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Understanding Livecasting: Exploring the Relationship between Theatre, Cinema and Livecasting

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ABSTRACT

Since 2008, the Royal National Theatre has been beaming several plays per year into cinemas across the United Kingdom in the form of livecasts. These live transmissions have created a form of access to the National Theatre previously unavailable to those outside London, and have been well enough received by audiences to have become a fixture of cinema programming across this country and others. Taking NT Live (the National Theatre's digital wing responsible for livecasting) as its focus, this dissertation aims to fill the current gap in academic writing dealing with livecasts. How is livecasting related to past attempts to record or transmit theatre, and how have those predecessors' aesthetics been drawn upon by NT Live? The relationship between historical precedents (such as live television dramas, pre-recorded theatre and Electronovision) and livecasting are examined from aesthetic and historical perspectives. The specific set of aesthetics visible in livecasting are analyzed through textual analyses of several NT Live productions, and the impact of film language on the plays transmitted is examined as a key aspect of the hybridized medium of livecasting. The "liveness" of livecasting is also examined with reference to existing theoretical frameworks within film and television and theatre studies, and livecasting's offer of co-presence in time, but not space, is discussed. How are livecast audiences expected or encouraged to feel a part of the theatre experience, if at all? The experience of attending a livecast as opposed to a film or play is examined, and the degree to which livecasts make theatre available to wider audiences is discussed as a key element of this new technology, particularly with reference to the National Theatre, whose remit and very name suggest that its plays should be available to the widest audience possible. This dissertation provides a discussion of some of the most fundamental aspects of livecasting, a subject bound to receive further academic treatment as this new transmedia option becomes more firmly entrenched in our cultural landscape.

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Introduction

The subject of livecasting is only beginning to receive its share of scholarly attention, but its success has already altered the way audiences can experience both theatre and cinema. By recording a play, opera, ballet or concert in a theatre and transmitting it in real time to cinemas, companies that produce livecasts have introduced the possibility of seeing live events on cinema screens. The questions raised by livecasting offer scholars fodder for a range of debate. Because livecasts operate in a liminal space between three established media, theatre, film and television, the critical framework of this dissertation is informed by both theatre studies and film and television studies. Taking as its focus the output of NT Live, the digital arm of the Royal National Theatre, this dissertation examines some fundamental questions about the aesthetics, form and ramifications of livecasting, and explores its relation to theatre, film and television. An in depth examination of this subject is overdue: livecasting is an exciting new element of our media landscape which is already having a profound effect on both cinema and theatre, and has changed the way the National Theatre is accessed by audiences throughout the United Kingdom.

The world's first livecast was transmitted from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 2006 to 100 cinemas in five countries (Barker, 2013: 2). On 25 June, 2009, the National Theatre transmitted its first livecast, *Phèdre* (2009), into 70 cinemas across the United Kingdom, where it was seen live by 14,000 viewers, and by 14,000 more throughout Europe and North America (Nesta, 2010: 4). Although the transmission was not seen in real time in some locations due to differences in time zones, "it is thought that a staggering 50,000 [people] saw *Phèdre* as it was performed on 25th June" (Nesta, 2010: 4). *Phèdre* was significant not just as the first NT Live transmission, but as the first livecast of a play. Prior to *Phèdre*, only opera, ballet and concerts had been livecast (Nesta, 2011: 11), so *Phèdre*

represents the first transmedia convergence of theatre and livecasting. Numerous theatre companies, including the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company and the Globe Theatre have followed in NT Live's footsteps and begun livecasting selected plays. Since 2009, NT Live has transmitted more than 40 productions over seven seasons, and its website boasts that these presentations "have now been experienced by over 5.5 million people in over 2,000 venues around the world, including over 650 venues in the UK alone" (National Theatre Live, 2016). NT Live's success has been enabled by the switch to digital methods of exhibition in cinemas rather than traditional celluloid, a desirable change for cinemas considering that celluloid "costs had topped $1,800 per unit. Digital unit costs could be as low as $300" (Barker, 2013: 3). In the UK, the switch to digital projection was largely facilitated by the now-defunct UK Film Council, whose "£12 million Digital Screen Network helped to fund the conversion [to digital] of 240 independent cinema screens across the UK" (Parliament. House of Lords, 2010: 509). The Digital Screen Network was intended to allow specialized films, such as foreign, documentary and alternative content (the category into which livecasts fall), to "reach around 30 million people throughout the UK" (Goldberg, 2008). Prior to the initiative of the Digital Screen Network, too few cinemas were equipped to receive livecasts for NT Live to have achieved the reach across the UK that it currently enjoys; the public initiative of the UK Film Council has been integral to NT Live's success, just as public funding has always played a vital role in the National Theatre's existence.

Because livecasting is a recent development, there is a dearth of academic literature available on the subject. Martin Barker's slim *Live to Your Local Cinema* (2013) is the only book-length study of livecasting currently available; it is from this book that I have borrowed the convention of using the word "livecast" as a "short, and sort of descriptive" (Barker, 2013: 11) alternative to competing terms such as "event cinema", "alternative content" or "expanded cinema". The most important contribution of Barker's book is a sociological study based on

his own research, for which he surveyed 644 UK livecast audience members, supplemented by similar studies conducted by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (Nesta), the Met and Picturehouse Cinemas. Barker is able to "paint quite a detailed portrait of the audiences for livecasts by drawing on the overlapping findings" (Barker, 2013: 24) of these four studies, and the subjects of audience demographics, expectations and reactions will not be discussed in this dissertation because Barker has addressed them adequately. For more academic writing focusing on livecast audiences, see Abbott, 2015; audiences are so far the only aspect of livecasting to have received detailed academic treatment. At present, the majority of literature about livecasting is found in the popular press. Nesta has also provided literature about NT Live, but these reports will be cited sparingly in this dissertation, and primarily for statistical information rather than analysis. The facts that NT Live's first season "was underwritten by a seed grant of £75,000" (Rosenthal, 2013: 796) from Nesta and that Nesta's reports on NT Live have been consistently uncritical ought to serve as red flags for objective academics, and less biased sources must be sought.

Because so little academic literature about livecasting exists, Chapter One will be an examination not of the history of scholarly writing on the subject, but of the historical antecedents to livecasting. Predecessors will be identified for their influence on the aesthetics of livecasting, as well as for representing previous attempts to present theatre in cinemas and on television. The strengths and shortcomings of these historical precedents will be discussed in relation to livecasting's own characteristics, and the ways in which livecasting addresses or is unable to address its predecessors' failings will be considered.

Chapter Two will offer an examination of the ways in which the mediation of the camera affects the meaning of the play being transmitted. How do camera movements, cuts and the language of film influence the livecast audience's experience and interpretation of a play, and to what degree is the introduction of film aesthetics exploited or minimized by the

directors of livecasts? (It should be noted that because this dissertation is an examination of livecasts rather than the plays with which they originate, the directors cited will be the screen directors, not the stage directors, unless otherwise noted. In all cases, both directors' names can be found in the bibliography.) These questions will be answered through the traditional framework of film and television textual analyses, which will be applied to several NT Live presentations, archive copies of which are available to be viewed on site at the National Theatre Archive in London.

The key issue of co-presence in time and space will be explored in Chapter Three. Livecasts are transmitted in real time to cinemas that are in similar time zones to the theatre of origin, and this preservation of the spontaneous nature of liveness is, as shall be demonstrated, seen by some as the integral characteristic that allows livecasts to give a truer impression of the theatre experience than previous attempts at filming live performances. If livecasts allow for co-presence in time, though, what effect is had by the absence of co-presence in space? What role is played by the theatre audience in a livecast, and how is the cinema audience encouraged to identify either with their counterparts in the theatre or with the performers on a remote stage? These questions will be answered through analysis of the representation of the theatre audience in livecasts, and within the framework of literature pertaining to liveness and audience identification from both theatre studies and film and television studies.

Chapter Four will consider the effects of livecasting on the National Theatre and on British theatre in general. How does livecasting fit in with the National's mandate to be a theatre for the entire nation rather than just for London? Can livecasting be seen as a step toward the democratization of theatre, or at least of the National? How might the National's extended reach into previously untapped markets (such as towns too small to receive National Theatre touring companies) affect existing regional theatres, and what role is played by the international transmission of NT Live productions in the globalization of theatre and of the

National? Finally, the question of whether ticket prices for livecasts promote accessibility will be discussed.

This dissertation aims to approach an understanding of livecasting's relationships with theatre, cinema and television, and to provide a foundational discussion of a subject that promises to elicit more debate in the coming years as NT Live and other livecasters continue to solidify their position as an alternative way of seeing theatre. This dissertation questions the form of livecasting: does it amount to something new or is it a hybrid or transmedia combination of existing cultural forms enabled by digital technology? What impact does the advent of livecasting portend for the existing medium of theatre? Spatial limitations preclude the exhaustive examination of livecasting for which the academic world is still waiting, but this dissertation will provide the foundation required for a richer understanding of an important development which is currently affecting the states of both theatre and cinema.

Chapter One: The Predecessors of Livecasting

It is fair to say that livecasting is a unique phenomenon. Prior to the first livecast in December of 2006, it had never been possible to see a theatrical production performed in real time transmitted to a cinema screen. However, livecasts comprise familiar elements. Live broadcasts are not new; they have existed on television and radio for a long time. Remotely viewing stage performances is not new; plays and concerts have been captured on film and video before. It is the combination of these elements, made possible by the proliferation of digital technology in cinemas, that makes livecasting a unique phenomenon which has brought about a new situation in both cinemas and theatres. Some of those predecessors to livecasting will be examined in this chapter, with a focus on what livecasting draws from each and where it differs. These predecessors can be roughly divided into two categories which will be taken one at a time: filmed performances and live broadcasts.

Filmed performances

The term "filmed theatre" may seem familiar or self-explanatory, but its definition is malleable. It might refer to anything from a cinematic adaptation of a play to a video archive performance taped by a local theatre company. Used pejoratively, the term can be levied at any film which emphasises dialogue over visual storytelling. Andre Bazin states that filmed theatre "frequently passes for heresy" (Bazin, 1967: 76) and that it is generally regarded as an inferior species of cinema. Bazin does not define "filmed theatre", but his examples demonstrate how he understood the term. One film he disparagingly calls "canned theatre" (Bazin, 1967: 118) is *Topaze* (1951), Marcel Pagnol's film adaptation of his own play. Despite Bazin's categorization, *Topaze* is not filmed theatre in a sense relevant to a discussion of livecasting, but simply a film adapted from a play. The method of its production, being shot in multiple takes on sound stages without an audience and assembled in the editing room, was

entirely cinematic; it looks like a movie. For these same reasons, many other films which one might naturally label "filmed theatre" can also be thrown out of our discussion, among them *As You Like It* (1936)*, A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)*, Othello* (1952), *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1962)*, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), *The Birthday Party* (1968), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) and *Miss Julie* (2014). Whereas the intent of a livecast is to present a live theatrical production to remote audiences, all of the films listed above are *adaptations* of plays which are shot as films, using cinematic techniques to varying degrees in order to tell the story. Orson Welles said of his adaptation of *Othello*, "The visual style of the film mirrors the marriage at the centre of the play, which is not that of Othello and Desdemona, but the perverse marriage of Othello and Iago" (*Filming Othello* 1978). This use of visual motifs is not employed in livecasts, nor are subjective shots such as the blurred POV shots from Stanley's myopic perspective in *The Birthday Party* or the skewed angles used in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* to suggest drunken abandon. Although the camera is used in livecasts to heighten the impact of key moments and very occasionally to convey information (as the next chapter will demonstrate), the aim of NT Live is to provide access to a stage play that *looks* like a stage play, whereas the films listed above offer cinematic adaptations of plays. Furthermore, the very liveness of a livecast precludes the use of the post-production effects to which the above films are subject, while the presence of an audience in the theatre affects where the cameras are able to go (the lengthy tracking shot in which George finds a gun in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* would not be achievable in a livecast), and perhaps also influences the actors' performances; the influence of a co-present audience on performers will be addressed in Chapter Three, but it can be seen at the very least that performing in a theatre forces actors to project in a way unnecessary on a film set, and the performances are therefore unlike conventional screen acting. The movies named above might be considered

filmed theatre from certain perspectives, but their relevance to livecasting is minimal, and such films are brought up only to be dismissed.

For these same reasons it is also possible to dismiss a type of film which one might immediately call "filmed theatre": episodes of television series such as *Wednesday Play* (1964-1970), *Play for Today* (1970-1984) and *Laurence Olivier Presents* (1976-1978). Individual episodes of these series are often referred to in popular literature as "plays", but they are better defined as filmed adaptations of plays, not very different in their execution from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* or *Topaze.* Many of these productions are shot on multiple sets and include location shooting; NT Live productions take place entirely on artificial sets, never yielding to the expectation of realism which often informs both televised and cinematic adaptations of plays. Even televised plays that are confined to a single set, such as *Abigail's Party* (1977), fit the mould of a movie better than that of a play because multiple takes remain possible in the absence of a live audience. It is also clear that *Abigail's Party* has been assembled from multiple takes as shots in the kitchen, hallway and living room would have required different set-ups. Aesthetically, televised plays from the series mentioned are generally more willing than livecasts to use the camera for exposition, perhaps not with the symbolic overtones of Welles' *Othello*, but in a manner reminiscent of film nonetheless. Consider a moment in *The Collection* (1976), which was presented as an episode of *Laurence Olivier Presents*, in which information is imparted to the television audience in a way that would be impossible in the theatre. When Harry asks where his fruit juice is, the answer is revealed to the audience with a close-up of the glass, followed by close-ups of each character looking at the glass to establish a spatial geography of the room. The characters' glances alone would have been enough to draw the theatre audience's attention to the glass, but the television audience has received the information through edits. This method of conveying information is generally avoided in NT Live productions. In a livecast, the camera strives to

eliminate the distance between the performance and the remote audience, a goal which, at its best, it achieves with less dependence on the language of film than the revelation of the glass in *The Collection*. Television drama series stand as a precedent to livecasting in that they represent an attempt to bring theatre to a wider audience (see Caughie, 2000 and Cooke, 2003 for an examination of their significance), but they do not bear as much aesthetic resemblance to live theatre as livecasts do.

