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Résumé de l'article

Bien que les universitaires et le public associent le terme « liveness » aux diffusions de performances sur scène, à quoi fait-il référence ? Cet essai évalue certaines des formes que la notion de « liveness » a jusqu'à présent endossées et propose de considérer le rôle des réalisateurs dans la création de ces diffusions. Le concept de « liveness » émerge alors comme le produit d'une médiatisation qui excède l'illusion d'immédiateté, une impression de direct, ou qui exploiterait l'habitus des spectateurs pour les attirer dans les cinémas. Le concept de « liveness » devient en soi une performance conçue pour mettre en lumière l'unique esthétique de ces films et privilégier la perspective de leurs spectateurs.

Is It Live?

Liveness as Lure, or the (Live)Cast Illusion: The Director's Cut

SANDRINE SIMÉON

Scholars, publics, and practitioners liberally use the term “liveness” to describe the live-like qualities exhibited in broadcasts of stage performances. In its generic understanding, liveness has been associated with strategies designed to create a sense of immediacy¹ for the broadcast spectators,² as a substitute for their physical absence from an event’s *locus*. Liveness could not have emerged as a concept before live events could be recorded or broadcast.³ The debate about what is live originated with the works of Peggy Phelan in 1993⁴ and Philip Auslander in 1998.⁵ Both agreed that lack of technological intervention defines what is live and that performances bearing traces of mediatization⁶ forfeit live status. Broadcasts consequently endeavoured to emphasize theatre’s live qualities. The emergence of technologies allowing the synchronous consumption of a remote live performance and the inherent broadcast aesthetic qualities are among the strategies developed to instill an impression of shared experience and emotional connection, a likeness of experience between live and remote publics.

1. Immediacy commonly designates a technologically unmediated (i.e. not mediatized) content spatiotemporally received in the instant of its occurrence.

2. The terms “broadcast spectator” or “broadcast public” refer specifically to spectators who watch theatre broadcasts in cinema venues; “broadcast directors” specialize in the filming of theatrical broadcasts.

3. The notion of the “live” may have become as problematic as that of liveness: “That the descriptor ‘live’ has been used in relation to multiple media forms has magnified the confusion about what it means for a medium to be live.” Karin van Es, *The Future of Live*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Polity Press, 2017, p. 2. Further, she concludes that the live “is not a natural occurrence but is heavily mediated” (p. 155), and thus liveness requires knowledge of what live is (also as a comparative tool) (p. 156).

4. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London, Routledge, 1993.

5. Philip Auslander, *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture* [1999], London, Routledge, 2008.

6. The term is used by Philip Auslander to refer to “a cultural object that is the product of mass media or media technology.” *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Many have investigated the attributes of liveness without defining it unambiguously. This ambiguity may reflect liveness' inherent complexity. Claudia Georgi remarks that "liveness is frequently invoked yet remains an ill-defined concept,"⁷ while Karin van Es claims that "considerations of liveness have been partial."⁸ Van Es also points to the paradox of liveness: "its seeming naturalness"⁹ when in fact its construction involves extensive work, thus echoing Martin Barker who notes that the concept is problematic and taken for granted because it "seems simple and transparent to those who use it."¹⁰ Auslander points out that defining liveness proves difficult since it is contingent on the relentless evolution of technology and mass media expectations.¹¹

Although many facets of liveness have been probed, to my knowledge, no study has examined the impact of broadcast directors' artistic contributions on liveness. Here, I propose to emphasize the ways in which they combine the work of the stage production creators with film's particular means of expression to craft this live-like feeling for the broadcast public. First, I briefly evoke the symbolic cultural value attributed to live shows. I then present the inherent ontological capacity of broadcast technology to convey a sense of immediacy, and the approaches theatres employ to produce the (live)cast¹² illusion. Finally, I analyze two of London's National Theatre

7. Claudia Georgi, *Liveness on Stage: Intermedial Challenges in Contemporary British Theatre and Performance*. Berlin, de Gruyter, 2014, p. 5.

8. Van Es, 2017, p. vi. Van Es proposes a conception of liveness that combines the three perspectives commonly delineated in media studies (ontology, phenomenology, and rhetoric) and which she presents as "constellations of liveness," as interaction among technologies, institutions, and users' reception, p. 5.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 154.

10. Martin Barker, "Crash, Theater, Audiences, and the Idea of 'Liveness'," *Studies in Theater and Performance*, vol. 23, no. 1, March 2003, p. 6. Barker distinguishes five dimensions of liveness: immediacy, which refers to a simultaneity of the production of the event with its reception; intimacy, or closeness to the performers; buzz, a way of sharing the pleasure of the performance via the live audience; expanding oneself via the learning experience procured; and being (in) the audience, knowing how to respond to such experience.

