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Projected performances: the phenomenology of hybrid theater

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PROJECTED PERFORMANCES:
THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF HYBRID THEATER

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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in

The Department of Theatre

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the 20th century, mediatized forms gained prominence and eclipsed the theater as a site of cultural power and popularity. Because of this tension, performance theorists like Peggy Phelan framed the definition of theater through its inherent differences from film and television. Other theorists like Philip Auslander problematized this distinction, particularly due to television's similarities to live performance. The cinema, however, has remained an opponent to performance, ignored in favor of technologies that more readily promote a sense of "liveness."

In *Projected Performances*, I argue that film projection is more closely related to performance than previously thought, particularly when viewed in light of their phenomenological similarities. Projection is a live act that generates a kind of presence that approximates what is felt with a live performer. The theatrical setting of most film viewings foregrounds this phenomenological frame, despite the prerecorded nature of the content. Despite the seemingly static nature of film, the exhibition of it is most often decidedly theatrical.

Hybrid theater, in which productions incorporate film projection alongside live performers, highlights these similarities in a much more explicit way, creating a unique sensory experience. This blending of effects is evident in theatrical broadcasts like the Metropolitan Opera's "Live in HD" series, which capitalizes on the liveness of theater to draw people to the cinema. I also investigate hybrid productions that use projected scenery, such as *The Woman in White* and *The Elephant Vanishes*, as well as productions that feature projected bodies, like the work of Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art.

Finally, I interrogate the use of projections in the monumental spectacles of the opening ceremonies at the 2008 and 2010 Olympics in Beijing and Vancouver, respectively. Throughout, I examine the ways in which these hybrid productions trouble the assumed distinction between

performance and media, demonstrating that projection is a kind of performance that can share the stage with live performers without damaging the unique essential qualities of theater.

CHAPTER ONE: THE POSSIBLE PRESENCE

Once during my undergraduate years, the theater department called upon me to create original projections for a rock musical it was producing. The show was *Return to the Forbidden Planet*, a combination of 50's b-movies, oldies rock and roll, and Shakespeare. The quality of the script notwithstanding, the production was one of the most ambitious the department had ever produced. The show took place in the interior of a space ship, and my job was to create video transmissions that would be projected onto the central screen in the ship's bridge. I recorded and edited several sequences involving characters, models, and rudimentary special effects. During the process, I had no illusions about the quality of the work I was doing, but it did lead to a lot of thought about the nature of what I was creating.

While several of the transmissions were paused and allowed to sit on screen for long periods of time (e.g. showing the outside of the space ship), others featured characters in other locations interacting with those characters on stage. This interaction was half-simulated; my projections were pre-planned with a fixed running time, but the actors on stage could feasibly improvise or change their performance from night to night. While I initially assumed that the projections would constitute a static interaction, it seemed night to night that the actors were responding uniquely each time the videos were played. Whether or not both sides of the relationship were dynamic or not, the live performances were evolving and interacting with the mediatized performances. The projections represented characters and moved the plot along; at some level, they were a performance.

The nature of these projections and their effect on the actors illustrate the sometimes-blurry line between "real" living presence and the presence sometimes felt through film projection. However, the idea of presence is complicated in regards to mediatized forms and their

assumed differences from the “live” experience. The projections I crafted seemed to be tangible for the actors, but what of the audience watching the scene unfold through both projection and acting? Was presence a possibility within the projected image? Does presence automatically imply physical weight and volume in a shared space, or a living organism, or the simultaneity of the act and the viewing of it? While the projections were not created to indicate any “liveness” of transmission, did the audience assume they were streaming live from some other room or previously recorded?

All of these questions are central to prevailing theories surrounding performance and media at the beginning of the twenty-first century, drawn from the writings of Peggy Phelan, Philip Auslander, and others. In a time when media formats such as television, film projection, radio, and online communication are not only a part of daily life but also rapidly entering the domain of the performing arts, their prevalence holds profound implications for both the performance scholar and theater artist. Scholars have, in the past few decades, distinguished media from live performance through several central qualities, and often media forms such as film are seen as antithetical to the assumed objectives of performance. However, there has recently been an increase in the use of projection technologies that, while not signaling a brand-new technology, may point to the future of the consumption of both film and live theater, such as in projected scenery, or even projected bodies.