The use of film language, the possibility of retakes and the absence of a live audience may make it appear that there is no difference between cinematic adaptations like *Topaze* and televised adaptations like *The Collection*. Indeed, similarities between the two forms are plentiful, but televised episodes differ importantly from feature films and from livecasts in the simple fact that they are presented on television rather than in the cinema, which has an effect on the way audiences experience them:

> Drama on television…is only part of a whole system of programmes that exist simultaneously…There is much choice for a television evening, and choices can also be made while the audience is watching. Most performances in theatre are far more completely isolated from other performances and occurrences, which isolation makes a performance in theatre a special occasion (van Stapele, 1988: 240).

That isolation from other programs also exists for members of a cinema audience, whether they are watching a movie or a livecast. However, television viewers are exempt from the protocol of the cinema or theatre, in which audience members are expected to remain silent in a space shared with strangers. In the way they are experienced by audiences, televised plays are even less similar to livecasts than feature films are.

All of the films discussed so far, from the cinematic adaptations to the ones made for television, do share one important attribute with livecasting: they attempt to make plays available in major cities accessible to wider audiences. Bazin believes Pagnol made *Topaze* "to make his play available to the provinces with a 'Paris cast'" (Bazin, 1967: 118), and many

episodes of the television series mentioned are adaptations of plays which had already enjoyed

success in London's West End; the opening titles of *The Collection* describe the play's success

in London. This concept of opening plays up to wider audiences, to democratizing theatre by

adapting it to another medium, is an important element of livecasting which will be discussed

further in Chapter Four, but whose roots are visible in many of these examples. Perhaps the

clearest antecedents to NT Live's attempt to make plays more widely available are the

National Theatre's own early attempts at capturing their productions on film. In the 1960s, the

National Theatre filmed several of its productions for television and cinema. *Uncle Vanya*

(1963), *Othello* (1965) and *The Dance of Death* (1969) represent the National's early attempts

to bring stage productions to the screen; *Uncle Vanya* was broadcast on subscription television

stations in America and the United Kingdom, while *Othello* was released theatrically. These

films are shot in a similar style to modern livecasts (the technical limitations of the time

notwithstanding) with two key exceptions: they were not broadcast live, nor were they filmed

before live audiences. Those two elements, which are central to NT Live's modern

productions, were unfeasible at the time, but these films can now be seen as evidence of the

National Theatre's early interest in presenting plays that looked like plays, with the edges of

the stage and artificial scenery fully visible; Welles called the National Theatre's film of

Othello a "cinematic record of a stage production" (*Filming Othello* 1978). With the advent of

digital cinema, technology enabled the National to go beyond mere recording and to simulate

the experience of seeing a play with its vital sense of liveness somewhat intact.

Another interesting ancestor to livecasting which made mediated plays more widely

available existed in North America from 1973-75 in the form of American Film Theatre

(AFT), which presented two seasons of filmed plays in cinemas. Aesthetically, these

productions are similar to the televised plays discussed above (they were filmed without

audiences in the conditions of cinema), but their exhibition was unique. "Offered in 500

theatres in 400 communities in United States [*sic*] and Canada, the series was seen by some

500,000 subscribers" (Comtois, 1974: 522). These subscribers were required to purchase

tickets for an entire season at a time, a strategy in use at the time by some North American

theatre producers such as Ed Mirvish in Toronto. AFT's producer, Ely Landau, referred to the

productions as "film theatre", a label that one contemporary reviewer, M.E. Comtois,

considered "unfortunate in that it implies 'going to the theatre' when one is in fact 'going to a

film'" (Comtois, 1974: 522). This, however, was central to AFT's strategy; the experience of

going to a theatre was approximated in the cinema. Audience members were given playbills

and intermissions occurred during some productions, although no practical call for an interval

existed as there were no sets to be changed or performers to rest. Chapter Four will examine

the experience of attending a livecast and the ways in which cinemas imitate the experience of

attending a play (with playbills and intervals included), but we can see that these elements

have an antecedent in AFT. We can also see that AFT inspired some of the debates pertinent

to livecasting. Comtois states that AFT:

> …stirred up critical tempests which at very least perplex an objective judgment
> about what AFT is, and what is achieves. Theatre critics and film critics alike
> eyed the offerings with suspicion, afraid to praise what might be violating their
> deepest convictions. Since the 1930s it has been axiomatic that you do not hope
> to reproduce theatre on film (Comtois, 1974: 522).

He goes on to reach a conclusion which may well be applied to the study of livecasting: "I

believe we must consider what AFT offers as a hybrid, a new cross-pollination, and allow an

equally original body of criteria to evolve from study of the stage film" (Comtois, 1974: 523).

Perhaps the most important difference between livecasts and all of the examples

referred to above is that the productions discussed are made with only one spectator in mind:

the camera. Livecasts, on the other hand, are simultaneously performed for two audiences.

Performances filmed before audiences are more commonly seen on television than in the

cinema. Many sitcoms, from *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) to *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-present)*,

have been shot before studio audiences. They are, however, performed foremost for the camera, with the possibility of retakes, and the home audience is aware that "the audience exists only because a programme is being made" (Mills, 2005: 50), whereas the theatre audience heard by livecast viewers would be there even if the play were not being relayed. (The effects and meanings of the studio audience on television viewers are examined in Mills, 2005.) Studio audiences are expected to sit through retakes, the most important result of the performance being its recorded version. The authenticity of the audience's laughter is also questionable, as laughs can be inserted or garnished in post-production. More analogous to livecasting is the American television series *Great Performances* (1972-present), whose episodes sometimes bear aesthetic similarities to livecasts; in fact, operas from the Met are sometimes televised by *Great Performances* after their initial live transmissions to cinemas. On *Great Performances*, the sense of liveness is aided by the audible and sometimes visible audience, but evidence of post-production work reminds the television audience that they are not watching a live performance. In *The Aspern Papers* (1988), for example, scene changes are signified by fading out at the end of one scene and immediately fading in on the next, eliminating the transition witnessed in the theatre in real time. This compression of time does not occur in livecasts, nor can it; even the interval is the same length for both the theatre and cinema audiences, whereas *Great Performances* may omit the interval entirely.

Although less common than televised plays, films made for cinematic release have occasionally been filmed with live audiences. *La venganza de Don Mendo* (1961) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2014) are two examples of feature films which present filmed versions of live plays. *La venganza de Don Mendo* is performed on a proscenium stage, with shots of the audience occurring only between acts, but their laughter is audible throughout the performance. Aesthetically, it is similar to the majority of NT livecasts, although the variety of angles on display is far fewer than what we see in a modern livecast. *A Midsummer Night's*

Dream is performed in the round, with the faces of audience members frequently visible in the background, not unlike NT Live's *Coriolanus* (2014). Despite aesthetic similarities, productions such as these differ importantly from livecasts because they frequently comprise pastiches of several performances. In the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, director Julie Taymor reports that she "shot four performances live, with four cameras in different locations surrounding the play, and then for four days we could go onstage and do more single-camera setups" (Adams, 2015). The conditions of a livecast preclude these possibilities, lending even repeat screenings of livecasts a more authentic feeling of "liveness" than recorded performances intended for cinematic exhibition.

The case of Electronovision's *Hamlet*

While all of the examples discussed share some of livecasting's characteristics, the most analogous predecessor to livecasting was Electronovision. Not only did it provide an aesthetic model as the previous examples did, but it was made possible, like livecasting, by recent technological advances which allowed it to offer an unprecedented experience: "a live Broadway hit in your own motion picture theatre" (Dutkowski, 2013). Patented in 1963, Electronovision was "an attempt to combine the electronic recording technology used in television with film production methods" (Jakovljevic, 2010: 106). Electronovision, Inc. produced only three pictures before the company's demise, two of which were recordings of live shows performed for audiences: *Hamlet* (1964) and *The T-A-M-I Show* (1964). The latter serves as an important precursor to the concert documentaries that were soon made possible by the coming of lightweight filming equipment, while the former stands as perhaps the single most relevant ancestor of livecasting. The history of its production, release and marketing holds lessons prescient to the era of livecasting, and an examination of the ways in which *Hamlet* succeeded and failed offers insight into the present state of livecasting.

John Gielgud's production of *Hamlet*, starring Richard Burton in the title role, was recorded at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre in New York using seven electronic cameras on 30 June and 1 July, 1964. The cameras were stationary and their signals were sent to a mixing board underneath the stage, where the information could be processed on site, producing an edited movie without the expenditure of time and money required to edit celluloid. The footage was then transferred to film stock for cinema projection. As well as requiring next to no post-production work, "the system's minimum lighting requirements meant that Electronovision could capture existing stage productions with virtually no additional illumination" (Leff, 1981: 21). For Burton, who invested in the venture, Warner Brothers, who would distribute it, and Electronovision Inc., it seemed that great returns could be had without much effort on anyone's part. The play would be performed as usual, with the live audience undisturbed by the recording equipment, and revenue would be generated by simply taping a regularly scheduled event. William Colleran, the television director to whom Electronovision assigned the task of filming the production, was not even given an opportunity to have a technical rehearsal, instead spending "almost a month at the Luft-Fontanne Theater just watching the production and questioning Burton" (Leff, 1981: 22). To compound his difficulties, Colleran had to succeed the first time because although "filming was to occur over three performances, two of them were restricted to securing protection footage and backstage shots. Essentially, Colleran had one opportunity to film *Hamlet*" (Leff, 1981: 22).

Aesthetically, the finished product was unsatisfactory. The sound quality of *Hamlet* was a serious handicap, as "halfway into the performance, the low and high ends of the audio failed. As a result, those speeches that Burton delivered with great velocity became garbled on the soundtrack" (Leff, 1981: 22). Contemporary reviewer Bosley Crowther complained that "the recording of the voices allows for...annoying vibration or echo" (Leff, 1980: 43). Furthermore, the visuals were poor as the lighting was too dark, a problem Electronovision,

Inc. owner William Sargent blamed on a processing error. This flaw was also criticised by Crowther, who observed that "the photography is fuzzy, especially in the long shots; the lighting is poor and distractingly uneven" (Leff, 1980: 43). This attempt to capture the experience of attending a live theatre production was an idea to which technology, despite Sargent's optimism, had not caught up.

Despite having a disappointing product on their hands, Warner Brothers released the movie with an advertising campaign that emphasised the liveness of the event, understanding that "it wasn't the technology that was seductive, but the virtualization of liveness" (Worthen, 2008: 311). The promotional material for *Hamlet* stressed "the celebrity appeal of Richard Burton and the uniqueness of the live theatrical performance recorded spontaneously, in the theatre, in the presence of an (invisible) audience" (Jakovljevic, 2010: 106). The trailer featured no images from the play, and included instead an introduction by Richard Burton, who states, "This is the theatre of the future, taking shape before your eyes today" (Dutkowski, 2013). The picture was scheduled to play at approximately 1,000 cinemas for two nights only, the ephemeral nature of the experience being emphasised in its promotion: "newspaper ads for *Hamlet* had announced that the film would never be shown anywhere again" (Leff, 1981: 25). As the voiceover in the trailer promised "a live Broadway hit in your own motion picture theatre" (Dutkowski, 2013), the word "live" in the accompanying onscreen text was within quotation marks, hinting at issues of liveness which are now very much at the heart of modern livecasting.

Hamlet was a commercial success, in part because it was not preceded by a press screening. Technically, however, it was considered a failure for the audio-visual shortcomings described above, and for a lack of dynamism which resulted from having seven stationary cameras. Colleran had anticipated this problem, "realiz[ing] that compared to a film, the Electronovision *Hamlet* would seem static, but he hoped that the energy of a 'live' production,

spontaneously photographed, would compensate for spatial limitations" (Leff, 1981: 22). Ultimately, the recording of *Hamlet* (which is now available on DVD despite its stated intention of being a one-time event) is stiflingly static, a failing NT Live is careful to avoid through its frequently roving cameras. *Hamlet*'s release was a financial success, but nobody was convinced that the theatre of the future had actually arrived.

Electronovision, Inc. went on to record one more live event: *The T.A.M.I. Show*, a 1964 concert featuring a slew of contemporary pop stars. *The T.A.M.I. Show* benefited from improvements to Electonovision's image quality. Lighting and issues of image clarity were improved, and the cameras, while still stationary, were positioned to allow for more close-ups than in *Hamlet*, and also to show the audience, as concert documentaries and NT Live productions do. The audio was also improved but not perfected, as "the audience's response occasionally drowned out the songs" (Leff, 1981: 24). Nonetheless, *The T.A.M.I. Show* was another commercial success and Electronovision, Inc. seemed to be in the ascent until the failure of its third motion picture and first studio effort, *Harlow* (1965), which one reviewer called "the worst movie of the year" (Bates, 1965:21), caused the company to fold. The technology was resurrected periodically during the 1970s and '80s, primarily to capture stand-up comedy shows, but it certainly did not revolutionize theatre-going as Burton had suggested it would, and as livecasting is doing today. With this brief outline of Electronovision in mind, let us examine what *Hamlet* shares with modern livecasting, and where the two attempts to capture live theatre differ.

A fundamental difference is livecasting's use of digital technology, both at the theatre and at the point of exhibition. Modern technology provides clear picture and sound, improving on the problems Crowther pointed out (but not wholly eliminating them, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Three). It also enables cinemas to receive live transmissions in a way that was unthinkable in the 1960s. As a result, the word "live" can be removed from its

quotation marks, as livecasts are indeed live in one sense in which modern audiences understand the word (denoting co-presence in time, if not in space, as in a sports event televised live). *Hamlet*, like AFT's productions, was ephemeral by design; it could have been given an infinite cinema run like any other film. Livecasts, on the other hand, are ephemeral by necessity; they cannot occur more than once, and the experience of watching a livecast in real time is more akin to a night at the theatre than watching a print of *Hamlet* could possibly be.

Another key difference between *Hamlet* and NT livecasts is the way in which the National Theatre and NT Live collaborate. Whereas Colleran was required to place his cameras on the balcony or on perches around the stage, NT Live's screen directors are "allowed to put cameras in the best seats in the house" (Hornby, 2011: 197), and unlike Colleran, NT Live's crew has "two full camera rehearsals" (Hornby, 2011: 197) prior to a livecast. Emma Keith, an NT Live producer interviewed for a featurette shown during the interval of *The Beaux' Strategem* (2015), says, "Having the camera rehearsal, going and watching it in a cinema, and then having a second rehearsal where we can make tweaks and changes is really a key part to what we do" (*The Beaux' Strategem* 2015). As a result, modern livecasts are unable to boast the extremely low production costs of *Hamlet*, but they offer a polished, practiced presentation. Additionally, while a perceived benefit of filming *Hamlet* with Electronovision was that the lighting would not need to be altered, NT Live does indeed make adjustments for the benefit of the camera. Broadcast lighting director Mike Le Fevre describes his department's attempt "to keep the original intent that the theatre lighting designer has done to make it translate well onto camera and onto the cinema screen" (*The Beaux' Strategem* 2015). NT Live's theatre audience is compensated for this altered production and the distraction of moving cameras; they "pay reduced prices because they know they are part of a broadcast" (Hornby, 2011: 197). In short, NT Live does not suppose as

Electronovision did that it can compellingly capture a live performance without affecting the theatre audience's experience, which was one of Electronovision's boasts and ultimately one of its pitfalls.

