

## **Ghosted Dramaturgy: Mapping the Haunted Space in Punchdrunk's *Sleep No More***

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*[Producer] Colin Marsh came up with the title [Sleep No More] when we staged the show in London back in 2003. Those three words from the text are meant to embody both the essence of our story, the darkness at its heart, and also the effect we aim to have on the audience. We wanted to make something that would literally haunt their dreams, something they would never forget having been inside and a part of.*<sup>1</sup> – Felix Barrett

This essay considers contrapuntal ghosting and liminal dramaturgy in *Sleep No More*, a radical reinterpretation of *Macbeth* by U.K. theatre company Punchdrunk. Directed by Felix Barrett and Maxine Doyle and designed by Barrett, Livi Vaughan, and Beatrice Moss, *Sleep No More* is an immersive theatre experience staged over multiple floors of a hundred-thousand square-foot warehouse, rechristened the McKittrick Hotel. Masked audience members explore the nearly one hundred rooms, free to rifle through drawers, open closets and sort through characters' personal belongings, all the while following various characters from *Macbeth*. According to the notes in the programme, "audiences are invited to rediscover the childlike excitement and anticipation of exploring the unknown and experience a real sense of adventure. Free to encounter the installed environment in an individual imaginative journey, the choice of what to watch and where to go is theirs alone".<sup>2</sup> This format rejects the passive obedience traditionally expected of Western theatre audiences, where there is a clear distinction between audience member and performer, and challenges them instead to be active participants in the story being told.

Post-structuralism, particularly deconstructionist theory, has contributed much to performance studies by calling into question assumptions about the process of interpretation and the primacy of the dramatic text. Such theories have expanded

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<sup>1</sup> Felix Barrett, "Director Felix Barrett on the Dark and Dangerous Interactive World of *Sleep No More*", Broadway.com (1 November 2011), <http://www.broadway.com>, accessed 15 January 2013.

<sup>2</sup> *Sleep No More* programme, p.9.

definitions of performance, the notion of authorship, text and the role of the audience. Punchdrunk refers to its interactive, intertextual dramaturgy as “game-changing” in their programme, though one must concede that their productions are indebted to a tradition of revolutionary theatrical praxis by practitioners committed to blurring the line between spectator and actor, including Augusto Boal’s collaborative spectActors and Richard Schechner’s ground-breaking Performance Group. Similarly Punchdrunk’s heteroglossic text evokes not just the theories of Bakhtin’s dialogism, but the layered, allusion-heavy productions of The Wooster Group. At the same time, *Sleep No More* signals new directions theatre might take in further provoking the sensory participation of audience members in performance. Arguably what accounts for the affective power of *Sleep No More* is its resistance to standard narrative explication and its emphasis on the visceral response of the audience to the tactile and spatial liberation the performance allows. Over nearly three hours, audience members run up and down the five flights of the playing space, duck in and out of rooms, and watch actors perform scenes told almost entirely through movement and dance. At various times, select members of the audience are approached by the performers, and pulled into rooms for one-on-one scenes that others can’t witness. Over the course of the night, eight audience members will be brought individually to a secret sixth floor, a fifteen-thousand square-foot space to which no-one else has access. With *Sleep No More*, Barrett and Doyle have sought to create experiences that challenge audiences to interact with a narrative physically, and to push the idea of entertainment to a more visceral place, where a show becomes a thing that happens to a person because of decisions he or she makes, not just something he or she watches.

While *Sleep No More* is Punchdrunk’s first production in North America, the company has enjoyed a long and successful tenure in the United Kingdom since 2000, when Barrett and Doyle first launched the artistic venture. While the pair have created original dramatic material for some of their productions, Punchdrunk is best known for its immersive theatre experiences, in which classic texts are reinterpreted through physical performance, large-scale design installation, and found theatre spaces. For their production of *The Tempest* in 2003, Punchdrunk converted five floors of a derelict warehouse complex in Deptford into a dark vision of Prospero’s island. Their 2010 production of *Duchess of Malfi* in collaboration with the English National Opera involved a sixty-nine piece symphony orchestra, twenty-one singers and dancers, and

a roaming audience spread over a 136,000 square-foot space in London's Docklands. Other productions include *Masque of the Red Death* (2007/2008), *Faust* (2006/2007), *It Felt Like a Kiss* (2009), and *Tunnel 228* (2009) which was inspired by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and staged in the long-disused tunnels beneath Waterloo Station. Their newest production, *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable*, is currently being performed at Temple Studios, London.<sup>3</sup> *Sleep No More*, Punchdrunk's thirteenth production, was originally staged in 2003 in the Beaufoy Building, an old Victorian School in Kennington, London. The production was later reworked in collaboration with the American Repertory Theatre (A.R.T.) in Boston, Massachusetts for their 2009/2010 season, where it was staged in forty-four rooms at The Old Lincoln School in Brookline. The show was the most successful in A.R.T.'s thirty-year history, and prompted a six-week engagement in New York during the summer of 2011, where it was expanded, extensively reimagined and staged in a converted warehouse at 530 West Twenty-Seventh Street.

Since its opening, *Sleep No More* has become a runaway hit in New York, selling out nearly every performance; its run has been extended multiple times and, as of the summer of 2013, is still running. Virally marketed, technologically savvy and resolutely hip, the show has attracted legions of fans across the blogosphere, with websites devoted to documenting every moment of its thirty-three hours of theatre, and every secret of its ninety-three room set. The show was the backdrop for an episode of the popular drama *Gossip Girl*, and was the inspiration behind an episode of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*.<sup>4</sup> Celebrities have routinely been spotted in the audience, and some, including Neil Patrick Harris, Alan Cumming, Dita von Teese and Evan Rachel Wood, have starred in special, one-night-only performances in protean roles.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See the Punchdrunk website for more information on company history and a complete list of productions: <http://www.punchdrunk.com>.

<sup>4</sup> *Sleep No More* served as backdrop in an episode of the popular television show, *Gossip Girl*, where the young New York City socialites attend a benefit performance of the show. The masks allow for machinations by the villain, who orchestrates the wrong pairings aided by the dim lighting and use of masks (Season 5, Episode 7). *Sleep No More* also inspired the setting of a *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit* episode (Season 13, Episode 11), "Theater Tricks", where audience members witness a rape during an immersive theatre performance, but mistake it for part of the performance. The actress begins painfully to cry for help as the masked goat forcibly rapes her. The audience stands and watches, thinking it's all part of the play.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Brown, "Neil Patrick Harris on Hosting the Tonys, and Guesting in *Sleep No More*", *New York Media* (26 May 2012), <http://www.vulture.com>, accessed 20 January 2013.