11. Auslander [1999], 2008.

12. "Livecast" is the term Martin Barker has chosen to refer to the broadcasting of filmed live events "because it is short, and sort of descriptive. Official, public christenings must wait." Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 11. The term seems ambiguous as it contains both a promise and an illusion: although the stage productions are filmed live, their broadcast may be delayed or replayed—therefore, I add the parentheses when using Barker's term. I have proposed a different expression, "film-théâtre," to emphasize its formal features, in "Le film-théâtre, un troisième temps du théâtre?" *Théâtre, levain du cinéma; théâtre, destin du cinéma*, Agathe Torti-Alcayaga & Christine Kiehl (eds.), Paris, Le Manuscrit, 2013, p. 169–183.

Live¹³ (NT Live) broadcasts to clarify the task of the directors in prioritizing their viewers' perspectives and emphasizing the singular aesthetic potential of filmed theatrical productions.

THE LURE OF THE LIVE

NT Live founder David Sabel admits: "Part of the reason we were attracted to this concept in the first place is that it is live and even when it's not live, it still has a residue of being live."¹⁴ The term "live" itself figures in the names of the leading broadcasting playhouses: NT Live, its French counterpart, Pathé Live,¹⁵ as well as the American opera stage, The Met: Live in HD.¹⁶ Broadcasting theatres' commercial interest in designing, maintaining, and capitalizing on an aesthetic capacity to convey the characteristics of live events—co-presence, immediacy, and ephemerality—has therefore become all the more relevant. In such contexts, liveness appears as a strategy to maintain the status of theatre; it is a carefully crafted illusion that exploits the public's internalized ideas about what it means for a broadcast to be live.

The lure of the live attracts audiences who generally insist on the experiential superiority of live theatre over its mediated form. Barker explains that attending a production in person has a superior cultural value, heightening its social prestige: "[P]hysical co-presence is the key component, and technologies are permissible only to the extent that they do not inhibit, even might enhance, that sense of shared physical space. [...] It is a primary cultural value, a *sine qua non*, of proper artistic experience."¹⁷ Barker surmises that publics may have unknowingly espoused discourses that compel them to respond according to certain cultural expectations, and "will feel it incumbent on themselves to behave and respond in accordance with [this] expectation."¹⁸ Likewise,

13. National Theatre Live is an initiative to broadcast British theatre to cinemas worldwide. The experimental season began in June 2009 with *Phèdre* starring Helen Mirren and was seen by over 200,000 people on 320 screens in 22 countries, <http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk/about-us> (accessed 12 October 2021).

14. Ian Sandwell, "NT Live: 'It's about Getting Back to the Core of What the Theatrical Experience is about,'" *Screen International*, 18 October 2012, <https://www.screendaily.com/nt-live-its-about-getting-back-to-the-core-of-what-the-theatrical-experience-is-about/5047936.article> (accessed 12 October 2021).

15. Pathé Live website, <https://www.pathelive.com/international/> (accessed 12 October 2021).

16. The Metropolitan Opera launched its Live in HD series of high-definition performance transmissions to movie theatres worldwide in 2006, <https://www.metopera.org/about/the-met/> (accessed 12 October 2021).

17. Barker, 2013 p. 43.

18. Barker, 2003, p. 18.

Auslander remarks that being in the physical presence of the performers becomes a privilege: “[T]here is [...] a socio-cultural value attached to live presence.”¹⁹ Both rely on Pierre Bourdieu’s hierarchy of taste, in which attending a performance *in situ* is reserved for a privileged few. Moreover, the unpredictability and potential risk during a live performance, “a possibility every time of performative failure and unanticipated and unwelcome consequences,”²⁰ adds to the event’s symbolic capital; even more so if that particular performance becomes legendary or is the object of multiple reruns, as was the case for NT Live’s *Frankenstein* (staged by Danny Boyle and filmed by Tim Van Someren in 2010).

Yet, according to a survey conducted by Barker, viewers attending the production’s filmed version reported higher levels of emotional and intellectual engagement than those who were present in the playhouse.²¹ Spectators were more absorbed through better views, high-quality sound, close-up takes, and the multiple perspectives provided by the variety of shots, in contrast to their difficulty discerning artists’ physical expressions in large playhouses. Although some shared that they missed being in the actors’ presence, others mentioned that physical presence mattered less than they had expected. Additionally, they appreciated being privy to behind-the-scenes shots and interviews of the performers backstage during intermissions—a compensation for their absence from the playhouse. Several respondents claimed that watching the performance in a cinema was “better than any seat in the house.”²² Nonetheless, despite their enhanced experiential involvement, the public in Barker’s survey confirmed a tendency to view live events as superior to their mediated counterparts.

