Staging Alice in 2015:
150th Anniversary Adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland*

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Abstract:
This article examines theatrical adaptations of Lewis Carroll's *Alice* stories staged to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). It sets these works within the context of a history of theatre inspired by Carroll's work, before turning to examine two 2015 works in greater detail: *wonder.land* written by Moira Buffini and directed by Rufus Norris and *Adventures in Wonderland* written by Oliver Lansley and directed by Emma Earle. The article situates these productions in the context of immersive theatre. It uses the concept of convergence culture to theorise the place of these adaptations in a network of cultural productions that seek to incite interaction and collaboration between performers and audience members.

Keywords: adaptation, *Adventures in Wonderland*, *Alice in Wonderland*, Lewis Carroll, convergence culture*,* immersive theatre, musical theatre, *wonder.land,* youth theatre.

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T he year 2015 saw the 150th anniversary of the original publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The story was first told by Charles Dodgson to Alice Liddell and her sisters during a boat trip in July 1862, after which he wrote the adventures up into a book given to Alice in 1864, and prepared the text for publication with Macmillan in 1865. We might thus argue that *Alice in Wonderland* began its life as "an improvised oral performance" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2015: 12). *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was well received by Victorian readers, and in 1871 Carroll wrote a follow up entitled *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1872).[1] Alice, and the parade of characters she meets in the fantasy world created by Dodgson, have since made their way into the cultural consciousness of readers around the world. And not just readers. For 150 years, people have been brought into contact with

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wonderland through illustration and the visual arts, advertisements, dress, consumer goods, dance, music, film, television, radio, opera, computer games and theatrical adaptation (Brooker 2005). Alice has become a lucrative franchise. The mass of cultural interventions related to Alice's anniversary year saw 2015 saturated with Wonderland.

Along with numerous special editions of the text itself, publications marking the anniversary ranged from scholarly monographs to manga comics, novels, puzzles, cookbooks, handbooks, and *Alice in Wonderland* colouring books. In these anniversary publications, Alice visits 'nightmareland', a 'Cockney Wonderland', 'Tokyo Wonderland', and 'Plunderland', and her adventures have been translated into numerous languages. All things *Alice* have been displayed in special exhibitions in spaces as diverse as Chester cathedral and the Victoria & Albert Museum of Childhood in Bethnal Green, used as the theme for pop-up restaurants and tea-parties, screened at special film-showings, viewed in art installations, and danced in forms from ballet to hip-hop, flamenco to burlesque. Such events were organised in Argentina, Brazil, Australia, Belgium, Austria, Canada, Japan, Iceland, France, Spain, and the United States and across the United Kingdom. Llandudno, Oxford, and Guildford were just some of the places laying claim to Carroll connections. Theatrical productions of the anniversary year, on which this article will concentrate, were similarly numerous and ranged across formats and genres from opera to marionette theatre.[2] Indeed 2016 saw Alice's continued presence on stages across the United Kingdom and beyond. A pantomime in Sunderland, a stage production in Stevenage, an interactive event called *Alice's Adventures in Numberland* at the British Library, and the transfer of the musical *wonder.land* from London's National Theatre to a run in Paris have all taken place in 2016. The Disney film version of *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, a follow-up to Tim Burton's 2010 *Alice in Wonderland*, was released in May 2016 and provided another boost to the Alice industry.

This article examines two of these anniversary productions, the new musical *wonder.land* (2015) and the family-friendly *Adventures in Wonderland* (2015). The first was created by Moira Buffini, Damon Albarn and Rufus Norris and opened at the Manchester International Festival in July 2015, before transferring to the National Theatre in London, where it ran until 30 April 2016. The second, a play written by Oliver Lansley and produced by Les Enfantes Terribles and Emma Brünjes Productions, was

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performed at the Vaults underneath Waterloo station during the summer of 2015 and is scheduled to re-run in 2017. Fidelity to the original Carroll texts is not the concern of these recent productions. I seek to follow work in adaptation studies that has, from the later 1990s, moved away from the hierarchy of seeing an original as primary and an adaptation as secondary (see Stam 1999: 54-78) and instead sought to complicate one-way models of translation or adaptation (Cartmell and Whelehan 1999: 3-19). The anniversary productions, I propose, are strongly engaged with creating a sense of audience interaction or immersion, implicitly seeking to place the audience in the position of the bewildered child Alice, who must ask the question repeated by the caterpillar in Carroll's text – "Who are *you*?" (Carroll 1993: 39 original emphasis). Indeed, these themes have a distinct history in *Alice* adaptation, and both come across strongly in the anniversary productions, which occupy a particularly self-reflexive space in the ongoing tradition of *Alice* stagings.