Cognisant of the oftentimes overwhelming experience theatregoers have with their pieces, Artistic Director Felix Barrett explained the choice of classic source material for many of Punchdrunk's productions, noting, "I tend to work with classical texts because so many people already have a relationship with them. It's helpful to have a shared language when the audience's experience of the show isn't linear."<sup>6</sup> Barrett and Doyle's *Sleep No More* is both a deconstruction of *Macbeth*, and a multisensory installation, leaving its visitors not with an understanding of the text *per se*, but a truncated experience that is dependent upon luck, one's ability to navigate the floors of the space, and prior knowledge of *Macbeth* and other source material. In addition to *Macbeth*, *Sleep No More* references Hitchcock, *film noir*, and neo-Gothic fiction, most specifically Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, in a postmodern mash-up that juxtaposes a Gothic scenic universe with Shakespearean tragedy. In this way the production is seen as new, as well as a new assemblage of material from other works. This expansive definition of text echoes Roland Barthes' claim in his 1977 work *Image, Music, Text*: "We now know that the text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture."<sup>7</sup> *Sleep No More* exploits this de-centering, this "blending and clashing", in its seemingly overwhelming amount of set detail and limited amount of narrative explanation or exposition. The viewer is both overstimulated and metaphorically in the dark. As Alice Dailey writes, *Sleep No More*'s McKittrick is the place where analysis becomes frustrated – where image and event refuse to constitute plot or allusion, and the setting is an invitation to enter not into specific stories, or characters, but into an epistemological mode – a way of seeing more than we expect but less than all that is there.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Brian Logan, "Felix Barrett: Up to His Ears in Theatre", *The Independent* (10 June 2012), <http://www.independent.co.uk>, accessed 1 September 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p.146.

<sup>8</sup> Alice Dailey, "Last Night I Dreamt I Went to *Sleep No More* Again: Intertextuality and Interdeterminacy at Punchdrunk's McKittrick Hotel", *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 7, no. 2 (2013): n.p., University of Georgia, <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu>, accessed 12 December 2012.

### The Source Material: *Macbeth*

In some ways, a haunted production of *Macbeth*, a play centrally concerned with haunting, is a *fait accompli*. Three Witches prophesise a murderer's rise to power, and ghosts share the stage space with bloodied corpses. Incantations and black-magic spells are cast as Macbeth is seduced by a lust for power and is haunted by his tenuous and ever-loosening hold on the Scottish crown. He fights off suspected threats and adversaries but cannot vanquish the demons of fate and the horror of his own ruthless ambition. While it is not Shakespeare's only play featuring ghosts, it is nonetheless the one with the reputation for being the most haunted as a play. The play about curses is itself cursed, with few actors willing to quote from it or refer to it by name in a theatre, choosing instead "The Scottish Play", "The Comedy of Glamis", or "The Bard's Play". According to theatrical superstition, to say "*Macbeth*" in a theatre onstage, outside of rehearsal or production, is to court disaster. This admission is only remedied by an elaborate stage ritual, which, allowing for some variation, generally includes the offender turning round three times, expectorating over his or her left shoulder, swearing, or reciting a line from another of Shakespeare's plays, frequently "Angels and ministers of grace defend us" from Act One, Scene Four of *Hamlet*. Some companies insist that the offender must perform the ritual after having exited the theatre and may not re-enter until he or she is invited to do so.<sup>9</sup>

The dim lighting and frequent handling of swords and daggers in the play make injuries and accidents probable, and certainly a work as popular and as frequently staged as *Macbeth* would accrue its share of famed mishaps and unfortunate anecdotes. But while *Hamlet* may well have as many or more theatrical calamities in its history, it has become part of *Macbeth*'s unique theatrical lore to be haunted, allegedly by the actual witches whose incantations were used in the play, as well as by its theatrical legacy. According to theatre historian Richard Huggett, the play's cursed status was affirmed in the premiere production in 1606. King James I, who had commissioned the work, was very familiar with the supernatural elements featured in the play, having authored the 1597 work *Daemonologie*, to convince the "doubting hearts of many" that the "assaults of Satan are most certainly practiced."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The *Macbeth* theatre superstition is widely known and documented.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Hugget, *Supernatural on Stage: Ghosts and Superstitions of the Theatre* (New York: Taplinger, 1975), p.157. *Macbeth*'s date of composition and original performance remain speculative. The earliest date for which we have a record of performance is 1611, though the play is usually

He was allegedly displeased with the violence and gore of the play, as well as the degree of authenticity of the incantations quoted, and banned it for five years.

The production history of *Macbeth* since 1606 lists enough calamities to warrant some of the superstition. Included among the many incidents cited as proof of the cursed legacy are the following: in a 1672 production in Amsterdam, the actor playing *Macbeth* used a real dagger instead of a blunted prop and killed the actor playing Duncan, in full view of the audience. *Macbeth* was the play in question during the Astor Place riot of 1849 in New York, the deadliest theatre riot in American theatre history, when close to thirty people were killed while rioting against English actor William Charles Macready, a long-time rival to American star Edwin Forrest. In a 1937 production, a heavy counterweight crashed to the stage, crushing the chair that Laurence Olivier, playing Macbeth, had just vacated. In a 1942 staging, with John Gielgud as Macbeth, three actors (playing two witches and Duncan) died and the set designer committed suicide. In 1947 actor Harold Norman was stabbed during the final sword fight in Act Five and died of his wounds. In 1948, Diana Wynyard, playing Lady Macbeth, decided to play the sleepwalking scene with her eyes closed and fell off the stage, falling fifteen feet. And in a 1953 outdoor production in Bermuda starring Charlton Heston as Macbeth, a gust of wind blew smoke and flames into the audience, during the realistically staged attack on Dunsiname. The audience fled and Heston suffered severe burns on his groin and leg because his tights had accidentally been doused with the kerosene used elsewhere on the stage.<sup>11</sup>

I do not list these anecdotes in order to claim the legitimacy of *Macbeth*'s dramaturgical curse. Rather, I offer them because, taken together, they suggest a narrative of a haunted production space more than an actor's hubris at defying debatable augury. Arguably, the legend of the curse persists not because of witches' spells in the text, but because it validates one of the stage's most accepted tenets – theatres as haunted spaces.

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regarded as having been written and performed in 1606. This earlier date is largely due to the Porter's joking reference to "an equivocator" (2.3.8), which most scholars argue is a reference to the recently executed Jesuit priest Henry Garnet, who had written a treatise defending equivocation for persecuted Catholics. See Stephen Greenblatt's introduction to *Macbeth* in *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp.2555-63.