THE (LIVE)CAST ILLUSION

Since an understanding of liveness rests on the public’s beliefs and affective experience, and broadcasts attract just as many people whether the screenings are live, delayed, or even encore ones, as Barker’s study proved, their success must lie elsewhere. An event may be perceived as live even without co-presence when the transmission occurs

19. Auslander [1999], 2008, p. 66.

20. Paddy Scannell, *Television and the Meaning of Live. An Enquiry into the Human Situation*, Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2014, p. 97.

21. Barker, 2013, p. 26.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

synchronously with its reception by a community of spectators. In *Liveness*, Auslander raises the idea that the live feeling extended beyond an audience sharing the theatre space with performers; an idea he reiterates in his 2012 article "Digital Liveness": "It may be that we are now at a point in history at which liveness can no longer be defined in terms of either the presence of living human beings before each other or physical and temporal relationships."²³ Immediacy thus hinges on the viewers' readiness to suspend certain expectations, to willingly engage with the performance. Immediacy, has become a subjective perception, a feeling that the mediatized event unfolding on the cinema screen is happening live. Whether or not it is live does not matter, as long as it feels live. The language used in NT Live's promotional material—"emulate," "translate," "equate," "replicate"—certainly instills the illusion of a live broadcast.

"Live in HD"

In order to craft this sense of immediacy and lure publics to cinemas to watch theatrical productions, theatres have combined several strategies designed to enhance the viewers' phenomenological and communal experience. Great emphasis is therefore placed on how the viewers see and hear the performance, hence using high-definition cameras and 5.1 surround-sound technology to emulate theatrical aesthetics. Directors are given complete freedom in choosing camera positions and movements, and sophisticated tracking and crane shots for vertical movements and high-angle takes may be implemented. Seats in the theatre may be removed for the cameras and the live public's sightlines may be blocked as a result—some theatres offer free or reduced-price seats on the day of the shoot. Though set-ups can vary according to productions and theatres' spatial configuration, the number of high-definition cameras typically ranges from five to eight, and these are cut live into a single feed. Generally, two full camera rehearsals take place before the actual (live)cast. Theatres' approach in prioritizing cinema audiences also includes adjustments made for lighting, sound, and makeup. Flo Buckeridge, NT Live General Manager, explains:

To be as reflective as possible of the sound in the theatre [...] we bring in a sound team who live mix the sound from the theatre into 5.1 surround sound for cinemas. We also bring in a lighting supervisor for the broadcast who [works]

23. Philip Auslander, "Digital Liveness. A Historico-Philosophical Perspective," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 34, no. 3, September 2012, p. 6.

with the lighting designer and operators [...] to make the light appropriate for the cameras [...]. Some changes [also] need to be made to hair, makeup and costume to accommodate what is more exposed on the big screen than it would be to a theatre audience.²⁴

With respect to opera, audiences have equally become accustomed to high standards of sound quality. The Met Live and NT Live strive to deliver production quality, and professionals are sought to film these performances (NT Live reports that the cost of production averages £350,000 (close to 600,000 Canadian dollars). Special equipment such as a digital projector is also required in the broadcasting cinemas).

Capturing a shared experience

Directors also implement filming methods designed to instill a sensation of communal engagement reminiscent of theatre reception: choices in filming the live theatre audience strategically encourage the broadcast spectators' response to model itself on that of their counterparts watching the performance live in the theatre. As Buckeridge states, "The atmosphere created by [the live public's] reactions to the production adds to the sense of shared experience—we can hear their laughter or applause for instance."²⁵ While some directors may record performances without a live audience for logistical reasons,²⁶ the decision of whether to keep spectators in the frame and how to show them also affects broadcast viewers' relationship with the performance. While The Met Live, Globe on Screen, and NT Live film their productions with spectators *in situ*, the way they capture live audiences differs significantly between them. The Shakespeare Globe's stage directors exploit the setting to showcase the live audience's performing role. If actors invite spectators to become participants in the performance narrative, for instance, the broadcast viewers' response is influenced by the live audience's interaction with the performers. When the live public's identity

24. Flo Buckeridge, (interviewed by Sandrine Siméon), January 2016, Sandrine Siméon & Agathe Torti Alcayaga (eds.), *Coup de Théâtre*, no. 31, *À vos écrans ! La scène anglophone en 2D*, 2017, p. 161.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

26. Thomas Kail shot *Hamilton* (2000) during two live performances, but recorded Steadicam and close-up shots during a performance without an audience.