1.   The History of Staging Alice

Carroll himself was involved in the early adaptation of his work for the stage. From childhood onwards, Carroll had been excited by the theatre, putting on home entertainments including marionette theatre and magic lantern shows; later he tapped into the professional theatrical world through friendships with the Terry sisters, Ellen in particular (Foulks 2005: 5-20, 88-107). He was a keen theatregoer, his diaries showing over four hundred instances of attendance, and he was interested in stage craft, even writing to directors and managers to suggest improvements (Douglas-Fairhurst 2015: 303). This enchantment with the theatre flew in the face of the disapproval of his father, and of his church, towards theatre-going (Cohen 1995: 361). Carroll was, of course, aware of the lucrative potential of the theatre to enhance the popularity of his novels and the worlds they created, and he worked in close conjunction with Henry Savile Clarke on the 1886 version of *Alice in Wonderland: A Musical Dream-Play* at the Prince of Wales Theatre in London.[3] The copyright act of 1842 did not cover theatrical adaptations of fiction, so from first publication Carroll's texts were open to dramatisation even without the author's official permission. Some novelists quickly and cursorily adapted their own work for the stage in attempting to protect their material (Laird 2015: 5). This was not the case with Carroll, however, and his relationship with Savile Clarke was courteous, with the

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dramatist respecting Carroll's directive that the production should only adapt one of his novels, rather than bringing the two together (Cohen 1995: 435).

Key points in the history of Alice on stage have usually been given as the Henry Savile Clarke production, Eva LeGalliene's adaptation that opened at the Civic Repertory Theater in New York in 1932, and the musical version of *Alice in Concert* produced by Joseph Papp and starring Meryl Streep at the Public Theater in New York in 1980. These three productions have been highlighted by critics as innovative in differing ways. Savile Clarke's work was "less like a traditional drama than a series of animated pop-up illustrations" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2015: 312). LeGalliene's was spectacular in its production values and scale, and Papp's adaptation took the work into the more adult territory of "groundbreaking" musical theatre (Jacques and Giddens 2013: 211).

With the exception of the very earliest adaptations over which Carroll had some control, the vast majority of stage versions of *Alice* select elements from both of Carroll's *Alice* stories, creating new versions to suit the director's vision, the staging demands of a particular theatrical space, the abilities of particular actors, and the perceived expectations of a particular audience. Will Brooker analyses processes of selection from both *Alice* texts at work in film adaptations and identifies "the Tea Party, the White Rabbit, the Caterpillar, the croquet game and […] the 'Drink Me' bottle and the 'Eat Me' Cake" as "iconic elements" without which "the story would seem lacking", while elements such as the nonsense rhymes and the Caucus Race are now frequently elided (Brooker 2005: 205). While the decisions about which parts of the narrative are included in a stage production do not lie with the audience, the sense of *Alice* as textually unsettled, in constant flux and negotiation, I would argue, is part of what has made it – and continues to make it – so attractive to audiences and adapters alike.

One set of *Alice* stagings, which have received relatively little attention, are the many pantomime versions of Carroll's works. Carroll himself enjoyed pantomime: he saw *Little King Pippin* in 1866 and himself wrote songs for two pantomimes (Lovett 1978: 6-7). He also sent a copy of *Alice in Wonderland* to the manager Thomas Coe, suggesting he might adapt it into a pantomime (Douglas-Fairhurst 2015: 305, 307). The hyperbolic whimsy of the *Alice* books makes them well-suited to the form, and the episodic nature of Carroll's texts lends itself well to pantomime's

