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## Rethinking Liveness: An Exploration of Phenomenological Liveness, Documentation, and Audience

Samantha Sully

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**Rethinking Liveness: An Exploration of Phenomenological Liveness,  
Documentation, and Audience**

Sully, Samantha

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# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

**RETHINKING LIVENESS: AN EXPLORATION OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL LIVENESS,  
DOCUMENTATION, AND AUDIENCE**

by

**SAMANTHA SULLY**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**RESEARCH MASTERS**

School of Society and Culture

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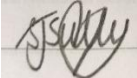
I would like to thank my family and partner for their complete support throughout this process and myself for persevering despite uncertain circumstances.

Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Research Masters has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

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Samantha Sully - Rethinking Liveness: An Exploration of Phenomenological Liveness,

Documentation, and Audience

Abstract

This paper explores experiential liveness discourse through the lens of phenomenology, semiotics, and auto-ethnographical research. This thesis examined previous experiential liveness studies and discourses and how these ideologies build a discourse centred around audience/performer relationships, communitas and virtual communities. It explores the interactions between experiential and ontological liveness through documentation, digital archiving and Cartesian dualism. Further, this thesis re-frames core ontological terms within the phenomenological liveness context. It examines event and ritual as experiences and explores my experiences of liveness with reference to previous experiential liveness studies. Finally, this paper examines the importance of experiential liveness as its own discourse and the impacts virtual performance can have for audiences regarding accessibility and communitas within the COVID-19 pandemic.



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## Introduction

My decision to analyse Western liveness specifically is due to my personal experiences and familiarity with such performances. To attempt to examine the livenesses within non-Western performance within this paper in addition to that of Western livenesses would not be appropriate in this essay due to the autoethnographic approach I have elected to take towards my research. In addition, these cultures of liveness are non-comparable and deserve to be examined in their own rights by an academic who has grown with non-Western forms so as to extensively analyse their liveness discourse with the proficiency of idiomatic and long-established knowledge. The lens through which I am situating my liveness discourse is a phenomenological, semiotic, Eurocentric, and middle class one. I understand that I am in a privileged position to be able to comment on liveness discourse and my choice to do so through such frames is a result of my personal conclusions upon reading previous liveness discourse and my perceptions of the trajectory that these discourses may take in the future as a result of my research journey.

There are certain theories situated at the core of my liveness discourse that should be considered throughout my writings and analysis within this paper. The most prominent ideology within my liveness discourse is phenomenology. In 1956 Maurice Merleau-Ponty defined phenomenology within his book *What is Phenomenology?* as '[...] the study of essences [...] an account of space, time, and the world "as lived."' It is an attempt to describe our experience as it is and to describe it directly[...]' (1956:59). I selected Merleau-Ponty's ideology of phenomenology as a basis for my discourse regarding experiential liveness due to my personal experience of both live and non-live forms. It is my initial understanding that performance is a medium which is felt and interpreted by the audience and as such I wanted to situate my analysis of the liveness of the forms within a theorem which allows for such perspectives at the forefront.

The secondary lens through which my liveness discourse should be viewed is that of semiotics. Elaine Aston defines semiotics as the ways through which '[...] meaning is created and communicated through systems of encodable and decodable signs [...]' (1991:3). My discourse of liveness examines the ways that live and non-live forms communicate and deliver experiences to audiences. Therefore, this lens of semiotic analysis is pertinent to my understanding and examination of experiential liveness and audience experience.

Additionally, the methodological approach of 'Spectator-Participation-as-Research' (SPaR) (Heddon et al, 2012) should be considered as a core lens through which I conduct research and analysis. Rose Biggin defines SPaR as 'a methodology in which writers draw on first-person accounts of their own experience as audience members alongside more theoretical writing' (2017:3). This methodology is vital for my examination of phenomenological liveness within my own research due to the ability to utilise autoethnographic research and interpretation as audience research. It also allows me to utilise previous liveness discourse alongside my first-person account to further root my research within previous writings. I examine this methodology within chapter 3, including its origins within Heddon et al's (2012) writings and the ethical implications involved with such a methodology.

The concept of 'discourse' (1969:8), as discussed within this paper, was outlined by Foucault. Foucault's discourse refers to 'ways of constituting knowledge together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them' (Weedon, 1987:108). This refers to the context through which these discourses are being delivered and who is hearing them. Foucault emphasises the importance of power/knowledge within his discourse and how discourses are linked to and generated by power. Within this paper I consider previously established discourses of liveness and begin to build my own through my research. I acknowledge the structures of power, social practices, and subjectivity

that both my own discourse and other academic discourses of liveness are situated within. These discourses are generated within academia by academia and therefore are rooted and imbued with the powers/knowledges that pertain to these social structures in this given time. I also recognise that the discourses of liveness discussed within this paper examine specific audiences' experiences bound within their own power/knowledge structures.

My impression of the term liveness originates from Jean Baudrillard's 1981 book *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. He discusses the disparities between physical media and mediatized media; defining physical media as '[...]everything that was an immediate inscription, given and returned, spoken and answered, mobile in the same space and time, reciprocal and antagonistic' (1981:176). He refers to protests and marches specifically in this example but widely when examining physical media he refers to the literal being there at the space time of the event. Whilst this ideology leans towards the ontological discourse of liveness it also it does begin to define the initial 'event' which is pertinent to both ontological and phenomenological livenesses. I identify the meanings of terms such as 'immediacy' within Martin Barker (2012) and Peggy Phelan's (1993) writings in chapter 2 of this thesis.

When examining mediatized media Baudrillard refers to forms such as radio and telephones. He states that these forms are '[...] [i]nstitutionalized by reproduction, reduced to a spectacle [...]' (1981:177). The term reproduction is analysed within ontological discourses of liveness, specifically Phelan's (1993) ideologies. However, the concept of reproduction and spectacle are also pertinent to phenomenological discourses of liveness through ideologies surrounding online documentation, digital archiving, and audiences' experiences of the theatrical atmosphere.

In chapter 1 I explore previous experiential liveness discourse beginning with Martin Barker's *Live to Your Local Cinema* (2012) as a core text for the origins of 'simulacasts' (2012:2). I

examine the types of audience that may be attending 'alternative content' (Barker, 2012: 2) with examination of the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) (2010) study. This study allows for the examination of the socio-economical status of audiences within a streamed performance at a cinema. I utilise these findings in conjunction with Barker's discourse (2012) to posit why audiences may attend streamed content over 'live' performance.

I examine Turner's 'communitas' (1969) and the impact community and togetherness have upon audiences' experiences of liveness, as referenced within NESTA (2010) and Barker (2012). I explore 'deadliness' (Reason and Lindelof, 2016:1) to examine performances that are ontologically live but fail to engage audiences phenomenologically. This emphasises the importance of experiential liveness in addition to ontological liveness.

I examine ideologies of extended liveness through Reason and Lindelof's research (2016). I also examine Erin Sullivan's 'eventness' (2018:61) and her study of audience tweets in reaction to an event. They emphasise 'a feeling of togetherness' (2018:61) as contributing to their experiential liveness. I examine togetherness, communitas and extended liveness within the digital sphere utilising Sedgman and Bucknall's examinations of 'fossils' (2017:114). These 'fossils' (2017:114) allow for documents such as tweets, blogs, and reviews to form pathways of extended liveness. These pathways are engaged with beyond the initial 'event' and create spaces for togetherness, discussion, and interaction outside of the 'live' event. I examine how these experiential 'fossils' (2017:114) echo ideologies found within ontological discourses of liveness through Barthes (1980).

Finally, I examine core audience studies which hold experiential liveness at their centre. Sullivan's (2020) study of a streamed performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* examines experiential liveness ideologies such as 'fossils' (Sedgman and Bucknall, 2017, 114), 'togetherness' (Sullivan, 2018) and extended liveness (Reason and Lindelof) alongside NESTA's (2010) report and the Arts Council's *From Live-to-Digital* report (2016). By examining this report I ground previous

writings of experiential liveness within a digital study of audiences. This allows me to examine experiential liveness ideologies within an online study rather than through live event cinema audiences. I examine the differences in responses between audiences at cinema events and those who watch performances within their own homes.

Additionally, I examine Pascale Aebischer and Racheal Nicholas' *Digital Theatre Transformation Report* (2020). This study examines audience experiences of a Zoom production alongside a suggested toolkit for creating performance over online platforms. This study allows my research to consider work that has never been performed within a 'theatrical setting' and is designed for the virtual space. I examine how previous liveness discourse aligns with Aebischer and Nicholas' findings and how experiential liveness and extended livenesses within the social media space perform different roles within a performance that is built to be virtual.

In chapter 2 I explore ontological liveness discourse through the dialogue of Phelan's *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) and Auslander's *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999). I examine these ideologies alongside previous experiential liveness discourses and studies. I examine where ontological and experiential livenesses overlap, specifically surrounding the benefits of co-presence of audience and performer within time and space (Aebischer and Nicholas, 2020) (Phelan, 1993). However, I emphasise that whilst co-presence is a necessity within ontological ideologies, it is only a preference within experiential liveness studies.

I examine the differences between ontological and experiential liveness' usage of documentational methods. I examine the similarities between 'referent' (Barthes, 1980:5), 'traces' (Reason, 2006:37) and 'fossil' (Sedgman and Bucknall, 2017:114). I analyse the usage of online archives as a form of 'fossil' (2017:114) through Abigail De Koznik's *Rogue Archives* (2016). I analyse how these online archives could be considered as a form of extended liveness, including

the benefits and negatives of digital archiving as a method of documentation. I explore Henry Jenkins 'Participatory Culture' (2006) as a method for contributing shared knowledge that could be accessed by all. I examine the positives, negatives, and implications of collective intelligence, exploring popular forms of extended liveness and audience participation within fanfiction and fan networks.

I re-examine core ontological liveness terms to include alternate or additional experiential meanings. Within Barker's *Live to Your Local Cinema* (2012) I examine 'immediacy' (2012:66), 'intimacy' (2012:66), and 'buzz' (2012:66). I examine these re-definitions in conjunction with existing ontological definitions and with consideration of previous examinations of phenomenological liveness discourse and studies.

I define 'event' and 'ritual' for the contexts of my research. I examine Schechner's *6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre* (1968) to define the event scale. This allows me to consider forms outside of the traditional staged performance as event. I examine Bourriard's relational art ideology where he frames event as 'period of time to be lived through' (1998:15) rather than 'a space to be walked through' (1998:15). This is vital to my consideration of digital mediums due to the common lack of physical co-presence between audience and performer. I examine Schechner's *Performance Studies* (2002) in which he defines ritual as 'collective memories encoded into actions' (2002:52). This analysis of ritual centres around previous experiential liveness themes such as 'communitas' (Turner, 1969) and behaviours in space as examined in Aebischer (2020:196).

Finally, I examine the phenomenon of feeling physical presence and extended body within virtual events through René Descartes Cartesian Dualism (1637). This allows my research to consider virtual bodies as a legitimate platform for audience experience. This is important due to many of my personal studies of liveness occurring through streamed or purely digital mediums.

In Chapter 3 I explore the methodologies I employ within my research including the previously mentioned SPaR (Heddon et al, 2012:122). I also examine phenomenological research via Susan Kozel's *Closer* (2007). This mode of analysis allows me to consider my experience as a 'situated researcher' (2007:57), able to interpret the meaning within audience responses. Finally I apply Sedgman's 'reception research' (2018:470) when considering past tweets as a form of audience experience. I explore the ethical implications of the above methods and apply Bruckman's 'light disguise' (2002) theory and Nissenbaum's 'contextual integrity' (2004:120) as methods to negotiate ethics within my research. I examine my phenomenological liveness experience at a streamed showing of *Fleabag* (2019), PEP Talk seminars at The University of Plymouth, and through tweets posted during the premier of *Hamilton* (2020) on Disney+. I examine my experiences of these events with reflection upon previous liveness discourses and studies. I examine how my experience as an audience member echo/divert from previous experiential liveness studies and discourses. I aim to examine audience experience/experiential liveness as a significant form of liveness. I aim to examine where ontological and experiential liveness ideologies align and diverge. I aim to define experiential counterparts to core terms often claimed by ontological liveness. I aim to examine my own experiences of phenomenological liveness through digital forms with reference to previous experiential liveness studies. I aim to highlight the importance of experiential liveness and accessible digital theatre within everyday life and in a time of pandemic.

### Chapter 1: Experiential Liveness Studies

The beginnings of liveness are rooted within ontology and essentialism. The ideologies of Peggy Phelan (1993) and Philip Auslander (1999) surrounding the workings of liveness in regard to its 'ephemeral nature' (1993:31), 'immediacy' (1993:134), and 'authenticity' (Berger,1972:21) generate a discourse emphasising ontological definitions of live versus mediatized. This thesis



focuses on liveness not as an ontological state of performance but as an ongoing relationship of experience shared between and within audiences. In *Live to Your Local Cinema* (2012) Martin Barker explores liveness through 'simulacasts'/'cinema livecasts'/'alternative content' (2012:2). He explains how these events unfold; noting the presence of 'adverts and trailers' (2012:13) prior to the screening. He notes the deliberate choice to include 'shots of the assembling audience' (2012:13). Barker suggests that it is 'important for the 'guarantee' they provide of the events simultaneity' (2012:13). By allowing the cinema audience to observe the theatre audience it reinforces phenomenological simultaneity and begins to bridge the relationships between both sets of audience. The element of simultaneity has been seen as a core marker for 'true' liveness within both ontological research and audience studies. In a study conducted in 2012 a student noted "'You're sharing this, I don't know – 100 to 1,000 other people and they're all there, you're all there laughing as one, you're crying as one'" (*God of Carnage*, student, public high school)' (Bundy et al, 2012:19). Barker states that simultaneity 'surely, is proof of liveness' (2012:13). Whilst co-presence and temporal simultaneity is indicative of a 'live' experience to audiences this is where the ontological and experiential diverge. The contingency of both temporal and spatial co-presence is core within ontological definitions of liveness with Peggy Phelan stating that liveness is '[d]efined by its ephemeral nature' (1993:31). Therefore, if the person is not sharing the same space as the performance they cannot have authentically viewed it. Experiential liveness pushes beyond this allowing for lack of spatial presence. Barker states that cinema audiences 'have to be willing and able to treat the camerawork as entirely *transparent* [...]. They must be able to reproduce 'being there' in their heads' (2012:16). Whilst there is an affect in not possessing both temporal and spatial presence as an audience member I dispute the need to 'reproduce' (2012:16) being there as an audience member. I suggest that there is a separate quality and experience in acknowledging different space; especially when discussing alternative mediums such as live casting or cinema streaming. Barker notes 'bravura moments' (2012:25)

within which the camera is directed to emphasise a shot that would not be viewable within the staged audience. For example, a bird's eye view or a tight closeup of the actors faces. These shots are designed by the director who adds camera angles for effect, emphasis, or clarity. These are the only times where the cinema audiences will experience a different view than those at the theatre. It is often the aim of the director to create a performance that replicates the experience of the stage audience exactly. Andre Bazin states

[...] if the scene were played on a stage and seen from a seat in the orchestra, it would have the same meaning [...]. The changes of point of view provided by the camera would add nothing. They would present the reality a little more forcefully, first by allowing a better view and then by putting the emphasis where it belongs (1967:32).

Although it is the aim of groups such as National Theatre Live (NT Live) to make camera work feel invisible there is value in exploring the dissonance of corporal separation and the different forms of community and connectivity that are generated from these gaps.