shifts to the narrative sphere, the broadcast viewers find themselves momentarily repositioned to become the exclusive audience.²⁷

Some of the NT Live filmed productions more easily construct an exclusive viewing experience for their spectators, emphasizing direct contact with the stage. Productions like *Skylight* (staged by Stephen Daldry and filmed by Robin Lough in 2014 at the Wyndhams in London's West End on a proscenium stage), for instance, can avoid showing the public during the performance, reserving only glimpses of it before the play starts, during intermissions, and at the very end during applause. However, in some of the wider shots for the filming of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (staged by Marianne Elliot and filmed by Nick Wickham in 2012 at the Cottesloe²⁸), *Frankenstein* (staged by Danny Boyle and filmed by Tim Van Someren in 2010), and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (staged by Benedict Andrews and filmed by Nick Wickham in 2014), which were performed in the round, it is nearly impossible to elude the public encircling the stage. Likewise at the Globe, which is designed to foster interactions between performers and spectators, it is impossible to exclude the audience from the frame, except in closer takes. Including the live audience in the frame is thus contingent on the playing area and seating arrangement, the staging of the production itself, as well as the artistic choices of the broadcast directors to highlight the co-presence of and engagement between the stage and the audience.

Emphasizing the theatrical markers

Along with the technology affording a high-quality perceptive experience and the methods conveying an impression of collective involvement, Lindsey Brandon Hunter proposes two additional approaches to underlining a broadcast's live qualities. The "disappearance strategy"²⁹ consists in withholding the filmed productions from general public release for some time after a (live)cast.³⁰ To keep the screen event as

27. For more on this subject, see Ana Andes, "The Instability of Suspending Audience Disbelief: Filming Productions at the Globe and the National Theater," in Siméon & Torti Alcayaga (eds.), 2017, p. 82.

28. Now the Dorfman Theatre.

29. Lindsay Brandon Hunter, "'We Are Not Making a Movie': Constituting Theatre in Live Broadcast," *Theatre Topics*, vol. 29, no. 1, March 2019, p. 20.

30. Such a proposition was already attempted with Richard Burton's 1964 Broadway production, directed by John Gielgud. It was recorded in live performance and edited into a film shown for only two days in nearly a thousand movie houses simultaneously across the U.S. This new form, called Theatrofilm, was made possible via the process of Electronovision, <https://thewoostergroup.org/hamlet> (accessed 12 October 2021).

evanescent as the theatrical one, broadcasts are only projected in cinemas, not made available via video on demand, and their access may be restricted to a consultation in the theatres' archives.³¹ The "synchronous consumption"³² strategy consists in underlining the marks of immediacy whether or not the filming and its broadcast are simultaneous. Hunter suggests that the conventionality of theatre-making practices implemented in the process of mediatization may define theatre more than its ephemerality, as Auslander had already proposed. Enquiring if liveness is less "theatre's ontology than its brand,"³³ she notes that "theatrical conventions that digital translations enshrine are fundamental to the product's reception as a form of theatre—potentially far more so than their gesture toward liveness."³⁴ For example, displaying streaming shots of spectators sitting in the playhouse, the dimming of the lights and the work of stagehands during a scene change, are meant to preserve and highlight some of the traditional theatre-making practices. Liveness, in this context, epitomizes a set of theatrical qualities and conventions shaped by film audience's reception and expectations.

Theatres' priority to render the mediatized process seamless also guides filming and broadcasting practices. Robin Lough, camera director for the Royal Shakespeare Company's broadcasts, considers this to be the main challenge of filming theatre: "Cinema audience should always feel totally engaged with the stage production without ever noticing how the transformation to screen is taking place."³⁵ Lough also claims that aesthetic decisions and choices are "done best when noticed least." Film crew members were also heard declaring: "[I]f you notice what we're doing, then we're not doing it right."³⁶ Therefore, to achieve immediacy, it is recommended that a medium effaces its own expressive means to keep mediatization invisible; it must deny that which defines it.

31. Auslander notes that access restrictions also contribute to the prestige of these events: "The less an event leaves behind in the way of artifacts and documentation, the more symbolic capital accrues to those who were in attendance." Auslander [1999], 2008, p. 67.