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relative lack of interest in cohesive plot in favour of linking scenes with song and dance. The Queen of Hearts, the Red and White Queens or the Duchess generally take the parts of the pantomime dame, and the Knave of Hearts is frequently converted into a love interest for Alice. The audience is prompted to participate in call and response, and young audience members are often singled out and brought on stage to participate in a comic musical section. The earliest of these pantomime adaptations took place within Carroll's lifetime: George Buckland's *Alice's Adventure; or the Queen of Hearts and the Missing Tarts* ran for five months in 1876. More recently, Alice pantomimes have been staged at the Millenium Centre in Cardiff by the BBC, with a cast populated by actors from the pre-school channel CBeebies (2015), the Customs House in South Shields (2015), the Octagon in Bolton (2014-15), the Grove Theatre in Dunstable (2014), and Lichfield's Garrick Theatre (2012-13), among others.

The Alice stories' place as a perennial festive production is assured and ongoing, as is their status as theatrical productions that thrive on audience interaction. Yet Zoe Jacques and Eugene Giddens have argued that

> [r]ecent stage productions of *Alice* have been poorly received by theatre critics, perhaps in part because they are not particularly challenging and generally follow a series of long-established conventions about what constitutes both *Alice*ness and holiday theatre for children. The place of live theatre, ballet, and musical in society has vastly diminished since Carroll's time. To find vigorous, contemporary reinventions of *Alice*, it is perhaps not surprising that film offers much more fruitful material. (Jacques and Giddens 2013: 214)

Arguably, however, this critical neglect of *Alice* adaptations aimed at children and young people ignores a key trope of *Alice* plays, namely audience interaction or immersion. Josephine Machon states that "[w]ith immersive theatre, a childlike excitement for curiosity and adventure, perhaps equally a wariness of compliance, is activated in each participant" (Machon 2013: 28). These traits, emphasised by practitioners as well as critics of immersive theatre, might also describe Carroll's *Alice* books and many of their adaptations (Stevens 2013: 199). If versions of *Alice* aimed at an adult market have been deemed valuable or complex because they tap

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into social issues such as drug-use, stagings of *Alice* aimed at children and
young people are, I argue, just as significant, because they open up some of
the conceptual issues often associated with immersive theatre. These include
how we might realise the "possibility of experiencing more fully" through
sensual and imaginative stimulation, how we navigate a "totally new
environment", and how the "rules and conventions" defining an
"audience/actor (us/them) relationship" might be redefined (Machon 2013:
26, 27).

         Several of the plays, musicals, pantomimes or theatrical experiences
mentioned in this article highlight the ways in which audience members
become a version of Alice, overwhelmed and disoriented by their sensual
and imaginative experience, immersed in a version of Wonderland that
refuses to be contained in a designated performance space, but ever curious
to know what will happen next. Since the publication of Jacques and
Giddens's work in 2013, there have indeed been "vigorous" contemporary
reinventions of Alice on stage (Jacques and Giddens 2013: 214), and the
anniversary has provided a particular stimulus for such productions. The rest
of this article examines two anniversary productions specifically aimed at
children and young people, making a case for their place in the *Alice* canon
and their importance to adaptation studies more widely.

2.   *Adventures in Wonderland*
Les Enfants Terribles used the vaults of Waterloo station to literally take
Alice underground in 2015. They staged two immersive productions from
April to August, *Alice's Adventures Underground* for adults and *Adventures
in Wonderland* aimed at children between five and ten, the latter of which
will be the focus of this section. The foreword of director, writer and
producer Oliver Lansley to the programme claims that Carroll's text creates
"the desire to visit Wonderland yourself", a desire that, he suggests, cannot
easily be fulfilled by adaptations that present Wonderland in a linear format
(Lansley 2015: vi). In both *Alice's Adventures Underground* and *Adventures
in Wonderland*, the conventional theatre setting (raked seating and a centre
aisle) actually served as a waiting area before the audience moved off to
wander through the various Wonderland settings located in the vaults. For
Adventures in Wonderland the audience was further divided up into those
holding black cards and those holding red cards, with each group taking a
different route around the Wonderland rooms.