Before I discuss audience reactions to liveness it is pertinent to examine who makes up these audiences and why they choose to attend 'alternative content' (Barker, 2012:2) rather than the live production. The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) conducted a study in 2010 based on audience members who attended a streamed production of *Phèdre* (2009) by NT Live. They sought to explore the backgrounds of audience members who attended and their experiences of the performance. They found that 'NT Live attracted significantly more low income individuals [...]. 24.5 per cent of cinemagoers earned less than £20,000 per year, compared with only 15.8 per cent of those who attended *Phèdre* at the National Theatre' (2010:4). An annual ticket review conducted by The Stage found that '[t]he average most expensive ticket for musicals was £149.19, [...] while the average topend price for plays was £83.12 [...]. Cheapest tickets for musicals have risen by 13% to £25.21 this year, while for plays they have increased by 15% to £19.74' (Masso, 2019). The most expensive ticket in 2015 went to

*Hamilton* (2015), averaging at \$355.83 per ticket (Lawrence, 2015). When taking these figures into consideration, it is understandable that audience members may turn to digital alternatives such as streaming services or cinema experiences. *Hamilton* (2020) is available for streaming on Disney+ for a membership fee of £5.99 per month. Another reason for the influx of low-income audiences may be due to travel expenses and location. In addition to high-ticket prices, travel fares and hotel costs due to late night showings add to the total cost of the experience. In contrast, live event screenings at local cinemas have negligible transport costs and a lower ticket price averaging at £7.21 (Masso, 2019) per screening. Barker states that '[l]ivecasts seem to be attracting audiences back to the cinema who may otherwise attend rarely or not at all' (2012:28). Additionally, NESTA found that a large incentive for audiences attending cinema streamed events was curiosity. They state that 'NT Live audiences most often identified wanting to see what a theatrical performance broadcast live at a cinema would be like: 34.8 per cent of audiences identified this as their main reason for going' (2010:5). This suggests that audiences view streamed cinema as a different form of event from attending staged productions and perhaps were expecting a different experience from this. Barker expanded upon NESTA's report and focussed on interrogating the audiences experience through interviews to gain further clarification on why they may choose to attend a streamed event. Participants stated that 'it's comfortable in the cinema [...]. Our local cinema has a good system for ordering drinks for the interval which is great. The only thing you miss out on is the excitement of a live event[...] - everyone clapped at the end! (2012:32). This touches on my previous suggestion that different spaces may elicit different experiential connections. Although this audience member feels they have 'missed out' on some live experience by not sharing the staged space, they fill this void with the assertion that they have experienced a different positive experience through being comfortable in their local cinema space. This theme of comfort/familiarity versus live event is common within Barker's findings as he states that audiences 'wish to own a local space' (2012:32). Audience members within Barker's study noted

feelings of belonging within cinema spaces versus experiences of alienation within theatrical spaces. One audience member commented: 'All the better points were that the Picturehouse is comfortable [...]; there isn't the snobbery that there is at the Opera House and you can still feel part of the production by dressing up[...]' (2012:32). Here Barker's research notes experiences of classism within the theatrical experience. This could link to the trend of lower income audiences approaching cinema streamed performances due to a feeling of comfort in a familiar space and being surrounded by peers. As Matthew Reason suggested in his 2004 study:

people in the cinema audience were familiar, perceived as being comprised, essentially, of peers – in terms of age, expectations and behaviour. In contrast, while the cinema audience is one of peers, one largely of sameness, the theatre audience was explicitly constructed as other people. (Reason, 2004: 223)

This desire to feel belonging within audience spaces is a core element within experiential liveness that emerges continuously throughout this paper.

This feeling of belonging refers to 'communitas' which was coined by Victor Turner (1969). To understand communitas we must understand liminality. Turner explains that in a person's life they pass through several rites of passage. These are events such as birthdays, major age milestones, career promotions, relocation, etc. He suggests that during these rites there are three main stages: '[...] separation, margin (or limen, signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation' (1969:94). The liminal stage marks an unstable period within a person's life experience; a time of change from the previously known state but not yet arriving at the final destination. Pushing beyond liminality as an individual experience, Turner suggests that within these feelings of loss, people are drawn outside of regular social rhythm and are connected as human beings. He suggests that regardless of hierarchy, whether that be class, age, career, etc., all people pass through stages of liminality and the feelings of hopelessness and loss of control that demark these periods. Turner labelled this shared liminality as communitas, stating that it is '[...] a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no

society' (1969:97). The purpose of *communitas* is to remind people that we are all of the same worth regardless of what societal hierarchies may imply. Although Turner's definition of *communitas* does not directly apply to liveness discourse it does impart the reminder that when removed from familiar societal orders human beings can feel similarly and this shared humanity may have bearing upon any study conducted upon groups of participants.

To contextualise the influence of *communitas* within audiences in performance studies Jill Dolan utilises Turner's ideology and suggests that *communitas* within the theatre is created by the shared focus of the performance. Dolan suggests that this shared focus means 'spectators can be rallied to hope for the possibility of realizing improved social relations' (2006:14), using *communitas* as a tool for wider social change outside of the theatre space. Whether this shared focus led to social change outside of Barker's and NESTA's research is not stated. However, there is evidence of shared focus on the experience of watching together. This is noted through the comments of attending with peers and curiosity of what such a live streamed experience might be like compared to staged performance.

To explore *communitas* and the audience's experience it is key to begin with the opposite of liveness. '[d]eadliness' (2016:1) is used by Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof to explore a phenomenon that afflicts performances that are ontologically live but fail in engaging an audience. They attribute a deadly performance to 'a failed relationship between the performance and the audience' (2016:2). This is a phenomenon I have experienced when spectating theatre. I attended a staged production of *We Will Rock You* (Elton, 2002) on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011 which had received a Laurence Olivier award (2011). However, despite this being a recognised musical with awards I experienced many moments of 'deadliness' (2016:1). I enjoyed the genre of musical and the music itself was entertaining. However, I found myself drifting from the performance both mentally and physically. The choice to include strobe as a frequent lighting choice forced me to close my eyes

and shut out the performance entirely. Additionally, my location towards the back of the theatre allowed for escape routes and acted as temptation throughout.

Reason and Lindelof state that deadliness is 'something that can infect and inhabit performances that are otherwise and ostensibly very live' (2016:2). By 'very live' they are referring to the ontological requirements that have emerged within essentialist discourse which signify 'true' liveness. I will explore these in chapter 2 including their origins and implications for audience experience. But to briefly identify some ontological markers for live experience they include: 'immediacy' (Phelan, 1993:134), 'intimacy' (Auslander, 1999:36), and 'ephemerality' (Phelan, 1993:31). They hold at their centre the need for spatial and temporal co-presence, disappearance in totality and an obsession for authentic performance. Reason and Lindelof state that 'assertions of something being live frequently becomes equated to being 'real' or being 'good' (2016:2). But deadliness suggests that this is not always the case. Barker also found this within his research with audiences using 'terms such as 'obviously', 'of course', and 'naturally'' (2012:63) when referring to the live event in contrast with alternative content. One audience member was surprised with the experience of alternative content and stated 'you actually get a better view of the performance than in the actual theatre. [...] Obviously, the atmosphere is not the same although the audience do often respond with applause. (2012:63). It is this assumption of quality that widens the socio-cultural chasm that surrounds conversations of ontology regarding liveness versus mediatization. However, by analysing 'deadliness' (2016:1) as a phenomenon that occurs regardless of ontological factors, it indicates that phenomenological audience experience has a significant impact on 'aliveness' (Sullivan, 2018:60) and liveness itself. It suggests that liveness is not 'something uni-polar, nor something that is defined in opposition to mediatization, but rather something that only exists in resonance between performance and audience' (Reason and Lindelof, 2016:3). If the connectivity between audience and performance fails or breaks down it

results in deadliness (2016:1) through which the audience fail to experience or recognise liveness. The existence of deadliness (2016:1) as an observed sensation reinforces the assertion that examining ontological ideologies of liveness without considering audience's phenomenological experiences does not comprehensively explore the workings of liveness. Attempting to analyse in absolutes without acknowledgement of audience is neglectful of the complete liveness experience. So much of liveness is observed and felt by the audience it would not be mindful to disregard the experiences and relationships felt by those who spectate.

Considering the importance of the audience/performance relationship I will examine studies regarding liveness with audience experience at the forefront. Erin Sullivan expands upon the relationship between audience and performance within liveness and suggests that this connection is seen as an event. I explore the context of event further within chapter 2 of this thesis. I choose to examine event later due to the importance of first contextualising the audience/performer relationship which underpins both event and much of experiential liveness discourse. Sullivan states that '[l]iveness or eventness in such contexts is about being part of an event that is 'a-live' with experience, engagement and possibility' (2018:61). If we consider that connectivity between both the audience and performance as well as between audience members themselves is an extension of liveness it destabilises the ontological affirmation of time and ephemerality as core to liveness. It leads conversation 'towards a particular kind of phenomenological experience that foregrounds interactivity and a feeling of togetherness' (Sullivan, 2018:61). In relation to extended liveness Reason and Lindelof state that 'one of the most pertinent insights of empirical audience research has been the repeated assertion by spectators of the importance of sharing and discussing their experience with others' (2017:11). This compulsion to discuss experiences of the performance with others strengthens the assertion that the relationship and connectivity between audience members and the performance directly

impacts the aliveness of the event. In addition, it averts deadliness (2017:1) implying that the performance can feel a-live for periods of time post ontological ending of the performance.

Reason and Lindelof explain that 'the act of live participation is connected not just to the sense of occasion of the private bodily experience, but to the way in which this presence is recognized and valued by oneself and others' (2017:11). This suggests that it is not just the individual audience member examining their experiences internally and being able to share this with others that forms connectors of liveness but also the response from others to this sharing. Regardless of whether these responses are supportive or challenging it is the ability to discuss and interact through a channel of open communication about shared experience that evokes experiential liveness. Therefore, attention must be paid to extended liveness '*beyond* the specific or singular moment of the live encounter' (Reason and Lindelof, 2017:11). We must consider the possibility of evolution within audience discussion as an extension of the live event. Reason and Lindelof state that the liveness experience

expands in both directions in time to embrace both anticipation/expectation and recollection/memory, including mutations, transformation, misrecollections of live memory that might be considered as a continuation of the liveness as an ongoing creative process (2017:11).

If this is accepted then live experiences can continue indefinitely, as long as an audience member cares to share or document this reflection. Kirsty Sedgman and Joanna Bucknall suggest that within these extensions of experience there is room for evolution within the conversational spaces of the audience. They suggest that some audience 'experiences may remain relatively fixed and stable, [...] or they may continue to evolve through ongoing reflection. Either way, all experiences contain within them an enduring *capacity* for change' (2017:117). As audience members discuss their experiences it could generate offshoots of experience that are entirely evolved from their initial experiences of the performance. This gives life to a separate, organic experience that is linked to the performance through initial stimuli but has developed into a liveness of its own.



Sedgman and Bucknall state that 'the act of remembering or sharing a reaction to a personal experience is a lively process, and an experience in and of itself' (2017:121). It is important to note that there is a difference between the live event and the live experience. The live event refers to the confines of the performance; the measurable time between curtains up and down. This is the period of performance which ontological researchers build their ideologies of liveness upon. However, the live experience refers to the phenomenological audience experience of the event. This includes conversations and documents prior to the event and after it. It is both the live event and the live experience that experiential liveness researchers consider when forming ideas of liveness.

#### 'Fossils' and Extended Liveness

As previously stated, the live experience can produce sharing's by audience members both prior and post-performance. Kirsty Sedgman and Joanna Bucknall label these documents and sharing's as "fossils" (2017:114). They are 'pieces of discursive evidence that are produced in and around the performative process, and that will almost always outlast it' (2017:114). 'Fossils' (2017:114) can take the form of videos, photos, reviews, social media posts etc and form extended liveness after the live event. Most 'fossils' (2017:114) are formed and 'operate simultaneously while the performance is *still* live' (2017:114). Their moment of creation occurs partially or fully during the live event.

Roland Barthes explores the trapping of a subject within photographs in *Camera Lucida* (1980). He suggests that through the capturing of the subject within a photograph it retains part of the subjects 'being' (1980:66) stating, 'it is as if the Photograph carries its referent with itself[...]' (1980:5). In retaining this link to the 'original' event it carries the fact that the live event did happen and that the live event has finished. Sedgman and Bucknall suggest that 'documentation can therefore be understood to actually *perform* the legacy of the cultural practice in place of the

disappeared original' (2017:115). If this trace to the original event is held within the eidos of the documented form it can continue to act as a space for audience conversation indefinitely. It is important to note that this 'fossil' (2017:114) or 'referent' (Barthes, 1980:5) does not replace the original live event. It allows for experiential recollection and conversation to emerge regarding the live event. However, it does not constitute the authentic event. Sedgman and Bucknall suggest that 'all these things are 'other' to the original [...]. While these ancillary items are indeed indicative of the event, produced in and by the originating conditions of the performance process, they can never stand in its place' (2017:116). This distinction between live event and 'other' (2017:116) marks the boundaries between experiential liveness and ontological ideologies. I will not be extensively exploring this othering of documented forms within this paper. However, it is important to note the transference between live form to experiential form. This is due to the crossover to extended liveness via audience discussion as previously mentioned.

Sedgman and Bucknall explain that although the live event may end 'the *experience* of participating will continue to evolve as long as its original performers and audiences survive' (2017:116). I suggest that some online conversational spaces allow for an extension to audiences beyond those who attended the original event to a new audience who may only have experienced the 'fossil' (2017:114). Sedgman examined a video of Neil Patrick Harris performing at the Tony awards (2013) (2016). She examined the comments section for interactions between commenters and explored how these comments could contribute to extended liveness despite the source material being a video. She states that 'while the performance might not be received as physically or temporally live, there is nonetheless a sense of 'social' liveness: of sharing a (digital) space with other people' (2016:1). The sense of extended experiential liveness remains despite the source material being a fossilized remanent rather than a 'true' live event. Sedgman suggests that these secondary audiences experience extended liveness in the same way as those audiences who are

directly linked to live events. She states that 'it is still unfolding – with comments continuing to be added every day – and the experience can be tapped back into whenever the audience member likes' (2016:1). This suggests that audience members continue to comment and evolve the conversation as previously explored and that it may be more accessible than directly linked extended livenesses due to the fact that the source material is a documented form. Therefore, new audience members can experience the 'fossil' (2017:114) at any point in the future and join the extended liveness at the same level as those who watched the video when it was first posted. This allows for a wider audience as they are not confined to those who were temporally present for the 'live' performance as there is no set time within which you have to watch a video.

When the methods through which audience members left comments; Sedgman noted that the comments section was used 'as a means of publicly expressing appreciation. [...] [t]hese comments function as a virtual curtain-call, allowing audience members to acknowledge performers' efforts in a way that watching a digitally removed version can otherwise frustrate' (2016:1-2). Sedgman noted that the ability to leave comments of admiration resulted in a phenomena that under 'live' circumstances often would not be communicated. It unique to be able to have an open line of communication between performer and audience during a 'live' performance. This could be due to the performers and audience being physically distanced at the theatre or that commonly the only time an audience interact with the performer is whilst they are performing. Therefore, it is not common that audience members feel they can individually express admiration and feel heard. The comment section under Harris' video formed a space for love letters from the audience to Harris. Although he likely will never read these comments it allowed the audience to praise his talent together and reflect upon the performance in an extended phenomenological liveness that presented itself in the form of adoration. This raises the theme of community and connectivity again within extended liveness. Sedgman found that the video

‘demonstrates the processes by which audiences seek to forge connections – between themselves and performers, and between themselves and their fellow spectators – through posting descriptions of affect and engagement online’ (2016:3). It is important within a society which is technologically driven to consider social/virtual spaces as meeting points for extended liveness and audience discussion.

Sedgman and Bucknall state that ‘sites such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook [...] allow for the ongoing compilation of a range of different media [...]. Read together in relation to theatre, these offer new opportunities for audiences to document their own experiences’ (2017:122). These medias could involve comments under an existing medium or a new document created by an audience member sharing their experience. This creates a new platform for discussion not only of the ‘original’ event but also of the audience member’s reaction itself. It is key to my research to consider social media spaces such as Youtube, Twitter and Facebook as pools of potential liveness knowledge.

Depending on the platform there are many forms of reaction that audiences may choose to document their experiences. However, they can be primarily split into documents that are generated after the live event and those created during the live event. ‘Fossils’ (2017:114) created during an event where the audience are physically present may be less common. This may be due to cinema retaining ‘the whole switching off one’s device ahead of a screening’ as ‘part of its mimicry of theatre etiquette’ (Aebischer, 2020:196). This restricts the time where the audience member has access to their devices and does not allow for immediate call and response within the virtual realm. Whilst studying ‘event cinema’ (2020:194) Pascal Aebischer found that ‘the vast majority of cinema audiences only use social media during the broadcast interval and directly after the performance’ (2020:196). I will not be exploring theatre and cinema etiquette in depth within this paper. However, it is important to note that audiences were found to adhere to this ‘no

phone' policy within event cinema and this may have an effect on how or if they choose to share their experiences.

Post-live 'fossils' (2017:114) are commonly formed from reviews, online blogs or status updates posted after the event. Sedgman and Bucknall state that 'users frequently use online platforms as experience repositories. Ephemeral moments can be captured in screenshots, to be revisited and re-experienced later' (2017:113). This refers to the concept of 'referent' (Barthes, 1980:5) and that audiences can use these posts as a springboard for memory and the development of further liveness discussion beyond the event. Sedgman and Bucknall describe the medium of a tweet similarly to how Barthes describes a photograph. They state that a tweet 'offers a snapshot of a single moment in time: an experience at the point of its capture, necessarily constrained by the limits of discourse' (2017:123). The moment of performance is frozen within the context of the tweet and is reflective of the experience of the tweeter in that period of time. The discussions that spread from this tweet are freed from the confines of the 'fossil' (2017:114) and can evolve through extended livenesses. However, the tweet and the frame remain still. Similarly, Barthes states that 'death is the eidos of that photograph'(1980:15).