<sup>11</sup> Huggett, pp.164-98.

As Marvin Carlson writes in his 2003 book *The Haunted Stage*, “theatre spaces, like dramatic texts, and acting bodies, are deeply involved with the preservation and configuration of cultural memory and so they are almost invariably haunted in one way or another, and this haunting of the space of performance makes its own important contribution to the overall reception of the dramatic event.”<sup>12</sup> Carlson examines multiple theatre spaces in his book, though the argument is largely predicated on what we might call a traditional theatre experience, where the audience is physically separated from the actors, and participates in the ghosted cultural memory of performance largely through their own memories of perhaps having been in the theatre before, or having seen a performer’s prior role(s), or of other productions of the play in question. This allows audience members to experience the play in and between memories and to map their own conceptual relationships to the work. Carlson’s “haunted stage” is tied most closely to the overt acknowledgment of memory at work in the theatre experience, and scholars mark conscious dramaturgical citationality as the defining characteristic of postmodern drama, “with gestural, physical, and textual material consciously recycled, often almost like pieces of a collage, into new combinations with little attempt to hide the fragmentary and ‘quoted’ nature of these pieces.”<sup>13</sup> Performance scholar Bert States makes a similar point and argues that the negotiation of memory so central to theatre doesn’t necessitate disruption or participation, but rather finds its offstage equivalent in dreams. “If something is to be remembered at all, it must be remembered not as what happened, but as what has happened again in a different way and will surely happen again in the future in still another way.”<sup>14</sup> States’ dreamscape is innovatively realised in the staging of *Sleep No More*, with its individualised experience, nonverbal text, and disorientingly labyrinthine design that resists coherent analysis. *Sleep No More*

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<sup>12</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p.131.

<sup>13</sup> Carlson, p.14. Directors of contemporary productions of *Macbeth* have adopted this citation dramaturgy to realise *mise en scènes* that convey a psychologically haunted landscape informed by semiotic markers beyond a recognisable Scotland. Rupert Goold’s (2009) production starring Patrick Stewart had clear Stalinist resonances, and located the play in a cavernous, white-tiled space that Ben Brantley described as resembling “nothing so much as a morgue.” (“Something Wicked This Way Comes”, *The New York Times*, 15 February 2008) Alan Cummings’ one-man *Macbeth* (2012), directed by John Tiffany and Andrew Goldberg and staged at New York’s Lincoln Center, posited a man cycling through multiple personalities in an insane asylum. Declan Donnellan’s *Macbeth* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (2011) did away with the witches altogether so that they were disembodied voices occupying seemingly every space of the theatre.

<sup>14</sup> Bert States, *Dreaming and Storytelling* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.119.

has a dramatic structure and arc, but the experience is alienating and truncated.<sup>15</sup> This has frustrated many critics and theatregoers, yet it's interesting to consider the ways the "structure of feeling", to borrow Raymond Williams' term, is privileged over a linear understanding of narrative in this production.

Williams writes in *Marxism and Literature* that "structure of feeling" best articulates "pre-emergent" phenomena that are active and pressing but not yet fully articulated. "We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity."<sup>16</sup> In many ways, *Sleep No More* privileges the audience's visceral response over an analytical or intellectual one; however, as the performance progresses, the audience is asked repeatedly to think about and reprocess what they have just seen. As the performance is repeated in three one-hour arcs, audience members might view the same scene more than once, and if they follow different characters each time, they will get more information and gain more understanding for what it was they just saw. Some allusions in the show are immediately recognised; some are purposefully withheld from the audience until after the performance has ended. But the effect is of a narrative slowly, deliberately revealing some of its secrets, while withholding others. Elin Diamond reminds us that in discussing performance, we *remember*, *reiterate*, *reconfigure* and *restore*. The very language of performance studies, the emphasis on "re", is centred around memory. She writes, "'Re' acknowledges the pre-existing discursive field, the repetition within the performative present, but 'figure,' 'script,' and 'iterate' assert the possibility of something that exceeds our knowledge, that alters the shape of sites and imagines new unsuspected subject positions."<sup>17</sup> Diamond's analysis is useful, though in this quotation she privileges discussions that occur post-performance. Might there be ways in which *Sleep No More* encourages this same type of *remembering* of the production even at the very moment that it is going on? I argue that this is first done through Punchdrunk's use of found spaces.

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<sup>15</sup> Dailey, n.p.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.126.

<sup>17</sup> Elin Diamond, *Writing Performances* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.2.

### **The McKittrick Hotel – 530 West Twenty-Seventh Street – New York, NY**

The use of found theatre spaces is not new to Punchdrunk, nor is it a novelty for New York theatre audiences and practitioners,<sup>18</sup> yet as Richard Schechner famously argued in his 1977 *Essay on Performance Theory*, too little study has been made of the audience's liminal approaches to and departures from the performance.<sup>19</sup> An audience member not only goes to the theatre; he or she goes to the particular part of the city where the theatre is located, and the memories and associations of that part of the city help to provide a reception context for any performance seen there. Found spaces announce and celebrate their own artistic legacies alongside the work created inside them. In this way, they work against Carlson's notion of cultural inheritance, and complicate and inform the thematic content of the production inside. As the use of vast, found spaces is an intrinsic part of Punchdrunk's dramaturgy, it is interesting to consider how the particular history of 530 West Twenty-Seventh Street seeps through the fictive history of the theatre creation in ways that inform the production and reward the audience member who may be more familiar with the building than other people.

In interviews, Felix Barrett has consistently dispelled the idea that the socio-historical resonances of a building or space determine the theme and subject matter of Punchdrunk's work; rather, he asserts that the physical space alone is what determines the design. As he puts it in an interview with *The Guardian*, "The space has always come first, and been crucial in all our shows".<sup>20</sup> He elaborates further in an interview with *Interior Design* – "The first time I walk around a location is when the whole

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<sup>18</sup> Scholars often look to the work of *avant garde* theatre scholar and director Richard Schechner and his *Dionysus in 69* as an early example of experimental staging and audience interaction. In this restaging of *The Bacchae* at the Performance Garage, a space that would become synonymous with innovative and transgressive theatre for the next four decades, Schechner transgressed the fourth wall and had his (sometimes nude) actors use full body contact to reach out and touch the audience. The production was infamous for its groping and sexual acts that took place among some audience members and performers. Amiri Baraka's *Slave Ship* (1967), the work of the Living Theatre, Wooster Group, performances by Karen Finley, and even the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1978) have all challenged the role of the passive audience member in order to incite activity and participation from spectators.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Schechner, *Essays on Performance Theory, 1970-1976* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1977), p.110.