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The whole audience started off in Lewis Carroll's study, where we encountered and interacted with the actor playing Carroll's assistant. The audience was encouraged to handle the books, papers and other objects lying around the study and to dip their fingers into the photographic baths. The dim lighting made us look more carefully at the surroundings in this new environment. We were then invited to rescue Alice by an apparition of her face shown in the reflective surfaces around the study set. Immediately both the child and adult members of the audience were not only asked to embark on a quest to find Alice, but were also led to identify with her by seeing their own reflections replaced startlingly by images of Alice. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has stressed the importance of the mirror symbol in the Alice industry, arguing that Alice becomes "a looking-glass in herself. She was a fictional character in whose features readers of every sort saw images of their own hopes and fears, a mirror that captured every passing reflection" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2015: 413). In a sense, the immersive experience of the Les Enfants Terribles productions literalises this mirror function.

The seemingly solid bookshelf in Carroll's study then split open, and the audience was led through a corridor of exploded books into a room appearing to be the inside of a camera obscura. Here, the walls were first mirrors, again heightening the audience's sense of themselves as part of the performance, before rotating images were projected to show the Tenniel illustration of Alice falling to the audio backdrop of Carroll's recited words. The effect was dizzying, and the audience experienced a disorienting 'fall' akin to Alice's, not knowing which way they came into or would go out of the circular space. The multiplicity of possible entrances and exits, with the implication that the audience was being led on a confusing or circuitous route, was another key to the staging: it ensured that the audience was continually in an active mode, guessing what and where the next move would be. The staging continued to foreground the intriguing potential of sensual and bodily experience, when the white rabbit invited first one audience member, followed by all, to step through a frame onto a stage and consume a sweet that would either shrink or enlarge them. After eating, the audience members either walked downhill and away from the front of this sloping stage towards an oversized door – making it seem as if they are "shutting up like a telescope" (Carroll 1993: 11) – or else up the sloping stage towards a smaller door, giving the impression that they were growing

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larger. The effect was enhanced by the black and white check design of the floor. While this served as a nicely choreographed piece of stage trickery to adults, some of the younger children in the audience I saw were convinced that they had shrunk or grown like Alice.

The various performance spaces contain Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-Dee, who recited nonsense poetry, asked the audience questions, and squirted water at their responses; the Cheshire Cat, operated by a puppeteer in a darkened space, who asked the audience where they were going; and Humpty-Dumpty, another puppet who asked an adult member of the audience to write down words shouted by the children and then invited the audience as a whole to join him in reciting an impromptu rhyme made out of the words. The Queen of Hearts was played as a pantomime dame, locked in a room full of doors with no way out, because she could not bear to live in the Wonderland world of nonsense. The finale of the Mad Hatter's tea party was staged in a large, dark and stagnant space (presumably a siding for a disused underground train line) bestrewn with broken tea cups. The relative darkness emphasised other sensory impressions for the audience, such as tasting and smelling the stale air and the jam tarts that were distributed. The scene brought Alice back into Wonderland, and she then invited the audience to a brightly-lit rose garden, where individuals could have their photo taken with the restored heroine, buy refreshments, and play flamingo croquet.

The level of detail in the production design was impressive, such as the images of Alice Liddell developing in photographic baths in the study scene.[4] The most significant aspect of this staging was the way in which it embraced the non-linear nature of Carroll's work, using immersive practices to allow audience members to encounter in a physical way the episodic nature of the *Alice in Wonderland* that exists in our cultural consciousness. It keyed into exactly the iconic elements Brooker found in filmic adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland* and allowed audience members to feel that they were constructing their own version of Wonderland through their interactions with the characters and through their perceived choice of route through the performance spaces. This sense, albeit artificially constructed, of the audience interacting with the story and even helping to produce it by 'finding' Alice, relates back to Carroll's own practice as a storyteller. Another of Carroll's child-friends, Gertrude Chataway, remembered that he "often took his cue from her [Alice Liddell's] remarks – a question would

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send him off on quite a new trail of ideas, so that one felt one had somehow helped to make the story" (Chataway qtd. in Green 1974: 58). This comment reveals Dodgson's child-centred approach to storytelling and his disregard for narrative conventions, but it also ties in with the ways in which anniversary adaptations of the *Alice* stories used an engaged and interacting audience to shape (or at least seem to shape) the direction of narrative events.