32. Hunter, 2019, p. 20.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Sandwell, 2012.

36. Hunter, 2019, p. 18.

Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin identify a paradoxical phenomenon that they conceptualize as the “double logic of remediation.”³⁷ They define remediation as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms,” which has two facets: hypermediacy “whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium,” and “transparent” immediacy, “a style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium.”³⁸ They write:

In digital technology [...], hypermediacy expresses itself as multiplicity. If the logic of immediacy leads one [to erase] the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible. [...] The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience.³⁹

Bolter and Grusin refer to Jonathan Crary's study⁴⁰ on the mechanical technologies of reproduction of the nineteenth century to illustrate this paradox. One of the examples is the phenakitoscope, which “incorporated transparent immediacy *within* hypermediacy.” While it “employed a spinning wheel and multiple images to give the impression of movement, [...] it was not easy for the user to ignore or forget the contraption [...]. The phenakitoscope made the user aware of the desire for immediacy that it attempted to satisfy.”⁴¹ In a similar way, and although the multiplication of cinematic values⁴² should make mediatization more conspicuous, film spectators have been conditioned to accept certain conventions, designed to emulate, in the words of Bolter and Grusin, the “rich sensorium of human” perception.

For instance, continuity editing, a paratactic system of temporal adjacency, which consists in “placing disparate things adjacent to each other in such a way as to implicate a ‘logic of continuity’ between them,”⁴³ has been normalized. So have multi-camera set-ups, a variety of shots producing a coherent visual rendering of the stage via seamless editing. Conventional sequential editing, avoiding elaborate

37. Jay David Bolter & Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 2000.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 273.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 33–34.

40. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1990.

41. Both quotes are in Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 37.

42. Cinematic values include camera movements, shots angles, composition, and scale.

43. Scannell, 2014, p. 159.

transition devices found in fiction films—such as dissolve, wipe, and fade—in favour of straight cuts, further effects a logic of continuity, thereby minimizing the potential impression of an event's time-shifted consumption. What is more, viewers tend to adopt a position where they focus on what is shown—the stage and the actors—rather than the way in which the performance is filmed. The broadcast event thus seems to unfold unmediatized.

Likewise, the cinema screen, supposed to replicate the stage aesthetics, instead provides an image where objects may appear bigger than they would on the theatre stage—even more so when close-ups are featured—hence calling attention to the process of mediatization. Indeed, since it is rare to perceive an object outside of its context, these images have more narrative and visual weight than others, they “capte[ent] et oriente[ent] l'attention de l'auditoire, en intervenant directement dans le film.”⁴⁴ Additionally, the multiplication of cinematic values communicate to the broadcast public much more than an experience homologous to its theatre counterpart since the former are offered a wide range of viewpoints from several positions in the theatre. Likewise, sweeping camera movements or aerial shots do not correspond to any playhouse's seat or spectator's perspective, but they represent the point of view of the cameras the director operates from the control room. Certain types of shots, for instance, are markedly reserved for the broadcast public. The bell in *Frankenstein*, perched high above the stage in the fly loft, and thus unnoticeable to most if not all playhouse attendees until it can be heard, is in contrast made perceptible on screen with several close-up takes. *Everyman* (staged and filmed by Rufus Norris in 2015) even inserts a selfie of one of the characters in the streaming shots of the live performance for the exclusive benefit of its viewers. The use of the selfie brings to the fore the potentiality of hypermediation, suspending the desired transparency of the broadcasting theatres; this overt act of mediatization again emphasizes a dissimilarity of experience between both publics. It is also another salient example of the paradox Bolter and Grusin describe, as it “[inscribes] mediatization within the im-mediate”⁴⁵ and a potential response to audience's expectations concerning filmic preferences in a highly mediatized culture. Lastly, the high quality of sound, enhanced by microphones

44. Pierre Sorlin, “Cinéma/télévision, un conflit que le public n'arbitre plus,” *Des arts et des spectacles à la télévision : le regard du téléspectateur*, Anne Benetello & Anne-Marie Gourdon (eds.), Paris, CNRS Éditions, 2000, p. 171.

45. Auslander [1999], 2008, p. 57.

placed on stage and often on actors, conveys a heightened sensory experience reserved for the broadcast spectator. These inherent features of film rhetoric act as narrative and aesthetic indexes, and add to hypermediacy, denoting a preponderance bequeathed to filmic expression rather than “honour[ing] the integrity”⁴⁶ of the play. Consequently, the way in which stage performances are perceived depends on their mediatization, and accordingly, the medium’s rhetoric cannot but be foregrounded rather than effaced.

REVEALING MOMENTS IN TWO NT LIVE BROADCAST PRODUCTIONS

Numerous productions filmed at the National Theatre testify to the directors’ meaningful contribution to liveness. Notable broadcasts include Tim Van Someren’s *Frankenstein* (2010) and *Treasure Island* (2015), Nicholas Hytner’s *Hamlet* (2010), Bijan Sheibani’s *The Kitchen* (2011), Nick Wickham’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* (2014), Rufus Norris’ *Everyman* (2015), etc. In contrast, the filming is less remarkable in broadcast productions like Anna D. Shapiro’s *Of Mice and Men* (2015), Simon Godwin’s *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (2015), Adam Penford’s *The Madness of George III* (2018), Jeremy Herrin’s *All My Sons* (2019), because of the nature of these plays—for example, Robin Lough’s *Skylight* features a simply staged dialogue between two characters in a single set representing the confines of a kitchen.