An important shared characteristic of Electronovision's *Hamlet* and modern livecasts is the emphasis in their marketing on the ephemeral nature of their product. Like *Hamlet*, NT Live presentations are advertised as one-time events, as common wisdom suggests a theatrical performance necessarily is. It is the transference of this ephemeral element of the theatre experience to cinemas that sets *Hamlet* and livecasts apart from most other attempts to film theatre (although AFT also had finite numbers of screenings), but NT Live has been far more successful at emphasising this attribute than the distributors of *Hamlet* were. One of Sargent's complaints about the handling of *Hamlet* was that it was distributed "just like a motion picture instead of a special event" (Leff, 1981: 24). Today cinemas market, price and present livecasts differently from films; at major cinema exhibition chains such as Cineworld and Odeon, livecasts are referred to as "event cinema". This use of the word "event", the very word used by Sargent to describe *Hamlet*, suggests that he understood how *Hamlet* could have been better marketed, and that the strategy currently used to promote livecasts is somewhat in line with Sargent's ideal.

It is also notable that despite *Hamlet*'s marketing as a one-time event, "Sargent's contract with exhibitors promised only a three-year domestic blackout of *Hamlet*. Even that was soon violated. In October 1964, Sargent announced plans to *sell* prints of *Hamlet* to colleges and universities" (Leff, 1981: 25). Some of NT Live's most popular transmissions are also repeated, although not in violation of a contract; both Sargent and NT Live are willing to repeat their motion pictures in order to bring in additional revenue, but NT Live incorporates this strategy into its plan, whereas it was an afterthought for Sargent during his early attempt to film live theatre. NT Live regularly presents "encore performances" of popular plays

originally transmitted live. These repeat screenings are generally "broadcast exactly the same as the live version and therefore contain all the same interviews and extras, however the advertising and surrounding context can change" (Abbott, 2015: 25). Occasionally, post-production effects are added to encore performances, such as the inclusion of slow motion in *The Crucible* (2014). Encore performances are unlike some of the predecessors discussed above because they have been shot in real time without the possibility of retakes, but the same is true of certain concert documentaries (discussed below) and many episodes of *Great Performances* which document one-time events. Although they are released cinematically under the banner of NT Live and priced accordingly at cinemas, encore performances are nothing new, resembling *The Aspern Papers* in their manipulation of time, and Sargent's selling of *Hamlet* prints as a source of additional income.

All in all, Electronovision's experiment with *Hamlet* can be seen as a test case for livecasting, which has benefitted from improved technology, realistic expectations, public funding and perhaps also from the lessons of *Hamlet*. Although no plans have ever been announced to sell NT Live's product in the form of DVDs, the home media release of *Hamlet* suggests that it is a potential source of future revenue for NT Live which may one day be exploited.

Other filmed performances

Before moving on to live broadcasts, there are two more predecessors to livecasting that bear mentioning. The first is the concert documentary filmed for cinematic release; I shall take as examples *Woodstock* (1970)*, Gimme Shelter* (1970) and *The Last Waltz* (1978). These films are generally discussed as documentaries, and perhaps livecasting might also be regarded that way in that they document a live performance in a similar way to *The Last Waltz*. However, livecasts differ from concert documentaries in several ways, beginning with

the collusion between the performers and the technical crew; documentary crews often act

with greater spontaneity, without the camera script that NT Live's camera operators follow.

The concerts depicted in *Gimme Shelter* and *Woodstock* were certainly media events, but they

were first and foremost concerts, with their recording by documentary crews being secondary.

Each of the documentaries captures a one-time event, rather than a play which is repeated

nightly but recorded once with alterations made to accommodate its recording (such as the

lighting changes mentioned above or alterations to the script such as those discussed in

Chapter Three). Concert documentaries also often contain shots of the audience reacting,

which livecasts only use in exceptional circumstances, as well as scenes not performed

onstage. *Woodstock, Gimme Shelter* and *The Last Waltz* all contain numerous scenes in which

musicians or attendees are interviewed or candidly filmed with no audience present. A similar

element is present in many NT livecasts in which the stage director is interviewed out of range

of the theatre audience and pre-recorded featurettes are shown. The primary intention of

livecasts, however, is to allow the story of the play to be told, whereas concert documentaries

are more inclined to emphasise the story of the event at which the performance occurred;

scenes of audience members are central to *Woodstock* and *Gimme Shelter*, and the

performances are often shown out of chronological order without detrimental effect. Whereas

NT livecasts present the performance in its entirety, only cutting away to additional material

during breaks, these three concert documentaries are as much about the event itself as the

music performed. An exception to these generalizations about concert documentaries is *Stop*

Making Sense (1984), in which no close-ups of audience members are shown until the final

song, when seven separate shots of spectators dancing are shown within thirty seconds. *Stop*

Making Sense, which documents a precisely choreographed rock concert, shares the aesthetics

of a livecast more than those of a concert documentary, suggesting careful planning rather

than spontaneous capture, and emphasising the content of the performance over the events

surrounding it. It should be noted that the rise of livecasting has allowed concerts to be transmitted live into cinemas, with acts including Andre Rieu, Eric Clapton and the Grateful Dead having had their concerts livecast. Although this dissertation focuses on theatre, the use of livecasting to broadcast concerts is a subject which awaits thorough academic treatment.

Many of the examples discussed in this chapter may be classified as "filmed theatre", or perhaps as "filmed performance", depending on one's definition of those terms. My interest is not in defining "filmed theatre" but in identifying predecessors to livecasting. With that in mind, it is interesting to briefly examine an outlier which few would think to call "filmed theatre", but which nonetheless shares some of the characteristics of a livecast: the single-take film; that is movies shot with one camera and no cuts, such as *Russian Ark* (2002) and *Victoria* (2015). These films contain elements absent from most narrative films not only because of the technical challenge with which they present their casts and crews, but because they raise the question of intentionality. In most films, the audience can assume that anything they see on screen has been included purposefully; even if it occurred spontaneously during filming, its inclusion during the editing process imbues it with a sense of intentionality. In a single-take film, however, imperfections may exist which the director might have chosen to cut if it were possible. As a result, these films contain a semblance of liveness not dissimilar to livecasts. An important difference, however, is that these films are able to be reshot if necessary; literature about single-take films tends to mention the number of failed attempts before the successful take. In a livecast, on the other hand, the sense of liveness is heightened by the audience's knowledge that they are witnessing the first and only attempt to record a performance, technical rehearsals notwithstanding. Their use of multiple cameras is also important, as a key feature of livecasts touted by NT Live is that audiences are afforded various viewpoints; in a single-take film, the audience is encouraged to identify with the sole camera whose perspective they share throughout the film, and indeed with the operator of that camera, whose

inclusion in the choreography and blocking is of far greater importance than in a livecast. Single-take films foreground their own technical achievement, with camera movement and location changes taking on special significance as the audience is aware that the film crew has been mobilised while simultaneously recording. In livecasts, the camera strives for invisibility; camera movement is frequent but deliberately unobtrusive, employing cinematic techniques as will be discussed in the next chapter, but seldom drawing attention to them. Additionally, the sound in single-take films is open to greater scrutiny than in a livecast. *Russian Ark*'s soundtrack was not recorded simultaneously with the images, so crew members were able to communicate without being heard by the audience. In *Victoria*, the live sound is muted and replaced with non-diagetic music during one sequence, something that does not happen in livecasts, in which the sound is as live and susceptible to spontaneity as the image.

Live broadcasts

If livecasting is unique, it is not because it brings theatre to cinema screens, but because it brings it live. Prior to the spread of digital technology, the idea of "live cinema" was oxymoronic, and live broadcasts were the domain of television and radio. Spatial limitations discourage an overview of the many applications of live television, so I will restrict myself to brief discussions of two particularly relevant examples: live televised sports and live televised drama.

Several important distinctions must be made between livecasts and live sports. First, sports are televised, and therefore experienced differently than a livecast in a cinema. The difference in experience between watching something in a cinema and watching it on television has been discussed above and remains applicable here. Even when watching in a public place with other fans, viewers of a sports game are not bound by the same protocol as livecast audience members. Additionally, sports are primarily a visual spectacle; the sound of

the event and the commentators can be removed without the meaning of the action being lost.

Because this is not true of the plays transmitted by NT Live, sports broadcasts can be

exhibited in a wider variety of settings, from pubs to public spaces. *One Man, Two Guvnors*

(2011) was broadcast on an outdoor screen behind the National Theatre when it was livecast,

with the cast going out to take a bow for the outdoor audience at the end, but this experiment

has not since been repeated by NT Live.[1] Second, sports are shot with greater spontaneity than

livecasts. There is structure, but no script. In a baseball game, the ball could be hit anywhere,

and large teams of camera operators strive to capture every play in wide shots and close-ups.

In a livecast, camera movements have been determined in advance and cues are anticipated

and hit. Third, there is far less manipulation of time in livecasts than in televised sports. It is

necessary to say "less manipulation" rather than "no manipulation" because pre-recorded

featurettes and interviews are often shown during livecasts, but time is always allowed to

progress naturally during the performance itself; there are no instant replays or recaps.

Nonetheless, the televised presentation of a sports game shares a key characteristic

with livecasts in that both present a complete event through fragmented images of its parts:

> …watching soccer on television is different from watching it from the edge of
> the field. On television we do not see the ritualized conflict as a whole. What
> we see is a selection of the game made by the makers of the programme. The
> game is fragmented, moved away from the ritualized conflict, which is the very
> heart of the game. Even when the whole game is televised we see fragments of
> it in the form of close-ups, medium shots, though cuttings, repeats of goals,
> slow motion of the repeats and goals, repeats of the joy of the scorer, slow
> motion, and the like. Meanwhile the game goes on as if it is not our concern
> (van Stapele, 1988: 235-236).

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[1] Free public screenings of ticketed events are more regularly available at the Salzburg Festival, where operas are projected, sometimes live, onto large screens in public squares. As Helga Rabl-Stadler, president of the festival, explains, the motivation for these free public screenings is access: "Anyone who could not get a ticket for a sold-out performance, or cannot afford one, has the wonderful opportunity of experiencing operas and concerts from the current Festival programme on Kapitelplatz free of charge" (Salzburgerfestspiele, 2016). This use of digital transmissions to heighten access is similar to NT Live's objectives, but free public screenings have not become a regular feature of NT Live's practice.

Some of van Stapele's criticism of televised sports can be applied to livecasts. By focusing on particular elements of the performance with close-ups and cuts, simultaneously enhancing and restricting the audience's view, the livecast viewer may also feel distanced or alienated from the play as a whole. This issue will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, but its antecedent is visible in televised sports.

Televising sports has also changed the nature of sports events themselves. In the 1950s, when American football had just begun to be broadcast live, "television encouraged the colleges to add larger doses of entertainment to accompany the games. Each game featured half-time shows complete with large marching bands, baton twirlers, and card sections" (Rader, 1984: 79). Similarly, livecast audiences are presented with introductions and interviews before the play and during intervals. While it is unlikely that such additions will ever be retained as an integral part of the live theatre experience the way the half-time show became a customary part of American football, it is noteworthy that the presentation of a livecast mimics televised sports to some degree. Both typically begin several minutes before the game/play with an introduction from a host who provides context and hype from somewhere within the theatre/stadium where the action will occur. During breaks, interviews are staged with key figures (but rarely the players themselves), who analyse the event. These elements of NT livecasts recall televised sports, although it must be noted that no commentary occurs during the performance of a play, whereas sports commentators analyse the action of a game in real time; in this way, livecasts are less heavily mediated depictions of events than sports broadcasts.

Another precursor to livecasting is live television drama, which enjoyed ubiquity on American television in the 1950s. A contemporary reviewer lists no fewer than ten play anthology series included in the 1954-55 season of American television, only one of which had premiered earlier than 1950 (Sterner, 1954: 451). These programs, shot with multiple

cameras on multiple sets, were usually discussed in the popular press as "plays", just as popular reviews of livecasts tend to comment on their theatrical aspects rather than their cinematic presentation. As is happening now, observers of the time were quick to pick out key differences between this new medium and better established ones such as cinema and theatre. Discussing a teleplay about Helen Keller, a contemporary reviewer writes:

> The close-up camera, one of the medium's strong points, helped convey the tensions and frustrations which marked Miss Keller's early years. Unlike the motion-picture screen, which tends to swell a face close-up into a grotesquerie, television presents a near life-sized image that adds to the realistic effect (Maloney, 1958: 121).

It can be added that the close-up does not present the same problem in televised drama as in sports or livecasts; it does not prevent the viewer from looking at an element of the scene they might consider more interesting, as televised plays offer no guarantee that the performance continues outside the frame. Stagehands may be shifting scenery or an off-screen actor may be receiving a quick touch-up to their make up; the play only exists in the images that are televised, as the television audience is the only audience. As a result, the potentially alienating fragmentation that exists in televised sports and livecasts does not affect the live teleplay.

Also discussed in the 1950s was the way in which the medium of television shapes its content. "…the TV viewer can sense the climax on the basis of the number of minutes left in the show. If there are only two minutes left and there seems to be no resolution in sight, a 'trick' ending is inevitable (and just anticipating a trick ending lessens its force somewhat)" (Maloney, 1958: 121). In a 1958 symposium on televised drama, Milton A. Kaplan asked:

> Am I correct in saying the television dramatists of today are aware of these commercial breaks and shape their plays because of those limitations and because, perhaps, of these opportunities?...And that therefore we are getting a play that is indigenous to TV and different from the stage play and motion picture (Kaplan, 1958: 554)?

Here is another way in which theatre, films and livecasts, which can run their ideal length, differ from televised drama. The fare offered in teleplays of the 1950s was either written or

adapted specifically for television, with the result that a genre of teleplays was created, with screenwriters like Rod Serling and Paddy Chayefsky rising to prominence in the new medium. NT Live simply offers mediated access to plays that were written for the stage, without a remote audience or exacting time limits in mind.