My study will interrogate those intersections of live performance and film projection in light of what such hybridization¹ means to the phenomenology of both arts. Phenomenology has provided the most consistent basis for distinguishing the two performance practices, and it is

¹ While there are numerous types of “hybrid” performances, I will be using this term to refer to the use of film projection within theatrical productions, instances in which both forms come together to interact or represent one another.

through that lens that I will analyze the nature of what happens when the two mechanisms meet. Before examining the meeting of the two, however, I will look at why scholars and artists distinguish live performance and projection as different experiences and how this binary came into being within performance scholarship. These two forms of entertainment and enlightenment capture the attention of audiences all over the world and stand as two of the most potent disseminators of information, ideals, and emotion, but what happens when the two meet? Is their efficacy doubled, or does one try to subsume the other with varying results? Can media² exist within the framework of performance without diminishing the latter's potential? Does the projection of film in front of an audience constitute a kind of performance?

Throughout the twentieth century, moving pictures prospered into a dominant art form, impacting the popularity of live performance.³ In the eyes of some, the increasing attention paid to film hindered the status of theater as a widespread communicator to the masses. Because of this supposed rivalry, in the latter half of the twentieth century theater and performance scholars became responsible for identifying and emphasizing the unique qualities of live theater in an attempt to counter the encroaching cultural cachet of the cinema as well as television. Some theorists focused on essential qualities of performance such as its live nature and the presence of the body as well as the position of performance within a capitalist market, with scholars like

² The term media from here on will be used to indicate recorded media, or instances of performance in which the actors and audience are not in the same location.

³ As early as 1936, some were lamenting the “death of theatre” at the hands of cinema, as Allardyce Nicoll notes in his book *Film and Theatre*: “Is, then, the theatre, as some have opined, truly dying? Must it succumb to the rivalry of the cinema? The answer to that question depends on what the theatre does within the next ten or twenty years.” Allardyce Nicoll, *Film and Theatre* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1936) 184.

Peggy Phelan defining performance through its ability to resist commodification.⁴ In contrast, scholars saw media as a tool of cultural hegemony, while phenomenologically media lacked the visceral power of the performing body, becoming less “alive.”

Artists have used projected media⁵ in a variety of forms with increasing frequency over the last several decades. The growing ease and accessibility of digital projectors give more artists the ability to use this technology.⁶ Within the traditional binary of live performance vs. recorded media, media’s place is a strange one. What kind of commentary is being made, or what kind of power is found through the use of a potentially inferior practice? If media is often commoditized and used as a tool of capital, then does it compromise theater’s ability to oppose that system? Theater, especially in its most visible locations on Broadway and in the West End, has by no means completely resisted the lure of the market, with producers developing productions to appeal to mass audiences. The compromises brought into artistic practice by the need for financial solvency are by no means a recent development. Beyond a production’s marketability or mass appeal, does the use of projection damage the theater in some way? Was the theatricality of *Return to the Forbidden Planet* impinged upon by the projections I created?

The answer for some of the theater artists in question would be a resounding no, as projection is often seen as a tool harnessed by the theater, which has so often appropriated technologies and material from the outside world.⁷ Media is sometimes simply a means to an

⁴ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 148.

⁵ The terms “projection” and “projected media” are meant to stand for images of the moving variety, rather than still projections.

⁶ Linda Matchan, “Watch or wince- video on stage isn’t going away,” *The Boston Globe* 28 Feb. 2010.

⁷ Electric lighting and amplified sound are two of the most notable.

end; using it can enhance a moment, but overreliance on it can possibly diminish the overall theatricality of a piece. Wendall Harrington, head of the projection design program at Yale, emphasizes rooting projection in the themes of a piece, but "...fears that attitude is being overshadowed by the availability of new, glitzy technology."⁸ Harrington is worried about designers using projection because of its novelty rather than its ability to help tell a story. The threat of spectacle overtaking substance seems to be a danger here, but where does the tipping point lie? At what point does a production cease to be a performance that uses projection and become instead a film that is occasionally interrupted by actors?

The invasion of the stage by content from film has elicited sporadic uproar over the death of original theatrical works, such as *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley's assertion that the spirit of Broadway "...always exudes the same damp aura of unconvincing jollity, like that of a superannuated party girl who lost her confidence with her youth and has taken to wearing her daughter's trendy clothes."⁹ Brantley faults Broadway for relying on the appeal of popular films to attract audiences instead of being confident in its own strengths. The increasing use of projection to create backdrops and other scenic effects points toward a greater regard for projection as a tool. However, other uses, notably in productions by The Wooster Group¹⁰, signal the use of projection as part of a commentary on media. Projections, or sometimes television sets in the case of the Wooster Group, seem to be conscripted into self-critique about the growing

⁸ Anita Gates, "The Screen's Now Setting Many a Stage," *The New York Times* 2 Mar. 2010.