<sup>20</sup> Lyn Gardner, "The Crash of the Elysium: Punchdrunk Children Only", *The Guardian* (8 June 2011), <http://www.guardian.co.uk>, accessed 2 October 2011. Space is so crucial, Barrett explains, that the reason their production of *The Duchess of Malfi* (2010) was unsuccessful was solely due to their having lost their original site and hastily relocating to London's Docklands. "Suddenly we lost the original site, and at the last minute it had to be completely reimagined. For the sake of getting it on, I broke one of my own rules: you can't cram a square-shaped show into a circular hole."

show gets conceived. A building tells you its story”<sup>21</sup> – and again in an interview with *The Independent*, describing his process as “listening to the building and hearing what it wants to have performed inside it”.<sup>22</sup> But which story? The story Punchdrunk invented for the space? The story of the McKittrick hotel from *Vertigo*? The actual story of 530 West Twenty-Seventh Street? Or perhaps, a mixture of all three? Which narrative haunts *Sleep No More*?

Firstly, the name of the hotel most specifically references the McKittrick hotel in Alfred Hitchcock’s classic 1958 film *Vertigo*. In the film, former police detective John Ferguson tails the mysterious Madeleine Elster to a grand Victorian mansion-turned-hotel. He watches her enter the front door, and sees her a few minutes later looking out the second-story window, but when he enters the hotel, and asks the clerk about her, the clerk tells him that the woman, Carlotta Valdes, has not been to the hotel in several days. When Ferguson demands to inspect her room, he finds it empty. He looks down the street and sees that her car is also gone. Was Madeleine/Carlotta really there? Where has she disappeared to, and how? In a film that ultimately explains its supernatural-seeming events through a conventional murder scheme, Ferguson’s mysterious visit to the McKittrick resists narrative resolution, leaving an opening for liminality in the film’s plot.

Secondly, the production website has invented a fictional history for the hotel that suggests *this* McKittrick is a rediscovered haunted house not unlike the one in *Vertigo*. The website reads, “Completed in 1939, the McKittrick Hotel was intended to be New York City’s finest and most decadent luxury hotel of its time. Six weeks before opening, and two days after the outbreak of World War II, the legendary hotel was condemned and left locked, permanently sealed from the public, until now”.<sup>23</sup> The text is purposefully concise and ambiguous, not explaining the particular reasons for its condemned status, why it was sealed for seventy-plus years, or why it has finally opened. Yet the brief description of the building suggests its potential as a haunted, polyphonic space.

The programme feint is surprising, given that the actual history of 530 West Twenty-Seventh Street between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues has rich and varied

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<sup>21</sup> Kate Sekules, “The Thane of Chelsea”, *Interior Design* (1 September 2001), <http://www.interiordesign.net>, accessed 30 September 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Logan, n.p.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.sleepnomorenyc.com>.

resonances for New Yorkers that are arguably more effective at haunting the theatre experience than any invented or cinematic reference. Long seen as the outermost part of West Chelsea, the street was, until the 1990s, a hot zone for prostitutes and drug deals. But from 1999 until 2005, West Twenty-Seventh Street had an astonishingly fast rise and fall as New York's infamous Club Row. Thanks largely to the area being zoned for commercial use, the spaces were cavernous, residential housing sparse, and liquor licenses easy to get. As Isaiah Wilner writes, in his profile of Club Row for *New York* magazine, "at the turn of the millennium, as the [Mayor Rudy] Giuliani administration cracked down on rogue club owners, many of the rest decided to go west."<sup>24</sup>

According to Wilner, during those short years, "the street attracted Bono, Paris Hilton, prostitutes, drug dealers, and everyone in between – thousands of people on a single block." Clubbers scampered to the more than ten clubs on the block, with the centrepiece of the street being #530, which housed, at various times and on various floors, multiple super-clubs including Sound Factory (1989-1995), Twilo (1995-2001), B.E.D. (2005), Home (2005), and Guest House (2005). The availability of drugs, lenient door policies, and lack of ID checks created a club boom for promoters and owners that ultimately proved as ephemeral as it was successful. Wilner quoted one patron, Melissa Maron, who remembered, "it was freaks and crackheads, you never knew what was going to come out of the corners or from behind a pile of trash."<sup>25</sup> The party ended in February 2005, when thirty-five-year-old club-goer Orlando Valle got into a fight at B.E.D. with a bouncer and was thrown against the doors of the club's freight elevator. The doors opened unexpectedly and Valle plummeted five floors to his death. His death came on the heels of the July murder of eighteen year-old Jennifer Moore, who had spent the night drinking to excess at Guest House and was found beaten, strangled and left in a dumpster in Weehawken, New Jersey a few days later.<sup>26</sup> #530 and most of the other clubs of Club Row shut their doors for good a few weeks later. The building remained unoccupied until Punchdrunk rented it for *Sleep No More*.

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<sup>24</sup> Isaiah Wilner, "The Short Drunken Life of Club Row", *New York Magazine* (28 May 2007), <http://nymag.com>, accessed 10 October 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Wilner, n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Wilner, n.p.

The production references the McKittrick's former life on Club Row specifically at the entrance, where a velvet rope and bouncer is positioned. Patrons are instructed to wait in line on the sidewalk, where their IDs are checked and hands are stamped; no one under sixteen is allowed entrance. During the performance, audience members might find their way to a room on the third floor, where the witches summon a series of apparitions that tell Macbeth the future. They show an armoured head, a bloodied baby and a crowned child holding a tree. Scholars familiar with *Macbeth* recognise this as Act Four, Scene One of the play, yet the information given in *Sleep No More* is less straightforward. Under a throbbing techno beat, strobe lighting and in the crowded presence of nearly one hundred masked audience members, the witches, some of them nude, dance maniacally, hurtling themselves against each other and the audience members so that the scene has the sound and look and feel of a crowded rave in a club not unlike Twilo or Sound Factory. The staging suggests a way to realise physically the vice, lust and excess that resonate thematically in *Macbeth*, as well as the altered perception of dreams and hauntings akin to Macbeth's waking sleep. The rave has become one of the "must see" scenes in *Sleep No More*. The overwhelming, sensual nature of the scene not only evokes the space's history as a club, but for those more familiar with that history, calls to mind the people who died here. Arguably they haunt the rave room as much as the witches do. In addition, the scene also uses the semiotics of space to provide the psychological framework for Macbeth's response to the witches' prophecies. The audience, even those familiar with Shakespeare's text, are so hampered by the noise, lighting, and the crowd that they are not always entirely sure of what they are watching. In this way, the design serves to complicate what is traditionally read as Macbeth's arrogant refusal to accept prophecy. He is not so much arrogant as physically and emotionally overpowered – unsure of what he saw and what it meant.