Another interesting link between livecasts and live teleplays of the 1950s is their perceived potential for educational purposes. A 1954 article by Alice P. Sterner containing advice for teachers suggests, "Now that the pattern of commercial television programming for this year has been established, the teacher of English can plan an out-of-school listening design for his pupils and for himself...Indeed most teachers of English will use television plays this year in several different ways in each class" (Sterner, 1954: 451). Sterner sees great merit in watching teleplays, particularly those based on literary sources, but worries that it may not be possible to assign every student the task of watching the same program out of classroom hours, and that the production recommended unseen by the teacher may disappoint. Today, NT Live makes some of its livecasts available in schools after their initial transmissions, along with worksheets, essays and discussion questions for students to use. This is relevant to livecasting's role in the democratization of theatre, which will be examined in Chapter Four, but it also highlights the possibilities invited by the technological improvements which NT Live exploits, and demonstrates a way in which the apparent pipe dreams of the 1950s have come to fruition. Teachers can now see the NT Live productions in advance and show them in class, effectively eliminating the drawbacks outlined by Sterner.

Finally, a familiar selling point appreciated in its time was the liveness of teleplays. "Even surpassing the close-up in importance is the spontaneity of live performance. The scene that cannot be reshot or rewritten once it has been done is a greater challenge to actor and writer alike. There is a here-and-now quality to plays unfolding at the moment, which films and kinescopes both lack" (Maloney, 1958: 121). Of course, "here-and-now" is not an

accurate description of either live teleplays or livecasts. Both are now, but neither is here. Nonetheless, Maloney's appreciation of the spontaneity of a live broadcast is shared by advocates of livecasting today, and is a key feature of both the live teleplay and the livecast.

Live televised drama reached its zenith in the 1950s, but "[t]he mid-1950s were...marked by the precipitous fall from the self-proclaimed heights of television's 'Golden Age' of live anthology drama of the early and mid-1950s" (Boddy, 1985: 23). Live anthology drama programs gave way to pre-recorded productions, and later series such as *American Playhouse* (1981-1994) were not broadcast live. In this century, live drama on television has become a novelty and occasionally a gimmick. A notable example is *Fail Safe* (2000), a TV movie broadcast live in black and white. Its aesthetics and Cold War theme are evocative of the era of live television, nostalgically reinforcing the historic nature of live drama. With rare exceptions such as *Saturday Night Live* (1975-present), today live television is primarily the domain of sports and news, while live mediated theatre has relocated to the cinema.

Each of the antecedents discussed in this chapter has shared some, but not all, of livecasting's characteristics. As a transmedia form combining film with theatre, the roots of livecasting are varied. Like *Hamlet* and live television, livecasting exploits the most recent technology available, and like *La venganza de Don Mendo* and *The Aspern Papers*, it presents an alternative and more accessible way to experience a performance given before an audience. The next chapter offers an examination of the aesthetic properties of livecasting and the ways in which the mediation of the camera affects NT Live's presentations.

Chapter Two: Mediated Theatre and Making Meaning

In a 1988 presentation about televised theatre, Peter van Stapele asserted that "the use of televisual codes transforms the theatrical performance into a new product of art rather than a representation of the performance. If we speak about drama on television, we speak about something different from drama in theatre" (van Stapele, 1988: 237). Livecasts bring to the screen conventional theatre performances designed for the stage. The performances are complete, self-standing works which convey their artistic meaning theatrically. When a play is mediated by the camera, how is its meaning impacted? How closely does the production seen by the cinema audience resemble the production seen in the theatre? How does the introduction of the language of film – cuts, close-ups, tracking shots, varied angles – affect the audience's reception, understanding and interpretation of the play? No matter how subdued and unobtrusive the camera may attempt to be, the language of film is always being applied by NT Live, and processed in turn by the livecast audience. A fundamental difference between conventional theatre and cinema is seen to be that "theatre *narrates* by discourse, and film by images. In the theatre the actor's speech is the main narrator; in film it is the camera that guides the spectator, and allows him to see this or that" (de Toro, 1988: 189). What the audience sees and does not see when watching a livecast necessarily impacts their understanding and interpretation of the original play. It also affects their emotional response, the function of the camera being not only narrative. In this chapter, the ways in which the mediation of the language of film affects the plays transmitted by NT Live will be unpacked. I will begin by examining camera movement, cuts and framing, which are used to emphasise, enhance or create emotional reactions in the audience which are not necessarily experienced in the same way by the theatre audience. Next the essential question of what the camera shows and omits will be discussed, examining the ways in which the camera simultaneously

enhances and restricts the cinema audience's view, and how this affects the meaning of the work.

Camera movement, cuts and framing

As Tornqvist observes in his examination of the differences between live and recorded theatre, "emotional intensification can…be created simply by gradually tracking or zooming in on someone's face." (Tornqvist, 1999: 19) This simple observation is illustrated in *Hamlet* (2015), which employs slow tracking shots at two key moments in the play. The famous "To be, or not to be" speech is presented in one long shot which gradually zooms in until Hamlet is framed from the waist up, then it remains stationary until the speech is over. There is no cut. In Act Four, Scene Five, Ophelia's final speech receives the same treatment. The audience is pulled into these two emotional scenes by the cinematic technique of eschewing cuts and slowly tracking or zooming in, so the size of the character on screen grows as the audience's emotional involvement is enhanced. (See Balász, 1952 for a fundamental discussion of the effects of film language). The theatre audience, of course, receives no such cue. Tornqvist's basic point is then exemplified: gradually zooming in increases emotion. As well as their emotions, however, the cinema audience's understanding of the play may be affected, as these two shots, exceptional in their length and identical in technique, become linked. In considering reasons that this link might be made, one finds the common theme of suicide. Hamlet's famous soliloquy depicts his ruminations on ending his own life, while Ophelia's mad ranting anticipates her suicide, and is the last the audience sees of her before news arrives that she has drowned. Is the use of a lengthy, slowly tracking shot intentionally linked with the theme of suicide, or is it simply being used to enhance the audience's involvement in the play's most emotional moments? Alternatively, are these shots merely picking out the play's most *famous* moments for a wide audience who may not have seen a production of *Hamlet* before?

Whatever the reason that these two moments were selected for special treatment, they become connected for cinema audience members in a way that they are not for those in the theatre, and the particular theme of suicide can be perceived to be foregrounded.

For another example of cinematic technique being used to enhance the emotional experience, scenes of violence in *Coriolanus* (2014) and *The Beaux' Strategem* (2015), both directed for screen by Tim Van Someren, can be compared. Each contains a fight scene which employs a cinematic technique. In *The Beaux' Strategem*, a brawl involving many characters occurs on multiple levels of the set. During the action, Van Someren cuts from camera to camera far more rapidly than in any other scene in the livecast, using a total of 22 shots in 84 seconds to convey the manic nature of a brawl through short shot durations. This quick cutting affects the livecast audience by determining a tempo, which complements the jaunty music playing throughout the scene, and by using a style of cutting which is familiar to cinema audiences: fight scenes including quick cuts can be found in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (1948), *Raging Bull* (1980) and *Fight Club* (1999) to name just a few examples. In cinema, of course, quick cuts do more than establish a pace; they allow the editor to assemble the fight scene from pick-up shots. As this is not the case in *The Beaux' Strategem*, in which the brawl is performed in one take, it would have been possible to show the scene in wider, longer shots, but the scene would perhaps have then lost its chaotic tone. What is lost in establishing this chaos, however, is a chance for the cinema audience to appreciate the choreography of the scene, as the camera does not linger on any pair of combatants long enough. The theatre audience member, on the other hand, can focus on a particular aspect of the brawl, metaphorically editing with their eyes, while remaining peripherally aware of the action's scale and context.

The brawl in *The Beaux' Strategem* can be contrasted with Aufidius' fight with Caius Martius in *Coriolanus*, a duel which occurs in stages. It begins with two brief sword clashes

shown in wide shots, broken up by dialogue shown in shot-reverse shots. After these clashes,

the bulk of the fight, which occurs without dialogue, is photographed in one shot lasting 68

seconds, during which the camera operator's position is in constant flux. This is a less

common way of shooting a fight scene for a film than the strategy used in *The Beaux'*

Strategem, if only because of the difficulty of choreography. In cinema, fight scenes filmed in

a single take appear are rare; *The Beaux' Strategem*'s technique is more easily recognizable to

cinema audiences. It is fitting that NT Live should use a long take to photograph a stage play,

bringing the choreography to the forefront as it would be for the theatre audience.

Nonetheless, the duel in *Coriolanus* is not presented to the cinema audience exactly as it is to

the theatre audience; the camera is in constant motion throughout the scene, apparently

handheld, unlike the camerawork throughout the rest of the play, for which the cameras are

steady, presumably mounted. In a sense, the camera operator becomes a third participant in the

choreography, and the fluidity of the fight is emphasised by the camera's movements. In short,

a film technique is used to emphasise the theatrical nature of the choreography. Additionally,

the absence of cuts reinforces the element of liveness in the same way as single-take films

such as *Russian Ark* and *Victoria*. Considering the respective tones of *The Beaux' Strategem*

and *Coriolanus*, the contrasting editing styles both seem apt. *The Beaux' Strategem* is a

comedy, light and bloodless, and the upbeat music played during the brawl suggests to the

audience that this is not a matter of life and death, but farcical. As a result, the cinema

audience does not need to glue their eyes to any particular character who is in grave danger.

Coriolanus, on the other hand, is a tragedy and this production is a dark, bloody one. For

audiences unfamiliar with the play, it seems possible that either Aufidius or Caius Martius

could die. Unlike *The Beaux' Strategem's* brawl, there is no musical accompaniment. It is a

tense scene whose tension is elevated by the unblinking eye of the camera. In its very different

presentations of these two scenes, it is apparent that NT Live's method of photographing

scenes is sometimes intended not only to document them, but to do so with some degree of interpretation.

The examples above demonstrate ways in which film language affects the cinema audience's emotions, emphasises tone and creates meaning. There are also identifiable instances in which the language of theatre is effectively replaced by the language of cinema, which intervenes to communicate information to the livecast audience which is imparted differently to the theatre audience. In *People* (2013), a recurring event is the shifting of the coal beneath the house. It is accompanied by a loud, low rumble, and the dialogue and the movement of the actors suggest that the house is shaking. For a member of the theatre audience, it is possible that the low rumbling sound effect could be felt physically, as low rumbles can often be, and this physical effect would enhance the illusion of being in a rickety old house. Cinema audiences, whose reception of the rumbling is indirect, being picked up on microphones then transmitted through the speakers in the cinema, are apt to be less physically affected by the sound effect; thus the camera intervenes. The first time the coal shifts in the play, the shot on screen is a long one, taking in most of the stage. As the rumbling is heard, the camera is gently shaken, as it might be in a movie scene in which an earthquake occurs, in order to communicate to the audience that the house is shaking. This only happens the first time the sound effect is heard; on subsequent occasions, the camera remains steady. The purpose is not to cause the cinema audience to *feel* that they are in a shaking theatre, but to condition them to *understand* that the rumbling sound effect connotes shaking. It is an expositional effect, not a visceral one, hence its single use.

A second example of the camera being used as an expositional tool rather than a mere instrument of documentation is a somewhat subtler moment in *The Beaux' Strategem*. In Act Two, Scene Two, Boniface and Gibbet are interrogating Archer in an attempt to discover his true identity when they share a conversation aside, unheard by Archer. The idea that a

character standing in close proximity to another is unable to hear what is being said is a rarity

in movies; asides occur in *Annie Hall* (1977) and *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986), but they are

atypical in cinema, whose realistic conventions preclude their use. The livecast of *The Beaux'*

Strategem reinforces the conceit that Boniface and Gibbet's conversation cannot be heard by

Archer by framing Boniface and Gibbet with an empty area on the left of the frame, omitting

Archer, who is just off camera on the right. What is lost here is an understanding of how the

actor playing Archer communicates to the audience that he cannot hear the conversation. What

expression does he wear? Is he involved in some sort of business which occupies his attention,

or does he simply stand still, as though he does not exist in that moment? The cinema audience

does not know what strategy is used to convey to the theatre audience that this is an unheard

aside; it is instead communicated through framing. The screen director is successful in

conveying the idea that Boniface and Gibbet are unheard by Archer, but some cinema

audience members may be left frustrated at not being able to see Archer during these

moments. This problem of not being able to see everything simultaneously as a theatre

audience member can introduces the problem of the cinema audience's restricted view.

The restricted and enhanced view

A primary difference between conventional theatre and cinema is the freedom to look

at what one chooses. "In the theatre we normally have several characters in view, and we have

the freedom to choose on whom we wish to focus. In a screen performance the camera,

functioning as 'narrator,' usually presents the characters by turns, often in the form of shot-

reverse shots, forcing us to concentrate on one face and momentarily disregard another"

(Tornqvist, 1999: 16). As well as impacting their emotional reactions in an appropriate way

and aiding their understanding of the action, the members of a cinema audience are dependent

on the cameras to provide them with all the necessary information to comprehend the meaning

of the play. Interpretations of any given play may vary, of course, so this becomes a problematic area as different viewers will draw upon different elements of the production in arriving at an interpretation. "In the theatre we can decide for ourselves what we wish to focus on: the speaking or the listening character, the scenery, a prop, etc. On the screen the camera does this for us. The choice and linking of shots highly determines our view of events and characters" (Tornqvist, 1999: 18). In order to allow the cinema viewing experience to be as stimulating and artistically meaningful as the experience of the theatre audience, NT Live's crew needs to provide them with enough information to engage with the play, but not so much as to insist upon a particular interpretation.

That cameras shape our understanding of drama in ways that stage directions cannot is a commonly observed distinction between the two forms. Stage director Mary Hunter provides an alternative view, summarized by Philip Auslander: "[Hunter] responds to such an objection by suggesting that the spectator's gaze is always directed in the theatre by means of focal points in the staging that are equivalent to camera views. She compares the stage director's manipulation of audience attention with the television director's use of the camera" (Auslander, 1999: 19). While it is certainly true that a theatre spectator's view is directed by the production, it remains the case that it is *possible* to focus on something the director does not intend. The theatre director may manipulate their audience, but they cannot make the audience blind to any lit performer or object present on the stage. If you are particularly interested in a certain performer, you may look at them when the director does not intend you to; in livecasts or recorded performances, this is impossible. The camera serves the story and star performers, forcing the viewer to focus on these elements rather than the details that may interest them most. If a particular aspect of the set, for example, interests a livecast audience member, their only option is to focus on it when it happens to be in the frame, whereas members of a live theatre audience can choose to scrutinize it whenever they wish, and so can

choose to do so without ignoring important action.