⁹ Ben Brantley, "A Look at the 2006 Broadway Musical Season," *The New York Times* 21 May 2006.

¹⁰ In particular, *Hamlet*, *Brace Up!*, *Poor Theatre*, and *L.S.D.* For more on these productions, see: Steve Dixon with Barry Smith, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007) 106.

mediatization of culture. In either of these potential uses, media is rarely the performance itself, but simply a tool like any other technology. It is seldom the main event, so to speak, as the live body remains the focus of most theatrical productions.

However, as I will elaborate on in later chapters, in some cases film projection assumes a substantial role, and actors interact with the media rather than simply performing in front of it. Some theater companies use projections to enhance a particular setting to make it more interactive, such as with Complicite's *The Elephant Vanishes*, while some create entire characters out of pixels and light, as in the work of Lemieux.Pilon 4d. The balance between the two practices becomes more equal in some productions. If the use of such technology continues to increase, will we see a new type of performance emerge, a hybrid of live bodies and projected ones existing within a landscape of physical and virtual scenic elements? I argue that such a hybrid form is already in practice in some locations, while writings from past decades¹¹ suggest that the combination has been in use for much longer than we might assume. I contend that this practice of combining performance and projection constitutes a true hybrid that becomes its own type of performance practice. Even today, film artists are developing technologies to mimic live performance, such as with the recent surge in 3D and the current push to film at a higher frame rate so as to make the 3D image more stable and physical.¹² When looking at such technology, the traditional binary between live performance and recorded media starts to become unstable.

¹¹ As I will elaborate in the fourth chapter, Robert Edmond Jones was one of the first to argue for the incorporation of film projection into the scenic space.

¹² James Cameron and Peter Jackson are both involved in pushing for the development of this technology. As reported by Film Journal International, Cameron's appearance at the 2011 CinemaCon convention involved a demonstration of 3d images being projected at 48 and 60 frames per second, rather than the usual 24, resulting in a more solid image during panning shots. See: Kevin Lally and Andreas Fuchs, "Loud and clear: Technology marches on at CinemaCon 2011," *Film Journal International*, 20 April 2011,

While commentary on media may be the subject of some theatrical productions and some films may depict live events, the content of performance and projections is so varied that a semiotic analysis of each is outside of the scope of this study. Rather, in this work I will analyze the hybridity in several instances of projections within contemporary performances. Phenomenology, as it is commonly used in theater studies, will be the primary analytical tool in the chapters that follow, as performance scholars have framed the aforementioned binary between performance and media in mostly phenomenological terms. Here, I investigate the phenomenological qualities of the hybrid performance/projection to show how such a combination destabilizes the performance/media binary. While theater scholars have identified several essential qualities of performance, film scholars have developed a phenomenology of film in the days since its creation, a discourse I will explore in the second chapter. In short, by looking at shared phenomenological qualities rather than content, I can analyze and question the potential of this hybrid, and perhaps point to possible future developments and the kinds of theatrical effects they might produce.

The motivations behind this study are many, but allow me to highlight a few. One is to categorize an emerging set of practices that scholars are likely aware of, but perhaps have not yet thoroughly established a critical frame of reference for. What happens to the phenomenology of theater when we bring film projection into the conversation? Theater educators have mostly considered media as a means to juxtapose the theatrical experience, such as in introductory theater textbooks. For instance, in Edwin Wilson and Alvin Goldfarb's *Theatre: The Lively Art*, we find passages like "The most significant difference between films and theatre is the

http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content_display/news-and-features/features/technology/e3i903e2873d422638c99cf9de631e922f7 (accessed March 21, 2012).

relationship between the performer and the audience.”¹³ The authors assume that film cannot have a relationship to its audience in the way that theater does. What happens when we challenge that assumption? How does that change understandings of film and the effect it has on the audience? There already exists a significant branch of multimedia studies which covers the use of technology in theatrical productions and art installations¹⁴, but here I am interested in zeroing in on film as a theatrical, performing object rather than simply a kind of technology, and I want to extend the conversation beyond uses of projection which artists use in pieces that comment on such technology.