In addition to post-live 'fossils' (2017:114) emerges co-live 'fossils' (2017:114). This refers to forms that are created during the live event. These constitute photographs, videos, or live tweets. Twitter has grown into a prominent space for theatrical discourse and audience discussion. Sedgman and Bucknall define live tweeting as 'the act of tweeting in simultaneous response to a live event or activity' (2017:124). It is an immediate and direct reflection of the audience member at the time of experience. This is captured in the same ways as other 'fossils' (2017:114) but the difference with live tweeting is the immediacy of the form. The audience member is using their device during the performance allowing for a 'purer' capturing since it does not rely on memory or future influences from the performance itself. Sedgman and Bucknall

suggest that 'tweeting is both an *act* that is committed, and a direct and immediate *document* of reflection: an enunciation of participants' embodied experience authorized by their role as an audience member' (2017:125). The spectator captures their experience in the moment often before the show has finished. The audience members understanding, or opinion of the performance may change between the act of tweeting and the end of the performance. This leads to a series of live tweets in a thread that can show the development of the audience members understanding as it evolves live. Other Twitter users can interact with the thread and leave reactions to the tweets and performance. This can lead to discussions between a large range of participants. These participants could be audience members who are physically co-present within the performance, audience members who are watching live virtually or Twitter users who have not seen the performance and are responding to the tweets alone.

Twitter allows performance discourse to expand beyond the time and space of the performance. Commenters can add to the thread of tweets any time after the live performance as long as the original tweet is kept live. Sedgman and Bucknall state that '[l]ive tweeting has the capacity to reach a wider audience than the originating event can directly engage (2017:124-5) and that '[t]weets therefore are both inherently lively in their moment of utterance and contain lasting possibilities of liveness, taking on additional dynamic roles as they are retweeted, recited and rewritten[...] (2017:126). In addition to audiences negotiating their understandings through extended liveness; Twitter acts as an ideal platform for users to alter live tweets from audience members and start new discussions which are divorced and warped from their performance origins entirely. This risks the spread of misinformation, a threat within online documentation that I explore further in Chapter 2.

## Virtual Liveness

Now that I have begun to explore the usage and importance of experiential research within liveness it is important to ground these discussions within studies that explore many of the above ideologies of experiential liveness within virtual spaces.

In September 2020 Erin Sullivan conducted an audience survey of people who attended the livestream of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the London Globe. She combined her data with the Arts Council's *From Live-to-Digital* report (2016) and NESTA's *Beyond Live* report (2010). She created a survey for audience members after the show with four main aims in mind: 'audiences' experience and enjoyment of online broadcasts' (2020:94), to not inform the audience that her research was on broadcasting, so she does not lead the answers to any topic or area, and to 'keep the survey brief' (2020:95). The survey was carried out online and she advertised the survey through Twitter. Sullivan posted to Twitter after the end of the performance since she had observed that the Twitter space had been active during the broadcast and included two hashtags 'in order to maximise the post's reach' (2020:95). These were '#DreamLive and #MidsummerNightsDream' (2020:95). She received 130 responses and left the questionnaire open until 12pm the following day.

Sullivan's audience differed to previously explored digital audiences due to not attending a live streamed event at a cinema. These audience members were watching the performance from personal devices in various locations. This could be in their home, in their car, at work, in a park etc. They are experiencing a wider, uncontrollable range of spaces than those who I have previously examined within cinema streaming. Due to this Sullivan's audience and feedback is much broader than previously explored digital audiences. When discussing the streamed format the audience were 'very clear that the format did make a difference to them and that they would have preferred to attend in person, had that been possible' (2020:97). This point within this

specific study may have been emphasised due to the prestigious location of the Globe and it being a Shakespearian play being performed. It would be a memorable experience to view this performance within the theatre physically due to the atmosphere that would be expected from such an experience. This could be why Sullivan's audience were insistent upon corporeal presence in this circumstance. Sullivan also found that many of her spectators 'carried out other activities while they watched' (2020:97). The opportunity for multi-tasking alongside spectating is not something that is possible within cinema streamed performance or staged performance. The ability to move freely and choose, as an audience member what they give focus to, links back to previous discussions of types of space and comfort within different settings. Whilst the levels of attentiveness given to the performance may fluctuate due to the location of the audience member within their own home it does allow for familiarity and subverts the negotiation of social rules dictated by space, as seen within Aebischer (2020).

Although physical presence was preferable for Sullivan's participants she found that 'as digital broadcasts have become more familiar, and as opportunities for seeing them have extended beyond the originating performance moment, the draw of temporal liveness has gradually lessened' (2020:98-99). This refers to the usage of extended liveness within forms such as 'fossils' (2017:114) and the increased accessibility to digital alternatives as seen within Barker (2012). For this showing of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the performance was streamed live from Shakespeare's Globe at '6:30pm BST on Sunday 11 September' (2020:98). This stream was uploaded to the 'Shakespeare lives' website for six months' (2020:98). It was also uploaded to BBC IPlayer for the same period of six months. Finally, two years after its initial recording, the stream was available 'for purchase as a DVD and through the Globe's on-demand viewing platform, Globe Player' (2020:98). The documentary journey that Sullivan's studied version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been on is extensive and exemplifies how extended liveness can interact with



wider audiences through the evolution of the original form. In addition to the widespread and sustained availability of this performance within the Arts Council England's 2016 report Sullivan found that 'matters of cost and convenience [...], practicality would typically win out over desires for simultaneity' (2020:99) when considering whether an audience member would attend live or watch the streamed version. This could refer to prior explorations of financial cost and the locations of live performances being too expensive for the average audience member. If the streamed version is widely and affordably available to spectators, without temporal restriction for attendance, Sullivan has found that audience members would rather not undertake these additional costs and stresses.

One audience member wrote that: 'It gave me a thrill to know that the whole globe was watching the London Globe' (2020:99). Another stated that 'the stream 'was an "event" just like seeing it in person due to it being streamed at a specific time, not just simply made available through DVD'' (2020:99). For these participants it is the connectivity and knowledge of joint observation with other audience members that forms extended experiential liveness. Sullivan states that 'it seems that ultimately the value of liveness may be more about such forms of emotionality – and the kinds of connection that emerge from them – than about specific conditions of time and place' (2020:102). The mention of 'event' (2020:99) is a core term within experiential liveness as I briefly explored earlier. The term previously has been used to refer to the original live event in contrast to extended forms of liveness. However, in this circumstance, the audience member is referring to the act of attending, whether that be digitally or physically, as the 'event' (2020:99). To consider event as ritual or occasion is different than the previously discussed understanding of event as indicative of the boundaries between live and extended live. It is not based on temporal limits or a change in mediums of liveness but includes experiences of theatrical

and social ritual as core elements of atmospheric liveness. I will explore the ritualistic origin of 'event' (2020:99) when I look at ontological origins of liveness in chapter 2.

Sullivan examines the ideology of 'aliveness' (2020:103) within her study. She found that aliveness was 'dependant less on temporal and geographical positioning and more on affectivity and immersion' (2020:103). This could refer to the feedback given by the audience member when they reference the 'thrill' (2020:99) of knowing that they are watching alongside others. The concept of 'aliveness' (2020:103) is core to examining Sullivan's research due to the lack of physical space shared by the audience members. In previous research the streamed event has been held within a cinema screen; so although the performers and audience are not sharing the same physical space, the audience are still located within an auditorium corporally. Cinema audiences still had the physical experience of sharing space as observers. They would feel each other shift in their seats and hear the audience's reactions to the performance. Sullivan's audience were not rooted by physicality; they were rooted within time. This shifts the community dynamic within the audience and they seek out alternative methods to connect and feel present through temporal means.

Sullivan found that 'shared experience creates a sense of shared presence, especially when it happens in shared time [...] (2020:104). Among the virtual audience of Sullivan's study there was a plethora of online activity to increase the feelings of togetherness by capitalising on the immediacy of call and response via social media. One participant stated that 'being able to tweet and interact with other "audience" members was extremely enriching. It helped me watch the production with a critical eye' (2020:104). Another stated that 'it was fun in a different way to be tuned into the social media audience' (2020:104). Finally, one participant praised the online space for being 'able to live tweet and discuss the performance with friends as it was happening' (2020:104). This concept of gaining knowledge or a unique experience of a performance by

utilising social media has been previously observed within liveness research by Sedgman and Bucknall (2017:125). They found that “live tweeting’ seeks to validate the temporary liveness of an activity: an act in which the tweeter is positioned as a privileged participant’ (2017:125). The tweeter is participating in a discussion that is temporally co-present with the performance. Other Twitter users could interact with the thread post-performance and the discussion could extend beyond the live event. However, this would be part of an extended liveness outside of the temporal bubble of the original performance. It is the act of tweeting and responding to the live action of a performance in co-presence that is considered a privileged act of experiential liveness. The idea of gaining a deeper understanding or appreciation for the live action during the performance due to a discussion on Twitter is interesting. The other audience members or users of Twitter are able to suggest different ways of viewing the content and therefore alter other audience members observational lens whilst the performance was still taking place. This differs from the audience experience where discussion and understanding of the performance evolves through post-performance reflection. The audience members are usually not able to re-watch the performance with the altered lens or input from other spectators to gain a different experience of the performance. That is unless they go and watch the performance again at a later date. However, the performance itself would not be identical due to them attending on another occasion. However it is a unique experience for an audience member to be able to discuss and shift their analytical lens mid-performance due to the live input of another audience member. It provides an opportunity for audiences to observe and experience in different ways during the same performance.

Sullivan concludes that platforms like Twitter produce ‘a sense of shared presence and eventful connectedness despite considerable geographical divides’ (2020:105). She states that although it was important to a lot of her participants that they watched ‘a performance in real-

time [...], it seems that the greatest value that emerges from such a formulation is the sense of togetherness it brings (2020:114-115). Finally, she found that the audiences 'perception of the artistic quality of a transmission still correlates strongly with their appreciation of the staged production upon which it is based' (2020:92).

Sullivan's above conclusions are core to experiential liveness and examining how streamed performances without temporal or spatial co-presence impact audience's experience and understanding of liveness. Sullivan's study suggests that community and connectivity between audience members in any form of space, whether that be online or in person, is the core element needed for 'alive' performance.

Another important study to consider is Pascale Aebischer and Racheal Nicholas's *Digital Theatre Transformation Report* (2020). This report explores audience understandings of liveness and performers approaches to making digital content within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is vital to include reports focussing on liveness experience and audience within the COVID-19 pandemic due to the circumstances of lockdown and the eradication of in-person performance at that time. This removal of choice on behalf of audiences when considering liveness in staged versus virtual environments is a unique phenomenon and Aebischer and Nicholas' report examines the effects of this.

The report examines several areas ranging from changes in the way company's produce work, the impact of shifting to online work on performers wellbeing, the audiences experience of online work, and audience's experiences in contrast to in-person theatre. Aebischer and Nicholas created a 'digital toolkit' for companies to utilise whilst generating performance work over Zoom. The intention for this toolkit was to make the process of creating and watching streamed Zoom theatre as comfortable and enjoyable as possible for all involved.

Whilst the report has much broader implications for online performance within pandemic circumstances generally; I will not be examining every facet of the report within this paper. I will be focussing on the feedback given by audience members regarding a streamed production they observed and how this impacted their experiences and understandings of liveness and extended liveness.

Aebischer and Nicholas examined audience responses to both of Creation Theatre's in-person and Zoom productions of *The Tempest* (2019, 2020), the latter of which took place during the first COVID-19 lockdown in England. They collected the box office sales from the in-person performance and cross referenced this data with the earnings of the 2020 Zoom performance.

The first observation notes the tickets sold in relation to audience size across the two modes of performance. Aebischer and Nicholas found that physical ticket sales for the in-person performance sat at '3368' (2020:87) versus just '1428' (2020:87) tickets sold for Zoom. However, it is suggested that the 'tickets for the Zoom shows were sold per device, rather than per person. Therefore, the number of ticket sales does not accurately reflect how many people participated in the Zoom shows' (2020:89). Despite this complication, Aebischer and Nicholas were able to manually count how many audience members on average were present at each device as they were able to see the audience members during the performance. They found that 'most people watched in groups of two (48%) or alone (37%), with a further 13% watching in a group of three, and 6% in a group of four' (2020:89). With this additional information the Zoom audience was estimated to be at an average of around '2827' (2020:89).

In relation to the Zoom audience, Aebischer and Nicholas found that many families or friends 'in different geographical locations are enjoying the digital shows together from their individual homes' (2020:42). This was particularly noteworthy given the social restrictions imposed by the pandemic at the time of the performance. Many audience members would not have seen

their loved ones in some time and to be able to participate in communal activities together has been reportedly vital to mental health during this period. Audience members responded that they 'wanted to share the experience with family' (2020:96) and that the performance was something the 'whole family could enjoy together' (2020:96).

This emphasis on community and togetherness through liveness and performance is something that has been noted throughout experiential liveness discourse previously; specifically, within Sedgeman and Bucknall's exploration of social media and liveness (2017). However, here the importance of connectivity has been extended beyond a component for extended liveness. Within the context of lockdown and this study it is a core emotional resource for audience members. One participant stated that 'I really felt this love for the audience to bring something to people in a time when people can't get out, when people are stuck, when people really are lonely and feel helpless' (2020:137). Another audience member noted that during the performance she 'heard my best friend on the west coast say hi to me, and then my other friends do the same. It was awesome' (2020:135). This performance allowed for new connections amongst the audience in a time where new connections were rare. It also formed a space for embracing and greeting known family and friends after a period of isolation.

In addition to creating a space for togetherness during the performance, the audience members praised the 'fact that the production was created specifically to be watched online, that it was live, and that they were able to actively participate' (2020:12). By curating a performance for Zoom it could have removed fears of missing out on the part of the audience members as previously observed within Martin Barker's 2012 study. In Barker's study the specific participant reported a fear of missing the atmosphere of liveness. However in this performance there is no alternate atmosphere or production to fear missing. The only available experience of this performance is via Zoom. Therefore, nothing can be missed, and audiences do not have to wonder

about alternate experiences they might have missed had they attended in-person. This also removes the preference for temporal co-presence as expressed within Sullivan's (2020) study as there is no physical space to attend.

The ability to participate within the production arose numerous times across responses. The term participate has different meanings between audience responses. Some praised the ability to participate socially through 'being able to discuss the experience with others' and 'interacting socially before and after the performance' (2020:13). Once again, the ability to extend the liveness of the event via discussion after a performance is a vital element of the audience experience. The usage of social media to achieve this could leave a longer lasting 'fossil' (2017:114) with the potential for a wider audience to interact with it. It is not reported whether these discussions were recorded and made available within the re-circulations of the Zoom production of *The Tempest* (2020). However, even with the absence of a complete 'fossil' (2017:114) to record those conversations, they remain vital to the attending audience's experience and extended liveness. Sedgeman and Bucknall suggest that in circumstances of live tweeting the audience who are watching live may have 'access to – exclusive aspects of these live experiences' (2017:125). Perhaps it is the case that the audience's discussion within the Zoom production is an exclusive experience of extended liveness for that audience alone.

Another theme that arose surrounded issues of accessibility. Many audience members appreciated the opportunity to watch a production that was professional and online. One participant stated that 'I think it's just the opportunity. So where I live is two hours away from any major city [...] so to go to a large scale professional theatre it is a ton of time, a lot of money [...]' (2020:109). I have discussed the financial costs associated with attending live productions at theatres and the expensive journeys and accommodations that come alongside these. For a number of audience members these costs are not realistic. The alternative of streamed

performance or Zoom performance is alluring. Another audience member referenced accessibility regarding disabilities or anxieties. They stated that 'it could bring a lot of theatre to a lot of people who can't get into the theatre or don't want to[...]' (2020:110). For those who cannot attend the theatre due to physical limitations or mental barriers it allows for a comfortable alternate experience within their own surroundings.

One negative to the Zoom production that Aebischer and Nicholas found was with issues of broadband connectivity and technical glitches. This is a risk when streaming live performances through multiple devices at home since the performance experience hinges on each individual's broadband speed. Participants stated that "broadband glitches', poor 'sound quality', and watching on a small screen made it difficult to maintain focus on the production' (2020:120). These external factors are often out of the control of the producers of the work due to the technology available to individual audience members. However, some audience members commented that the presence of these glitches heightened 'a sense of authenticity, 'realness', or liveness' (2020:123). Some had accepted that this performance was built to be viewed via Zoom and therefore glitches and technical difficulties had become normalised blips similar to performer errors that can be experienced within staged performance. One participant states: 'There were certainly some glitches [...] but that made the "live" experience all the more immediate' (2020:123). Another remarked: 'I thought it was brilliant; the "look" made it a more intimate experience with the audience participation' (2020:123). Although 'immediacy' and 'intimacy' are markers within the ontological ideology of liveness, the mention of them within a digital performance furthers the idea that aspects commonly attributed to the ontological are equally operational within experiential liveness. It grounds the importance of phenomenological liveness and liveness generally outside of pure ontology as well as expanding the conversation to include content that is built specifically for the digital.