3.   Alice in *wonder.land*
The Les Enfants Terribles production of *Adventures in Wonderland* can easily be defined through a conventional understanding of immersive theatre in that it demands sensory acts of its audience, "such as touching and being touched, tasting, smelling and moving – this latter often (but not always) being characterized by freedom to move within an aesthetic space" (Alston, 2013: 129). Alston goes onto argue though, that "[o]nce spectatorship is acknowledged as an embodied and potentially affective activity, all theatre and performance is, or at least has the potential to be, an immersive activity" (Alston 2013: 129). Machon too discusses an "immersive performance scale" rather than a strict definition of what is, and is not, immersive (Machon 2013: 70). So, although *wonder.land* is staged in the conventional theatrical space of the National Theatre and does not require sensory acts or movement from its audience, it does stage spectatorship as embodied and affective, and it does make use of immersive technologies beyond the auditorium. Like *Adventures in Wonderland*, *wonder.land* blurs the edges of the performance space and creates a sense of immersion in a fantasy space. But this production also forces us to consider ourselves and our bodies in relation to twenty-first-century technologies, an aspect of immersive theatre regularly practiced by companies such as Punchdrunk or Back to Back Theatre (Machon 2013: 37).

      The musical *wonder.land* is inspired by both of Carroll's *Alice* stories. In this re-working of the Alice stories, the protagonist is Aly (played by Lois Chimimba), a thirteen-year-old girl having recently moved to a new school after her parents have split up due to her father's online gambling addiction. This instantiation of Alice fits with the pattern traced by Catherine Siemann of the character's movement towards teenage or even adult life in recent filmic and gaming versions of *Alice* (Siemann 2012).[5] At school, Aly is bullied by a set of teenage girls – Dinah, Kitty and Mary Ann

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– and by her headmistress Ms Manxome (played by Anna Francolini). This stage world is drab, with costumes and set for the production designed in dreary shades of grey. When Aly is bullied in an internet-chatroom she types "BE SOMEONE ELSE" into a search engine, and the result leads her to the online game "wonder.land" (Buffini 2015: 17). Aly creates the avatar Alice, and they both follow the white rabbit into a technicolour digital world peopled by other avatars – Dodo, Humpty, Mouse and others – with whom Aly/Alice becomes friends. These worlds eventually collide when Ms Manxome steals Aly's phone, takes control of the Alice avatar, and attempts to become the (red) queen of wonder.land.

The play's production values were high, and it undoubtedly proved an impressive spectacle, but it still received mixed reviews from theatre critics. The *Telegraph* reviewer praised Norris's "extraordinary visual flair", the projections of 59 Productions and Rae Smith's set designs that helped to convey "something of the simultaneously colliding and dissolving frontiers between the real world and cyber space in a way contemporary theatre rarely manages" (Allfree 2015: n.p.). However, Buffini's script was found to be "rather heavy on the theme of alienated teenagers for whom cyber space offers a much more viable reality than reality itself" (Allfree 2015: n.p.). The *Guardian*'s theatre critic similarly deemed the "diverting" staging "not sufficient to distract from didacticism" (Clapp 2015: n.p.). While the play attracted adult audiences, its exploration of 'teenage issues' suggests its targeting of a specific demographic, as Buffini emphasised in an interview with the *Guardian*: "We wanted to write something for families" (Buffini 2015: n.p.). This orientation towards a teenage audience may have been problematic for some critics, but it is key to the ways in which the play deals with immersion, both as a theatrical mode and as a concept highly pertinent to contemporary youth culture.

The M.C. (Mister Cat), who also plays a version of the Cheshire Cat, invites the audience into the play's world with a comic riff on a stage management announcement:

> Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to tonight's performance in the Olivier Theatre. Please make sure that all mobile phones are turned off – not just on silent mode but completely off[.]