The problem then is one of freedom of choice, and it can encroach upon the cinema audience's experience and interpretation of a livecast play. This problem could be said to exist in cinema in general, but there is often no guarantee in a film that there is anything to see beyond the frame; in livecasts, something is being omitted in all but the longest shots. This perceived deficiency has been remarked upon in popular reviews of NT livecasts:

> …when the director cuts to a close-up you lose at least as much as you gain. In one scene I knew a character was secretly listening to a conversation only because I had seen the play in London – something my fellow cinema-goers only realised when they were finally shown the listener, like an afterthought (Nathan, 2010).

This complaint might well have been applied to the interrogation scene in *The Beaux' Strategem*, except it was made five years earlier, suggesting that NT Live has not much improved on its ability to anticipate what its audience members think they ought to be focusing on at a given moment. This is an inevitable pitfall not only of livecasting, but of filming any performance with multiple cameras.

In *A View from the Bridge* (2015), the problem of the restricted view may have a negative impact on the cinema audience's ability to interpret the play. The lawyer, Alfieri, is omnipresent in his role as narrator and chorus, but the livecast of the play contains so few wide shots of the stage in Act One that it is easy to forget he is there. Richard Hornby states, "In a theatre, we never forget the entire stage even when we are looking at only part of it" (Hornby, 2011: 202). This is possible thanks to peripheral vision, an advantage lost to the finite parameters of the movie screen. The theatre audience knows that Alfieri is always present, but the livecast audience's eyes are usually fixed on the character currently speaking, while Alfieri is absent from view. What is lost through the erasure of peripheral characters like Alfieri? In an essay included with the 1987 CD recording of the opera *Nixon in China*, Michael Steinberg writes that the character of Henry Kissinger:

…has little to sing, and so someone who first gets to know *Nixon in China* from this recording probably has little idea of the drearily oppressive force of his cloddish, silent, and nearly constant presence on stage…Melot in *Tristan und Isolde* is a parallel example from the standard repertory of a character who is immensely compelling as a stage presence for who for the same reason – near-silence – does not come across on a recording (Steinberg, 1987: 21).[2]

The livecast of *A View from the Bridge* certainly provides a greater chance to observe Alfieri than audio recordings of *Nixon in China* or *Tristan und Isolde* provide to be aware of their own laconic characters, but the process of mediation, either by audio recording equipment or cameras, presents the same shortcoming in both cases. It is only by being present in the theatre that the audience can receive the full impact of every character's presence, regardless of how many lines they deliver. In the case of *A View from the Bridge*, the cameras' treatment of Alfieri as an expendable presence is significant for cinema audiences trying to understand the meaning of the play, which is vitally mediated by Alfieri's presence; he may represent the link between the characters' Italian values and their adopted American life, so his omnipresence is suggestive of the cultural conflict which consumes the characters at all times and flavours the play. The livecast audience may *infer* that Alfieri is present on stage all the time, but, blinkered by the screen director's choice of camera angles, they are not *confronted* with his presence as the theatre audience is. His significance is therefore minimised, and an essential element of the meaning of *A View from the Bridge* not quite lost, but made less accessible to the cinema audience than to those in the theatre.

With regards to the basic representation of who is where on the stage at a given moment, the cinema audience's restricted view can also cause disorientation, which happens more often than is desirable in livecasts. There is a sequence in Act One, Scene Four of *Coriolanus* in which the cinema audience sees Coriolanus and his followers climb nine ladders

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[2] See Arnheim, 1936 for a historical precedent to this discussion in which Rudolf Arnheim provides a similar criticism of theatre broadcast on the radio.

at the upstage wall. In a wide shot, Coriolanus is seen climbing right to the top of his, but his followers only climb a few rungs before retreating. The director then cuts to a shot of Coriolanus' soldiers running downstage to lie on the ground, during which time the ladders are not visible to the cinema audience. This is followed by a medium shot of Coriolanus speaking from his ladder, looking down on his soldiers and chastising them, then jumping from the ladder. A moment after he jumps, the director cuts to a wide shot of the stage, which reveals that Coriolanus' feet were no higher than the third rung. He has, unbeknownst to the cinema audience, climbed back down the ladder, so it initially appears that he is jumping from a far greater height, creating a false reaction in the livecast viewer, followed by disorientation when he lands on the ground sooner than expected. The introduction of this confusion, which is not shared by the theatre audience, distracts from the content and introduces an irrelevant sense of tension for the cinema audience. Later in the same play, a series of close-ups is followed by a wide shot revealing that there is a man standing behind Coriolanus with a knife, ready to kill him. The cinema audience does not know how long the assassin has been there, and can only retroactively apply the tension introduced by this man's presence to the previous close-ups. The timing of the assassin's entrance, deliberately chosen in the stage production, is lost in the livecast. In a carefully coordinated stage performance, it is detrimental to have false tension created, as in the ladder scene, or intentional tension lost, as in the assassin scene. The cinema audience member can only feel that they have missed some important element of the performance.

Perhaps the most frequently affected element of plays being livecast is comedy. On numerous occasions, the restricted view has caused a joke or gag to lose its impact. During a musical number in *Pirates of Penzance* (2015), which was not an NT Live presentation but an English National Opera livecast, the chorus of girls unexpectedly pop their heads out of a large hole in the scenery to sing a response to a line. The theatre audience were surprised by their

sudden appearance and laughed, but the cinema audience still had a close-up of the soloist, and the shot only revealed the women when their first line was nearly over, at which point they hid their heads again to re-emerge for the next line. The cinema audience had a complete view of their second emergence, but the gag had lost its surprise value and the audible laughter of the theatre audience was not shared by the cinema audience of which I was a part. In Act One of *People*, a joke is omitted entirely when Ralph, the National Trust representative, says goodbye to Iris. While the camera is focused on a medium shot of Dorothy, the theatre audience reacts with amusement and disgust to something that has happened between Ralph and Iris off screen. In *Pirates of Penzance*, the livecast viewer is able to fill in the missing information and infer the reason for the theatre audience's laughter; in *People*, there is no knowing what joke has been missed in the cinema.

In Act Three, Scene Two of *Hamlet*, a comedic moment is created accidentally by a poorly timed cut. After Hamlet shouts, "By and by is easily said" (*Hamlet* 2015), Polonius, alarmed, runs away. When the shot cuts, he's already well out of the spotlight and running offstage. The specific timing of the cut created a comedic moment which the cinema audience laughed at, while the theatre audience, unaware of the joke, remained silent. Conversely, in Act One, Scene Three of *Coriolanus,* there is a moment in which Virgilia declines Valeria's offer to spend the day with her. As she says, "No, good madam" (*Coriolanus* 2014), she wears an ironic smile, suggesting that she does not like Valeria, and this moment drew the first laugh of the evening from both the theatre and cinema audiences. The cinema audience at the screening I attended laughed especially heartily as the joke was aided by a well-timed close-up, (the tightest shot in the scene so far), enhancing the humour. This illustrates one of the advantages of livecasts, the necessary counterweight to the restricted view: the enhanced view.

"In a stage performance the spectator follows the action from one and the same optical point of view: his/her seat. In a screen performance the optical viewpoint – distance, angle, is

constantly changed by means of the camera…The stage offers nothing but 'long shots'" (Tornqvist, 1999: 18). Regardless of whether one considers constant change preferable to a steady perspective, the shifting view available to the cinema audience grants access to details too minuscule to be observed from every seat in the theatre. This privileged viewpoint is sometimes extolled by NT Live, as in the featurette shown before *Coriolanus* in which the play's gory make-up is shown in extreme close-ups, emphasising the intimacy of the cinema experience, or the interval featurette during *The Audience* (2013), in which the costumes are shown in detail. The livecast audience is invited, in the words of *Nation* (2010) director Melly Still, to "step on stage and see all the detail" (*Nation* 2010). NT Live's presentation of this privileged view as a desirable bonus is reminiscent of a question Bazin asks in his discussion of the comparative virtues of being present at the death of Manolete versus watching it on film: "What we lose by way of direct witness do we not recapture thanks to the artificial proximity provided by photographic enlargement?" (Bazin, 1967: 98) Livecasts abound with moments in which the cinema audience is treated to a view of small details, as in Act Two, Scene Two of *Hamlet*, when the prince draws a crude sketch of a grey-haired man, which he shows Polonius. The cinema audience clearly sees it, whereas only some members of the theatre audience would be able to. Other examples of details captured with particular care include the rubbish on the stage of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2015), particularly in the opening scene when it is being sorted, Varya's map in *The Cherry Orchard* (2011), which he spreads upon the stage and the livecast audience sees thanks to a high angle, or the props on the set of *The Kitchen* (2011), which are examined in detail before the dialogue begins. The benefit goes beyond close-ups, as Barker observes, recalling his experience watching a livecast performance of *Frankenstein* (2012): "Some of these high-angle shots themselves provide a special kind of aesthetic experience. Highly choreographed movements whose interrelations may hardly be visible to those attending the event can become visible through

well-chosen high shots, emphasizing cinema audiences' privileged access" (Barker, 2013: 14).

A double-edged example of the audience's enhanced view is found in *The Hard Problem* (2015). During each scene change, the camera pans up to the colourful display of lights above the stage. While the cinema audience's attention is focused on the lights, which carry meaning, being suggestive in their flickering of neurons firing in the brain, the opportunity to observe the set change is denied, and when the camera pans back down, the new scenery is in place. Surely there are theatre-goers (of which I am one) for whom part of the pleasure is the visibility of the mechanics or interest in the way these practical matters are hidden. In the case of *The Hard Problem*, this pleasure is denied as the livecast viewer's attention is instead focused on the most artistically meaningful element at play during scene changes, the lights, which we are able to observe in greater detail than the theatre audience thanks to their enlargement and the omission of any distractions, but without any choice. Here meaning is foregrounded, but the experience of watching a play, which will be examined in the next chapter, is not successfully conveyed.

Interviewed before the beginning of NT Live's second season, producer David Sabel said he considered the project "an artistic success, honouring the integrity of our artists' work and successfully transferring the work to the screen. Whilst not the same experience, we are confident that we have pioneered a way of successfully capturing theatre on camera and creating a valuable proposition for audiences everywhere" (Trompeteler, 2011: 42). NT Live's manner of presenting its plays has undergone some experiments since it was launched in 2009, but the pros and cons of the aesthetics of livecasting remain today what they were then. The integrity of a play being livecast may be "honoured" by the camera, but the play itself cannot be transferred intact. The mediation of the camera, whether perceived as a benefit, a handicap or a mixed blessing, inevitably impacts upon the play itself and its reception by remote audiences. To echo van Stapele's opinion on televised drama from the outset of this chapter,

what livecast audiences witness is neither theatre nor cinema, but something different.

Because it is a transmedia form, livecasting cannot provide all the delights of either theatre or

cinema, an impossibility considering the subjectivity of individual audience members.

Chapter Three: Liveness and the Lack of Co-presence

In 2010, four years after the Met transmitted the first livecast, an article in *The Guardian* stated, "Without anyone quite realising it, live performance has experienced a revolution. From being a unique experience shared by one group of people, it has become a form of mass participation" (Dickson, 2010). Is this a tenable claim? How is it possible for the style of theatre which NT Live broadcasts (intimate, modernist theatre) to be reconciled with the idea of mass participation? When theatre is no longer performed for a co-present audience, does it remain theatre or is something else created? The same article presents an opinion commonly held among defenders of traditional theatre who are wary of livecasting: "David Thacker, artistic director of Bolton's Octagon theatre, is a sceptic, although he admits he hasn't yet seen the new live transmissions. 'For me, the unique power of theatre is that we're all in the same room,' he says" (Dickson, 2010). This objection that co-presence is at the heart of theatre is often remarked upon in popular press articles dealing with livecasting. Indeed, the irreconcilability of the two media, theatre demanding co-presence and cinema disallowing it, is inevitably at the root of discussions of livecasting and of many discussions of theatre versus cinema in general. This well-worn subject is neatly summarized by Chiel Kattenbelt:

> A major characteristic of the theatre is that the actors and spectators are present at the same time in the same space. They create the theatre performance, mutually influencing each other…So in the theatre the actors and the spectators are there for each other. Their physical presence at the same time is a necessary condition in performing a play which can only be realized in a direct communication process. A major characteristic of the film is, on the contrary, that the actors and the spectators are not simultaneously present…The indirectness of the cinematic communication process implies the impossibility of immediate feedback (Kattenbelt, 1988: 223-224).

Comparisons between cinema and theatre are not universally applicable to a discussion of livecasting. Because livecasts take place in real time, they can be argued to contain the spontaneity of a theatre performance, while film "cannot be in any significant sense live"

(Barker, 2013: 49), and therefore lacks that spontaneity. In his discussion of live radio and television, Andrew Crisell makes a point which is applicable to livecasts:

> But it is also possible to object that radio and television can *never* be live because however self-effacing they may be, they are media and thus offer *mediated* communication: they may provide co-presence in time but they cannot provide co-presence in space...This objection is by no means trivial: it is what people mean when they say that they prefer the live entertainment of the theatre to watching television (Crisell, 2012: 6).

What is it that physical co-presence adds to a performance that cannot be accessed merely by co-presence in time? What makes the co-presence of performers and audience irreplaceable and informs Thacker's opinion that being in the same room is integral to the theatrical experience? This chapter is an examination of the concept of liveness and its application to livecasting. Specifically, co-presence in time and space and its implications for audience identification will be explored; with whom do livecast viewers identify during livecasts, and in what ways are they alienated from the performance? (It must be noted that in this context, the word "alienation" is not being used in its Brechtian sense, but to describe the livecast viewer's feeling that they are not a part of the event on screen but rather are distanced from it by not being in the theatre.) Finally, spontaneity and the possibility of chance occurrences will be discussed as a chief characteristic of theatre which may actually be greater in a livecast than on stage.