### **Entering the McKittrick and Finding Manderley**

*I've entered the hotel, checked in at the front desk, and have been instructed to go down a dark hallway. I'm not prepared for the absolutely enveloping darkness that I find myself in. I instinctively reach out to grab something – a wall, a rail, but the path I'm on keeps winding and the walls I grab onto are made of stretched black fabric and offer little support. I must keep my eyes on the ground and hope that I don't fall.*

*The path turns endlessly. More than once I think that I must have reached its end, only to make another turn, go up some stairs, and down another darkened corridor. The soft glow of what looks like red lights appears in the distance and I walk eagerly towards them. Finally, the corridor opens and I'm welcomed into the boozy embrace of a red-walled 1930s bar. I've reached Manderley.*

The enveloping darkness of the entrance, while disorienting, is a design strategy that Barrett insists is necessary for the efficacy of a Punchdrunk production.

“Even if we did a family show, we’d still need that nerve-wracking entrance, because you need to reach that point as you’re entering that your comfort zone is removed, there’s a danger, the adrenaline’s coursing through your veins so that your synapses are firing so that any sensory stimuli we then give to you, the audience, you’ll receive it tenfold [...] it’s the crescendo; in terms of the lighting, the sound, in terms of the actual course of the evening [...] the key thing now is the crescendo, the fact that you don’t know what’s behind the door; it’s so dark down the end of a corridor, should you go down there and when you finally do you get that reward because suddenly [the environment] changes, it’s constantly unpredictable, it constantly evolves.”<sup>27</sup>

While the entrance is a dramaturgical strategy in the tradition of *avant garde*, interactive theatre, it is a crucial transition for the spectator into the world of the play. It forces a new way of seeing that will be imperative for the experience to come. It also signals the intertextual references that make up the production, echoing the “seeming night” of *Macbeth*, and the winding road that takes the second Mrs. DeWinter to her husband’s estate, Manderley, in Daphne Du Maurier’s 1938 novel *Rebecca*, as well as the opening tracking shot/voiceover of Hitchcock’s 1940 film version. However, the *Rebecca* reference does not become clear until you arrive at the bar. The name Manderley forces one to reconsider the path just taken and its context. This allows for a conceptual remapping of the space and one’s interaction with it. Though the famous opening line of the novel, “Last night I dreamt I went to

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<sup>27</sup> Josephine Machon, “Felix Barrett In Discussion”, Brunel University (2 February 2007), <http://www.people.brunel.ac.uk>, accessed 24 August 2012. Barrett explains the primacy of darkness in their productions by citing an early production that failed specifically for lack of darkness. “One of our very early shows, we were experimenting with form in an outdoor version of Oedipus and Antigone combined, six hours over the course of a Saturday, summers’ afternoon, a beautiful garden, the place was fantastic, brilliant design team; it was a joyous thing to behold. But, because it was daytime and thus daylight, you could see the distance that you were walking towards. Even though the detail was fantastic, little huts built of logs and so on, very exciting, but because you could see it as you walked, when you finally arrived there, there wasn’t that sense of discovery.”

Manderley again”, positions the now-ruined English mansion as an ideal rather than an actual place, her first trip to Manderley echoes the audience member’s first trip as well.

This drive twisted and turned as a serpent, scarce wider in places than a path, and above our heads was a great colonnade of trees, whose branches nodded and intermingled with one another, making an archway for us, like the roof of a church. Even the midday sun would not penetrate the interlacing of those green leaves, they were too thickly entwined, one with another and only little flickering patches of warm light would come in intermittent waves to dapple the drive with gold [...]. On we went, over a little bridge that spanned a narrow stream, and still this drive that was no drive twisted and turned like an enchanted ribbon through the dark and silent woods, penetrating even deeper to the very heart surely of the forest itself, and still there was no clearing, no space to hold a house. The length of it began to nag at my nerves, it must be this turn, I thought, or round that further bend, but as I leant forward in my seat I was forever disappointed, there was no house, no field, no broad and friendly garden, nothing but the silence and deep woods. The lodge gates were a memory, and the high-road something belonging to another time, another world. Suddenly I saw a clearing in the dark drive ahead, and a patch of sky, and in a moment the dark trees had thinned, the nameless shrubs had disappeared, and on either side of us was a wall of color, blood-red, reaching far above our heads.<sup>28</sup>

Alice Dailey notes that those familiar with the novel and Hitchcock’s film version come to understand the Manderley of the second Mrs. DeWinter’s dreams as the architectural expression of her lost innocence entangled in a thorny overgrowth of homicidal violence, erotic transgression, and guilt.<sup>29</sup> While Du Maurier forgoes the usual trappings of Gothic writing in the novel – hidden staircases, ghosts, and so on – the atmosphere of the house is so pervaded by the memory of Rebecca that the marriage of Maxim and the second Mrs. DeWinter is almost destroyed, and the heroine becomes so distraught that she nearly commits suicide, with the encouragement of the maniacal Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper. It is Mrs. Danvers who ultimately destroys Manderley in the end of the novel by setting it ablaze.

While the reference to *Rebecca* at the start of *Sleep No More* might seem initially disconnected from *Macbeth*, it provides a crucial way to understand the function of space in the McKittrick in terms of the Gothic *mise en scène*. The red

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<sup>28</sup> Daphne Du Maurier, *Rebecca* (New York: Pocket Books, 1943), pp.64-65.