The final finding of Aebischer and Nicholas' work was the link between simultaneity of performance and the experience of liveness. They found 'an overwhelming 95% of our survey respondents considered the show's liveness and the simultaneity of performance and reception to be important' (2020:125). There were two main reasons why simultaneity was a vital component of liveness for this audience. Firstly they enjoyed that the performance was being observed by other audience members in the same temporal time as their watching experience. One participant states 'it's the knowledge that lots of people are watching something new to them at the time that you are[...]. I think it's the sense of connection with people that isn't there if you are watching something asynchronously in your own time[...]' (2020:126). This builds upon the previous discussion of the importance of connectivity and building a space for discussion both during and after the performance especially under the circumstances of COVID-19. One audience member stated that 'it was heartening to be focussing in with others/strangers at a time of mental and physical isolation. Boosted me emotionally' (2020:137).

Secondly, audience members enjoyed 'being able to see the audience' (2020:130) with '75% agreeing or strongly agreeing that this was important to them' (2020:130). This is an interesting aspect that I believe may be unique to Zoom performance. When audiences attend staged performance there is often the knowledge that they will be attending the performance with other audience members. However, to be able to see the other audience members face on, alongside the performers in the way that Zoom lays out the cameras would not necessarily be a regular experience in staged performance. One audience member references this suggesting that you see audience members 'more so than in a traditional theatre, where you kind of shuffle past them to your seat and see them in profile[...] but you're actually right in people's living rooms for moments here' (2020:131). This invitation into audience members private surroundings is unique to streamed performance and may breed a deeper sense of connection and community within

audiences. When attending the theatre often people conform to behaviours as previously explored and therefore you may not see the most authentic version of those people. Also many people view attending the theatre as a form of event, as I will explore later in more detail. So the behaviours and interactions that you may experience with these other audience members may not be vulnerable. However, in watching from home these behaviours may be negated or lessened and in being granted permission to observe audience members in their own environments it allows space for deeper connections to be made amongst audience members and could heighten the sense of authenticity or uniqueness of the experience. One audience member suggests that it made the audience 'part of the spectacle' (2020:131).

Both the above studies of experiential liveness have solidified the importance of audience experience within liveness discourse. They have identified core ideologies such as community, immediacy, intimacy, and social media as foundational aspects for determining the phenomenological liveness of a performance. However, there are themes and terms within both studies and previously explored writings on experiential liveness that are equally attributed to ontological liveness ideologies.

It is not the aim of this thesis to challenge ontological ideologies. However, it is pertinent to explore the origins of ontological liveness and examine how the application of core terms differs between the ontological and the phenomenological liveness ideologies.

## Chapter 2: Examining Ontological Liveness

The ontological discussion of liveness was spearheaded by two opposing academics, Peggy Phelan (1993) and Philip Auslander (1999). In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Phelan refers to liveness within several forms stating, 'Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than

performance' (1993:146). She explores the notion of documentation and recording further, whether that be via writing or video. She suggests that partaking in these practices also constitutes a breach in a medium's inherent liveness, stating '[d]efined by its ephemeral nature, performance art cannot be documented (when it is, it turns into that document – a photograph, a stage design, a video tape – and ceases to be performance art)' (1993:31). This distinction defines the parameters of Phelan's ideology of liveness and also her key term 'marked'.

Phelan's ideology suggests that no liveness could be experienced outside of the individual due to its ontological nature. What we have experienced are all 'representations of representations' (1993:146) of works that have never, nor could ever be. Steve Connor examines this stipulation stating, 'The live is always "produced" as an artificial category of immediacy and is always therefore a quotation of itself; never the live, always the "live". Paradoxically, this desire for the original and the authentic exists alongside the recognition that there never can be such a thing[...]' (Connor, 1987:134). This notion of 'marked' performance permeates through Phelan's liveness and trickles down through ontological ideologies through the vessel of immediacy. This could refer to the belief that live performance is hallmarked, in Phelan's understandings, by the proximity both physically and mentally between the producer and the perceiver. Matthew Reason affirms this, stating that ontological ideologies 'can be described as essentialist positions, whereby live performance is defined as the product of spatiotemporal presence' (2017:3). These necessary components of shared space and time within ontological liveness permeate throughout Phelan's ideologies of both live performance and documentation. However, by stating that '[p]erformance's only life is in the present' (Phelan, 1993:146) and taking an ontological stance Phelan 'ignores the possibility for a failed relationship between performance and spectator, the possibility of deadliness' (Reason and Lindelof, 2017:3), as previously defined within this paper. Phelan's ontological ideologies allow no consideration for the audience's enjoyment or presence

within the performance. She suggests that as long as the co-presence of performer and audience exist within shared time and space, the performance is live and with that liveness comes the assumed positive connections that have been observed previously within liveness research. Terms such as immediacy, ephemerality, and authenticity are ascribed commonly as positive markers. However, as previously explored within Reason and Lindelof's 'deadliness' (2017:2), whilst this may satisfy the ontological markers for live performance it does not necessarily constitute an 'alive' (Sullivan,2018:60) performance. Unfortunately, Phelan's ideologies inform much of the core ontological conversation regarding liveness and so the components of co-presence and terms such as immediacy and ephemerality are considered as a form of check list for a successful live performance with little to no regard for audience experience.

This is not to suggest that experiential liveness theories do not see the benefits of corporal/temporal co-presence. As seen within Aebescher and Nicholas' research and Sullivan's study there are positives within the feedback of participants who suggest that 'there is a pleasure in experiencing people doing things in real time' (Reason and Lindelof:2017:7) as well as a few who 'would have preferred to attend in person, had that been possible' (Sullivan,2020:97). However, the difference between ontological liveness and experiential liveness' perception of co-presence is that 'while experiential aliveness at broadcasts is often enhanced by the liveness of shared time and place, one factor is not necessarily dependent upon the other' (Sullivan,2018:62). Within ontological liveness, Phelan suggests that there needs to be both temporal and corporal presence in order for a live performance to take place. However, within the experiential studies previously examined there were many occasions where participants either positively or negatively experienced temporal and corporal presence separately from one another and still constituted the performance as 'live'. For example, within Sullivan's 2020 study she found that 'while audiences at the cinema are geographically cut off from the performers, they are still physically proximate to

one another, an arrangement that can produce its own feeling of togetherness' (2020:103). In this circumstance the audience are praising corporal presence with no reference to temporal presence. Additionally, they are not referencing the co-presence between audience and performer, rather they are discussing the shared physical space of audience members. This differs from the co-presence discussed by ontological ideologies within which both presences need to be discussed with physicality referring specifically to shared space between the performer and audience. Therefore, it is not the case that experiential liveness disregards the power of co-presence within liveness, it simply allows for a wider range of possibilities within presence where not all elements have to be accounted for or binarily observed to constitute liveness. It recognises that liveness relies equally on audience and 'therefore, needs to shift away from locating liveness within performance a priori [...] and instead to careful consideration of the particular and contingent relationships between performance and audience' (Reason and Lindelof,2017:4-5).

To return to the two pillars of ontological liveness, on the opposing side rests Philip Auslander, Auslander condemns Phelan's essentialist liveness stating that '[i]f live performance cannot be shown to be economically independent of, immune from contamination by, and ontologically different from mediatized forms, in what sense can liveness function as a site of cultural and ideological resistance[...]'? (1999:7). Auslander aims to break down Phelan's ontological liveness by suggesting that if the above categories cannot be distinguished between mediatized forms and live performance there cannot be a 'pure' live as she suggests. Although Auslander does set out to dismantle the binary ideologies of Phelan, he remains within the realm of ontology. He is seeking ontological difference between mediatized forms and staged performance without considering audience's experiences of the mediums. Furthermore, considering the clear-cut nature of ontological liveness within Phelan's writings it is guaranteed that Auslander will be able to find areas where other forms 'contaminate'(1999:7) ontological

liveness due to the fact that it is so binary. The existence of CD's and DVDs of music gigs already encroach upon Phelan's liveness, ephemerality, and representation. So whilst Auslander's objective is forward thinking in terms of moving beyond the binary of Phelan's ideologies, it remains trapped seeking discrepancies within the ontological overlapping's of forms.

Auslander highlights instances where ontological terms betray pure liveness and create the 'effect' of liveness via mediatization. Although these examples do propagate the ontological binary there is consideration given to audience experience within Auslander's examples. He allows for the corruption of the pure live within ontology whilst considering the importance of experiential liveness in its own right. He notes that modern staged performance often incorporates the usage of assistive technologies to enhance the audience experience. For example, technologies such as lighting and sound via microphones and speakers are commonplace within live staged performance to enhance accessibility for all audience members. Auslander states that mediatization 'provides a means of creating in a large-scale event the effect of "intimacy and immediacy" [...] large-scale events must surrender a substantial measure of their liveness to mediatization' (1999:36). Auslander suggests that in large venues the usage of assistive technologies is necessary to provide a consistent experience for all audience members. For example, if microphones and screens were not used at concerts there would be a discrepancy in the quality of performance depending on where an audience member is located within the venue. Those at the back of the group have little chance of hearing or seeing the performance they have paid for. However, by using assistive technologies as standard it allows for the creation of intimacy or immediacy by technologically extending the performers presence to fill the required space. Looking again at Kirsty Sedgman examination of Neil Patrick Harris' 2013 Tony's performance, she found that 'rather than making people passive, producing distance between performers and spectators, big productions can actually provoke the feeling that performers are giving their all[...]

(2016:17). Sedgman's findings suggest that larger performances may build experiential bonds between the audience and performer due to the feeling that the performers are '*giving the audience something of themselves*' (2016:17). In this way larger scale performances could forge alternate, experiential links of intimacy and immediacy with the audience rather than simple ontological links. Although the ontological performance is 'contaminated' (Auslander, 1999:7) the experiential liveness thrives.

### Documentation and Digital Archiving

Ontological ideologies challenge technology as a documentational method. This was briefly examined within Phelan's ideologies. She suggests that 'performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented[...] it becomes something other than performance' (1993:146) and that doing so subverts the liveness of the original; instead becoming a new, different copy of the authentic live event. From these ontological examinations of representations and copies emerges themes of referent and traces.

As previously explored, Roland Barthes analyses photography as a documentational form through considerations of themes such as time, documentation, representation, and ephemerality. Barthes initially concurs with Phelan's ideologies of liveness stating that '[d]eath is the eidos of that Photograph' (1980:15). He suggests that once a subject has been captured within a photograph, they are no longer alive as they were in that moment. This reflects Phelan's discourse on ephemerality and documentation. Barthes extends his analyses to the confusion between a photograph and its subject stating that 'by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces the belief that it is alive, because of that delusion which makes us attribute to Reality an absolutely superior, somehow eternal value[...]' (1980:79). This could explain the obsession that Phelan and other ontological theorists have with discovering a pure live and the aversion to any 'contamination' (Auslander, 1999:7) of such purity. It could also reflect the

boundaries seen within experiential liveness between 'live' and extended liveness. Much like comments sections or blogs as previously discussed; Barthes' photograph generates a freeze-frame of the live performance which can allow for discussion long after the initial event even by those who were not present for its capturing. In this way Barthes' photograph begins to subvert ontological liveness and allows room for extended liveness beyond the point of capturing through this documentary form. This reinforces the idea that something can be ontologically non-live and phenomenologically live simultaneously.

Furthermore, Barthes indicates through the process of capturing that the subject is melded to the final photograph. He states that 'it is if the Photograph carries its referent with itself[...]' (1980:5). Matthew Reason also notes the presence of 'traces' stating that 'the performing arts archive makes physical the dichotomy of documentation and disappearance: preserved traces, but not complete presence; fragmentation, but not complete disappearance' (2006:37). This phenomenon has also been noted within experiential ideologies of liveness within Sedgman and Bucknall's research on 'fossils' (2017:114). The shared observation of these 'fossils' (2017:114) between both ontological and experiential livenesses solidifies their importance within liveness discourse. However, it is not the interpretation of these 'traces' (2006:37) that differs between the ideologies. Ontological theories concede that they are observed phenomena and as Reason suggests does not allow for 'complete disappearance' (2006:37) or ephemerality in totality within liveness. However, within ontology, these 'traces (2006:37) do not generate liveness or extend liveness in any way beyond the original event. Alternatively, within experiential liveness, as previously explored, these 'fossils' (2017:114) can be seen to create opportunities for discussion both during and after the original live event. The difference lies within the potential for new or extended livenesses to emerge. Sedgman and Bucknall suggest that 'it is through their *relational positions* that fossils become lively' (2017:123). This suggests that it is through the experience and



interaction with audiences that these 'fossils' (2017:114) of performance generate new extended forms of liveness and become reinvigorated beyond the original live event.

In her book *Rogue Archives* (2016) Abigail De Koznik examines the ways that nonprofessional archivists curate and document digital archives on the internet. She states that these 'digital archives of cultural content, not associated with any physical museum, library, or archive, populate the Internet, to the point that many people refer to the Internet as a giant archive' (2016:2). This content has no original that exists outside of the digital medium. The 'authentic' version of these archives do not exist within any regular archive or museum and so the ontological issue of reproduction or 'referent' (1980:5) does not afflict these in the same ways. It allows for content that is less traditionally documented e.g. blogs or tweets to be archived in a semi-regulated form. De Koznik suggests that 'rogue archivists explore the potential of digital technologies to democratize cultural memory. With digital tools and networks, they construct repositories that are accessible by all Internet users' (2016:2). This is a positive step in terms of accessibility to information. To have an archive that is accessible without a paywall or academic requirement gatekeeping allows for the opportunity for a wider section of society to gain knowledge. However, De Koznik identifies challenges that emerge from this form of digital archival documentation.

Firstly, digital archiving does not have the strict regulatory process that traditional archival work must adhere to. De Koznik suggests that 'digital cultural memory means cultural memory that lives in and as digital media, and the fact that vast swaths of nonprofessional's are undertaking micro- and macro-sized missions pertaining to digital cultural memory[...]' (2016:26) could mean that those documents and sources are less scrutinised than those at traditional institutions. De Koznik labels these nonprofessional's as "'techno-volunteers": self-appointed, mostly nonprofessional individuals and collectives who regard some digital cultural productions

and events as worth preserving' (2016:41). In addition to the less regulated and less standardised method of collection De Koznik notes that the ephemerality of the internet may be an issue regarding the upkeep and longevity of these archival sources.

She notes that the fast-paced evolution of the internet is not only what makes it a valuable tool for the accessibility of archival sources but could also be the extinction of them. De Koznik states that 'the near-constant availability and functionality of the network itself may suggest that everything that traverses the network is permanent and durable, but this association between the persistence of the Internet and the persistence of online content is a delusion' (2016:41). It is through the devotion of 'techno-volunteers' (2016:41) that the digital archives can remain relevant and updated. If these volunteers stopped their work the longevity of the digital archive would fall into disrepair and with the evolution of the online network would quickly cease to exist. In this sense the ephemerality of digital archiving methods may be more extreme than those of physical archives. However, it is the inclusion of nonprofessional's and other documents such as fan writings that suggest that this disappearing is some way off. De Koznik notes the importance of fanfiction as a documentational form and an archival resource. She states that 'fanfiction and other genres of transformative fan works, as well as the source texts that inspire them, can be seen as cultural memory objects' (2016:29). If this is the case the digital archives of fanfiction and the fan network are a thriving, growing community online who generate more than written documents. They partake in a variety of mediums dedicated to a multiplicity of fandoms and are contributed to by a majority who are likely techno-volunteers rather than professional archivists.

The opportunities for accessibility provided by digital archiving are invaluable. As previously explored in chapter 1, the economic cost of both tickets and travel to attend staged theatre is often too much for the average household. In previous experiential liveness studies, there are instances where audience members state that streamed mediums are attractive

alternatives due to the cheaper cost and lack of geographical restriction. Henry Jenkins explores these opportunities and the challenges that arise from what he labels as 'participatory culture' (2006). Jenkins defines participatory culture as

a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression[...], strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices[...]. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (2006:3)

Jenkins' participatory culture could be seen to describe some aspects of De Koznik's digital archive through the inclusion of documents such as fan works and 'techno-volunteers' (2016:41) as the informal mentorship.