Co-Presence and mediation

The relationship between performer and audience member is considered by some to be an integral part of going to the theatre; the opinions of Thacker and Kattenbelt quoted above exemplify this viewpoint. One of the most influential works supporting the opinion of those for whom co-presence is vital is Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), an essay which contains many of the assertions still being

made today, although the species of "reproduction" discussed by Benjamin was very different

from the circumstances of livecasting; simultaneous remote participation is far removed from

what Benjamin addresses. Nonetheless, his interest in the reproduction of theatre on film has

applicability to the present circumstances of livecasting. According to Benjamin:

> …the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance, since he does not present his performance to the audience in person. This permits the audience to take the position of a critic, without experiencing any personal contact with the actor. The audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera. Consequently the audience takes the position of the camera (Benjamin, 1973: 222).

In Benjamin's view then, both performer and audience member are replaced by technology.

The performer is an unresponsive shadow on a screen while the viewer cedes control to the

camera; we have seen examples from NT Livecasts to support the latter assertion in the

previous chapter. Benjamin attempts to pinpoint the quality lost in mediation by naming it as

the performer's "aura":

> …this is the effect of the film – man has to operate with his whole living person, yet forgoing its aura. For aura is tied to his presence; there can be no replica of it. The aura which, on the stage, emanates from Macbeth, cannot be separated for the spectators from that of the actor. However, the singularity of the shot in the studio is that the camera is substituted for the public. Consequently, the aura that envelops the actor vanishes, and with it the aura of the figure he portrays (Benjamin, 1973: 223).

This is a tidy encapsulation of what perturbs detractors of livecasting such as Thacker, who

would likely agree with Benjamin's assertion that as a result of technological mediation, the

reproduced work of art will always be inferior to the original. "The situations into which the

product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet

the quality of its presence is always depreciated. This holds not only for the art work but also,

for instance, for a landscape which passes in review before the spectator in a movie"

(Benjamin, 1973: 215). This assertion that the reproduction must always pale in comparison

with the original has also been echoed in popular reviews of livecasts: "It's great that you can

buy beautifully printed posters of Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond* from the National Gallery.

But you'd laugh if the gallery said that the poster gave you access to the painting" (Nathan,

2010). The space between the authentic and the reproduced is what critics of livecasting object

to.

In opposition to this view, the actor-audience relationship touted by Benjamin and

others has been suggested to be of greater importance to the audience than to the performers:

> First, while co-presence benefits both parties by allowing the 'senders' of the theatrical communication to be influenced for the better by the receivers, the need for co-presence is primarily felt by the receivers rather than the senders. The basis for this assertion is that cinematic actors are often able to perform very effectively even though they lack a co-present audience (Crisell, 2012: 12).

The implication is that the sense of alienation which may affect livecast audiences has little

effect on the performers they watch. Perhaps the most notable detractor to Benjamin's view is

Andre Bazin, who writes that "one can only explain [the successes of Welles, Olivier,

Cocteau] by casting doubts on that commonplace of theatrical criticism 'the irreplaceable

presence of the actor'" (Bazin, 1967: 96). In Bazin's view, co-presence between audiences and

actors and the accompanying relationship carries no guarantee of superior art. He even

suggests that mediation and the absence of a live audience can be beneficial, taking Charlie

Chaplin's film work as an example:

> …it is clear that his art consists in perfecting, thanks to the cinema, his skill as a music-hall comic. Here the cinema offers more than the theatre but only by going beyond it, by relieving it of its imperfections. The economics of the gag are governed by the distance between the stage and the audience and above all by the length of the laughs which spur the actor to protract his effect to the point of their extinction. The stage, then, eggs him on, forces him indeed to exaggerate. Only the screen could allow Charlie to attain mathematical perfection of situation and gesture whereby the maximum effect is obtained in the minimum of time (Bazin, 1967: 79).

In Bazin's view, the demands of a live audience prevented Chaplin, and presumably other

comic performers, from reaching the apex of their art. From this point of view, livecasts give

audiences the worst of both worlds. The performances are indeed shaped by audiences, most apparently in comedies in which performers withhold their lines until the laughter subsides, but they are not shaped by the cinema audience, who may laugh longer or less than their counterparts in the playhouse. One contemporary livecast reviewer believes that "extra care needs to be taken to prevent comedies feeling like TV sitcoms when they are filmed. During close-ups, laughter from the theatre audience can sound awfully canned in the cinema" (Nathan, 2010). Unfortunately, no degree of extra care can liberate livecast comedies from their resemblance to sitcoms, as the actors will always be responding to an audience outside the cinema. This can lead to a feeling of alienation similar to that described by Benjamin; the livecast audience watches actors whose performances are affected by an audience, but it is a remote audience whose aura is, along with the performers', lost in mediation. The only people with whom a livecast viewer can feel a direct connection are the other members of the cinema audience, who are all equally alienated from the performance and whose responses are formed in a shared context, heard and felt only by one another.

Part and parcel with that drawback is that the actors must perform theatrically, projecting for and not often turning their backs on their co-present audience. Consequently the style of acting seen on cinema screens during livecasts is out of step with the conventions of screen acting, which tends toward realism. *The Guardian* complains that "there appeared to be no attempt physically to tone down the performances for the screen. From the cinema, it sometimes looked like the return of the silent era – only with sound" (Nathan, 2010). This, however, seems not like a drawback but rather a fact of transferring theatre to cinema. If performances in livecasts can resemble outdated styles of screen acting, this is not a shortcoming but simply a characteristic of this new transmedia form. Livecasts cannot be expected to resemble movies nor carry the communicative impact of live theatre, and critics who seek one or the other will inevitably be disappointed. Neither theatre with the performer-

audience relationship so valued by Benjamin, nor cinema, edited, printed and imbued with intentionality, livecasts operate in a liminal space between two established media.

Identification

Given their spatial alienation from the performance, how are cinema audience members able to feel that they are a part of a theatre event being performed remotely? When they watch, whom do they identify with in order to enter into the world of the performance? Bazin quotes M. Rosenkrantz: "The characters on the screen are quite naturally objects of identification, while those on the stage are, rather, objects of mental opposition because their real presence gives them an objective reality" (Bazin, 1967: 99). This raises a question. If the cinema viewer "tends to identify himself with the film's hero [or with the characters in general, as Rosenkrantz says] by a psychological process" (Bazin, 1967: 99), whom might he or she identify with when watching a performance designed for objective, characteristically theatrical consumption? It has been said that performances in livecasts are too theatrical, meaning they do not invite audience identification in the same way a film performance might, yet it is the natural inclination of the cinema viewer to identify with those on screen. In what direction does NT Live channel this inclination?

According to Nesta, which finds little fault with NT Live, livecast audiences "appear to feel connected to the performance and to the South Bank audience" (Nesta, 2011: 14); the evidence provided is the cinema audience's tendency to applaud at the end of performances. Whether this connection between livecast viewers and the performers and theatre audience exists or not, it can certainly be observed that a key strategy employed consistently by NT Live is to present the theatre audience as proxy representatives for the cinema audience. This process of identification is established at the beginning of every NT livecast, when the theatre audience is shown entering the auditorium, taking their seats and waiting for the performance

to begin. The audience's preparations mirror the arrival of the cinema audience, who are also taking their seats, chatting and waiting. This "gives the broadcast audience a feeling of sharing an experience with [the theatre audience], rather than one of eavesdropping on somebody else's event" (Hornby, 2011: 197). More importantly, it encourages the cinema audience to identify with the theatre audience, who will be heard and, in some cases, seen during the performance. Plays presented in the round, such as *Coriolanus*, are particularly well suited to the presentation of the theatre audience as a proxy for the livecast viewer, as members of the theatre audience are frequently visible in the background. This is also utilized effectively in Julie Taymor's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2014), a film of a theatrical performance which relies on the inclusion of the audience within the frame to create a sense of liveness. Most productions presented by NT Live, however, occur on proscenium stages, elevated above the audience, who are only seen before the play, after it, during intervals and in particularly wide shots. This, along with their audible presence, is enough to invite the cinema audience to identify with them to some degree. Moments in which the theatre audience is shown during the performance are rare, but usually purposeful in identifying them as a proxy for the cinema audience. *Fela!* (2011) and *A Disappearing Number* (2010) contain examples of these moments which can shed light on the way NT Live attempts to bridge the gap between theatre and cinema audiences.

Thus far, the NT Live production to most directly involve the theatre audience has been *Fela!*, which is as much a scripted concert as it is a play. When Fela makes his first entrance, the band has already been playing for 21 minutes, immersing the theatre and cinema audience in the tone of the show while they enter and blurring the line between the show and pre-show. When Fela enters, he says, "Everybody say, 'Yeah yeah'" (*Fela!* 2011). The theatre audience responds, while there is no need for those in the cinema to do so. Fela then says, "God damn it. Look, we don't come here tonight just for money. We came here for our

enjoyment and your own enjoyment. No matter if this is your first concert in the Shrine or not. I gonna say, 'Everybody say, "Yeah yeah."' You gonna say, 'Yeah yeah'. Everybody say, 'Yeah yeah'" (*Fela!* 2011). This time the audience responds more loudly, while there are several dancers at the foot of the stage watching them to ensure that they do. This somewhat aggressive treatment of the audience is reminiscent of the Orson Welles production described by Bazin in which the actors fire guns on the audience, "crossing the footlights" (Bazin, 1967: 101). Asserting pressure on the audience as the dancers in *Fela!* do or otherwise engaging them directly as in Bazin's example is an impossibility in livecasting. Performers can speak directly into the camera as they do at the end of *Everyman* (2015) and in *The Beaux' Strategem*, but although they can break the fourth wall, they are unable to cross it. In *Fela!*, the relationship with the dancers does not exist for the cinema audience, who are neither pressured nor expected to respond, but who are able to identify with the theatre audience's response through shots of them. Director Nick Wickham encourages this identification with frequent shots of the audience not just when they are addressed, but throughout the performance, reminding the cinema viewers that a relationship exists between the performers and the audience, and thus communicating a key component of the performance intellectually if not experientially. The livecast of *Fela!* draws somewhat on the tradition of concert documentaries in its focus on the audience, which serves to demonstrate to cinema audiences that the experience of hearing this music is enjoyable and prove it by showing proxy audience members enjoying it.

In the livecast of Complicite's *A Disappearing Number*, identification with the theatre audience is encouraged to a greater degree than is usual in a play performed on a proscenium stage, and with far greater impact than in any other NT livecast. The play contains several speeches which are delivered directly to the audience, as well as conventional scenes which respect the fourth wall. When the fourth wall is broken, the cinema audience usually receives a

wide shot of the stage with the first few rows of the audience visible, making it clear to livecast viewers that spectators are a part of these scenes. This occurs from the first scene, which is spoken to the audience in the form of a mathematics lecture. The opening shot of the play, in which the first three rows of the audience occupy the bottom third of the frame, lasts fifty-eight seconds, firmly establishing the role of the audience and suggesting direct communication. The lecture is immediately followed by another lengthy monologue, during which Aninda does a mathematical trick that ends with him accurately guessing the number everyone must be thinking of. During his speech, he occupies only the bottom right corner of the screen, with about seven eighths of the frame occupied by his audience. This is a particularly artful use of screen direction, as the stated purpose of the scene is to demonstrate that in the theatre, a group of strangers can be made to think the exact same thing; the purpose of this speech is extended to the cinema audience, who are linked not only with those sitting near them in the cinema, but with the onscreen audience and by implication audiences around the world. This effect is anticipated and exploited by Complicite, who make a slight alteration to the text to enhance the impact of the speech; in the livecast, Aninda says, "Please everyone here in Plymouth, for those people in cinemas, in New York, in London, I would like you to think of a number" (*A Disappearing Number* 2010). In this moment the theatre audience is more than a proxy to the cinema audience; they are all linked by the text of the play, and NT Live's positioning of the theatre audience as proxies for those in the cinema becomes not just psychological, but artistically meaningful.

Alienation

Although shots of the audience often allow cinema viewers to regard the live audience as their proxy representatives, a very different effect is sometimes attained. The opening speech in *Everyman*, delivered by God in the guise of a cleaning woman, includes a line

directed straight at the theatre audience: "I see you have your drink. Prosecco" (*Everyman* 2015). The director then cuts to a shot of four well-dressed audience members. This, however, highlights a disparity between those in the theatre and the cinema audience, who tend to be casually dressed and, at the venue at which I attended the livecast, Cineworld Glasgow, have access to no fancier drink than a pre-packaged plastic cup of wine. Here the theatre audience does not feel like a proxy, but like a part of the spectacle. A similar moment occurred at Cineworld Glasgow during *The Beaux' Strategem*, when Lady Bountiful's short feminist speech delivered right after the interval was greeted with hoots and applause by the Londoners, causing some members of the Glasgow audience to laugh. In this instance, the theatre audience's reaction became a part of the humour, a part of the spectacle on screen. These are two of several moments I have witnessed during which cinema audiences may feel alienated from the event they are watching.

Alienation as a result of distance is a constant threat to cinema audiences' enjoyment of livecasts. It occurs most frequently when geographical references are made. *The Beaux' Strategem*, particularly Act One, contains multiple references to London, which Archer and Kate speak of with the reverence with which Moscow is described in *Three Sisters*; it is presented as an El Dorado for certain characters. These lines were silently heard by the theatre audience as a matter of course, but the Glasgow cinema audience received them with sardonic laughter. Conversely, a joke in *Hangmen* (2016) about Scottish women being unattractive got a laugh from the London audience but was met by a pronounced silence in Glasgow. At moments such as these, the remote viewer is reminded that there is indeed a relationship between the actor and the live audience to which the cinema audience is not privy; references to London and Scotland carry different connotations for London and Scottish audiences, and the livecast viewer is unable to identify with anyone except their fellow cinema-goers. Such a situation does not occur in live theatre with a co-present audience, nor in a film, during which

the actors have no special relationship with any one particular audience. It is a unique product of livecasting.

