to be initially enjoyable so that the full effect of its expression can be experienced by the role-playing participant. Roland Barthes in *The Structuralist Activity* discusses the usage or creation of worlds that reflect our own, stating that:

> 'Creation or reflection are not, here, an original "impression" of the world, but a veritable fabrication of a world which resembles the first one, not in order to copy it but to render it intelligible. It is of little consequence whether the initial object liable to the simulacrum-activity is given by the world in an already assembled fashion [...] or is still scattered [...] whether this initial object is drawn from a social reality or an imaginary reality. It is not the nature of the copied object which defines an art, [...] it is the fact that man adds to it in reconstructing it; technique is the very being of all creation.' (Barthes, 2000, p. 1128)

Barthes suggests that an alternative imaginary entertainment environment or game world is used to highlight worldly concerns inside a new landscape, allowing audiences and participants to experience situations with which they are familiar but in new ways. Similar to Bertold Brecht's Verfremdungseffekt. Uri Rapp's *Simulation and Imagination: Mimesis as Play* suggests that Barthes considers simulation as not just imitation, but a reworking of reality and belief. (Rapp, 1982, p. 143)

As a game or performance simulation presents real-world situations in a fantastical setting, the audience, as a participant or player must live within this same dual identity. Mackay suggests that the identity of the role-player 'is both diegetic (in the game) and nondiegetic (in the real world). It includes both the social identity of the player, which is created during and around the narrative's performance and the fictional identity of the player-character, which is created within the narrative's performance. The efficacy of the role-playing performance is determined by the role-playing games relation to the broader cultural climate of which it is a part' (Mackay, 2001 p. 18) The social identity of the player, and the games broader cultural climate, could be reconsidered as an example of Goffman's frames, or a form of semiotics, or perhaps a synthesis of both. The performance of the individual within the game world reflects themselves in the real world, and their identity, history, politics, all play out in the game environment, even subtly, making it an excellent petri dish for social examination.

Chapter One posited the notion that game structures in performance act as a replacement for ritualism by drawing on the work of Richard Schechner. Using Schechner's mode of performance as detailed in his essay *Drama, Script, Theatre, and Performance: Ritualized Behaviour Conditioned/Permeated by Play* (Schechner, 1994, p. 96) Mackay continues this enquiry by suggesting strengthening the relationship between role-playing games as a form of performance. He states that the 'role-playing game rulebook – the "code independent of any individual transmitter" – is analogues to the "tight, verbal narrative" of dramaturgical theatre.' (Mackay, 2001, p. 49). Dramatic theatre and interactive performance, of course, share their origins within performance genealogy, much with game structures in performance and ritualist performance, with the role-

playing gamebook acting as a script, with small 'gaps' for audience interaction.

The gamebook, the script, the set of rules designed by the procedural author that make up the definition of the situation is the core of what allows an interactive game-based performance to work. Mackay states that 'The drama of the role-playing game encompasses [these] set of rules, flexible but invariant, that bound the role-players' performance.'(Mackay, 2001, p. 50) the interactive performance would not be able to retain any element of clarity in its objective without its rules, the audience participant would not be comfortable enough to enter into the imaginary entertainment environment without such rules. As Schechner rightly states 'players need to feel secure in order to begin playing' (Schechner, 1994, p. 26) In this comfort, the audience, as strangers to each other, can come together by their shared knowledge of the definition of the situation. Mackay explains that 'Familiarity with a shared rules system – equivalent to a group of actors who have never met before but perform from the same dramatic text – often brings a group of diverse role-players together to create their own narrative' (Mackay, 2001, p. 50)

Sociologist Gary Alan Fine also draws on Goffman's *Frame Analysis* to quantify three 'finite worlds of meaning' (Fine, 2002 p. 181) three frames that work in tandem during an interactive game or performance. These are:

'1) The social frame inhabited by the *person*;

2) The game frame inhabited by the *player*,

3) the gaming-world frame inhabited by the *character*.' (Mackay, 2001, p.54)

But Schechner was critical of the usage of 'frames' in game playing, explaining in *The Future of Ritual* that 'If one needs a metaphor to localize and (temporarily) stabilise playing, 'frame' is the wrong one – it's too stiff, too impermeable, too 'on/off', 'inside/outside.' 'Net' is better: a porous, flexible gatherer; a three-dimensional, dynamic, flow-through container.' (Schechner, 1994, p. 41) Not only does Schechner's text hint at the argument developed in Chapter One, that of game playing as a new form of secular ritual, but it also shares a similar lexicon of the development of game

playing from the analogue to the digital with the continued development of the internet or net.