Thus, hybrid theater can be seen as a type of multimedia performance, but is different from productions labeled “cyborg theater” by scholars like Jennifer Parker-Starbuck.¹⁵ I will examine the exact distinctions between these terms in the fifth chapter when dealing with projected bodies, but simply put, “hybrid” points toward the similarities of projections and performers, while “cyborg” focuses on the differences. While not explicitly evoking the cyborg label, other recent multimedia studies have examined the ways that performance and media clash or expose boundaries when put together, often to create a certain technological aesthetic.¹⁶ Intermediality is a term that has also been used to describe this meeting of the real and the virtual onstage, and based on its construction, seems to also be focusing on the union of forms rather

¹³ Alvin Goldfarb and Edwin Wilson, *Theatre: The Lively Art*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2010) 6.

¹⁴ The aforementioned study *Digital Performance* by Steve Dixon is an extensive catalogue of such performances.

¹⁵ Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁶ See: Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Also: Susan Kozel, *Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007).

than their boundaries and differences. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, in their introduction to an anthology on the subject, claim that intermediality “...operates in the spaces where the strict formal boundaries become blurred.”¹⁷ Despite the focus on interrelationships in the term when compared with the cyborg distinction, “hybrid” blurs performance and media even more, creating a classification that allows for different heritages while acknowledging the newness of the resulting form. Rather than focusing on the boundary that is being blurred, hybrid points to the result of the blurring, and I contend that film projection is the technique through which the greatest amount of destabilization occurs. Hybrid theater is a title that can be used in conjunction with these other terms while still providing a degree of specificity.

I exclude from the hybrid title productions that use other types of visual technology which are not film projections, namely television sets or computer screens. Though the light from a television may illuminate a dark room, its illumination is still contained within physical confines. Film projection, even when used on a rectilinear screen, defies those types of physical boundaries when projected through space. When this happens, it becomes a moving breathing technique that exposes the ephemerality of its own transmission. Television and computer screens, in contrast, are bound by the limits of their screen. The light and images can move and transform, to be sure, but always within the rectilinear frame and always from within. Despite all the technological assurances involved, when a film projector is turned on and pointed at a screen, there is still no absolute guarantee that the light will reach the screen and display the image it is meant to. A moving piece of scenery, an actor, or even an audience member can interrupt it. This spontaneity and risk feature heavily into the “liveness” of projection; while other technologies

¹⁷ Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt, “Key Issues in Intermediality in Theatre and Performance,” *Intermediality in Theatre and Performance*, Ed. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt (New York: Rodopi, 2006) 23.

may generate their own kind of liveness, it is not the same kind as I outline here. In this study, rather than focusing on, as Steve Dixon puts it, "...new paradigms, genres, aesthetics, and interactive experiences,"¹⁸ I want to consider the total experience created by the use of projection.

Another motivation for this study is to bring a part of film studies under the umbrella of theater studies. The study of movies in academia has largely existed within film studies departments, as well as English departments and curricula. I do not envision theater studies taking anything away from these departments, but that side of film studies mainly focuses on cinema as a text to be closely read like a work of literature through formal analytical techniques. English departments also do this with dramatic literature but we still have theater departments, so there is clearly room for the sharing of topics. It seems to me that because of the performative nature of projection, which will be discussed in greater length later on, that film should also fall under the purview of theater studies, not necessarily in an all-encompassing sense, but through the common elements that theater and film often share: performance, theatricality, dramaturgy, etc. The popularity of film has become both a crisis and an opportunity for live theater, and studying film as a kindred form rather than a competitor may prove to be important for theater's future.

One of the other major reasons for this study is to give voice to my own personal feelings about the cinema, and one of the reasons that, while I am deeply rooted in theater as an object of study, I am continually drawn back to film as a source of artistic inspiration, emotional insight, and intellectual stimulation. Many of the qualities that draw me to theater also draw me to film, and it is the similarity of those experiences that drives my passion for studying the performances

¹⁸ Dixon, xii.

analyzed here. I have found that phenomenology in the strain outlined by Bert States, Alice Rayner, and others is the best way for me to describe the feelings conjured up by both art forms, and it is an understanding of those writers that best lays the foundation for the rest of my work. In fact, while researching phenomenological studies of the theater, I was constantly being reminded of similar experiences with the cinema, feelings that I believe are compounded by the integration of media into performance, and vice versa. In this chapter, I will introduce some approaches to performance phenomenology, and then establish the major components of the liveness debate that has framed the performance/media dichotomy. This dichotomy and its attendant questions will frame the rest of my study of the use of projections onstage.