Another way to invite the cinema audience into the experience is through direct feedback. The theatre audience is able to laugh, applaud or otherwise make their reactions to the performance known, but how are cinema audiences able to make their voices heard? Thus far, the only solution on offer has been social media, a strategy in use by television shows such as *American Idol* (2002-2016). During NT livecasts, cinema audiences are encouraged to tweet @NTLive during breaks in the performance, but these tweets are not shown on the screen; rather, the discussion which might take place in the foyer of the theatre during the interval is moved online, and there is no substitute offered for audible applause. The Royal Opera House's livecast of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (2015) took remote audience interaction via social media further than any NT Live screening has, projecting tweets onto the scenery during the intermission. This attempt to give remote viewers a voice in the conversation is particularly apt to this politically charged opera, but the viewer and potential participants remain aware that only selected tweets will be projected; the conversation is mediated in a way face to face conversations are not, so although social media users are given the ability to address their far-off fellow viewers, they are not guaranteed the chance to be heard. To date, NT Live's most direct attempt at interaction with their remote audiences came after *Travelling Light* (2012), when NT Live presenter Emma Freud conducted an onstage interview with the writer, the director and a film critic (the latter being included because the play deals with the history of cinema). In her introduction, Freud tells cinema audiences:

> But here's the thing: the questions are going to be coming from you. If you have a phone with you, we would love you to tweet us @NTLive or to post on our Facebook page any questions that you have about the play, about how it went, about the costumes that they were wearing, anything at all. I'll take as

> many of your questions as I can as long as they aren't particularly rude (*Travelling Light* 2012).

Here the cinema audience is provided with another proxy; Freud will stand in for them and ask their questions, pending her approval. This offers cinema audiences a level of interaction, albeit mediated, which is unavailable even to theatre-goers, whose only chance at asking questions might be found by waiting outside the stage door. A similar moment when cinema audiences were directed to the internet to participate occurred during the curtain call after *Hamlet*, when Benedict Cumberbatch quieted the theatre audience and made a charity appeal on behalf of Save the Children. He informed the cinema audience that those in the theatre would be personally asked for a donation on their way out, but since such direct appeals cannot be made remotely, cinema audience members ought to visit www.savethechildren.org.uk/hamlet in order to donate. (For an interesting examination of social media responses to *Coriolanus*, which take the form of online discussions between fans rather than between audiences and NT Live, see Abbott, 2015.)

Another way NT Live has attempted to make the cinema audience member feel that they are in the world of theatre rather than cinema is by evoking theatre history. Prior to *A View from the Bridge*, the cinema audience was shown a featurette describing the past glories of the Young Vic, including a look at the building in which the play was to take place. In the featurette that preceded *Coriolanus*, director Josie Rourke talks about the theatre in which the play is being performed, the Donmar Warehouse. While the audience is given sweeping shots of the theatre from various angles, Rourke says, "I just love the idea that this building was not intended to be a theatre and yet has this extraordinary magic. It's a kind of deeply psychological space. It has to be enormously truthful." Descriptions like these are at least as alienating as they are successful at establishing a mood. Whatever aura the performance space may have can be described to and even understood by the livecast audience, but like the

pressure asserted by the dancers in *Fela!*, it cannot be experienced directly. After all, the cinema audience is sitting in a separate space with its own history, mood and connotations: going to the cinema, even a livecast, is a very different experience from going to the theatre, a subject explored in the next chapter.

Chance occurrences

Derek Jacobi, interviewed for the television special *National Theatre Live: 50 Years on Stage* (2013), describes the experience of seeing a play by Harold Pinter with reference to *No Man's Land*. "And when they pause, have they dried or is it intended?" (*National Theatre Live: 50 Years on Stage* 2013) Jacobi is describing an element of live theatre which does not exist in conventional cinema: unintentionality. Chance occurrences may be visible in a film, but as has been discussed in chapter one, their inclusion during the editing process imbues them with a sense of intentionality: if the director did not wish for us to see them, we would not. Defenders of live theatre point to the "spontaneity of the performance, the element of liveness that involves suddenness and unpredictability" (Crisell, 2012: 11) as setting it apart from cinema. A noticeable mistake can be both a distracting and communal experience for a theatre audience; distracting because it removes them from the artificial world of the production, but communal because this unique moment is shared by all those present. Whether or not the possibility of error is desirable for audiences, it is an essential element of theatre and of the liveness of theatre.

Livecasting not only offers cinema audiences the same possibilities of forgotten lines, missed cues and technical errors that are familiar to theatre-goers, but is also rife with possibilities of its own, a multitude of potential errors being inherent to the technology which mediates the cinema audience's experience of the play. In attending livecasts for this research, I have yet to witness a production which has not included at least one technical error, with

some of the most serious causing intense alienation for the cinema audience. During the live transmission of *Pirates of Penzance* at Cineworld Glasgow, the screen froze and the sound dropped for approximately five seconds, drawing a gasp from some members of the audience. Here is where the possibility of error is far more serious for the cinema audience than the theatre audience: the whole performance could suddenly be taken away. That is precisely what happened on 10 April, 2016 during Cineworld Glasgow's livecast of the Bolshoi Ballet's *Don Quixote* (2016), when the feed was lost at the beginning of the show, never to be re-established; the audience received refunds. This is the most extreme example of technical failure; the range of possibilities of things that might go wrong during a live theatre performance does not include anything as severe as the performance simply disappearing. During *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, the subtitles did not come on until the final song before the interval, making much of the opera unintelligible. During *The Beaux' Strategem*, horizontal blue lines appeared on the screen continually until the intermission, and the picture was once dropped for three seconds. Performers sometimes bump their lapel microphones, as happened three times in *Coriolanus*, or their microphones may fail, as Laertes' did in *Hamlet*, causing his voice to sound distant and come accompanied by crackling until his exit (an occurrence reminiscent of the unclear sound in Electronovision's *Hamlet*). When errors like these occur, the cinema audience's relationship with the performance is impeded, as is their relationship with the theatre audience. The livecast viewer is aware that their proxy representatives are not susceptible to the same range of mishaps, that Laertes is always as audible as ever in the theatre, that the co-present audience will not see the performance freeze or disappear. When the audience for *Don Quixote* left Cineworld with their refunds, they were aware that the performance was continuing normally for the theatre audience, but the means of relay had failed.

While problems with the transmission are certainly avoided by NT Live, however, other errors appear to be regarded as a part of the experience. In the opening act of *Hamlet*, there are three moments when the director cuts to a camera caught out of position, which must then quickly zoom in to reach the position dictated by the shooting script. Similar moments occur during *Coriolanus* and *People*, and are not uncommon throughout NT livecasts in general. At other times, as in *Coriolanus*, a camera becomes visible in the frame. It is evident that these are regarded by NT Live as a part of the experience because they are preserved in encore performances, rebroadcasts of performances originally transmitted live. Encore performances sometimes contain post-production effects, such as slow motion in *The Crucible*, but *Coriolanus* and *Hamlet*, both of which I saw at encore performances, do not omit the types of errors described in this paragraph. Is this because NT Live is unable to access alternate footage to which they may cut during unplanned moments? Alternatively, NT Live may subscribe to the idea that "one way to make simulcasts come alive is seeing roughness and rawness not as drawbacks, but virtues, emphasising the friction and tension of live performance as well as its communality" (Dickson, 2010). From this viewpoint, such imperfections may be regarded as guarantees of liveness in opposition to the contrived intentionality of a film, and thus are retained for encore performances in order to enhance the feeling of spontaneity that is integral to theatre. Whatever the reason that they are not omitted for encore performances, it is clear that the potential for error is at least as present in a livecast as it is in a live theatrical performance, and that this potential is greatly enlarged by technological mediation.

It is clear then that in the absence of a direct relationship between the performer and the audience and with the introduction of a proxy audience for livecast viewers and the possibility of alienation, livecasts are not theatre. Neither are they cinema, though, as their co-

presence in time, spontaneity and potential for error demonstrate. When NT Live claims that it is bringing theatre to audiences across the country, an assertion which is frequently made, as the next chapter will demonstrate, we must take pause and consider what exactly is being transmitted: neither theatre nor cinema, but a new hybridized form which may well be bringing about the mass participatory revolution identified in *The Guardian* at the outset of this chapter.

Chapter Four: The Democratization of (the National) Theatre

Accessibility has always been an issue for the National Theatre. Richard Eyre, Director

of the National from 1988-1997, warned that "our work *is* inaccessible to large numbers of

people and we MUST do something about this, or die" (Rosenthal, 2013: 794). It has been

seen in Chapter One that the National was experimenting with filmed performances as early as

1963, but with the proliferation of digital technology in cinemas, livecasts seem to have

enabled that accessibility that has always been lacking. This chapter will examine livecasting

as a means of democratizing theatre, and will ask to what degree it is the National's obligation,

as a publicly subsidised body, to bring its productions to larger audiences through whatever

means available. It will also examine what effects the availability of livecasts may have on

ticket sales at the National, as well as on regional companies. Finally, a brief examination of

what livecast audiences receive for the price of a ticket will be provided.

A national theatre

Representatives of NT Live have always been careful to distinguish their productions

from the National Theatre's stage work, never suggesting that livecasts provide a superior or

even equal experience to seeing a live production. David Sabel, the American producer who

spearheaded the first season of NT Live and is now the National Theatre's Head of Digital

Media, summarizes the National's view of livecasting: "Whilst not the same experience, we

are confident that we have pioneered a way of successfully capturing theatre on camera and

creating a valuable proposition for audiences everywhere. In this way, we are offering the best

of British theatre and can truly be a national theatre" (Trompeteler, 2011: 42). From the

perspective of the National, livecasts may not equal a night at the theatre, but they are a way of

creating access to plays previously unavailable outside London. It is this possibility of

democratizing theatre by making it available to a wider audience that NT Live's supporters

emphasise. Peter Bazalgette, chair of Arts Council England, sees livecasting as an opportunity:

> …the digital era is allowing us to distribute more arts to more people in more places than we ever considered possible, which means that we can deliver double the public good for the money that goes in…So NT Live might have a play for 300 people in the Dorfman Theatre on a Thursday. On a Friday if it's on NT Live it might be seen by 80,000 people. That's dynamic. This is the first year the Royal Opera House will have more people watching its ballets and operas on large screens and in cinemas than buying tickets. They've doubled their reach across the country. That's a wonderful thing (BBC Radio 4, 2014).

Bazalgette and Sabel's favourable opinions of livecasting may be founded in two different

desires: Arts Council England is pleased because it brings some form of theatre to wider

audiences, which is seen by supporters of the arts as a positive result in itself, while the

National Theatre is able to widen its audience and present itself as a nation-wide theatre which

is entitled to the national funding it receives. Because the National is publicly funded, it has

been seen to have "a core objective of bringing theatre to all – not just people visiting or living

in London" (Schutt, 2011). This objective is frequently referred to by the National's

representatives in their discussions of livecasting, including during livecasts themselves. Being

interviewed live prior to *The Cherry Orchard*, the National's then-artistic director Nicholas

Hytner said, "If you're a national theatre it's reassuring that you can reach people even if they

don't live near a town where we're capable of touring because of the size of the productions

that we produce" (*The Cherry Orchard* 2011). It is certainly true that livecasting has allowed

greater numbers of Britons to see productions, albeit it in a mediated form, which their taxes

have supported. If accessibility is paramount to the National, the development of livecasting

has been a positive step and, as Hytner puts it, "a form of public service" (Rosenthal, 2013:

793).

Nonetheless, the idea that livecasts are a means of being more accessible to British

taxpayers does not explain NT Live's availability in other countries. NT Live "began

transmitting productions of their 2010-11 season to cinemas internationally…by autumn of 2010 they were reaching 325 venues around the world" (Hornby, 2011: 197). That number has continued to grow. During the interval of *The Beaux' Strategem* in NT Live's most recent season, presenter Kirsty Lang boasted that "NT Live has broadcast almost 50 productions since it started back in 2009…Recently launched in China, now over 4 million people have experienced one of our screenings" (*The Beaux' Strategem* 2015). Interviewed live before *Othello*, Hytner referred to the National as "your national theatre, and increasingly an international theatre" (*Othello* 2013). Becoming international in scope is not a mandate of the National (although the company does mount tours abroad), but it can be lucrative, bringing in both financial profit and international esteem. It was reported in 2011 that "[n]o UK box office figures are published for NT Live (*Frankenstein*'s first broadcast grossed around $6,627 in New Zealand), but Head of Digital Media David Sabel confirms that it's starting to make a profit" (Radford, 2011). An inspection of the National's finances suggests that NT Live is "making a growing income contribution to the NT bottom line: £6.7m in 2014, against £2.4m in 2013" (Gardner, 2014). This is mentioned not to criticise the National for exploiting a lucrative market, an achievement which could theoretically allow Arts Council England to reassign funds to other projects, but to help explain the international direction in which NT Live has been headed since its second season, a direction which has no relation to the National's responsibilities to the British public, but demonstrates the globalization of theatre that may come to be seen as one of livecasting's results. It occasionally becomes apparent that NT Live is directed not only at Britons but at international audiences, as in the intermission of *The Kitchen* when presenter Emma Freud said one of NT Live's upcoming shows would star "the British comedian Lenny Henry" (*The Kitchen* 2011). Her identification of Henry as a "British comedian" suggests that she is not only addressing the British public, who would be likely to know Henry's name, but foreign audiences as well. This is not to say that NT Live

does not cater to British audiences (it certainly does), but it tells of an international turn in the direction of NT Live. When *Of Mice and Men* (2015) was transmitted from Broadway's Longacre Theatre by NT Live during its most recent season, NT Live was not ensuring that publicly funded British theatre could be seen by taxpayers, but acting as an importer, making money and establishing itself as an international presence in livecasting. The potential downside to international success may be that compromises are made for international audiences; plays may be chosen not with Britain's national interest in mind, but for international appeal. In general, however, NT Live has spent most of its efforts on British plays, most of which originate in the National Theatre, and Nesta states that "[i]ncome from international ticket sales has helped to subsidise the UK programme" (Nesta, 2011: 36). It is too early to say whether the livecast of *Of Mice and Men* is a harbinger of more imported productions.

Regional Theatre

A concern expressed early in the history of NT Live was that making productions available at a lower price via livecasting could be detrimental to ticket sales at the theatre itself. There is indeed a precedent to be found in the early history of televised sports in America:

> A pilot study conducted by the Crossley Corporation for the NCAA in New Haven, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore revealed one especially disturbing fact: 50 percent of those interviewed rated viewing games on television to be equal or superior to watching from the stands. In 1950 the Big Ten Conference banned televised games entirely; attendance dropped less in that conference than nationwide" (Rader, 1984: 70).

Research has already suggested that some audience members have rated watching a livecast preferable to seeing a play in a theatre (see Barker, 2013 and BBC Radio 4, 2014). Nonetheless, no research has supported a correlation between livecasting and decreased ticket

sales at the National; a study carried out by Nesta found the opposite to be true: "…the National Theatre appeared to be recruiting audiences into the theatre itself through these live broadcasts" (BBC Radio 4, 2014). If the National Theatre is satisfied that livecasts are not harming their box office returns, though, what impact is NT Live having on other theatre companies?