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The M.C. is revealed making the announcement: the human embodiment of the Cheshire Cat. He is playing on a smartphone as she [sic] *speaks.*

May I remind you that filming, texting, tweeting, playing poker, chasing fruit, high-speed racing, zombie slaying, flying through the galaxy and taking selfies during performances – these things are *fabulous…*(Buffini 2015: 3, original italics, emphasis and ellipses)

Whether audiences took this announcement as an invitation to use their smartphones whilst watching the musical is difficult to ascertain. In the performance I saw, the audience watched silently with smartphones resolutely in their pockets or bags, not wishing to contravene the normative rules of audience behaviour. The M.C. then moves into a song, which acts as a paean to the smartphone – the 'rabbit hole' into which Aly will dive – and the MC's final words of the prologue pose the question (as if to an interlocutor on the other end of the phone) "Who are *you*?" (Buffini 2015: 4, original emphasis). This question recurs throughout the piece, one of the 'iconic' elements of dialogue found by Brooker to be crucial to adaptations of the *Alice* stories. In Buffini's play, it serves to pre-empt the ways that we see identity being re-constructed and imaginatively renewed when Aly creates her avatar, attempting to dump her own personality in favour of a 'better' version. Immersion proves a double edged concept, here and throughout *wonder.land*, particularly when it applies to digital life. When Aly's mother tries to pry her away from her phone, she seems negatively immersed in a digital world that involves cyber-bullying and a loss of identity. When she first enters wonder.land (a digital game that can be played in real time with multiple players) and creates her avatar, she wants Alice to be as far removed as possible from her own self. However, when she begins gaming in wonder.land, immersion in digital realms allows Aly to become braver, smarter, kinder and to take control of situations at school and in her family that had previously been too difficult to deal with.

Kamilla Elliott has pointed out the complexity of gaming in relation to Disney's 2010 videogame version of *Alice in Wonderland*, a spin-off from the Tim Burton film.[6] Although its advertising material stresses the

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individuals' active participation in the game world, Elliott argues that this virtual Wonderland actually renders

> consumers complicit with producers, who also seek to master and conquer markets, alter perception in advertising, and make products disappear through consumption [...]. Here and in general, videogames construct narratives in which acquisition is essential to survival, as well as to access and progress through spaces, triumph over enemies, and maintain allies. Players cannot progress in the game without engaging in virtual consumption and victorious competition through acquisition – both hallmarks of corporate capitalism. The agency given to players in gaming, then, renders them complicit and identified with capitalism – a far more invasive and insidious incorporation of consumers than passive consumption. (Elliott 2010: 199-200)

The world of online gaming represented by 'wonder.land', in which Aly finds friends, a sense of freedom and a new self-confidence, is a much more complex space than the production allows. Aly's father, a version of the Mad-Hatter who has lost his job and his family due to his online gambling addiction, does give a sense of the dangers of immersion in a digital world, but his storyline is not developed in the piece. Indeed, some of the final lines of the chorus suggest a somewhat flippant attitude to the difficult questions of the immersive nature of the digital world and the threats to selfhood it poses. The cast sing:

> Perhaps it's causing damage to the cells within our brain
> We lose the world around us as we steer through this domain
> We sail past trolls and strangers and the landscape can be
dark
> But if this is the future, we're not going to disembark
> (Buffini 2015: 119).

The words invoke a blithe idea of digital immersion as central to youth culture. Douglas-Fairhurst has argued that through developing *Alice in Wonderland* for production, Carroll "explored the idea that the theatre need

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not be a damaging or dangerous place for children. In fact it could be another Wonderland" (Douglas-Fairhurst 2015: 306). Buffini, Norris and Albarn similarly ask us to suspend a sense of danger concerning a world in which the identities of children and young adults become unstable, now an online Wonderland.

The thematic concern with the dangers of online gaming links to an interest in immersive practice in *wonder.land*. Practitioners of immersive theatre often feel that audiences have become more interested in experiential theatre as the opportunities for human interactions in everyday life have been greatly reduced by technologies such as Skype or Facebook (Machon 2013: 27). Norris's production, although set in a conventional theatre space with a static audience, shares some of the aims of immersive theatre by attempting to elicit an embodied and affected response from playgoers that shocks them into looking at their technologised lives anew. The technicolour projections created by 59 Productions provide a digitised immersion into the *wonder.land* world: notably, when the avatar Alice is being created and falling into the world of the game, the projections seem to dizzyingly encircle the audience. Audience members feel physically affected, almost assaulted, by the digitally created psychedelic effects alongside the resonating beeps and blips of the score. Just as in the Les Enfants Terribles production, the audience 'falls' with Alice, albeit without gaining as full a sense of embodied identification with the questing protagonist. Similarly both the Cheshire Cat/M.C. and Alice are encountered as real-life actors and video animations created utilising motion capture, live action, 3D and 2D animation. When we see the 'real-life' actors on stage with their video alter-egos projected around them, we get the impression that the audience is being offered proliferating routes into wonder.land: visual, aural, embodied, digital.