Within this culture of shared creation Jenkins recognises three main areas for concern. The first is '[t]he Participation Gap — the unequal access to the opportunities, experiences, skills, and knowledge that will prepare youth for full participation in the world of tomorrow' (2006:3). This refers to both the physical lack of peripherals such as computers and access to a reliable WIFI connection as well as the knowledge of how to use such tools. Jenkins suggests that a large element of participatory culture rests on the individual's choice to contribute and to engage with the community and without access to such electronics readily the culture cannot be fully realised. Jenkins also recognises that the contexts under which these tools are provided must be accounted for too. He states that

what a person can accomplish with an outdated machine in a public library with mandatory filtering software and no opportunity for storage[...] pales in comparison to what a person can accomplish with a home computer with unfettered Internet access[...], and continuous connectivity (2006:13).

If a person is restricted by the software of the electronic they are researching on they will not have the same opportunities as those who are able to use the machine freely in their own space. This is relevant with modern technology companies often making versions of their software defunct and

turning older machines into paper weights as they are no longer able to support the latest operating system updates.

Secondly, Jenkins identifies '[t]he Transparency Problem — The challenges young people face in learning to see clearly the ways that media shape perceptions of the world (2006:3). This can be seen within today's COVID-19 pandemic and the large amounts of misinformation that have been cultivated and spread within online communities. It is an issue that surrounds all online content when it is open to all who have Internet access and can be helped in part by regulating information through 'techno-volunteers' (De Koznik,2016:41). However, it is also important to teach people who are using the internet how to spot and evaluate the validity of information for themselves. Jenkins states that 'increasingly, opportunities to participate online are branded such that even when young people produce and share their own media, they do so under terms set by commercial interests' (2006:16). This could refer to content that is sponsored by companies and is influenced by said companies. It could also refer to the rules and regulations set by content sites such as Youtube that restrict content based on their own rules which are also influenced by companies who sponsor the content on Youtube. All of these elements brand the content, and the uploader may not have knowledge of this. This affects those who view this content since it is wrapped up in meaning that has been commercially placed there.

Finally, Jenkins identifies '[t]he Ethics Challenge — The breakdown of traditional forms of professional training and socialization that might prepare young people for their increasingly public roles as media makers and community participants' (2006:3). There could be ethical implications in allowing young people to upload content that is freely available without training them on the potential dangers of doing so. He states that education should 'encourage young people to become more reflective about the ethical choices they make as participants and communicators and the impact they have on others' (2006:17). By allowing content to be freely

uploaded there is a potential that if those creators are not educated sufficiently they could spread harmful messages to a platform of more impressionable people, and this could reinforce discriminatory behaviour within society.

However, even with these risks 'participatory culture' (2006) has massive benefits relating to accessibility within areas such as literacy and community. Jenkins states that 'digital cultures provide support systems to help youth improve their core competencies as readers and writers[...]. Experiences that might once have been restricted to student journalists' (2006:19). One space that allows for such literacy feedback is the fanfiction community. Francesca Coppa defines fanfiction as 'networked creative work produced within and for a community of fans' (2017:8). This community has generated opportunities for writers to practice their creative writing and share this with those who are also part of the community. This allows for 'fossils' (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:114) of popular tv shows/film to be generated and their extended liveness' to be cultivated within these fan communities.

Jenkins suggests that it is within these shared communities, like fanfiction, that 'like-minded individuals gather online to embrace common enterprises, which often involve access and processing information' (2006:39). These communities could be seen to reflect the online communities previously observed within experiential liveness discourse on Twitter. If this is the case these communities could provide invaluable spaces for reflection and extended discussion of the works as well as a space for support and connectivity within the current pandemic circumstances. To provide 'opportunities for being together alone' (Reason and Lindelof,2017:72).

Furthermore, Jenkins noted opportunities for 'collective intelligence' (2006:41) within online spaces. This forms an archive for lived experience to be shared amongst online users. He suggests that 'as players learn to work and play in such knowledge cultures, they come to think of problem-solving as an exercise in teamwork' (2006:40). This could have implications for how

online participants approach and react to situations within their lives. This could allow for the understanding of communities, religions, and cultures outside of the participants immediate surroundings. Jenkins suggests that 'culture flows easily from one community to another. People online encounter conflicting values and assumptions, come to grips with competing claims about the meanings of shared artifacts and experiences' (2006:52). Since this online space has provided opportunity for education and literacy that is shared it could provide a safe space for different communities to engage in discussion and education surrounding alternative cultures. However, Jenkins notes that 'new experiences are read through existing prejudices and assumptions' (2006:52). He notes that whilst these cultures may be accessible and there may be people online who would like to teach about their culture; they may not be heard objectively. The space for sharing information may be safe but the space for hearing information could be hostile or misleading depending on who is receiving the information. Jenkins states that 'cyber communities often bring together groups that would have no direct contact in the physical world, resulting in heated conflicts about values or norms' (2006:52). This is further problematised if you consider the ability to remain anonymous and the physical distance between the discursive parties online. However, despite this risk, these interactions with other cultures or groups could be areas for learning and education to be provided by schools as Jenkins has previously suggested. Preventative measures and education are needed on remaining safe whilst online as explored within the three issues of 'participatory culture' (2006). However, if there is sufficient education and regulation by 'techno-volunteers' (De Koznik. 2016:41); I'd suggest that the value of such communities and the accessibility it provides to a wider section of society are worth the resources it would take to make digital archiving safe. Also, in terms of documentation as a liveness issue it encourages communities for experiential discussion such as fanfiction and fan networks whilst side-stepping some ontological criticisms surrounding referent (Barthes,1980:5) and representation.

## Re-examination of Core Liveness Terms

Upon the examination of the ontological origins of liveness and the similarities and disparities to experiential liveness it is important to re-examine the definitions of some terms and themes for the context of this paper. By examining these core terms within experiential liveness in addition to the ontological applications it will allow examinations within this paper to utilise these terms within both ontological and phenomenological contexts.

In Martin Barker's *Live to Your Local Cinema* (2012) he re-defines core liveness terms that arise within both ontological and experiential liveness research. He generates these definitions based on the findings of his study into liveness, cinema and audiences.

Barker begins with immediacy he states that:

this is very much bound up with the fact that the event is unfolding as it is being watched. It is fostered by any sense of being able to interact with performers or communicate responses to the event. Typical phrasings expressing this are 'sense of risk ... there could be gaffes ... knowing it's going on ... wondering how it will go ... watching them achieve it ... wanting to clap ... wish they could hear us clap (2012:65-66).

Many of these themes have been reflected within the previous studies I have examined within this paper. However, the appreciation of risk as a positive element of liveness experience is not an isolated area that has arisen explicitly within the studies I have examined.

In 2006 Reason conducted a study in which he took a group of school aged children to a performance of *Othello* (1603). The 'risk' was praised as an element that added to the children's experience of liveness. This risk could be both on the part of the performer fumbling their performance and on the audience for losing attentiveness and 'missing out' on content. One participant stated that they were upset 'when Othello slapped Desdemona and I missed it because someone sneezed and I was laughing' (Reason,2006:232). In this circumstance the 'risk' negatively impacted the individuals experience of liveness due to the sneeze causing a distraction and

breaking their immersion with the performance. As previously noted sharing a space with audiences corporally can be a negative and positive element when determining liveness experience. Additionally, some participants reported a closer experience with the performers through the shared knowledge of when the performance did go wrong. Some participants stated that 'these little improvizations just gives a bit more of a personal view of it and that it is a one-off performance. And it's funny because you're all there together in the joke[...]' (2006:233). These participants experienced a closer sense of *communitas* (Turner,1969) both between audience and performer and other audience members through this shared experience of mistake.

Additionally, these participants felt like they received a personalised performance experience that cannot be replicated due to the mistake and joke they shared together. This has been previously explored within experiential liveness through the act of live tweeting as a method of generating an exclusive community of audience within a digital realm during the temporal limits of a performance (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017). One participant within Sullivan's study of a streamed performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* stated that 'being able to tweet and interact with other "audience" members was extremely enriching' (2020:104) and Sedgman and Bucknall found that participating in the social media audience was 'an act in which the tweeter is positioned as a privileged participant' (2017:125). However, when Reason asked if the participant could remember or identify the mistake they replied: 'I don't actually remember' (2006:233). This implies that it is not the mistake itself that marks the performance as special or different for this participant but rather the potential for mistake. This links to a comment made by Martin Barker on the phenomena of risk in liveness discourse. Barker states that

that 'a performance is never the same' or 'the audience is different each time' might be right [...] but it is worth pointing out that this is from the perspective of the production and the performers. It is a different relationship for audiences, most of whom only experience a performance once (2012:6).



This observation in addition to the feedback of Reason's participant and the admission that they did not recall a mistake suggests that it is not the mistake itself that perpetuates liveness. Rather it is the experiential connection to the audience and actors through a communal experience that is perceived as being unique by the participant. The ontological ideology of ephemerality and uniqueness regarding risk is not necessarily an element of liveness that is seated within the awareness of the audience. Rather this knowledge of genuine mistake is held within the understandings of the cast and those backstage. Whether there is or is not the presence of a genuine mistake is irrelevant. The thrill of risk is phenomenological and Barker states that 'audiences invest meaning and value in the *possibility* of change, of risk, of mistakes, even in the absence of them actually occurring' (2012:7). This appreciation for risk perpetuates a phenomena colloquially labelled as 'the magic of live theatre'. Barker suggests that it is not the presence of mistakes but the absence of them that generates this aura. He states that it produces 'an admiration of virtuosity and an appreciation of the skill and craft of the performer' (2012:7). It is within this admiration of skill and belief that the audience have either witnessed a great feat without mistake or a performance made unique by a mistake that enhances this heightened engagement and experiential community of audience.

Secondly Barker examines the term intimacy stating:

this involves feeling close to the performers and the action, perhaps even in some sense *enabling* it to happen, by the way in which one responds. It also involves sensing how performers are achieving their performances. Typical phrasings include 'feeling you can get inside their performances... knowing they are doing this for you... intense emotions with the characters (2012:66).

This definition of intimacy is estranged from the ontological definition explored within Auslander's ideologies. Auslander suggests that intimacy within ontological liveness relies on the literal physical proximity between the audience and performer. He continues to explore ways through which mediatization can replicate or extend feelings of intimacy within larger performances as

previously explored. However, Barker's definition of intimacy, based upon his findings within the participants of his liveness study, suggest that physical proximity is less vital to audience's experiences of liveness. Here we see more emphasis on how emotionally close and connected audience members felt, predominantly to the performers and the action itself. Within Sedgman's analysis of Neil Patrick Harris' Tony's performance (2016) she noted many instances where commenters had shared the physical impact the performance had upon their bodies despite the performance being a video recording. The participants had not been present during the performance corporally or temporally and knew that this was not a streamed event but was a documentational 'fossil' (2017:114).

Despite these stipulations one participant stated that the video left them 'stupefied' and that it 'took my breath away' (2016:2). Sedgman noted that the audience were commenting on 'the magnitude of *what it did to them*: producing huge emotional and physical responses' (2016:2). This reflects Barker's definition of intimacy without the ontological stipulations of physical or even temporal proximity. It suggests that experiential intimacy is capable of generating physical responses within audience members without the need for shared location or time. It also further establishes the importance of experiential connectivity between audience and performer and the social community cultivated within online spaces as a catalyst for additional avenues of liveness beyond ontological co-presence.

Within Aebischer and Nicholas' 2020 study of Zoom performance they found that 'Creation Theatre's audiences placed extra value on the fact that the production was created specifically to be watched online[...] and that they were able to actively participate' (2020:12). The delivery of a Zoom performance may allow for easier methods and opportunities for direct participation with the audience. It also remains a notable positive on the part of experiential intimacy for these audience members. Zoom performances retain the element of temporal simultaneity for the

audience and performers without the ontological requirement for physical proximity. Sullivan notes that 'interactivity may be as powerful a factor as physical presence in the creation of aliveness among audiences' (2018:72). Therefore, it reinforces the need for Barker's extended definition of intimacy with consideration of audience interactivity and experiential liveness.

Thirdly Barker mentions the element of 'buzz' (2012:66).

this involves having one's reactions heightened by the awareness that other audience members are also engaged, excited, moved[...]. Typical phrasings include 'hearing the anticipation... watching other people's reactions... talking in the interval... finding like-minded people. (2012:66).

This phenomena can be observed within ontological and experiential livenesses initially via the same means and could potentially report similar findings. For example, as previously discussed, Auslander reports that intimacy and the aura of liveness create an atmosphere of liveness or buzz. Moreover, many phenomenological liveness studies note the impact of the presence of other audience members upon the individual's experiences. Reason and Lindelof note that 'one of the most pertinent insights of empirical audience research has been the repeated assertion by spectators of the importance of sharing and discussing their experience with others' (2017:11). However, this is where the similarities between ontological and phenomenological ideologies of 'buzz' (Barker,2012:66) diverge.

Once again the dissonance falls upon the ontological limits of 'live' and the need for physical and temporal co-presence. Experiential 'buzz' (Barker,2012:66) has been observed across virtual forms which do not necessarily present both temporal and corporal presence. There are two forms of 'buzz' (2012:66) within liveness studies. One form permeates through the usage of social media, specifically Twitter and through the interaction and cultivation of online communities both during and after the initial live event. Sullivan notes that 'social media, when embraced enthusiastically, can help create opportunities for being 'together alone'' (2018:72). Aebischer examines the usage of technology and mediatization within a performance of

Shakespeare in her 2020 book. During one performance she examined the online space utilised by both the audience and production team to advertise and discuss the performance both during and after the event. She noted that in engaging with online spaces the audience participated 'with vibrant awareness of agency in an event' with 'as strong a sense of occasion and co-presence' (2020:197) as that of those physically within the theatre. Additionally, she noted that the online space continued to develop as a site for discussion 'both during and after the broadcast and across the five days during which is remained available' (2020:196). This suggests that these online forums or tweets not only provide an additional space for community and intimacy beyond the ontological 'buzz' (Barker,2012:66) but also that this 'buzz' (2012:66) can form an element of extended liveness and remain active or present for as long as the audience actively engage with it.

The second form of experiential 'buzz' (Barker,2012:66) refers to sharing temporal space and in the ability to observe other audience members without sharing literal corporal space. Within Aebischer and Nicholas' 2020 study of Zoom performance they found that 'being able to see the audience was important to respondents more widely' (2020:130). One participant stated that 'it was so wonderful to get to see other audience members watching it because that's what a theatrical experience would be, getting to see all the other audience members enjoying it with you' (2020:131). The ability to see audience members during the performance may influence the feelings of connectivity felt amongst audience members. The ability to see how the performance is impacting others and share moments of emotion such as shock, laughter and applause further connects and nurtures the phenomenological experience. This buzz and feeling of community was especially important to Aebischer and Nicholas' audience given the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions that were in place during their study. The ability to share in such an emotionally bonded experience with others and be able to see them respond to performance in real time was 'part of the spectacle and you could look at them and have all the joy of being around other

people' (2020:131). This buzz (Barker,2012:66) has been noted as an important indicator in an audience members experience of liveness both ontologically and phenomenologically.

### Event, Ritual and Cartesian Dualism

In addition to Barker's definitions of core liveness terms it is necessary for the shared contexts of ontological and experiential liveness to re-examine the terms 'event' and 'ritual' for the context of this paper.

In Richard Schechner's *6 Axioms for Environmental Theatre* (1968) he establishes core components that could be used to classify something as an event. He states that 'the theatrical event includes audience, performers, text[...], sensory stimuli, architectural enclosure[...], production equipment, technicians, and house personnel[...]' (1968:41). To be classed as an event not all the above elements must be present, rather Schechner suggests that the theatrical event exists on a scale between 'nonmatrixed performance to highly formalized traditional theatre' (1968:41). This scale allows for performances outside of the regulated theatrical space to be considered as event. The scale is as follows: "'impure; life" public events demonstrations' – 'intermedia (happenings)' – 'environmental theatre' – "'pure; art" traditional theatre' (1968:41).

Much of Schechner's analysis of event focusses on the ontological definitions of the term. This could be due to live cinema events and streamed theatre being non-existent or emergent at the time of his research. However, Schechner does give some consideration to the phenomenological experience of the audience by stating that 'the theatrical event is a complex social interweave, a network of expectations and obligations' (1968:42). Here Schechner could be referencing the social rules and regulations followed by the audience whilst attending a staged event. It was explored previously that when attending the theatre there are certain rules and expectations that come with attending an event as an audience member such as 'the whole switching off one's device ahead of a screening' (Aebischer,2020:196). However, as previously

examined within experiential liveness studies, these traditional theatrical etiquettes are not strictly followed by virtual audiences in the case of Erin Sullivan's 2020 study of a streamed performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Here, not only did the audience have their phones out during the performance but they actively participated in tweeting and social media discussion during the time of the performance. Sullivan reported that 'online platforms like Twitter help facilitate lively exchange among digital audience members, producing a sense of shared presence and eventful connectedness despite considerable geographical divides' (2020:105). Sullivan also found that her audience tended 'to divide their attention between the performance and other tasks[...]' (2020:92). This would likely not be permitted within the traditional theatrical expectations of the audience. Perhaps in the case of defining event within experiential liveness, the expectations and obligations of the audience should be reflective of the form or space within which the performance is being experienced.