Phenomenologically Speaking

In broader philosophical terms, a strain of phenomenology often seen in theater studies is closely related to the work of Edmund Husserl, focusing on the relationship between the psyche and reality, defining the world in terms of a person's perceptions of it. Husserl describes phenomenology as such:

...it can be ascertained as a necessity that before all other transcendental and, as we can say, philosophical work there stands the work of pure seeing, and that in this sphere, as has emerged evidently from all our presentations, there stand not incoherent and accidentally colliding data, but rather it is the case that by virtue of the freedom in the governance of the phantasy...the possibility exists of unveiling *systematically* the fundamental composition lying in consciousness in general.¹⁹

Husserl is concerned with consciousness and its composition as an object of study rather than simply the objects observed by that consciousness. Rather than a contextual or semiotic approach to the world, phenomenology deconstructs and foregrounds the observing subject. As Emmanuel

¹⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Trans. Ted E. Klein and William E. Pohl (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980) 70.

Levinas puts it, “Any theory of knowledge presupposes, indeed, the existence of an object and of a subject that must come in contact with each other. Knowledge is then defined as this contact, and this always leaves the problem of determining whether knowledge does not falsify the being which it presents to the subject.”²⁰ Levinas frames his ethical philosophy around the relationship between the subject and object, or the Other, noting that people develop their ideas of humanity based on the ways in which they engage with the world around them.²¹

As a methodology, phenomenology may seem arbitrary in terms of the work done by the observer, as it is so dependent on the subject and the conditions of their observations. However, the observation is itself work, and the viewer constantly adjusts to changing circumstances in both conscious and unconscious ways. The theater is particularly apt for phenomenological study, as artists display objects and themselves expressly for observation by the subject. Phillip Zarrilli highlights the process of the subject: “We develop a battery or repertoire of sensorimotor skills and ways of being attentive that are the foundation for our perceptual encounter with the world. At the simplest level, possessing sensorimotor knowledge allows us, for example, to grasp our spatial relationship to things.”²² For Zarilli, phenomenological encounters are not framed by abstract concepts, but through tactile engagement, and with projection, the idea of spatial encounters is particularly key to understanding the phenomenology of certain hybrid practices.

²⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Andre Orianne (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973) 24-5.

²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, “Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony,” trans. Iain MacDonald, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

²² Phillip Zarrilli, “An Enactive Approach to Understanding Acting,” *Theatre Journal* 59.4 (2007) 644.

One of the most influential studies of the phenomenology of theater has been Bert States's *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*. States's desire to resist dismantling the audience experience through semiotic analysis²³ (in other words focusing on images and signs as stimuli that produce specific responses) leads him to focus on the phenomenological qualities of the theater, centering on physicality, presence, and doubling. At the heart of his theory is the idea that the theater "...ingests the world of objects and signs only to bring images to life."²⁴ The physicality of the body and of objects on stage, from the dimensions of a prop to the physiology of an actor, engages the senses of the audience, and it is this contact between performance and audience that forms the theatrical experience, the knowledge that the subject encounters. States's significance for my study exists partly in his notion that elements which later become theatrical conventions start out as being unconventional, even shocking, to the audience, such as real furniture or electric lighting. Objects engage the audience on a phenomenological level before they become part of the semiotic system.²⁵

In this sense, one can see film projection as being one of those elements that is trying, as States puts it, to "...break into the circuit, to pester the circuit with nuance, to wound it with the resistance of its presence."²⁶ In part due to the assumed binary between live performance and recorded media, the presence of projection in the theatrical space can seem, to some, jarring or

²³ States saw the two fields as complementary, while Bruce McConachie would later see cognitive approaches to theatre as supplanting both modes. See: Bruce McConachie, "Falsifiable Theories for Theatre and Performance Studies," *Theatre Journal* 59.4 (2007).

²⁴ Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1985) 37.

²⁵ For an application of this idea to theatre and literary history, see: Mary Thomas Crane, "What was Performance?" *Criticism* 43.2 (2001).

²⁶ States, 12.

antithetical. In light of States's theory, theater's phenomenological effects could subsume and overrun projection's own phenomenological qualities when projection is used as a tool.

However, certain concepts within States's work point toward a theoretical framework that allows the mediatized to work in conjunction with performances, in the way that technologies have been introduced to enhance the overall theatricality of a performance. As previously mentioned, there can be anxiety about the balance of film's use in theater, but there is a way of thinking about film as a kindred spirit to performance rather than some inferior bastard that must always comment upon the shallowness of its own existence. Seeing projection in such a way expands definitions of performance (much as they have expanded within the field over the past several decades) to include techniques and mechanisms often considered opposite or anathema.