<sup>29</sup> Dailey, n.p.

rhododendrons of the novel that once lined the drive to the Manderley estate have been replaced by the red-velvet walls and sconces of the Manderley bar. Fred Botting writes, in his introduction to *Gothic*, that while it is impossible to define a fixed set of Gothic conventions, it is best understood as a hybrid form incorporating and transforming other literary genres and developing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing.<sup>30</sup> This hybridity is a destabilising force not only in terms of setting but also of character, according to Eve Sedgwick, who notes the prevailing concern in the Gothic novel regarding the impossibility of restoring “to their original oneness characters divided from themselves.”<sup>31</sup> And Robert Hume writes that, while the Gothic atmosphere is one of evil and brooding terror, the imaginary world in which the action is taking place is the author’s objectification of his imaginative sense of the atmosphere.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the setting exists primarily to convey the psychological atmosphere, and while that atmosphere is not genre specific, it is structured around Raymond Williams’ emergent structure of feeling. Continually resisting narrative decoding, the Gothic space again and again serves to present the psychological position of the hero or heroine. Certainly, the popularity of early Gothic fiction in the eighteenth century, with its haunted castles, ghosts, and floating staircases, made those scenic features fairly consistent. Female Gothic writing, specifically works by Mary Wollstonecraft, Ann Radcliffe, and the Brontë sisters, arguably went even further to present the Gothic space as a psychological and literal realm of women’s imprisonment. Liberation – whether intellectual, emotional, psychological and/or physical – is brought about by the heroine’s metaphorical or physical liberation from the space. *Sleep No More* conveys the necessary sense of disorientation, terror and wonder by confusing the spectator’s spatial awareness to such a degree that even after two hours, one can still open a door expecting a bedroom and instead find a cemetery. It is as if the space keeps changing independently, and we, the audience members, have lost the ability to navigate it. Additionally, the sensory deprivation caused by the very low lighting serves as a focusing strategy. Often, we can only see what is right in front of us, and we must slow down, look closely, and feel our way through hallways, rooms, and even forests. The masks worn

<sup>30</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel”, *PMLA* 96, no. 2 (March 1981), pp.255-70.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Hume, “Gothic versus Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel”, *PMLA* 84, no. 2 (March 1969), pp.282-90.

mark us as audience members, yet it's a spectral sight, these Venetian-inspired masked figures that silently follow every character. We are both the heroes/heroines of this Gothic setting but also the ghosts. We are unable to make cognitive sense of the narrative the space is presenting, and yet we have freedom to transverse the space, to walk throughout the five floors and witness what is going on. In some ways, the audience member is more liberated than the traditional Gothic heroine, but significantly, he or she is denied exposition about the specific characters in the show. With no character list or programme available before the performance, audience members are not completely sure who any of the characters they are following actually are.

*The maître d', appropriately named Maxim, gestures to us to enter, guiding us smoothly to a freight elevator where we will don white masks, be told not to speak, and to explore all that we see across the five floors of this massive space. I realise I've been here before, back when it was B.E.D. Isn't this the elevator where someone died? We are given specific instructions by the bellhop, who advises us to explore the hotel alone and to observe strict silence. "Fortune favours the bold", the bellhop says, his Scottish accent giving some indication of place and I'm startled when I see my masked reflection in the sheet metal walls of the elevator. I look like a ghost, standing in the space where a man fell to his death. My thoughts are interrupted by the elevator doors opening. A single person exits. I move to follow and the bellhop suddenly blocks my path, making enough noise so that the person who just exited turns around just in time to see the elevator doors close on him, leaving him alone in what we will learn is the King James Sanitorium.*

### **The Design**

As Harold Bloom argues, "the world of *Macbeth* [is one] into which we have been thrown, a dungeon for tyrants and victims alike", and in the play, "Shakespeare rather dreadfully sees to it that we are Macbeth, our identity with him is involuntary but inescapable."<sup>33</sup> This sense of being thrown into a space beyond our control is evidenced in the serpentine, near-black hallway entrance to the McKittrick, and continues throughout the five floors. Each visitor is dropped off at a random floor

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<sup>33</sup> Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p.517.

with no introduction, map or direction, save the stairwells marked “E” and “W” on each floor. The top floor, the fifth, contains a forest maze and a series of hospital rooms in the King James Sanitorium – a reference to Lady Macbeth’s descent into madness and the monarch for whom the play was written. One room has a number of hospital beds; the other rooms include an operating theatre, doctor’s office, padded cell, and an examination room. The fifth floor is primarily the realm of Christian Shaw, an orderly, nurse and Doctor. The fourth floor includes a “street” with a taxidermist shop, confectioners, tailors, undertakers, detective agency, and Hecate’s apothecary. The fourth floor also contains a replica of the Manderley bar on the first floor, covered in dustcloths – a ghostly relic of a place we just left. The replica bar complicates the audience’s relationship to the first-floor Manderley bar, for the fourth-floor lobby suggests the present McKittrick (that remained locked until now) and the first-floor bar now arguably suggests a saturated dream. The third floor includes a cemetery, the Macbeth suite, the ruins of Manderley, and the Macduff apartment. The second floor contains the McKittrick reception desk, and dining room. Below the second level is Duncan’s apartment, and the first level has a large ballroom with an elevated dais. The rooms, while seeming disparate, are linked thematically around the ideas of prophecy, death, madness and lust. Some rooms, like the sanatorium, are clearly linked to the madness in the play. In a particularly charged scene, Lady Macbeth is forcibly bathed in one of the many bathtubs in a hospital room. Other rooms hold arguably more secrets, but reveal themselves to the investigative and intrepid audience member. Duncan’s chambers, for example, are filled with clocks, suggesting that his time on earth is running out. In a small chapel, off his bedroom, Duncan goes to pray. Not every audience member opts to go into the chapel and open the Bible he has been reading, but if they were to do so, they would find a stopped pocket watch hidden in the pages. Similarly, the Macduffs’ children’s room is realistically designed, but if one looks through the full-length mirror, one sees an image of the room with blood splattered on the children’s beds – a chilling image of their impending fate.

If the rooms appear initially to resist narrative cohesion, the music, pumped over speakers, provides the emotional throughline of all the plots and spaces. Music is everywhere, with Bernard Hermann’s score from *Vertigo* providing a unifying soundscape across all the floors. Characters move easily from room to room, with

crowds of masked attendants following them. The characters run upstairs, move fluidly in choreographed scenes with other characters, and literally climb the walls in physical dance choreography. At the same time, this expressionist dreamscape relies on the audience's ability to move freely from room to room and floor to floor, linking the seemingly disparate spaces, and using one *mise en scène* to map another conceptually. On the fourth floor, in an open space adjacent to Lady Macbeth's room, are the ruins of a burned-out estate that best approximates the Manderley that haunts the second Mrs. DeWinter's dreams. The second Mrs. DeWinter is now living in a series of hotels with her husband. She can only return to the Manderley estate and the early months of her marriage in her dreams, but when she does, it is this feral Manderley that has been reforested by wild surrounds, its former civilised beauty and "perfect symmetry" flickering elusively through the thick of nature's "long tenacious fingers".<sup>34</sup> The ruins take up a large amount of the floor, and as audience members walk through them, they come to a bank of French doors, which open up to the Macbeth suite, where Lady Macbeth is washing a bloody Macbeth in the large bathtub in the centre of the room. The destruction of Manderley foreshadows the ruin of the Macbeths, and the Macbeths' impending destruction is read in the shadow of the burned-out estate. Taken together, the rooms map out the psychological worlds of *Macbeth* more than they represent a hotel.