Schechner suggests that there are additional social or communicative elements to the event that should be observed. These refer to the relationships 'among the performers. Among members of the audience. Between the performers and audience' (1968:44). Once again Schechner is referring to staged performance where the audience and performer are co-present in the same physical location as this is the standard form of performance at his time of writing. However, as previously examined within audiences of both streamed and virtual performances that these connections can be forged and maintained within the virtual realm.

Since Schechner's examinations of event are rooted within the necessity for the corporal co-presence of both performer and audience it is necessary to examine event in conjunction with other theories which allow for different connections.

Nicholas Bourriard defines relational art as 'an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context. Rather than the assertion of an independent

and *private* symbolic space[...]’ (1998:14). This expansion of relational art allows for a more experiential or phenomenological approach to event. It considers human relations and connectivity at its centre rather than the ontological fixed shared space. Bourriard suggests that ‘it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through[...]. It is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion’ (1998:15). This allows for digital forms ranging from the streamed and Zoom performances to the recorded documentational video to be considered as event. If the initial event is considered as a lived experience that allows access to ‘unlimited discussion’ (1998:15) it not only marks the crossing between event and extended event but also denotes the importance of extended event as an opportunity for participation. The ability to ‘actively participate’ (Aebischer and Nicholas,2020:12) as part of an event was noted as being vital to the liveness experience in Creation Theatre’s audience as previously explored. Bourriard also observed that there was a need for ‘being-together as a central theme, the “encounter” between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning’ (1998:15). This reflects the social need seen within experiential liveness studies wherein audience members stated that the ability to discuss their experiences was core to their enjoyment of the performance. Aebischer and Nicholas (2020) found that ‘being able to discuss the experience with other was important for audiences, with audiences especially interacting socially before and after the performance’ (2020:13).

Additionally, Bourriard’s relational art links to the ideology within experiential liveness of the extended event. As previously explored, the extended event consists of any discussion or ‘fossils’ (2017:114) produced and kept lively after the temporal end of the initial event. By being able to view the event through the lens of time rather than physical space it allows for the creation of the extended event beyond the performance. As Sedgman and Bucknall (2017) have suggested, the extended event or ‘fossils’ (2017:114) ‘are not and can never be the actual live

event, which is extinguished at the moment of its making' (2017:116). However, by considering Bourriard's relational art and Schechner's scale for events it may be suggested that the extended liveness beyond the original event could generate a new extended event consisting only of 'fossils' (2017:114) that are hosted within online spaces.

Schechner defines 'ritual' as 'collective memories encoded into actions' (2002:52). The ideology of collective memory echoes both Jenkins' 'collective intelligence' (2006:41) and Turner's 'communitas' (1969) within liveness discourse. Schechner suggests that there are two forms of ritual; 'the sacred and the secular' (2002:53). The sacred ritual refers to 'expressing, or enacting religious beliefs' (2002:53), whereas secular rituals refer to 'state ceremonies, everyday life, sports, and any other activity not specifically religious in character' (2002:53). The rituals of liveness explored within this paper fall within the secular ritual due to their lack of religious connotations. Ritual refers to 'performances enacting known patterns of behavior and texts' (2002:57). This is pertinent within experiential liveness discourse through both the phenomenological reports of patterns of liveness and via performed audience behaviour within different temporal settings of performance. As previously explored within audience studies of liveness, the expected ritualistic behaviours attached to the theatrical experience were negotiated by audiences within Aebischer's study of digital Shakespeare (2020:196).

Additionally, Schechner notes the impact of 'sacred space' upon the participants, noting that 'in such spaces, special behavior is required' (2002:71). This reinforces and heightens the pattern of performative ritual placed upon the audience if the audience find themselves located within a 'sacred space' (2002:71). In the case of liveness studies this may be the difference between attending the theatre and attending virtually or via 'alternative content' (Barker, 2012:2). Although, as explored within chapter 3 of this paper, there are instances where ritualistic behaviours are enacted even when distant from 'sacred space' (2002:71). This may be due to



previously explored notions of *communitas* (Turner,1969) and ‘togetherness’ (Sullivan,2020:103) generating such an atmosphere of experiential liveness that the audience member is compelled to complete the rituals they believe are expected of them within performance. This may also be the effects of a phenomena called cartesian dualism.

It is necessary for the exploration of how audience members experience physical presence within virtual events to examine Descartes’ theory of Cartesian Dualism. It has been indicated within experiential liveness studies that audience members have experienced some altered form of physical presence or community when attending virtual performances. Kirsty Sedgman found when examining the comments section of a Youtube video that ‘the act of watching is often a very physical experience’ (2016:2). Furthermore, Erin Sullivan found that ‘interactivity may be as powerful a factor as physical presence in the creation of aliveness among audiences’ (2018:72). Given these responses to virtual environments and the current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic wherein many physically attended performances were stopped, it is valuable to consider different forms of physical presence and body.

In 1637 René Descartes wrote *The Discourse on Method* in which he examines the phenomena of the mind and body as linked entities that are made from different substances. Descartes suggests the existence of ‘thinking substance’ and ‘extended substance’ (1637). He understood that his mind was formulated purely of thinking; he thought about truths and ideas and existence but there was nothing concrete to suggest that he did actually possess a body, he simply thought he did. He states ‘[...]”I”, that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body [...]’ (1637:unpaginated). Descartes description of extended substance is straightforward. When referring to extended substance he denotes space, specifically ‘[...] length, breadth, and height or depth’ (1637:unpaginated). He notes that the body takes up room, physical space unlike the mind and, therefore, is comprised of a different substance. However, as

previously suggested he does not trust the metaphysical facets of reality. Descartes justifies this mistrust by describing the wandering nature of human's perception of reality during dreams. He states '[...] when asleep we can in the same way imagine ourselves possessed of another body and that we see other stars and another earth [...]. For how do we know that the thoughts which occur in dreaming are false rather than those other which we experience when awake [...]?'

(1637:unpaginated). This drift into an alternate realm other than reality is what constitutes Descartes split between mind and body. Rather than being autonomous the mind may enter states in which its presence extends from the corporal confines of the body. Never truly separated but temporarily outside of reality, tied by a tether of awareness that they are indulging in the suspension of disbelief and must inevitably return to their physical form.

To apply this theory to modern virtual environments, Steve Dixon explores 'virtual bodies' (2007:212). He states that 'virtual bodies are new visual representations of the body, but do not alter the physical composition of their referent flesh and bones' (2007:212). Here Dixon uses the term 'referent' (Barthes,1980:5) like Barthes had previously. This acknowledgement that the virtual or 'extended substance' (1637) does not override or equate to the original living body of the audience member echoes previous examinations of extended liveness and event within phenomenological ideologies of liveness.

If the understandings of Cartesian dualism and virtual bodies is considered within experiential liveness it allows the audience to deepen their connection with the performers and other audience members due to their ability to extend their consciousness onto any virtual bodies that they are perceiving. This may allow for a closer relationship with the performers as it allows the audience to project their thinking onto the character and participate through experiencing an additional perspective beyond the audience member. This may account for the observed phenomena of physical experience within experiential studies where the performers and audience

are not co-present. It also may explain reports of physical impact within audiences as noted within Sedgman's (2016) study of Neil Patrick Harris.

In 2010 Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants conducted a study into phenomenology and virtual reality to examine the effects of Cartesian dualism upon performers and audiences. Two performers were rigged to head mounted displays (HMD) in separate locations. The performers 'could look and move around in the other's visual domain' (2010:279) via the HMD. The performance was observed by two audiences, one at each location, who could see both perspectives of the performers on screens as well as the physical body of the performer in front of them. This performance allowed the audience to 'see from within the performed image, controlling both one's position in relation to the image and the dimensions of the image itself' (2010:280). By limiting the audience's view of the other performers space to the gaze given by the body in front of them it allowed for their extended substance to flow through the physically present body, onto their extended virtual body. Vanhoutte and Wynants state that this experience challenges 'the way in which we experience being a body in relation to perceiving a body acting on stage , or, in immersive space, located in our very own life world (2010:280). By allowing the audience to see the body that is directing their gaze and link the virtual to them through shared temporal presence it could ground the phenomena of Cartesian dualism and extending the body to virtual performance within a more personable and comfortable realm. This study allows audiences to directly connect the virtual with the physical body in a way that previous experiences of virtual performance such as Zoom performance and streamed performances do not. It allows for a smaller steppingstone when exploring virtual bodies and lack of temporal presence between audience and performer body.

By re-examining core liveness terms to include phenomenological liveness it allows for wider access to theatre through virtual mediums and online platforms. This frames audience

experience at the forefront of liveness and allows more opportunities for participation as part of an online networked community. It also allows for event to be examined through time rather than physical space and for the additional acceptance of extended liveness as extended event. Finally, it allows for a virtual body and space to be considered as a legitimate platform for experience through Cartesian dualism. This is especially important given the emergence of mediums such as Zoom specific performance as examined by Aebischer and Nicholas (2020). It is with these expanded terms that I begin to examine experiential liveness as an audience member at a variety of events, both streamed, recorded and in-person.

### Chapter 3: My Experiential Liveness Research

Within my research of audiences and experiential liveness I consulted three main sources for information. These consisted of a live event cinema showing of *Fleabag* (2019), the tweets made by the cast and audience during the premier of *Hamilton* (2020) on Disney+, and finally in-person and virtual seminars at the University of Plymouth. Before I examine the findings of my research I must detail my methodology and approach to each form of research including any ethical considerations or challenges I faced as part of the research processes.

#### Methodology and Ethics

The first methodology I utilised was 'Spectator-Participation-as-Research' (Heddon, Iball and Zerihan, 2012:122). This refers to a method of spectatorship which focusses on 'one on one' (2012:120) performances 'that invite one audience member to experience the piece *on their own* (2012:120). Although the sources I examined were not performed exclusively for me, Heddon, Iball and Zerihan state that both one to one performances and 'digital 'first person' platforms' (2012:121) 'suggest the possibility of connection and personal encounter via their forms' (2012:121). This emphasis on connection and 'participatory' (2012:122) spectatorship allows for 'comparative study, based in phenomenological description and reflection and personal

revelation' (2012:132). This could allow for the phenomenological research I collect within digital and 'live' experiences to be considered as a form of 'comparative study' (2012:121) through which I can examine previous liveness ideologies and studies. Furthermore, the personal nature of these performances links the 'moments of production' (2012:122) to 'the participant's life experiences and senses of self' (2012:123). This further entwines this method of examination with phenomenology and self-reflective research and legitimizes these findings as sources to be examined via other literature and studies.

In conjunction with SPaR, I utilise Susan Kozel's ideologies pertaining to phenomenological research both on the part of the researcher and on behalf of others. Kozel suggests that it is possible to write on another's phenomenological experience if two concepts are minded. She states that 'phenomenological philosophy provides the conceptual framework and methodological sketch for interpreting the experiences of others; [...] the sensibility and interpretive power comes from the physical experience of the [...] heterophenomenologist' (2007:59). Here 'heterophenomenologist' (2007:59) refers to 'a situated researcher[...] who interprets what is seen' (2007:57). This understanding allows for the observation and phenomenological analysis of audience members outside of the above 'one to one' (2012:121). However, this is only possible through a shared connectivity, such as those observed between audiences in previous experiential liveness studies.

Additionally, I apply Kirsty Sedgman's 'reception research' (2018:470) when examining tweets. Sedgman describes this methodology as 'gathering and analysing discourse that is already in circulation' (2019:470). This allows me to analyse 'fossils' (2017:114) such as tweets or reviews as fragments of liveness and audience experience. The consideration of 'reception research' (2018:470) is vital to my research since my examinations and notes of my experiences will almost always be recorded after the performance. Additionally, tweets and discussions generated by

other audience members could have begun with the performance and have taken the form of 'fossils' (2017:114) in the time that I am collecting them for research. To consider these fragments as authentic reflections of experiential liveness allows my research to consider extended liveness within my analysis.

There are some inherent ethical challenges involved in utilising the above methods. When considering tweets as research there are issues surrounding the right to remain anonymous when posting online and the intended purpose of these tweets. When considering these I refer to Sedgman's methodology (2018) wherein she utilises the ideologies of 'light disguise' (Bruckman, 2002) and 'contextual integrity' (Nissenbaum, 2004:120) to consider ethical concerns. Bruckman lists stipulations which must be followed in order to constitute this level of 'light disguise' (2002). They are as follows:

The group is named. Pseudonyms and some other identifying details [...] are changed. Verbatim quotes may be used, even if they could be used to identify an individual. Group members themselves may be able to guess who is being discussed. An outsider could probably figure out who is who with a little investigation. Details that are harmful to individuals should be omitted (2002).

Sedgman utilised this approach within her methodology with the intent to 'acknowledge the right of authors to be recognised for their writing via citation [...], while also resisting calling out any one individual' (2018:51). This is the approach I seek to apply within my research. I cite the contents of the tweet verbatim whilst omitting the Twitter handles of those I reference. I replace the handle with a randomly selected pseudonym. This allows the writer to be attributed to the post without compromising fully on their right to anonymity.

I also apply Helen Nissenbaum's concept of 'contextual integrity' (2004:120) when referencing some Twitter sources. Sedgman explains that 'contextual integrity' (Nissenbaum, 2004:120) 'ties internet users' rights to privacy to the specific content of dissemination' (2018:50). This allows for the 'difference in how the information flow is perceived by researchers [...] and by

users' (2018:50). By examining the context through which members of the cast post on Twitter during the premier of *Hamilton* (2020) it could be suggested that the intended dissemination of these tweets was to be for the public's perception. Despite this potential context, I follow the principle Sedgman suggests 'in acknowledgment of online posters' right to contextual integrity' (2018:107). This is to acknowledge the risk that 'off-the-cuff statements might be quoted out of their intended context' (2018:107). Being mindful of this I refrain from naming the specific person whom I am citing, instead opting to identify them simply as 'cast'. This recognises the context of the tweet as being from a different context than those who are tweeting to friends or privately but does not remove all considerations of their right to anonymity and 'light disguise' (Bruckman:2002).

There are additional ethical complications when considering SPaR as a method. Since SPaR is 'one to one' (2012:122) by design it is limited by the single audience member. Heddon, Iball and Zerihan explain that 'while the academic commentator might, for once, reasonably speak for the whole audience that is only because she was the whole audience[...]' (2012:132). This creates issues within the 'narrowness of that perspective' (2012:132) and the ethical complications surrounding the lived experiences of that researcher. With consideration of Kozel's phenomenological analysis this could be partially resolved. However, this does not erase issues of subjectivity regarding life experiences due to social or cultural difference. In this case, myself being a white, educated, middle class, disabled, female I am unable to reflect any other experience other than my own in that specific time and space. This makes the replicability and reliability of the data subjective to my personal socio-cultural experience. Additionally, there could be issues of conformity within the audience member since the experience is 'one to one' (2012:122). This could refer to following expected behaviours, such as the previously explored 'switching off one's device ahead of a screening' (Aebischer,2020:196) policy. It was suggested that 'there is a (danger)

zone where practitioner's assumptions meet the participant's desire to 'give good audience'" (2012:123). This could result in both the performer and the audience member altering their behaviour, especially within a 'participatory' (2012:122) form. I made effort to eradicate these conforming behaviours as they arose within my body as an audience member. However, I understand that it is difficult to identify conforming behaviours within oneself as they are occurring. This could be especially difficult when attempting to observe internal phenomenological reactions to performance. The viewing lens could be altered from the natural spectator to the analytical researcher and, therefore, the behaviours I exhibit could conform to this shift as well. This could result in additional or fewer behaviours that are reflective of my genuine phenomenological experience. This could be remedied slightly with consideration of Bucknall's 'reflective participant' (2017:127) as explored below.

### Fleabag

My methodological approach to *Fleabag* (2019) draws from Pascale Aebischer's study (2020).

Aebischer states that

In each case study, I weave close attention to the processes and affordances of technologies of performance into thick phenomenological descriptions informed by my own embodied experience of the productions as a 'reflective participant' [...] (2020:28).