Considering States's roots in phenomenology, it is natural that he quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception*. One of the passages States points to describes the way light illuminates a scene. Merleau-Ponty writes, "If I imagine a theatre with no audience in which the curtain rises upon illuminated scenery, I have the impression that the spectacle *is in itself visible* or ready to be seen... We perceive in conformity with the light, as we think in conformity with other people in verbal communication."²⁷ In the visual sense, the phenomenology of the theater depends on the light by which the audience sees, as light is one of the chief mechanisms of our perception. Light is the means by which consciousness collects the knowledge of the event. In a similar vein, light is the chief mechanism of film projection. Not

²⁷ From *The Phenomenology of Perception*, in which Merleau-Ponty also writes "To this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion, the taking up or completion by us of some extraneous intention or, on the other hand, the complete expression outside ourselves of our perceptual powers and a coition, so to speak, of our body with things." This "communion" of our senses and the objects of our perception is where our reality and the illusion of theatre grow perilously similar. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Phenomenology of Perception," *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (New York: Routledge, 2004) 139.

only does one not see the image without it, without light there is no object at all except upon the filmstrip in the projector's booth. Light illuminates or is part of the performance in one case, while in the other it *is* the performance. This is in tune with Merlau-Ponty's philosophy of perception, in that our perspective defines the world: "We must not, therefore, wonder whether we really perceive a world, we must instead say: the world is what we perceive."²⁸ A person never sees the objects around them, but rather only the light bouncing off of them, illuminating the colors and textures. In the visual sense, without light the world does not exist; the eye requires it in order to perceive anything. In this sense, light becomes reality, and so it is with the mechanism of film projection. In light of this, what then is the difference in terms of perception between the live performance and the projected image?

The central difference, of course, is the weight and physicality that some assume to be present in the live performance, but can film projection produce phenomenological effects similar to those produced by the embodied actor and three-dimensional objects? When States talks about bringing images to life through the gestation of objects, is it the gestation or the bringing to life to which the audience is most drawn? If this process involves the creation of theatrical signs by the reframing of ordinary objects, is it the artist's presentation or the audience's interpretation that matters most? Do bodies and objects themselves make up a performance, or is it the frames and mechanisms through which the audience perceives them? States writes that "...metonymy and synecdoche are means of reducing and transporting whole worlds by substituting parts for wholes, or parts for the qualities of wholes..."²⁹ What prevents light from being a kind of synecdoche in the same way as the stage?

²⁸ Ibid., 73.

²⁹ States, 75.

If, as according to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, perception creates the world, then performance occurs not in the objects themselves and their presence, but the perception of that presence. When stage lighting illuminates performers onstage, the way the senses perceive them is the primary indication of their existence. The actor's place in the viewer's consciousness is the site of the performance. Stanton B. Garner writes about the manifestation of such thinking in the theater: "If post-Husserlian phenomenology has rejected presence as unitary self-givenness in favor of a view of presence as constituted by vanishing points and dissociations, then surely few environments reward a post-Husserlian phenomenological approach more richly than the theater."³⁰ Without sensory exploration, performances do not exist. Therefore, if something about film projection causes us to perceive something in a similar way to the way we perceive live performance, where can we truly draw the line between the two?

Some of the other ways that States talks about dramatic performance bring to mind the mechanism of film projection, such as when he refers to the dramatic text as "...the animating current to which the actor submits his body and refines himself into an illusory being,"³¹ but States also has his own views on film itself. For him, one of the central differences between the effects of film and theater is the different ways that the audience focuses, or is allowed to focus, on particular images. States writes: "...film envelops us and puts us into its world more or less as we are visually within our own."³² The vantage point of the film viewer is within the perspective of the camera's lens, as determined by the film's director. The vantage point of the theatrical

³⁰ Stanton B. Garner, Jr., *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994) 39.

³¹ States, 128.

³² *Ibid.*, 152.

viewer is always in some way outside of any one perspective, with each audience member being able to choose his or her own focus and perspective. In a film, the *mise-en-scene* is a composition that is likely the same, barring obstructions by different audience members, for all viewers.