To underline the ways in which broadcast directors enhance and prioritize their viewers’ interpretive perspectives, and the impact the directors’ filmic choices have on their public’s emotional and cognitive experience, I analyze revealing moments in NT Live’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *Medea*. The mise-en-scène and cinematography, the elaborate staging and décor in these productions have undoubtedly played a role in the directors’ creative shooting and editing decisions to emphasize their film’s distinct rhetoric; even more so in *The Curious Incident*, where special effects are predominant and easily appropriated by film’s inherent ontology—digital projections, along with sound and lighting effects used on stage provide what André Bazin would describe as a “true hallucination.”⁴⁷ The hyperreal capacity of the filmic image to blur the distinction between reality and its representation allows these special effects to emulate locations from the real world.

46. Siméon, 2017, p. 162.

47. My translation. André Bazin, “Ontologie de l’image photographique,” *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma*, Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 1993, p. 16 (our translation).

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

The Curious Incident was staged by Marianne Elliot and opened in the National Theatre's smallest stage, the Cottesloe, in August 2012. The first (live)cast filmed in public by Nick Wickham followed in September. Cameras were placed around the square stage as if in the position of the public in the first-row seats; others were situated in the upper rows, and one in the fly tower of the theatre. The camera placements provided a variety of perspectives, while the change in focal lengths allowed for various scales of shots. As a result, the public, surrounding the stage on three sides, often appears in the frame.

On stage, to figure a dream-like sequence, stagehands prop the body of the protagonist, Christopher Boone, in the air. The lights in the theatre dim drastically and, on the stage floor itself, dozens of small lights illuminate to represent a starred night sky. The same scene is captured for the screen in an aerial take, the limits of the camera lens aligning with those of the stage. As a result, the stagehands lifting



Fig. 1. An image from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* ©Brinkhoff/Moegenburg.

Christopher's body disappear in the obscurity, and Christopher appears to be floating in space (see Fig. 1).⁴⁸

The point is not to compare what is perceived on stage and on screen by their respective publics, since the former's fixed perspective differs according to their seat in the theatre while the latter's tends to be varied. Instead, I suggest the film exploits its ontology—its capacity for visual illusion—in order to propose a distinctive multisensory experience to its spectators. Such a shot is evidently composed for them since the illusion can only be activated by a combination of elements composed by the film director. The aerial shot reserved for the broadcast viewer, the framing excluding the live public, and the editing isolating this particular action, all concur to fool the senses and make the viewer forget that the scene actually takes place on a stage. This scene may be one of the most salient illustrations of ontological exchange between theatre and cinema: the illusion is accomplished on theatre grounds, yet it benefits from filmic devices.

Another scene features a camera movement that affects the course of the story. In one scene, Christopher converses with a neighbour. A medium close-up shot frames them. The camera, placed right outside the stage arena, slowly zooms out, eventually revealing the figure of Christopher's father reading his son's diary. At that point, Christopher, along with the neighbour, stands in the background while his father occupies the foreground, channeling the broadcast viewers' gaze to this focal point. Focalization assumes diverse narrative functions and usually directs the attention to what is important. In this scene, the zoom operates as a prolepsis, drawing a direct correlation between this particular instant and a later time in the narrative, when Christopher discovers his father has read his diary. Assuming a handful of live spectators, sitting in the exact same axis, interpret the scene similarly, those sitting on the opposite side of the stage who see a reverse perspective of the scene may focus instead on the interaction between Christopher and his interlocutor, possibly missing an important narrative element. The scenography choice in *The Curious Incident*—a combination of shot movement and scale—hence visually dramatizes a turning point in the action and places the cinema audiences in an informed position. In this

48. See the first image in the official trailer, available on youtube.com: <https://youtu.be/tPf-cR7jFWLI> (accessed 12 October 2021).

case, the film's rhetorical authority is emphasized since the mise-en-scène and the cinematography anticipate an emotional breakdown.

Medea

Another NT Live production, *Medea*, similarly exploits its own media-specific means to deepen its spectators' emotions. *Medea* was both staged and filmed by Carrie Cracknell, in July and September 2014, respectively. In contrast to *The Curious Incident*—staged at the Cottesloe with spectators surrounding the action on three sides of the stage—*Medea* is filmed at the Olivier, an amphitheatre reminiscent of a Greek theatre. Despite a stage architecture defining a minimally accented proscenium opening, the public is unseen during the broadcast—only a quick shot shows the audience before the first take of the stage. As in *The Curious Incident*, the scenic design plays an important role and the cinematographic means to capture the different parts of the décor contribute to enhance the broadcast public's emotional response.