Game playing, particularly role-playing has advanced from the original tabletop adventures alongside digital technology to include online, or computerised versions of analogue counterparts. The previously mentioned *Elder Scrolls* series, and *Baulder's Gate* series (which uses the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* 2nd Edition rules as the core of its internal code), have become the new reference point (or shared signs) for an alternative generation of interactive artists, not drawing on game shows, or analogue role-playing games like *Dungeons and Dragons,* but on their digital counterparts, as with the work of Seth Kribel, who draws on early 80's text-based roleplaying games to develop his brand of 'choose-your-own-adventure performances'.

Role-playing is at its heart an escapist medium, it is used to temporarily remove oneself from being oneself, this is why it becomes such an important tool in exploring social causes as in *Word* because it perverts the expectation. In Seth Kribel's *A House Repeated* the audience are led through a scenario, of a world in two half, one team of audience members affect the world of the other, but ultimately, this adventure has no social undertones, wears Word uses the expectation of entertainment, of game as fun, to lure the audience in, to reveal their true selves. Friedrich Nietzsche in *On The Geneology of Morals* explains the rationale for a desire to roleplay to escape the participant's current situations, stating that:

> 'It was man, who lacking external enemies and obstacles, and imprisoned as he was in the oppressive narrowness and monotony of custom, in his own impatience lacerated, persecuted, gnawed, frightened, and ill-treated himself; it was this animal in the hands of the tamer, which beat itself against the bars of its cage; it was this being who, pining and yearning for that desert home of which it had been deprived, was compelled to create out of its own self, an adventure, a torture-chamber, a hazardous and perilous desert.' (Nietzsche, 1989 p. 77)

In finding an audience, who by their shared understanding of the situation, are looking for an escape, by perverting the form they have come to expect. Jamal Harewood creates the perfect setting to explore the language of racism in contemporary society, he makes it a game, a comfortable scenario with which we are all familiar, so that in our comfort, our choices, can reflect who we truly are.

Conclusion: Absolution

Jamal Harewood's *Word* uses the community-based performance form of the gameshow to structure his performance event. In using the game show, he allows the audience to become active participants in the event, drawing on their shared cultural understanding of games, game playing, and game shows to subvert the traditional voyeuristic, end on approach to theatre-making, as well as providing a shared language to ease the establishment of the temporary audience community. The form allows for the creation of temporary communities in similar ways to ritualistic performances, but where the ritual is more focused on the efficacy of experience (Schechner, 1994, p. 122) the game show form allows for an efficacy of self-reflection.

This reflection is a process that works as a result of an 'autopoietic feedback loop' (Fischer-Lichte, 2008, p.39) between performer, event, audience, and participant, all reciprocating from each other to create a shared 'definition of the situation' (Goffman, 1986, p. 1). This is where *Word* begins to trouble the notions of the shared definition. Harewood deliberately constructed a performance that would gradually involve his audience in a competition, where the natural desire for the audience to win would supersede all else, even if that meant shouting a racial slur at a voiceless performer. The shared definition of the situation' that the audience shared was not the same as that held by the procedural author. He aware of the feedback loop, began to manipulate it, he acts more as a gamemaster and if the audience, as Bakshi states 'are entirely dependent on the gamemaster for their knowledge of the situation.' (Bakshi in Bolmei, 1992, p. 8) then he allowed them to hold a different definition than the one actually in play.

This is similar in a way to The Stanford Prison Experiment, in which Dr Philip Zimbardo allowed his subjects to guess his research aims. When the participants attempted to guess the demand characteristics of the Stanford Experiment they brought into question its results, and although *Word* does not allow its participants time to second guess the desire of Harewood, does the manipulation of the audience, through usage of the psychology of crowd dynamics, also bring

into question the validity of his results?

If, as McPhail suggests. 'human beings [...] control their own behaviour by means of self-instructions regarding the achievement of their goals and objectives.' (McPhail, 1991, p. xxxiii) does the manipulations of the procedural author even matter. Is *Word* an experiment in which Harewood, as lead researcher, conducts a study on the behaviour of his audience? No, it is a performance, one that strikes at the very core of white privilege. During the post-show discussion, people attempted to justify their actions, their usage of words, just as I tried to justify my decision to write on his chest. No matter the apparent justification, there is no reason why the usage of such words was acceptable in that situation, and yet they were used.

This is why Word is such a fantastic example of the power of game structures in performance, how it can be used to affect the audience on such a deep level. It allows them to question themselves, as individuals, as groups, as audiences, as performers, as human beings of one tribe using words of power to hurt another. There are no easy answers with *Word*, or indeed any answers at all. Only questions, only a niggling feeling that you did wrong. A desperate desire to absolve oneself of decisions made in strange circumstances, but there can be no absolution, just an acceptance. Harm was done and I must try harder to avoid causing such harm again. To evaluate the words is use and the power they hold over marginalised groups. To understand, this was not a game, it was not a performance, it was a large crowd of white people shouting "nigger" at a voiceless black man, whilst I wrote it on his chest.

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