Here Aebischer utilises Bucknall's definition of 'reflective participant' (2017:127) meaning to participate 'not only as a member of the public and as part of the general audience, but as a researcher and maker' (2017:127). This allows me as a researcher and audience member to retain two lenses simultaneously. I attended the screening on the 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 at The Vue, Plymouth. I would have preferred to attend multiple screenings but due to the short timeframe that it was available at my local cinema and my financial circumstances at the time I was unable to attend multiple viewings. I made notes both before the viewing and afterwards. The notes I made before the viewing began once I entered the cinema and continued until the moment the content



began playing. However, I did conform to the rules of the cinema and put away my notes during the performance. This refers to the ethical complication of conformant behaviour explored within Heddon, Iball, Zerihan (2012:123). However, given the circumstances and the potential for removal should I not conform I elected to behave as expected. This meant that some of the audience behaviours and reactions I observed had to be allocated to memory until I could note them down post-performance. However, Reason and Lindelof suggest that the 'misrecollections of live memory[...] might be considered as a continuation of the liveness as an ongoing creative process' (2017:11). Therefore, my recollections could be considered as an extended liveness despite the reliance on memory. After the performance due to the large amounts of information I had stored I elected to record my thoughts within an audio recording in the hopes that I would recall and retain more information via this method. I found this beneficial and proceeded to generate notes from this audio recording. I then utilised similar experiential liveness studies to examine and analyse my notes and my own phenomenological liveness experience.

Firstly, I noted the comfort of the cinema itself. As an audience member had noted within Barker's study; "It's comfortable in the cinema [...]" (2012:32). The auditorium had reclining leather seats and small lap tables. This is polarising to my previous experience of traditional older theatres where the historical buildings often have wooden or worn seating. Additionally, I noted that the cinema screen smelt of 'popcorn, and the butter-like stuff they put on popcorn, and [...] air-conditioned air' (Romm,2016). This contrasted with my experience of traditional theatres which commonly smell of 'worn leather smells like faint mold and too much dust' (Roush,2017:7). Barker's participants also noted this stating 'the Picturehouse is comfortable (luxurious seating), clean and the staff are welcoming' (2012:32). Whilst these observations did not necessarily impact the liveness of my experience it had a profound impact on my comfort and my experience of the 'event' itself.

I observed that the audience were of a wide age range, spanning from teens to 50+ years old. However, I did note the presence of a majority of older audience members. I did not note any large families attending this showing however I believe this was due to the age rating and inappropriate nature of some of the content within the performance rather than due to disinterest in the form of event cinema itself. In Barker's study he finds that the majority of his respondents are 46-60+ years old (2012:27). He notes that 'livecasts seem to be attracting audiences back to the cinema who may otherwise attend rarely or not at all' (2012:28). This was reflected within the screening I attended. Additionally, younger audience members seemed to prefer attending in groups of 2-4. This was noted within Aebischer and Nicholas' study as they found 'audiences mostly watched in small groups, with two being the most common group size' (2020:12). This reinforces the experiential liveness ideologies regarding togetherness and the importance of shared experience and discussion as part of the liveness experience (Sullivan,2020:115) (Aebischer and Nicholas,2020:13).

As the event itself began the stream showed an overhead shot of the audience in London taking their seats. We could also hear ambient noise from the stage audience as they took their seats. I found the inclusion of this both comforting and immersive as an audience member. I found that it settled the divide between us as cinema audience and them as theatre audience and allowed for feelings of 'communitas' (Turner,1969) to settle. This echoed the findings within Aebischer and Nicholas' 2020 study of Zoom audiences where they found this to be a great indicator of the liveness experience (2020:130). Although this performance was not over Zoom and I was aware that this audience were pre-recorded it still allowed me to connect my presence in the cinema to the audience on the screen. Once the performance itself began they did focus the camera on the stage, cutting out the view of the staged audience and they muted the ambient noise of the extended audience. At first this left a vacuum of silence as the cinema audience

attempted to navigate being cut off from half of the audience. However, soon the cinema audience filled in these gaps with our own ambient noise and the staged audience were only heard during moments of laughter as a reinforcing backing track. I remained aware of the extended audience despite not being able to see them and their laughter encouraged me to laugh along as I felt connected and safe within the totality of the audience.

I did feel a slight disconnect from the action due to the knowledge that the performance was a recording. I felt the relationship between myself, and the performer was hindered by the recorded nature of the performance. Although this was not due to the form itself, rather I felt that it removed the opportunity for participation on my part. This was also reflected in Barker's participants where he asked, 'how interested they would be in attending if the presentation was not live, but transmitted 24 hours later?' (2012:40). He found that 'levels of interest fell by almost 50 percent [...]. Clearly, even if no other aspect of liveness mattered to people, simultaneity does' (2012:40). On the other hand, the connection and participation I experienced post-performance within members of the cinema audience enhanced the liveness experience for me. I overheard audience members engage in both ontological and phenomenological discussion surrounding the liveness of the event rather than the contents of the show itself. There were discussions regarding the oddness of theatre being presented as cinema and the appreciation for being able to see such a prestigious show at such low cost. This particular comment was also noted within Barker's study with '*privileged access*' (2012:65) described as getting 'otherwise impossible tickets, and at affordable prices' (2012:65). The significance of these discursive spaces has been widely reported with Reason and Lindelof stating that there is a 'repeated assertion by spectators of the importance of sharing and discussing their experience with others' (2017:11). It was clear that the medium of event cinema, in this case, had begun an extended liveness discussion beyond the performance itself.

Attending this live cinema screening reinforced the importance of audience experience, 'eventness' (Sullivan,2018:61) and discussion as important cornerstones to experiential liveness. Despite experiencing phenomenological liveness via attending the live cinema event it is important for my research to examine circumstances where there are elements of co-presence between the audience and performance. This is vital due to the reoccurring emphasis placed on temporal simultaneity and heightened liveness expressed within previously explored studies of liveness. The live event cinema showing is a recorded event with no co-presence shared between the audience and performer and cannot be utilised to examine such relationships. Therefore, I attended seminars both in-person and virtually to analyse the impacts of temporal and corporal co-presence and the impacts of such relationships upon experiential liveness.

#### PEP Talk Seminars

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of November 2019 and the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 2019 I attended two seminars, called PEP (Performance Experience Presence) Talks, at the University of Plymouth. I chose to attend the PEP Talk on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November via Instagram live. Then I attended the 11<sup>th</sup> of December PEP Talk in-person at the University of Plymouth. I once again utilised the methodology described within Aebischer's 2020 study as described above, in conjunction with Bucknall's 'reflective participant' (2017:127). I elected to maintain these methodologies due to the similar approach I would be taking towards the research, and it would also allow me to maintain continuity in how I collected and examined my feedback. I took notes during both occasions noting my experiences and then examined these notes both against each other and experiential liveness literature. I will be using my in-person experience as a baseline, commenting predominantly on how my experience via Instagram differs from this. This will allow me to frame my discourse through experiential liveness primarily and discuss the medium of livestream and virtual presence

rather than get caught in discussing any potential ontological livenesses afforded by my in-person experience.

Firstly, I noted that my experience of camera was different from *Fleabag* (2019). The professional cinematography and camerawork I had experienced during *Fleabag* (2019) was steady and unobtrusive upon my liveness experience. However, the PEP Talk was streamed through a mobile phone being held by Dr. Victor Ladron de Guevara, associate head of theatre and performance at The University of Plymouth. This direction of gaze echoes the performance given by Vanhoutte and Wynants in which HMD were used to present the performers gaze to the audience. I did not find that I struggled with lack of visibility or distraction during Dr. Victor Ladron de Guevara's camerawork. I did appreciate the opportunity to experience 'the image-space from an embodied point of view' (2010:280). Although this seminar was perhaps mundane compared to the performance of Vanoutte and Wynants, I appreciated the opportunity to surrender my gaze and the burden of spectating to embrace the perspective given to me by a body that I utilised as a form of extended substance. However, I did note the shakiness of a camera that was not mounted and the occasional delayed focussing of the lens.

Such digital discrepancies were noted within Aebischer and Nicholas' study of Zoom performances (2020). They found that audiences reported 'technological issues were the most commonly mentioned source of distraction' (2020:120). However, in Aebischer and Nicholas' respondent's they found that these glitches heightened their experience of liveness. One participant stated that 'I enjoyed the blend of chaos and talent, and I think the glitches bring a much needed air of reality' (2020:123). In this circumstance, I knew the majority of those attending and had seen them earlier that day and therefore I knew that they were presenting in that moment. Perhaps this acute closeness to their reality is why the stability of the camera was more of a hinderance rather than a confirmation of liveness for me. Should I have had the

personal distance from the performers and not known with certainty that the event was temporally live, perhaps my experience would have been different.

The main source of experiential liveness for me was within the constant participation and engagement of the virtual audience on the part of the PEP Talk's host Professor Roberta Mock. She would continually reference the virtual audience, inviting us to participate actively during question times and would greet us directly, gesturing to the camera whenever there were breaks. This heightened my experience of co-presence with the physical audience continually and kept me as an active participant throughout. Reason and Lindelof express the importance of this relationship or connection stating that 'A phenomenology of experiencing live, therefore, needs to consider experience as a set of dynamic and particular relationships – the most crucial of these being the active or interactive relationship between the art work and the spectator' (2017:9). I had a clear connectivity and relationship to all in the room at the PEP Talk due to Professor Roberta Mock's constant engagement with the virtual audience.

Conversely, although this connection and feeling of togetherness was strongly felt by myself I struggled with the form of communication that I was limited to. If I wanted to verbally engage with those in-person I had to type in the chat box and Dr. Victor Ladron de Guevara would read my words aloud to those attending the PEP Talk. This was jarring to my experience as it is not a method of communication I have personally used before. Whilst I have experience of conversation and discussion via text online I have not experienced hearing my text be filtered through another body before. This functioned as reverse Cartesian dualism, rather than the common application within liveness discourse of the digital body acting as the extension I was utilising Dr Ladron de Guevara's physical body as my extended substance. However, despite this being an unusual experience it did confirm the effectiveness of Cartesian dualism as a method of forging presence through other bodies within experiential liveness.

There were other technical/human glitches which impacted my experience of the streamed PEP Talk that I would not have experienced in-person such as Dr Ladron de Guevara occasionally omitting to resume the livestream. Therefore, I did miss the presentation of one performer, and I was unable to communicate that the stream was not live to those who were physically present. This left me with feelings of hopelessness and compromised the 'communitas' (Turner, 1969) and immersion I had built as an extended audience. Additionally, the choice was made to end the livestream whenever a task was set for those attending in-person. This completely excluded those attending virtually and further engrained feelings of 'them' and 'us' regarding audiences. It also generated feelings of 'missing out' as also noted within Reason's 2006 study of liveness and Othello (2006:232). I felt I had been excluded from important conversation which could have further enhanced the connectivity felt between the in-person audience. However, these technical disparities were due to human error or the elective choice to structure and run the PEP Talk's in that particular manor. This was not reflective of issues within the medium itself or in experiential liveness.

By combining my examinations of live event cinema and the above seminars I was able to experience the discrepancies between two forms of digital medium. The visual comfort afforded to me during *Fleabag* (2019) enhanced my liveness experience due to steady camerawork allowing me to forget that I was observing a screen. I did not experience this suspension of disbelief during the PEP Talks. However, this discomfort with camerawork could be attributed to my closeness to the seminar and the speakers rather than with a disassociation with liveness itself. Furthermore, I experienced the strong relationships and connections within the PEP Talks that I had missed from the *Fleabag* (2019) performance. These were reinforced through the vessel of participation further implicating the importance of a 'participatory culture' (Jenkins,2006) when speaking of liveness as reported within previously examined studies such as Reason and Lindelof (2017:6) and Sullivan

(2020:99). My connection to the staged audience was also examined through Cartesian dualism rather than through sight or conversation as previously explored within my *Fleabag* (2019) experience. This afforded a very different form of connection specifically filtered through the body of the camera person who was also audience. Dr Ladron de Guevara acted as a median through which my connection to the audience was filtered. This raises ontological questions regarding Cartesian dualism such as who the thinking or extended substance are and how this could shift depending on perspective to the audiences. Whilst these questions are interesting they are ontological in nature and had little bearing on my phenomenological liveness experience in that moment.

Whilst the above two studies examine some experiential liveness discourse they do not address the aspect of social media presence within liveness. Since the extended liveness through platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and blogs forms such a large part of audience discussion it is important for my research to examine instances of this facet of phenomenological liveness.

#### Hamilton and Twitter

When examining the tweets made regarding *Hamilton* (2020) I utilised the methodology set out by Ruth Deller (2011). Deller's research was carried out over a period of weeks, and she collected tweets created with temporal co-presence alongside the performance. My research and tweet collection takes place post-performance; therefore the collection process was not reliant on the schedule of a series of performances and could be done over a shorter period of time. The original premier of *Hamilton* (2020) on Disney+ took place on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2020. I was able to collect the tweets for analysis over the space of two days: the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 2020 and the 29<sup>th</sup> of December 2020. This draws on Kirsty Sedgman's methodology of 'reception research' (2018:470), as previously explored, and allowed the collection of 'fossils' (Sedgman and Bucknall, 2017:114) to be considered as lively research.



To begin my methodological process I 'monitored the Twitter streams relating to this programme [...] to see what discussion was occurring' (Deller,2011:230). By using Deller's technique I scrolled back to the day that the *Hamilton* (2020) premier was due to occur on a cast member's Twitter feed to get a general outline for the types of discussion occurring. I used Deller's technique and 'used the key terms' (2011:231), in this case hashtags, that were commonly used to refer to the performance and premier, namely '#Hamilfilm' and '#Hamilton'. Deller then 'used Twitter's search facility to monitor the search categories' (2011:231). I searched both hashtags in the search bar to find tweets from the night of the premier and any discussions that may still be evolving as extended liveness post-performance.

Unfortunately, both hashtags had fallen out of use in relation to the premier performance when I collected my research. I then 'organised the data into categories according to the content of the tweets' (2011:232) as Deller did. I sorted tweets into categories of liveness discussion based on previous liveness research. I isolated the categories: emotional impact, mistakes, theatrical etiquette, access, money, communitas, adoration/physical reaction, and hope in COVID-19. I also examined the tweets in categories based on who was posting and responding to them. I noted that the cast members were present and interacting in debate with audience members. Deller also experienced the creator of her programme 'answering questions about the programme' (2011:231). Therefore, I wanted to measure the relationship and connectivity between the cast and audience closely as a category of experiential liveness. I utilised previous liveness research such as Sullivan (2018, 2020), Sedgman and Bucknall (2017) to examine the language presented in the tweets. I chose to do this due to the emphasis within research on tweets as a way 'to connect with one another online and create new kinds of experiential liveness' (Sullivan,2018:62).

The first category of discussion I identified pertained to a mimicry of backstage theatre experience. Tweets posted prior to the performance by the cast emulate the traditional stage calls

that you would hear backstage as a performer in the theatre. These tweets formed a virtual stage call for those in the social media audience, building hype and continuing until the premier began:

Stage Manager: half hour ladies and gentlemen, this is your half hour call. Remember there will be cameras at tonight's show...please remember to sign in or stop by the stage manager's office if you have not done so. This is your half hour call... #Hamilfilm (Cast Member,2020)

(The house IS open, do not cross the stage, the house IS open) #Hamilfilm (Cast Member,2020)

Stage Manager: Ladies and gentlemen, this is your places call. Have a great show. Places everyone. [...] #Hamilfilm (Cast Member,2020)

The emulation of theatrical behaviour within digital mediums has been noted within Aebischer's (2020:196) study and in Barker (2012). Barker notes that 'a distinct set of 'manners' for correct behaviour had emerged' (2012:72) when observing audiences close to the front of a performance. These tweets are designed to encourage the audience to consider this performance as possessing temporal liveness despite the performance occurring over a streaming service. The liveness presented here is extended due to the lack of temporal co-presence between the 'original' performance and the audience. However, the participation and simultaneity of discussion with cast members during a mass viewing of the recorded form produces a thread of 'lively' 'fossils' (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:123) and active discussions that could constitute 'a lively process, and an experience in and of itself' (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:121).

The atmosphere surrounding a live event has been noted as a negative to non-live performance in Sullivan's (2020) study. An audience member expressed how they 'longed to be 'in the crowd, experiencing the atmosphere in the venue'' (2020:99). The purpose of these tweets could be to emulate the live atmosphere that is critiqued as missing from some non-live performances, pushing a narrative of liveness, whilst simultaneously acknowledging the extended liveness of Twitter and the documentational nature of the film medium through the hashtag #Hamilfilm. The impact the blending of these ideologies had upon audience's experience of

liveness is not clear. Many of the replies under the tweets were expressing excitement 'JUST WOKE UP IM SO READY' (Alice,2020) and 'THANK YOU 30 AHHHHHH' (Beth,2020). Some were hinting to previous experiences at the theatre and their appreciation for the mimicry: 'Ahhhhhh!! I miss theatre. Thank you for this' (Caitlyn,2020). One audience member echoed Aebischer's (2020) findings surrounding phone etiquette stating, 'For this one, I will turn off my phone' (Debbie,2020). Despite these indications of heightened liveness, the emulation of the cast experience at the theatre was perhaps too obscure a reality to enhance the phenomenological liveness of the total audience. There were a few tweets where the audience member reflected on their own conformation to theatrical behaviours within their home environment. One audience member notes 'anyone else find themselves clapping even through you know the cast and crew can't hear you? No? Just me? OK' (Harriet,2020). However, these reflective audience members were few and did not expand the liveness discourse beyond these brief expressions.