Performance scholar W.B. Worthen argues that the design of *Sleep No More* spatialises literary character in cognate ways, remaking a network of verbal imagery as the scenic landscape of performance.<sup>35</sup> We are not hearing Lady Macbeth's "out damned spot" according to Worthen, but rather, we are immersed in the world of her neuroses; her acrobatic dance, nudity, and encounters with members of the audience lift the performance out of an expectation of realism and towards an expressionist dreamscape. Certainly this effect is aided by the sheer number of rooms (ninety-three) in the performance space, and the meticulous level of design throughout. The rooms are realistically decorated, but are also filled with symbolic objects and properties that are visually arresting, as well as metaphorically in keeping with the world of *Macbeth*. A small nursery off the Macduff bedroom reveals nearly two dozen decapitated dolls suspended from the ceiling, functioning eerily as a mobile over the

<sup>34</sup> Du Maurier, p.1.

<sup>35</sup> W.B. Worthen, "The Written Troubles of the Brain: *Sleep No More* and the Space of Character", *Theatre Journal* 64, no. 1 (March 2012), pp.79-97.

crib positioned in the centre of the room. Design Associate Beatrice Minns explained the process of staging such a psychologically informed design: “We sit in the [individual rooms of the set] and try to make it real – [we] go into the characters’ persona and think about how they would have felt. There’s so much paranoia around the *Macbeth* characters, so we researched different types of voodoo-esque things.”<sup>36</sup> Resulting from that research, the designers spent months filling each room with layers and layers of minutia associated with warding off spirits, augury, or prophecy. Eggs, crosses, salt, ticking clocks, locks of hair, stags, birds, dried herbs and taxidermy are repeatedly worked into the design of the rooms in unexpected and visually arresting ways. In the hotel restaurant, crosses made of cutlery are planted in piles of salt. In an examination room, locks of hair pinned on cards (to which I noticed some intrepid audience members contributing) fill a medical cabinet. In Duncan’s study, travelling cases line the walls. If an audience member were to open one, he or she would find it filled with soil, and if that person would dig through the soil, he or she would find metronomes.

*I am watching Malcolm. He has been imagined as a private investigator and is in his office. He has just found a message left for him on his desk, warning him that the King is in danger. I’ve watched him earlier in the evening dance forcefully with a woman in a confectioner’s shop. She repeatedly evaded his grasp and appeared to taunt him with information she would not share. Was she a witch? I watched him interrogate Macduff after Duncan’s murder in a tiny, four-foot-by-seven-foot space; both actors skilfully dodging the overhead lamp that swung just overhead as they engaged in a physical dance seemingly too large for the room they were in. Now I’m in the backroom of his office. He is examining a message that someone left for him. I would later learn that it was Agnes Naismith. He looks up and appears to notice me for the first time. It’s as if I’m a ghost that has just appeared to him. He strides over to me, grabs my hand, and starts running. A group of audience members run after us. We exit his office via the side door, and into a dark room I’ve not seen before. It’s empty, save for a small desk with a drawer. He shuts and locks the door and pushes me against the wall with surprising force. He walks up to me and removes my mask. For a moment I’m taken out of the world of the play and question whether I’m safe. He then opens up the desk drawer, which has four eggs inside. He gestures towards a*

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<sup>36</sup> Sekules, n.p.

*specific egg in the drawer, as if I should I pick the one he wanted me to. I take it, and hold the egg in my right hand for a few seconds, not moving. He lets me examine the egg for a few brief moments, then, without any warning, crushes it violently in my palm. Instead of white and yolk, dirt spills out everywhere. He grabs my palm, and starts rubbing the dirt into my skin, trying to read the lines on my palm. He drops my hand, picks up the magnifying glass, and takes a step towards me, "Who are you?" I say nothing. He takes another step towards me. "Do you see the signs, student?" I still say nothing. He takes another step towards me. He begins quoting Act Four, Scene Three of Macbeth, "On Tuesday last, / A falcon, towering in her pride of place, / Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd." "Duncan's horses turned wild against nature. They would make war with mankind." He keeps walking towards me. He continues reciting lines as he reaches me and presses his body against mine. He is covered in sweat. He whispers in my ear, "It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood." He repeats himself. "It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood. It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood. It will have blood; they say, blood will have blood!" He kisses my cheek, adding, "Methinks I heard a voice cry out. I thought I heard a voice cry out, I thought I heard a voice cry out..." Suddenly the lights go out with a bang. A bell rings in the distance. He deserts me, sprinting out of the room. I put my mask back on.*

Perhaps one of the more innovative aspects of the Punchdrunk experience, and one that the company has used since the beginning, are the one-on-ones, moments when a spectator is singled out by the performer and taken to a private space to experience a scene alone with the actor. For the majority of the performance, even though the traditional spatial relationship is broken down and spectators surround the performers, the performers seem to carry with them an imaginary "fourth wall", rarely acknowledging the audience's existence. Black-masked ushers occasionally guide audience members out of the way of the performers, and escort people out of the hotel if they take out a cell phone or camera. When the performers do look up and appear to see a member of the audience, it is an interruption of the action, like a ghost they have caught sight of, frightening and distant. In this context the one-on-ones become visceral and shocking: performers will touch you, kiss you, remove your mask and stare into your eyes.

*It's my second visit to Sleep No More and I'm following Agnes Naismith, who was originally referred to as the second Mrs. DeWinter in the Boston production. I learn that she was the one who left a note for Malcolm in his office, warning him of Duncan's murder. Now she has approached Hecate, desperate to find someone. I'm not sure if I'm watching the beginning of her story. I've seen bits of her story arc and started to follow her when I lost track of Catherine Campbell, the housekeeper to Duncan. Agnes stands before the door of her room and turns around. She looks beyond the people directly behind her and sees me. She smiles and takes my hand, gently bringing me into her room, locking it behind her. "Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again" she tells me. She removes a locket from around her neck and gives it to me, then draws me into an embrace. Is the photo that she carries around of Rebecca? I hope she'll give me more answers, but as soon as my one-on-one encounter has begun, it ends. She opens the doors of what appears to be an armoire, and pushes me through it. I move the clothes hangers out of the way and realise the closet has a false back. Suddenly I'm in a secret hallway and walk down it, ultimately exiting into another part of the floor. Agnes has remained in her room.*

### **The Characters: Mapping the Relationships**

After each performance is over, audience members have the opportunity to purchase a programme for twenty dollars. The programme contains an interview with Barrett and Doyle, brief biographies for the performers, a condensed synopsis of *Macbeth*, photographs of the cast and design, and most significantly, a relationship diagram for the characters in the play.