Fig. 2. An image from *Medea* @Richard Hubert Smith/NT/all rights reserved.

Tom Scutt designed a two-level décor, split between the interior of Medea's house in the forestage and an outdoor area figuring a forest backstage,⁴⁹ where the nurse will find the murdered children (see Fig. 2).

The shooting set-up includes a camera mounted on a crane to navigate seamlessly from one area of the décor to another, combining physical and optical movements. When the nurse discovers Medea's lifeless children, starting as a high-angle long shot, the camera crane sweeps forward, pans downward to the forest, zooms in on the corpses and stops on a slight high-angle close-up shot—close-ups occur only occasionally. If on stage the lights lower considerably to channel the live public's gaze, with this elaborate camera movement, the broadcast viewers become proximate witnesses to Medea's murders. This elaborate movement, combined with the close-up, adds dramatic impact to the scene and intensifies the emotions of the film's audience. First, the camera movement contrasts with the stasis of the children's corpses, emphasizing their lifelessness. Second, the proximity that the close-up affords offers a unique tableau whose emotional charge is all the more amplified by the tight frame, constraining our gaze. Not only does the close-up evacuate off-screen the site surrounding the action, but the nurse also finds the children in the most remote part of the stage, the forest—a décor only ever dimly lit, accentuating its confining and oppressive depth. Such framing *en abyme* intensifies the scene's ghastliness, as the framing within the frame—suggested by the close-up shot within the already compartmentalized set—forces compassion.

WHAT IS LIVENESS?

In itself, a camera has no sense of purpose, even if it plays the necessary role of mediator during the filming of live performances. It records unthinkingly and manifests no human agency: "It is the product of a technology whose function is impassively and mechanically to record what immediately passes before it—this being no more or less than its purely technical capacity in play." The unmotivated task of a camera recording "the visible as a natural fact" thus contrasts with the motivated intent of the broadcasts' makers, "the visible and hearable as an available experience."⁵⁰ While a camera captures

49. Photos can be seen here: <https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/medea-9> (accessed 12 October 2021).

50. The three quotes are in Scannell, 2014, p. 99.

what is immediately visible within the constraints of its frame and position, theatrical performances are filmed for their transmission with a specific intent.

The directors⁵¹ purposely select the best frames amid the continuum of shots provided by the live stream multi-camera set-up, and if the display of theatre-making tools can be said to convey (not emulate as promised) illusory synchronous consumption, it is the directors' artistic vision that contributes to the film's meaning. It is therefore incredible to assert, as Hunter reported, that theatre's mediatization can be concealed, and that immediacy is predicated on the supposed self-effacement of the film creators, as if their artistic contribution was best left inconspicuous.

If liveness is an artifact of mediatization, it also results from a performance executed by broadcast directors for the benefit of their audience. On the one hand, hypermediacy, inherent to film rhetoric yet normalized to the point of invisibility, is designed to enrich the broadcast public's perspective, especially when placed in the position of the exclusive audience; on the other, it is the directors' artistic vision that fosters the interpretive perspective of their public. The directors' aesthetic aspiration⁵² is what provides a better seat *from* the house⁵³ because it offers an enhanced experience, correlatively implicating its own public in the film meaning-making. Consequently, directors who avoid cinematic values that may contain indexical significance deny their own artistic agency and their public's partaking.

What if, instead, distinctive filming practices and the virtuosity of the directors were highlighted? What if theatre broadcasts' unique aesthetic stemming from their inherent hybrid artform on the cusp of film and theatre was emphasized? What if, as an alternative to endorsing the medium's transparency as the main attractive aspects of a (live)cast, theatres featured its opacity, the process over the product? What if liveness as lure consisted in demanding that the broadcast viewers stay aware of the mediation tools instead of seeing through them?

51. During the interviews I conducted with director Dominique Thiel and producer Gildas Le Roux of La Compagnie des Indes, both said that the vision of the film creators prevails, even when film and stage directors work closely before the shoot begins.

52. There is more to explore concerning crossover filming techniques between live television and the public's expectation for more creative cinema, since live performance broadcasts capitalize on both. However, even if live performance broadcasts find their origins in television broadcasting, it is important to note that broadcast directors specialize in this type of artistic performance filming for the big screen.