One theme of discourse that emerged from the Twitter space focussed on the ability to see moments in close-up via the stream versus the staged performance. One audience member wrote 'Seeing it live was a breathtaking experience, but seeing it up close on screen is a different kind of emotional I wasn't expecting [...]' (Ellen,2020). This audience member acknowledges that the experience of seeing both forms of *Hamilton* (2020) have differences. However, they suggest that the emotional impact that the close-ups provided within the streamed version was just as great as that of the staged performance. This echoes my findings within the camerawork of *Fleabag* (2019) and the PEP Talk's. There was a difference in camerawork between the two and these allowed for different viewing experiences. This affirmation mirrors my findings that the stable 'professional' camerawork allowed for greater immersion and connection with the performers. This could also be reflective of the connection between liveness and intimacy or relationship that is found within experiential liveness research. As previously explored, Barker's 'intimacy' (2012:66), referring to

either relationship or connection to performers and other audience members remains core to experiential liveness discourse. Aebischer and Nicholas (2020) report that 'audiences were able to feel like they were connected with the actors and other audience members and as though they were part of a community' (2020:13). To be able to see performers faces closer than the capabilities of the human eye at a staged performance could allow for deeper levels of connection and community through the usage of camerawork. Another audience member reported that the close-ups made 'our whole family cry' (Frankie,2020). The physical response to a documented or streamed form is observed by Sedgman (2016). She states that 'it seems that the act of watching is often a very physical experience' (2016:2). Additionally, Sedgman notes that the social media space 'can be understood as a means of publicly expressing appreciation' (2016:1). One audience member both compliments a cast member and expresses the physical toll watching took on their own body. '@redacted How the hell did you do that? I got out of breath just watching! #Hamilfilm' (Georgia,2020). This forms deeper connections for the audience member since the corresponding cast member was known to be live tweeting alongside the performance and so there was an opportunity for a response to their comment. This could have heightened their experiential liveness since there was genuine opportunity for engagement and connection.

Another tweet by a cast member confesses to a re-occurring error within previous performances: 'That letter pass around the set sometimes would go wrong. Someone would drop it and we would all do everything we could not to die laughing #Hamilfilm' (Isabelle,2020). This refers to the examinations of 'risk' (2012:66) noted by Barker, Reason and Lindelof (2017:7). However, in previous examinations Reason and Lindelof note that audiences would not notice error as they 'experience a performance once' (2017: 6). They do note that it is 'the *possibility* of change, of risk, of mistakes' (2017:7) that enhance an audiences liveness experience. However, in this circumstance the possibility of risk is removed and could be suggested to compromise the

liveness experience. The cast member notes that although these mistakes did occur in the past, they did not and would not occur within this recorded performance. Therefore, it could be suggested that the knowledge that the scene goes as planned removes the potential for risk for the audience and could lessen their immersion and engagement with the performance. On the other hand, Barker notes some audiences 'are willing to sacrifice [liveness] for something else which they discover at these events: an experience of *privileged access*' (2012:65). Sedgman and Bucknall also note this privilege specifically regarding tweets stating, 'the tweeter is positioned as a privileged participant' (2017:125). Perhaps the knowledge that the audience are interacting and receiving privileged information directly from a cast member could negate or compensate for any lost risk through the compromise of being privy to a unique interaction.

A small section of audience members commented on the enhanced accessibility the streaming service provided them regarding theatre and shows. One audience member states

a lot of the country/world doesn't have access to Broadway or touring shows due to location/\$. Movie musicals and PBS broadcasts were all I had. That's why it's so important that #HamilFilm is spreading a new kind of musical theatre to a wider audience (Julia,2020).

As previously examined, the economic cost involved with travel and tickets for a Broadway or West End show is unattainable for many (Masso,2019). Streamed alternatives have been found to draw 'significantly more low income individuals' (NESTA,2010), framing themselves as a genuine alternative for families and less economically stable persons. However, the ability to stream performances from your home further removes the costs of individual cinema tickets and travel to cinemas. A single Disney+ subscription can be used on multiple devices and does not restrict the numbers of audience members watching each screen. This was noted within Aebischer and Nicholas' 2020 report where 'most people purchased one ticket regardless of group size for the Zoom production' (2020:65). This also allows for watch parties much like that of *Hamilton* (2020) where family and friends can watch geographically separate but temporally together. Aebischer

and Nicholas note that in their participants 'there is strong evidence to suggest that families and friends in different geographical locations are enjoying the digital shows together from their individual homes' (2020:42). Additionally, the tweeter emphasises the potential for new audiences and the importance of allowing theatre to be available to a wider audience. The usage of mainstream platforms such as Disney+ could allow for a younger, family-based audience to access the genre of theatre and encourage a wider spread of the form into previously underexposed areas of society.

Finally, there were tweets focussed on the ability to watch together; both with family and friends in person and online via the Twitter space. This was initially encouraged by a cast member stating: 'so we're gonna all start the movie at 7pm EST yah? Use the hashtag #Hamilfilm. This will be the big loud talkalong we'd never actually do inside the theater, so let's do it big' (Kayla,2020). This tweet encourages the temporal simultaneity of the performance and the Twitter discourse by specifying a start time. This enhances the liveness experience when proceeded by the previously discussed tweets marking the virtual stage calls. It also generates atmosphere and forms a deeper sense of connectivity among the audience members as they are all counting down for the premier together.

Additionally, the cast member directly references the Twitter feed as a space for discussion and encourages interaction with the platform as a 'talkalong' (Kayla,2020) to enhance the liveness experience. They also express the uniqueness of the experience inferring that this is another form of 'privileged access' (Barker, 2012:65) for the audience as 'privileged participant' (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:125). Audience members responded to this tweet stating that 'I just finished watching #HamilFilm an hour ago, and I'm back now for a second viewing with the Twitter watch party' (Lisa,2020). This implies that the audience member has already viewed the performance earlier and has now returned to experience the performance with the additional experience of

participating within the Twitter discourse. This need to participate as part of the performance has been noted by Aebischer and Nicholas (2020). It was important to participants that 'it was live, and that they were able to actively participate' (2020:12). The ability to participate has been linked within experiential liveness discourse to feelings of connectivity with Sullivan noting that 'it seems that the greatest value that emerges from such a formulation is the sense of togetherness it brings' (2020:115). These feelings of *communitas* (Turner, 1969) are especially important within the COVID-19 pandemic. One audience member notes '#Hamilfilm is a wonderful thing to happen in 2020 at a time when we need something wonderful to lift our spirits' (Molly, 2020).

The above examinations highlight the relevancy and importance of audience experience to experiential liveness. Within my examinations I had experienced many of the liveness discourses reported and examined within chapter 1. My experience and interpretation of these livenesses are my own and I acknowledge the difficulties SPaR and 'one on one' (2012:120) analysis incurs regarding the wider implications of phenomenological liveness. Additionally, I am aware that I have presented one interpretation as a 'reflective participant' (Sedgman and Bucknall, 2017:127). However, despite these ethical considerations this research has indicated that audience experience and experiential liveness are intrinsically linked through deep, longstanding discourses and ideologies. Furthermore, this research suggests that it is vital to consider experiential liveness and audience experience as equal to ontological liveness.

## Conclusion

This dissertation has examined the importance of experiential liveness discourse. It is essential for experiential liveness to be considered alongside ontological ideologies. The audience experience regarding liveness within performance is a valuable source of reflection that must be treated respectfully. Sedgman states that 'there is no one 'right' way to study theatre audiences' (2019:462), this may be due to the individualistic nature of the discourse itself. Much experiential

liveness research concludes with the understanding that liveness is felt via relationships. This may be between the audience and the performer or 'between cultural engagement and lived experience [...] by specific communities within particular social contexts' (2019:467). These relationships facilitate a method of researching which must be examined through 'the political and interpersonal implications of the process of research itself' (2019:475). It is important to recognise the socio-cultural contexts involved with studying audiences and how these are intertwined within the methods utilised when generating audience research. Sedgman states that this need to consider context is 'why audience studies literature has tended to call for researchers to adopt a self-reflexive stance' (2019:476). In this way the researcher is part of the researched audience and must consider how research is gathered and how this research has been conveyed to the researcher by the audience. This further frames experiential liveness studies of audience phenomenology as 'an act of interpreting an act of interpretation' (2019:479). By utilising methodological frameworks such as 'light disguise' (Bruckman,2002), SPaR (Heddon et al,2012:122), phenomenological analysis as research (Kozel,2007) and 'reception research' (Sedgman,2018:470), I endeavoured to guide my interpretative analysis through previous methodological approaches to experiential liveness study.

I conclude that experiential liveness is a thriving space of research that had its beginnings alongside ontology but has diverged from the parameters of definition and live/non-live forms alone. The diverse range of studies explored in chapter 1 suggest that audience experience and correlations to liveness are no longer simply confined to live/mediatized discourses. There are references to aspects of ontological liveness that remain within experiential liveness studies, such as longing for co-presence or at minimum temporal co-presence of performer and audience (Sullivan,2020:97), (Barker,2012:106). However, I suggest that there are abundant findings within experiential audience studies wherein the audience are content with temporal co-presence alone



as an indicator of experiential liveness (Aebischer and Nicholas,2020:125), (Sullivan,2020:102), (Reason and Lindelof,2017:7). As suggested previously, I conclude that the relationships built between fellow audience members and the performers generate an individual, communal liveness that can satisfy the need for a 'live' atmosphere and generate feelings of event and 'togetherness' (Sullivan,2020:103).

I conclude that it is the role of *communitas* (Turner,1969) combined with the phenomena of a 'longer experience' (Reason and Lindelof,2017:11) or extended liveness that generates discursive spaces wherein liveness can be renewed and continually experienced by audiences. Within modern society these extended livenesses are made more accessible through social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. These platforms allow for opportunities of experiential liveness to occur within a virtual space alongside the temporal performance. The effects of partaking in these discussions or reflections during the performance have been observed within both streamed and entirely virtual performances (Sullivan,2020), (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:124-5). These spaces have allowed for greater connections between audience members attending the event as well as engaging with new audiences who only have interactions with social media threads. These posts/blogs/threads act as 'fossils' (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:114) of liveness which are indicative of the original event. These spaces allow for extended livenesses to branch and remain lively long after the original event has ended. I suggest that these spaces offer core areas for reflection upon the live event and could generate potential audiences for future performances as a result of having discussed and interacted with the audience community within these virtual spaces.

I conclude that whilst experiential liveness has diverged from ontological liveness discourse there are still some remaining areas that cause overlap. Core terms such as intimacy (Barker,2012:66), ephemerality (Phelan,1993:31), immediacy (Barker,2012:65), event

(Schechner,1968) (Bourriard,1998) and ritual (Schechner,2002) remain in common use within both discursive spheres. Although, I suggest that there is a necessity for alternative definitions and use cases of the above core terms within experiential and ontological research. It is important to recognise that these terms remain core to both discourses but must be contextualised within experiential liveness to reflect the foundational ideologies of relationships and opportunities for extended and alternate livenesses beyond the initial event.

I suggest that examinations of documentational methods within experiential liveness discourse also takes a differing approach to the ontological binary of ephemerality and disappearance. Given the approach to phenomenology and *communitas* (Turner,1969) displayed within experiential liveness it is necessary to consider systems of documentation such as digital archiving (De Koznik,2016) and a societal approach to accessibility via 'participatory culture' (Jenkins,2006). I conclude that these approaches are vital to the context and understanding of *communitas* (Turner,1969) and how extended liveness can expand to include documentational forms such as digital archiving, fanfiction (De Koznik,2016:29) and 'collective intelligence' (Jenkins,2006:41). I suggest that by embracing digital forms of documentation as spaces of extended liveness it allows for greater opportunities for accessibility in terms of both knowledge and access to a wider social group or community. However, I accept that there are limitations and problems within accepting and applying such broad and open borders within a virtual space that could make many members of society vulnerable or 'othered'. I conclude that these opportunities for widespread experiential liveness and discussion through digital documentational spaces could be valuable if correctly regulated and monitored by trained 'techno-volunteers' (De Koznik,2016:41). However, much work would be needed to safely secure these spaces and potentially in doing so this may undermine the freedom that makes these spaces so accessible. If they become over-regulated there is a risk that the regulations and restrictions given to physical

archives and education may be enforced digitally, removing the allure of the accessible, extended documentational space.

My research into experiential liveness reinforces much of the discourses and ideologies expressed within studies examined within chapter 1. I conclude that much of my personal liveness experience attaches itself to the relationships I feel between fellow audience members and performers. I suggest that my analytical lens impacted my experience of liveness as I was attempting to be reflexive and observational. However, I attempted to combat these inclinations by utilising the previously mentioned methodologies and allowing myself to recognise the influences I had as a researcher and the awareness I had of previous liveness discourse as I was examining my research. I conclude that online platforms continue to provide core spaces for audience discussion as seen within my analysis of *Hamilton* (2020) and that digital mediums allow for differing phenomenological experiences of liveness within audiences. I suggest that within the current circumstances of COVID-19 and isolation these digital alternatives have become a vital medium for both performers and audience members. As seen within Aebischer and Nicholas' 2020 study of Zoom performance these digital performances contribute 'to their mental health and decreasing isolation' (2020:14). Pandemic performance and 'alternative content' (Barker,2012:2) for many forms the only opportunity for connectivity and engagement with the arts within COVID-19. Therefore these mediums may constitute not only a vital source of accessibility in terms of economic availability but also in keeping people connected and active within periods of uncertainty.

To conclude, experiential liveness is a critical discourse that holds value both independently and in conjunction to ontological ideologies. Without audience experience the conversation surrounding liveness in performance cannot be said to be comprehensive or complete. I suggest that phenomenological studies of liveness and audience studies offer unique

analyses into liveness that otherwise could not be observed via ontology alone. However, I understand that ontological ideologies of liveness cannot be entirely forgone. There are still many areas through which experiential liveness studies and feedback from audiences express the importance of ontological stipulations of liveness. It suggests that audiences still place value upon elements such as temporal co-presence and, if available, corporal co-presence. These ties to binary liveness imply that experiential liveness must be considered alongside ontological discourses as notes surrounding the 'magic of live theatre' and atmosphere of the space remain important within some audience feedback. Additionally, the previously discussed ontological definitions of core terms such as 'immediacy' (Connor,1987:134), 'ephemerality' (Phelan,1993:31), and 'intimacy' (Auslander,1999:36) remain attached to ontological ideologies despite alternative phenomenological definitions being suggested by Barker (2012). The connections these terms have to ontology within the understanding of performers and audience members suggests that attempts to examine liveness, whether it is experiential or ontological, may result in the unintended reference to these terms within the ontological contexts.

Despite these connections I conclude that experiential liveness discourses has allowed space for digital technologies and spaces to be considered as legitimate forms of phenomenological liveness. These spaces, which previously under ontology were discarded as 'contamination' (Auslander,1999:7), generate sources for expansive experiential liveness research and form core platforms within which the performance experience can be reflexive and provoking for audiences in fresh ways. These opportunities for extended liveness beyond the performance with others outside of the immediate 'space', and occasionally time, allow for discussions outside of the initial performance context. The ability to engage with a much wider virtual audience encourages 'communitas' (Turner,1969) and allows for experiential liveness beyond the 'event' (Bourriard,1998). It is within these spaces and forged communities that experiential liveness

thrives and generates vital connections and opportunities for 'being together alone' (Sullivan,2018:72). Sedgman states that experiential audience studies restrict the researcher 'to gleaning insights from those tantalisingly rare things people chose to include about themselves' (2019:476). I suggest that this is what makes experiential liveness unique and important to liveness discourse. To discuss ontological binaries and impose definitions of what is and is not live upon audiences removes the voice of the audience. Experiential liveness and audience studies are interesting because they value the voice of the audience at the centre. It is the role of the researcher to interpret the audience and to navigate the methodological challenges that arise from both engaging the audience in an act of 'togetherness' (Sullivan,2020:103) and as a privileged researcher.

I conclude that experiential liveness discourse is a core resource in a society where technology and virtual spaces have become comfortable and discursive for many people. It may not be enough within this evolving techno-culture to consider physically present audiences alone without the consideration of the online discourse and areas of extended liveness beyond the initial event. This may only have been exacerbated within the pandemic due to virtual spaces becoming the only option for many audiences and performers. Whilst the impacts and longevity of the online boom due to the pandemic are yet undetermined it has exposed the importance of online space as a legitimate platform for performance and discussion. Therefore, experiential liveness discourse is core to the study and examination of these online spaces regarding audience experience of digital documentation, 'fossils' (Sedgman and Bucknall,2017:114) and virtual performance.

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