In the theater, there are numerous other variables at play to determine what the viewer will see and from what angle. In States's words, film gives us an "unmediated experience...at once intimate and spacious, with almost unlimited power to imitate our experience of being present in the world: the daily texture of life, the 'aroundness' of space..."³³ States's phenomenological observations point to the theater as a frame that translates objects from everyday life into an artistic mode. The very nature of *mimesis* has profound implications for the performing body. Responding to States, Garner asserts, "...unlike the represented body in film, the body's living presence on stage asserts a physiological irreducibility that challenges the stability (and the separability) of representational levels."³⁴ However, if projection could create some kind of presence, it would not bypass this representational interruption and would become a theatrical object. Despite it forming its own frames, a projection is still used within the larger theatrical context, and has the potential to challenge that context. This potential challenges traditional understanding of projection and the effects it has on the audience, a challenge that will be further illuminated in later chapters.

A kind of projection that has been on the minds of many writers in the past several decades hearkens back to the idea of the double and the "ghost" that is being projected by the actor in a dramatic performance. In short, they are detailing the projection of a character

³³ Ibid., 153.

³⁴ Garner, 44.

alongside and around the physical actor, the ability for both entities to exist at once in the same place and time while still maintaining separate spaces within the consciousness of the audience. While States focuses on the physicality and gestation of the dramatic experience, Alice Rayner develops the idea of the doubling effect of acting in her book *Ghosts*. For Rayner, the art of acting is a continual raising of dead spirits and animating them for the audience.³⁵ She writes that performances produce “...a visible, material, and affective relationship to the abstract terms of time and repetition, sameness and difference, absence and presence.”³⁶ Rayner also writes about the affect that performance has on the audience’s memory of the deceased and of past events, acting as a kind of memorial. Repetition of such performances is also key, as it “...offers possibilities for intersubjectivity through representation conditioned by memory, recovery, and recognition on the part of the audience.”³⁷ Central to this phenomenological model is the idea that performance is bringing the supernatural or the forgotten to life, bringing the audience into another world that conjures such impossible events. In a way, it is similar to Antonin Artaud’s assertion in *The Theater and Its Double* that acting gives materiality to the soul, which “...makes accessible an empire of passions that extends our sovereignty.”³⁸

The reason for this raising of the dead is that, in Rayner’s theory, acting performs the repetition of loss and death. Objects, such as props and possessions, do this because “As a

³⁵ Media is also capable of the raising of spirits, as noted here: Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, “Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 54.1 (2010).

³⁶ Alice Rayner, *Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) xiii.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ Antonin Artaud, “An Affective Athleticism,” *The Theater and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958) 135.

representation of a representation, an object becomes its own ghost. The phantasm retains the connection to the past at the same time that it dematerializes the object.”³⁹ The body, however, is the most capable of producing such an effect. As with Artaud’s idea of the double, Rayner believes that the ghosting effect of the body translates the body for the viewer’s consumption. She writes, “The psyche, ‘spirit or soul,’ the haunting ghost, is not simply translated or manifested by the body; rather it organizes the body and is visible on the surfaces that, like the form of the vault, are nonetheless hollow, empty.”⁴⁰ The body is the substance that is translated by perception into a valuable sign.

Stated another way by Phillip Zarrilli, “In performance, the actor enacts a specific performance score—that set of actions/tasks that constitute the aesthetic outer body offered for the abstractive gaze of the spectator—often read and experienced as character in a conventional drama.”⁴¹ In a way, what is being manifested by the performance is not really there, hence the loss that is being repeated. This also figures largely into Phelan’s view of performance, with Rayner echoing her sentiments about the recording of performance onto a media format: “...reproduction is not repetition.”⁴² Performance is made up of absences, produced by the ghosting of the actor within the overall fiction of the event. Part of the effect of these absences on the audience is due to the passage of time involved.

³⁹ Rayner, 89.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁴¹ Phillip Zarrilli, “Toward a Phenomenological Model of the Actor’s Embodied Modes of Experience,” *Theatre Journal* 56.4 (2004) 665.

⁴² Rayner, 40.

All performances exist in time, and time organizes the viewer's perception of them. Whether it is in a live performance or a film, as I will discuss in greater detail in the next chapter, time is one of the most important facets of any theatrical effect. Time, for Rayner, "...may thus still not exist as a thing independent of the consciousness that experiences and holds it. The measurement of time is a measurement of consciousness."⁴³ This temporal effect, it would seem, would not necessarily be exclusive to live performance, though it does aid in the appearance and performance of ghosts in the theatrical space: "Objective time exists only as a representation of something that escapes objectification."⁴⁴ The phenomenological effect of time itself is nothing without something to experience within it. One is not aware of its passage without change, and whether that change is "live" or recorded, it is one of the guiding forces of theater's phenomenology.⁴⁵ Performance, for many theorists, relies on the synchronicity of an audience existing in the same space as the event that is happening. Dramatic theater's own manipulation of time can sometimes increase this effect, as States notes: "The play imitates the timely in order to remove it from time, to give time a shape."⁴⁶