53. Promotional materials often claim that broadcasts provide "the best seat *in* the house" (our emphasis); found in the "About Us" tab: <https://www.ntlive.com/about-us/> (accessed 12 October 2021).

Liveness, as I conceive it, demands a shift in perspective: it is not only the shown images that are significant but also the ways in which they are presented. The filmed performance is not an imitation of its staged production, but its mediatised presentation. The way the images of the stage are interpreted is the result of the way they are perceived on the screen, which depends on the rules of the art form presenting them. Even though the images of the stage cannot be ignored, “l’accent est mis sur l’objet représenté qui doit, pour être réussi (kalôs ekhein), obéir aux règles de l’art (tekhnè),”⁵⁴ which Jacques Rancière also expresses through this distinction: “il s’en déduit que la rupture avec la représentation en art n’est pas l’émancipation par rapport à la ressemblance mais bien l’émancipation de la ressemblance par rapport à [la représentation].”⁵⁵ Liveness results from a cooperative relationship between transitivity (what of the stage is seen) and self-referentiality (how what is seen is shown).

The analyses of decisive moments in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *Medea* show that remarkable cinematic values foregrounded by the directors’ aesthetic skills accomplish more than merely conveying a similarity of experience between live and broadcast publics. They establish how, in the mediatisation process, live scenic elements are successfully assimilated to craft heightened illusory and sensory dramatic experiences for broadcast spectators and stimulate their interpretative meaning; distinguishing—or emancipating⁵⁶—them from their live counterparts. These filmed productions also bring to light how the exchanges between live and mediatised events serve to develop the aesthetic of both film and theatre⁵⁷—the matter may be especially pertinent when the same person directs both the performance and the film, as is the case for *Medea*.⁵⁸

54. Aristote, *La Poétique*, Roselyne Dupont-Roc & Jean Lallot (eds.), Paris, Seuil, 1980, p. 20.

55. Jacques Rancière, *Le Destin des images*, Paris, La Fabrique éditions, 2003, p. 136.

56. Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur émancipé*, Paris, La Fabrique éditions, 2008.

57. In another article for *Intermédialités/Intermediality*, I explore the intermedial nature of this type of film. “Film-théâtre, intermédialité et nouveaux enjeux esthétiques,” *Intermédialités/Intermediality*, no. 33, 2019, <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/im/2019-n33-im04907/1065016ar/> (accessed 12 October 2021).

58. I would like to credit the anonymous reader who suggested the idea of “*médiagénie latente*.” If the staging in these two productions certainly lent itself to elaborate filming values, the fact that *Medea* was staged and filmed by the same director also emphasizes the mutual influence film has on the stage and *vice versa*.

“Digital is the only safe stage right now,”⁵⁹ since the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the live entertainment industry. The distribution of (live)casts worldwide became even more timely and relevant than ever before: concerts, operas, and sports events continue in many places to perform in empty stadiums and auditoriums for broadcast publics. The Met Live shut its doors and offered free streams from its catalog. Likewise, NT Live made its repertoire available via streaming platforms. It remains to be seen how this global pandemic will impact our ways of absorbing cultural events and how it may contribute to a growing importance for (live)casts and an overall reassessment of liveness.

59. Charles McNulty, “Digital Theater Is All the Rage, But Could It Destroy the Live Stage?,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 May 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-05-13/coronavirus-theater-digital-streaming-risks> (accessed 12 October 2021).

Is It Live? Liveness as Lure, or the (Live)Cast Illusion: The Director's Cut

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ABSTRACT

Scholars and publics associate the term “liveness” with broadcasts of stage productions—but what does liveness refer to? This essay evaluates some of the protean forms the notion of liveness has so far assumed and proposes to underscore the motivated role of the broadcasts’ directors. Liveness emerges as an artifact of mediatization that encompasses more than an illusion of immediacy, a live-like feeling, or capitalizes on spectators’ habitus to lure them to screening venues. Liveness is in itself a performance that confirms the unique aesthetic of filmed theatrical productions designed to enhance and prioritize their viewers’ perspective.

RÉSUMÉ

Bien que les universitaires et le public associent le terme « liveness » aux diffusions de performances sur scène, à quoi fait-il référence ? Cet essai évalue certaines des formes que la notion de « liveness » a jusqu’à présent endossées et propose de considérer le rôle des réalisateurs dans la création de ces diffusions. Le concept de « liveness » émerge alors comme le produit d’une médiatisation qui excède l’illusion d’immédiateté, une impression de direct, ou qui exploiterait l’habitus des spectateurs pour les attirer dans les cinémas. Le concept de « liveness » devient en soi une performance conçue pour mettre en lumière l’unique esthétique de ces films et privilégier la perspective de leurs spectateurs.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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