Some favourable perspectives of livecasting, such as Bazalgette's, are rooted in the notion that any dissemination of the arts is necessarily positive. It seems possible, however, that NT Live's improved accessibility could give it a stranglehold on British theatre, to the detriment of regional companies. Playwright Alan Ayckbourn, who was the artistic director of Scarborough's Stephen Joseph Theatre until 2009, told the BBC, "One's fear, which may be groundless, is that eventually we and our equivalent theatres will stop doing plays and they'll all be streamed live from these centres of excellence" (Youngs, 2014). The question Ayckbourn raises is whether NT Live brings democratization, making quality theatre available to remote audiences, or colonization, claiming territory in markets previously held by regional theatres. Again, Nesta's study seems to negate this concern:

> …what we've found actually is if anything, again, the National Theatre Live broadcasts are associated with an increase in attendances at a local theatre. That result tends to be particularly strong in London. So what we found is that if you look at areas within a 3 kilometre radius of a screening venue, you see an uplift in attendances at local theatre of over 6% in London. Outside London, you don't see an impact either way. Certainly what we can conclude is there's no evidence that we've found that the National Theatre's live broadcasts are detracting in some way or diminishing audiences at local theatre" (BBC Radio 4, 2014).

Bazalgette has accepted these results, stating that "small theatres have not suffered from the transitions in cinemas" (BBC Radio 4, 2014). Nesta's study, conducted in 2010, has put at ease the minds of the key players in NT Live and Arts Council England, although it must be noted that neither Nesta nor Arts Council England are wholly impartial: NT Live's first season "was underwritten by a seed grant of £75,000 from the National Endowment for Science,

Technology and the Arts (NESTA), and £37,500 from the Arts Council, who committed the

same amount again as a guarantee against loss" (Rosenthal, 2013: 796). As livecasting

becomes more and more firmly entrenched in our media landscape, it will be necessary to

objectively monitor the relationship between NT Live and regional theatre to ensure that its

impact on regional theatre is indeed neutral or complementary; to become a Goliath in the

theatre market might be considered contradictory to the National's role in the world of British

theatre.

It is clear, however, that if NT Live is not stealing audiences from local theatres, it is

not actively engaged in developing them. It is an issue Bazalgette has acknowledged:

> …I would say this: We need to knit the whole thing together to deliver more
> value. So, for instance, if you remember those ghastly curry ads for the local
> curry house when you sit in the cinema, we shouldn't be having those when
> you go to the theatre in the cinema. There should be a wonderful ad for the play
> that's on down the road" (BBC Radio 4, 2014).

As no such advertisements have appeared in NT Live's presentations to date, it can be argued

that NT Live does not disseminate theatre in general to regional audiences; it disseminates

only itself. The only advertisements shown during livecasts are for other NT Live productions,

which are plugged repeatedly during introductions and intervals. Daisy Abbott notes that

Emma Freud's introduction to *Coriolanus* "primarily consisted of describing upcoming NT

Live shows" (Abbott, 2015: 25). This is true of most of NT Live's presenters' introductions.

During the intermission of *Tymone of Athens* (2012), Freud's interview with Hytner consisted

entirely of descriptions of three upcoming plays on NT Live; the interview was not a look at

the current production or its components, but a sales pitch for future events. During the 2015

season, the National's livecasts included advertisements for an upcoming feature film

produced by the National Theatre, *London Road* (2015); director Rufus Norris was

interviewed about it during the interval of *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2015), and the

trailer was shown. A BBC special called *National Theatre Live: 50 Years on Stage* (2013) was

similarly promoted during the 2013 season. What is being advertised is not theatre, but projects specific to the National.

Can NT Live be faulted for promoting its own productions? What responsibility does the National have to promote theatre in general? Should it be expected to function as any business does in a capitalist marketplace, employing all of its resources to earn maximum returns? The National is certainly not expected to advertise other theatres' productions on its London site. Alternatively, does its prominence and use of public money oblige the National to be as accessible as possible, but not to the detriment of other companies that receive less or no public funding? It is easy to see why Bazalgette, who is tasked with nurturing the arts across England, would wish to see advertisements for local productions during NT Live presentations, but is it in the interest of the National Theatre? We find ourselves encountering familiar questions about the National, such as:

> …what role the National should…play in the theatre system. Clearly, it should be complementary to other theatre managements and not in rivalry with them, for in any straight competitive battle, the odds unfairly favoured the National. The size of their subsidies…and the very name of the National raised the National Theatre company above – and away from – the normal battles of the market-place" (Elsom and Tomalin, 1978: 326).

It is no doubt a difficult order for the National to be as widely accessible as possible, but still remain complementary to theatre in general. NT Live's strongest defence against claims of colonization is made by pointing to plays it has livecast which have not originated in the National Theatre. The first of these co-productions was Complicite's *A Disappearing Number* (2010), broadcast from Plymouth; *King Lear* (2014) and *Coriolanus* (2014) were transmitted from the Donmar Warehouse. In Nesta's view, "NT Live's promotion of Donmar Warehouse and Complicite productions show that companies can tap into the delivery model without having to fund everything themselves" (Nesta, 2011: 50). The vast majority of NT Live transmissions are indeed National Theatre productions, but the inclusion of other companies'

productions can be seen to make NT Live seem a more benevolent giant in the field of livecasting. "In the second season, because of partnerships with Complicite and Donmar, NT Live's strap line became 'Best of British Theatre broadcast to cinemas around the world'" (Nesta, 2011: 32). This slogan is something of a stretch, as NT Live has only collaborated with a small number of "selected partners" (Nesta, 2011: 45), and it is clear that NT Live, which originated livecasts of theatre, remains in firm control of the medium in the UK, while offering nothing more to regional theatres than the assurance, supported by Nesta's data, that it is not stealing their audiences.

The price of admission

In 2010, just one year into NT Live's history, the National Theatre was presented with an award for innovation at the Arts and Business Awards. "Award judges said the project had helped break new markets and attract new audiences" (BBC, 2010). The democratization of theatre via livecasting has been seen not just in terms of making theatre accessible to people outside London, but to less affluent audiences than theatres attract. The demographics of livecast audiences will not be closely examined here; Martin Barker provides a thorough discussion of the subject in *Live to Your Local Cinema* (2013), in which he sorts the audience by age, gender, distance from the venue and theatre-going habits. Instead, I will briefly consider the accessibility of NT Live with reference to ticket prices, and consider what audiences receive in return for their money.

The price is often gloated over by supporters of NT Live and livecasting in general. "The $17.95 charge – considerably above normal cinema prices – compared very well with prices at the Met itself, where tickets could cost up to $350" (Barker, 2013: 3). Of course, $350 is the top end, which hardly makes for a fair comparison with livecast tickets. When it was launched, "NT Live negotiated with distributors to charge no more than £10 per ticket"

(Schutt, 2011). According to Nesta, NT Live settled on this price "partly due to its desire to keep ticket prices accessible and not to exceed the lowest ticket price at the National" (Nesta, 2011, 36). For the second season of NT Live, the price rose to £15, an increase explained by Nesta: "After the success of the first season, it was felt that NT Live created a valuable proposal to audiences and represented a premium on cinema tickets they were willing to pay" (Nesta, 2011: 36). The current price of a NT Live ticket at Cineworld Glasgow is £17.95, regardless of whether it is a live or encore presentation. This price is slightly higher than the cheapest seats in the Olivier Theatre, where tickets can be bought for as little as £15; these are the most distant seats in the house, of course, and it could be argued that those who pay £17.95 in the cinema receive a better show thanks to the privileged access of the camera. When livecast ticket prices are compared with regional productions, they fare worse. Regular priced tickets to plays at Glasgow's Citizens Theatre and Tron Theatre cost as little as £10, and those venues are small enough that no seat is particularly distant. Why pay more to see one of NT's livecasts when live theatre can be had cheaper? What NT Live offers are London productions with London casts, and the price charged is deemed affordable only when compared with good seats in London theatres. In this way, NT Live is asserting its dominance and prestige by charging nearly twice as much for a virtual experience than a local theatre might charge for a live one. The question then, "Does livecasting make theatre available to people who could not otherwise afford it?" can only be answered in the affirmative if we are specifically discussing the *National* Theatre; theatre in general is already available at lower prices than a livecast. It is also worth noting that the type of theatre NT Live provides is limited to a conventional form of theatre; productions that make use of exceptional elements may not be able to be transmitted through livecasts. Once again then, it is not theatre in general that is democratized, but a specific variety of theatre produced by the National.

As well as being more expensive than locally available theatre, NT Live's £17.95 ticket price at Cineworld is nearly twice as expensive as a regular movie ticket. This is justified not only by the liveness, but by the adjustments to the movie-going experience which are made in deference to "event cinema". At Cineworld Glasgow, the cinema staff hand out programs, which usually consist of a folded sheet of A4 paper with information about the play and advertisements for upcoming events (although no glossy playbill is available for sale as it would be in the actual playhouse). A staff member with a microphone makes a short introduction before the feed begins, introducing the play somewhat redundantly before NT Live's onscreen presenter does the same, but also pointing out the availability of refreshments. Ice cream and sweets are sold from a trolley in the screen during the interval, as are beer and wine, which are prohibited during regular screenings. Cineworld Glasgow assigns a team of staff members to each event cinema screening, with a minimum of one employee in the cinema throughout the presentation to act as an usher and ensure that the show runs smoothly. These alterations to the cinema's procedure remind the audience that they are attending something other than an ordinary movie; this gives even encore performances an additional element of interest, and goes some way in justifying the higher than normal ticket price. Additionally, by imitating the experience of visiting the theatre, Cineworld invites London into the cinema space. According to Cineworld's website, "Event cinema can transport you to the Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden from the comfort of your local Cineworld seat" (Cineworld, 2014). Because the audience cannot literally be "transported" to London, the compromise offered is that the aesthetics of the London theatre experience are imitated in Glasgow. When considering whether NT Live democratizes or colonizes, this must be seen as an example of colonization, as an imitation of the original event with its programs, ushers and alcohol is mounted in a remote space.

What audiences receive, then, is a simulacrum of a night at the theatre enabled by the relay of a live performance and enhanced by adjustments to the site of exhibition. In addition to the transmedia experience of seeing a play on a cinema screen, they have an approximation of the aesthetic experience of attending a theatre, as local cinema employees make efforts to complement NT Live's onscreen product (William Sargent of Electronovision would have been pleased to see screenings of *Hamlet* treated so exceptionally). Livecast audiences may not be going to a London event, but they are certainly being provided some form of access which did not exist ten years ago. Audiences who could not otherwise see a National Theatre production are given a clear sense of what those productions consist of, and thus the National can more convincingly claim to be a theatre for the nation. Whether it opens up theatre to less affluent audiences is questionable; livecasting more definitely addresses geographical obstacles than financial ones, as £17.95 remains a somewhat high price for a night at the local theatre or cinema. Nonetheless, access to the National is there for those who want and can afford it, just as it is in London, and livecasting can be seen to have succeeded in solving the problem of accessibility bemoaned by Richard Eyre at the beginning of this chapter.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Livecasting has had a large impact on the National Theatre and created new possibilities for interested audiences around the UK and throughout other parts of the world. It has made it possible to see a live or nearly live National Theatre production in North America or Asia, and to see the Bolshoi Ballet or an opera from the Met in Glasgow. The technology that facilitates these new possibilities brings with it a method of communication of its own, which is used to convey the sense of a live theatrical production at its best, and detracts from the meaning of the stage production at its worst. Livecasting represents a major step in the dissemination of theatre through video technology because it is able to retain co-presence in time, although co-presence in space is not replicable. Livecasting is seen by some as a solution to the old problem of theatre's inaccessibility to people who live outside big cities or cannot afford the price of a ticket to a high end production, and as a means of helping the National Theatre live up to the adjective in its name.

The subject of livecasting presents no shortage of questions for scholars to address, and the current scarcity of literature on the subject presents a great opportunity for those interested in exploring this new phenomenon. This dissertation has examined the aesthetics, form and ramifications of livecasting, particularly the impact of the mediation of the camera, the integral element of liveness and the democratization of the National Theatre. I am sure that these topics will be further unpacked, particularly the merger of the aesthetics of cinema, television and theatre: By what aesthetic criteria should livecasts be judged? They cannot be evaluated as films or as plays, but as a fusion requiring its own set of criteria. Just as the critical framework of this dissertation draws on elements of both theatre studies and film and television studies, an understanding of livecasting must be reached by applying theory from both of these disciplines as they are seen to be applicable to the transmedia development of livecasting. This dissertation has used traditional textual, secondary and historical analysis

drawn from the disciplines of both film and television studies and theatre studies to address the nature of livecasting. This is a new medium which calls for a new hybrid paradigm to better understand its aesthetics, form and ramifications. It is not a reductive matter of determining whether livecasts are *better* or *worse* than live theatre or films, but of examining where theatre, film and livecasting intersect, applying extant, pertinent theories and developing new ones to address the specific nature of livecasting.

Beyond aesthetics, there are a number of aspects of livecasting that require academic treatment. This dissertation has provided a close examination of the aesthetics and impact of livecasting, but spatial limitations leave a good deal of work to be done by future academics. A history of livecasting would be a valuable contribution, as current histories are either brief (such as the one provided by Barker, 2013) or focus specifically on one company's involvement in livecasting (as in Rosenthal, 2013, which, like this dissertation, considers only NT Live). The impact of livecasting across all the arts it touches (theatre, ballet, opera, popular music) ought to be considered as a whole. With regards to the National Theatre, it is essential that unbiased research be conducted on the impact of livecasting on regional theatres. Although preliminary research has already been conducted on livecast audiences (Barker, 2013), it would be useful to see how perceptions alter as livecasting becomes more deeply entrenched in the cultural landscape. An examination of livecast audiences focusing on socioeconomic status has not yet been produced but would be very useful in examining the ways in which livecasting democratizes or does not democratize expensive live events. Finally, as livecasts reach increasingly large audiences, it would be beneficial to consider the degree to which live performances are now being globalized, and to examine where NT Live and other companies send their livecasts, as well as where they do not send them. While these and many other questions await the academic attention they are due, this dissertation has provided a foundation for future research. The study of livecasting is in its infancy, but

livecasting itself has already had a large enough impact on our consumption of the arts that it

cannot be ignored by anyone with an interest in the current or future states of theatre or

cinema, which are now more tightly intertwined than ever.

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