This sense of digital immersion surrounding the piece is further enhanced at the climax of the musical, when Aly's friend, Luke (played by Enyi Okoronkwo), enters Ms Manxome's office and live streams her crazed fight with Aly for control of the avatar Alice. This brings about Ms Manxome's downfall. She realises that she cannot control the narrative; as Luke tells her, "You're trending, Miss Manxome. The local paper's following you now" (Buffini 2015: 113). This plot function actually crossed over into the digital world outside the theatre when, on 12 April 2016, this section of the play was live-streamed from a real mobile phone used in this

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scene and made accessible via a link on Enyi Okoronkwo's twitter account. The National Theatre has in recent years shown live performances of various productions at local cinemas (under the branding NT Live), but in this case the live stream was used both as a trailer or teaser to bring audiences to the final weeks of the London show and to further blur the boundaries between on and off stage, a central feature of immersive theatre.

Additionally, the sense of immersion and interaction in *wonder.land* was carried out of the auditorium and into the pre/post performance area. 'Absent Alice', a free installation in the Wolfson Gallery of the National Theatre, featured "a range of immersive digital activities, including a 360° virtual reality music video, facial recognition screens and a Walk in Wonderland green-screen experience" (Anon 2015: n.p.). Participants were invited to take a selfie – adding the face of the Cheshire cat over their own – or to create an avatar made up of body parts of the cast. Visitors could tweet the results of these digital experiences using the hashtag 'enterwonderdotland'. Perhaps the most impressive of these pre/post performance experiences was the immersive music video created by 59 Productions, experienced by donning an Oculus Rift headset whilst sitting on a reproduction of the school toilets in which the teenager Aly hides from her bullies. The 3D music video sends you down the rabbit hole and into a garish technicolour garden with the Cheshire cat's disembodied head hovering around you.

We might see the 'Absent Alice' installation in conjunction with *wonder.land*, and its presence on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook as an example of the convergence culture discussed by Henry Jenkins. He argues that consumer capitalism is disrupted when stories are consumed across multiple media sites, offering the opportunity for the audience to interact with such stories in creative and unconstrained ways – such as by writing fan fiction or participating in online discussions (Jenkins 2006: 1-19). The convergence culture that Jenkins describes relies on very active audience engagement and interaction such that the audience become participants or co-creators. In this respect, its aims overlap with those of immersive theatre. Whether we see it as an example of convergence culture or of immersive theatre, 'Absent Alice' seeks to provide theatre-goers with further routes into the play world, and to offer them real sensory experiences such as touching, sitting on, moving through the exhibition space, and immersion in a hallucinogenic digital garden in the virtual reality music video. Discussing

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the *Matrix* trilogy of films and related media, Jenkins acknowledges that "reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption" (Jenkins 2006: 96).[7] As Elliott argues in relation to gaming, "acquisition is essential" to the experience of convergence culture (Elliott 2010: 199). The 'Absent Alice' installation was free of charge but was certainly motivated by an economic imperative to create consumer-driven publicity for the show. It capitalised on the digital presence of each individual participant and on those individuals coming together around a specific hashtag to make their consumption of *wonder.land* public.

Yet Jenkins also suggests that artists can "surf this new economic imperative to produce more ambitious and challenging works" and to "build a more collaborative relationship with their consumers" (Jenkins 2006: 96). Judging by the numerous contributions to social media, 'Absent Alice' has mainly inspired mutual consumption rather than creative responses. But looking more broadly across the range and variety of 150th anniversary responses to Carroll's work, it seems clear that the *Alice* stories will continue to inspire ambitious and challenging theatrical experiences as well as works that seek to cash in on a lucrative franchise.