The relationship diagram lists the characters from *Macbeth*, but also names the supernumerary characters of Gallow Green and the sanitorium. Further research reveals that the character names reference the Paisley witch trials of 1697. Eleven-year-old Christian Shaw complained of being tormented by a number of local witches, including one of her family's servants, Catherine Campbell, whom she had reported to her mother after witnessing her steal a drink of milk. Seven people, including Catherine Campbell, Margaret Fulton, and Agnes Naismith, were found guilty of having bewitched Shaw and were condemned to death. They were hanged and then

burnt on the Gallow Green in Paisley, Scotland on 10 June 1697, the last mass execution for witchcraft in Western Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Shaw appears in *Sleep No More* as an adult, Nurse Christian Shaw of the King James Sanatorium, “former prior [sic] patient now running the sanatorium.”<sup>38</sup> Catherine Campbell is listed as the housekeeper of the McKittrick and Agnes Naismith (originally called the second Mrs. DeWinter in the U.K. and Boston production) is listed as having come to Gallow Green to look for her sister. Gallow Green is represented in *Sleep No More* as a street in Glamis comprised of the shops described previously. The names of the shops specifically reference persons involved in the trials: J. Fulton is the Tailor, evoking Margaret Fulton, one of the accused witches executed. Mr. Bargarran is the taxidermist, but also shares the name of the father of the young Christian Shaw. The characters thus thrice ghost the production, as executed women suspected of witchcraft, as characters (perhaps witches) in the world of *Macbeth*, and in oblique references to *Rebecca*. Significantly they demonstrate the split subject position of characters that is so thematically important in *Macbeth* and in the Gothic tradition.

Interestingly, one only learns this information after having seen *Sleep No More*, which forces yet another reconsideration of who the characters were, how they acted towards one another, and what their scenic environs looked like. Not having this information before the show presents a challenge, for the audience member is frustrated for much of the evening, not only by not knowing who anyone is, but also by not knowing his/her belated connections to the Paisley Witch trials and *Macbeth*. The audience member must then negotiate with a memory, balancing the new knowledge he/she has received with the diminishing details of a recollected performance.

After reading the relationship diagram and researching the Paisley trials, I tried to remember details of Catherine Campbell in performance as housekeeper that might link her to witches. Throughout the show, she is seen as concocting a milky beverage, which she appears to force Lady Macduff to drink. Is this a reference to her crime, allegedly witnessed by Christian Shaw? Are these characters supposed to be

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<sup>37</sup> Brian P. Levack, *Witchcraft Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.113-14.

<sup>38</sup> *Sleep No More* programme, pp.18-19.

witches, or do they represent victims of the kind of paranoia evidenced by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth?

For the audience members who opt not to purchase the programme, and for whom this information is not made available, how does their experience of *Sleep No More* compare? Arguably, we privilege a reading of performance supported by context and research, but that does not invalidate the largely impressionist experiences of other audience members. As liberating as *Sleep No More* is lauded as being, and for as much as the production eschews any one reading of the event, there is a sense of rewarding with information those who spent more money on a souvenir programme.

### **Checking out of the McKittrick**

*The evening ends with everyone in the first-floor ballroom to witness the famed banquet scene. Banquo had made his appearance, but lingered, and he, Macduff, and Malcolm string Macbeth up on a noose and kick the chair out from under him. Macbeth hangs above us, swinging from side to side, and we must walk under him to exit the hotel. We walk up the stairs to the Manderley bar, where our evening began. I remove my mask and see that there is fake blood on it. I purchase a souvenir programme on my way out. I'm eager to talk about what I have seen, and what it meant, for even as I walk out of #530 West Twenty-Seventh Street, I can feel the experience slipping away from me.*

Like so many neighbourhoods in New York City, West Twenty-Seventh Street between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues has undergone yet another transformation. Standing outside the McKittrick Hotel in 2013, one notes the galleries and cafes that line the street now, but also the large marquee for Scores, the topless lap-dance club located directly across the street. The street is primarily paved, but has spots where the asphalt has been worn down or peeled back to reveal the nineteenth-century cobblestones underneath. One block away is the High Line, one of the most prominent symbols of the urban regeneration of the Lower West Side. It's a one-mile linear park built on a nearly one-and-a-half mile section of the long-disused former elevated New York Central Railroad Spur. The changing resonances and multifaceted landscape of the street provides perhaps the most useful way to think of the intertextuality of *Sleep No More*. City streets and neighbourhoods, particularly in

New York, are marked by their consistent change – in landscape, architecture, storefronts, demographics, connotation, and even name. These spaces are texts in and of themselves, with no singular narrative, but layered with references, allusions, omission, and constant additions of resonance and meaning. City streets are trod by masses every day, yet each person's relationship or experience with a street or neighbourhood is individual. In many ways, the street serves as a further example of the allusive haunting constantly at work in *Sleep No More*, which is first introduced with a *Vertigo* reference, becomes a renegotiation of *Macbeth* and *Rebecca*, and is further complicated by the revelations of the Paisley witch connection and the building's own club history. The McKittrick Hotel of *Sleep No More* is at the same time a fictive creation, a ground-breaking turn in theatrical design, and a spruced-up version of one of the more infamous clubs of the 1990s. It resists narrative decoding and easy navigation, and like the street it is located on, references its past as well as its transformed present. Punchdrunk's dramaturgy challenges us to rethink the relationship between performer and audience, but also to see the space of performance as a text as compelling and elusive as one character's relationship to another.

While images generated during any performance may fade from memory, a semblance of the experience will remain within the memory of the spectator. The goal is common to all theatrical performance, but the methods employed by Punchdrunk are unconventional, indeed often disturbing, and exploit the frustration of audience members, who feel that they didn't see all that there was and must therefore come again. Whereas the distinctive method of presentation may not by itself provide a rational experience of what is occurring on stage, the unexpected visceral experience is intended to offer the participants a pathway for participating in the performance that is rewarding and engaging in and of itself. The intertextual literary references and extratextual geographic space together create a new kind of performance that both suggests new directions theatre may take in the twenty-first century, and harkens back to the singular appeal of theatre – the power of live performers to engage audience members temporarily in a fictive universe before returning them to the present. Perhaps one of the most innovative aspects of *Sleep No More* is how, even with its multi-million dollar budget, elaborate design and complex performance constraints, it makes the live spectacle of performance its most thrilling aspect.