4.   Conclusion

The commercialisation of the *Alice* stories is not a new phenomenon, and the 150th anniversary of their first publication is also a landmark anniversary of the *Alice* franchise that began very shortly after Carroll's text appeared. Many of our interactions with stories like *Alice in Wonderland* or *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There* are through our choices as consumers. While the multi-media convergence culture we see operating around the *Alice* stories can be interpreted as an alternative to capitalist consumption, in which the consumer can also become a producer of culture in chat rooms, blogs or on social media sites, the anniversary productions of *Alice* discussed here simultaneously rely on the drive of capitalist culture towards conspicuous and ever-increasing consumption. In both *Adventures in Wonderland* and *wonder.land* the gift shop provides a space outside the auditorium or performance area, in which further versions of the *Alice* stories are offered to the viewer through a range of platforms and products. Both of the productions under discussion in this article offer their audience the chance to buy programmes, play scripts, soundtracks, and all manner of tie-in merchandise and related products. Lewis Carroll himself authorised

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Alice-themed products such as the biscuit tins which, disappointingly for the children Carroll sent them to, were empty.

Many of the other events and productions marking the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* also attempt to reinvent our expectations of interaction and immersion, production and consumption. For example a joint project between the *Public Domain Review* (an online journal) and Medium (an online community of readers and writers) provides an unstyled online text of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and gives readers/producers the opportunity to illustrate, enhance, and edit the text in their own styles. The reader effectively creates their own 'Wonderland' with basic digital design skills. Similarly, Foundwaves, a non-profit organisation that supports live music and creative collaboration, invites listeners to music inspired by *Alice* to engage with the creative process of the musicians involved. The *Alice 150* website, spearheaded by the Lewis Carroll society in North America, invites us to "Be a part of history; plan your tea-party, your flash mob, your cosplay, your graphic novel, your read-aloud marathon, and be sure to send us pictures!" (Lewis Carroll Society of North America 2015: n.p.). This participatory rhetoric links back to the invitations found in Carroll's original text to "Eat me" or "Drink me" and to consume with an active and engaged sense of wonderment rather than to do so passively. Such non-theatrical projects do not seek to immerse participants in a new environment subject to its own logic or to unsettle a participant's sense of selfhood (Machon 2013: 55), but the concepts by which they are driven do link to the principles of immersive theatre. Such projects, whether digital or embodied, global or local, challenge interested parties to engage creatively with Carroll's stories. They give anyone the chance to adapt *Alice*. They make us feel like writers, adapters, or collaborators and link back to Carroll's own creative processes. Immersive or interactive theatre, however, not only gives us the chance to participate creatively in the stories but simultaneously makes us feel like Alice herself, brought into a new environment and asked the same question as she was 150 years ago: "Who are *you*?" (Carroll 1993: 39).

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Notes

1. Many adaptations of Carroll's work combine elements of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There.* To avoid confusion this article will refer to these adaptations as utilising '*Alice',* meaning that they deploy the story-world, plot points and characters of both of Carroll's texts in various combinations. 'Alice' refers to the central character.
2. See http://lewiscarrollresources.net/events/index2.html. Thanks to Mark Richards of Lewis Carroll Resources for sending me the full list of anniversary productions.
3. Anne Varty's *Children and Theatre in Victorian Britain: 'All Work, No Play'* contains an interesting section on this production, along with a chapter on Lewis Carroll in relation to the performing child and an appendix featuring Carroll's letters concerning child actors (see Varty 2008: 49-61, 101-108, and 251-256).
4. The use of photographic props invites older audience members to think about Carroll's relationship with Alice Liddell and other young girls. See Kali Israel's essay, 'Asking Alice: Victorian and Other Alices in Contemporary Culture' (2000) for interesting work on Carroll's photographs.
5. The same trend is also evident in fiction; see, e.g., Gaynor Arnold's *After Such Kindness* (2013).
6. See Catherine Siemann (2012) for analysis of another significant videogame*, American McGee's Alice* (2000) and its sequel *Alice: Madness Returns* (2011).
7. The *Matrix* productions borrowed several tropes, such as the concept of following the white rabbit, from Carroll's stories.

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