While absence and ghosting figure into many phenomenological descriptions of performance, there is also the idea of physical presence to be contended with, something one might assume to be an inaccurate description of film projection. Aleksandra Wolska attempts to

⁴³ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵ From Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*: "The present still holds on to the immediate past without positing it as an object, and since the immediate past similarly holds its immediate predecessor, past time is wholly collected up and grasped in the present." Merleau-Ponty, 82.

⁴⁶ States, 50.

reassert the importance of presence in her 2005 article “Rabbits, Machines, and the Ontology of Performance.” Responding to the discussions of loss, absence, and death in the theater, Wolska’s work functions as a reminder of the living, present, and physical being at the heart of any performance. She writes: “During rehearsals, neither actors, director, nor designers are concerned with disappearance, but with its opposite—how to make things happen, appear, take place.”⁴⁷ States emphasizes the physical presence of the actor as well, noting that despite the ghostly phenomena, theater is based on “...Macbeth being *here* before us yet absent, of his story being unreal but imprisoned ‘positionally’ in real time and space.”⁴⁸ Wolska, in a way, also helps to unite the ghosting and the physicality of performance, rooting its phenomenology in the memory of the audience: “When theatre functions only as an organizing force, creating a matrix of predictable causes and effects, it tolls its own vanishing. After all, shows end. Performance, however, never does, for it unfolds in the world where the performative abides in everyday reality...”⁴⁹ Performances live on because they unfold in reality, not merely in a constructed fictional narrative. Theater’s power lies in its happening in the same time and space of the audience.

Whether it is rooted in time, physicality, or doubling, phenomenological effects produced by live performance have been at the center of theater scholars’ efforts to distinguish it from recorded media, particularly in the wake of the growing cultural cachet of media. While these may be evident to theorists, how much of this is evident to the audiences? Clearly, audiences get

⁴⁷ Aleksandra Wolska, “Rabbits, Machines, and the Ontology of Performance” *Theatre Journal* 57.1 (2005) 87.

⁴⁸ States, 27.

⁴⁹ Wolska, 92.

something out of the experience of going to watch a film. Even when movies are available for home viewing systems on average three to four months after their theatrical release, the movie theater industry sees record grosses.⁵⁰ While theater scholars and practitioners may find a binary of performance vs. recorded media useful in reaffirming the essential qualities of theater, it is perhaps less useful in explaining the appeal of media and its kinship to performance. The examples that will be discussed later in this study will show how the use of media in performance serves to trouble this binary, but scholars have already begun to problematize this dichotomy in theoretical terms. The phenomenology of hybrid theater lends an air of uncertainty to totalizing statements about both performance and media.

The Live and the Living

Perhaps the most notable example of this troubling has been the work of Philip Auslander, whose book *Liveness* talks about the construction of the titular term and how it is challenged by modern-day media forms like television and recorded music. Throughout, Auslander opposes the common assumption that theater has always been “live” and that this quality is part of its eternal appeal. One of the chief proponents of the view that Auslander problematizes is Peggy Phelan, whose book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* champions performance as a site of political efficacy because of its resistance to mediatization. In a way, Phelan is responding to the dominance of media by reflecting on theater’s essential qualities. Because media has assumed capitalistic and cultural power, Phelan points to the political realm as an advantage that performance will always have over film and television. *Unmarked* highlights several relatively obscure performances to point to political agency outside of mass popularity and market forces. For Phelan, theater has a certain power that Hollywood will never

⁵⁰ Michael Cieply, “Hollywood Grosses Shatter Record,” *The New York Times*, 27 Dec. 2009.

have precisely because it is different. It is in the schism between the two that Phelan finds theater's strength.

Phelan writes: "Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility—in a maniacally charged present—and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control."⁵¹ Because it continually dies, ghosts, and disappears, performance is free from the restrictions of market forces and cultural censorship. It is because of its relative obscurity (in comparison to film and television) that performance has its power. The presence of media, however, exposes this power. Just as Rayner would write over a decade after Phelan, performance that is recorded ceases to be a performance. The question then is whether this power is evident to us without the presence of media. In previous centuries, theater has served as a tool of the state, a product of mass appeal, and a subject of censorship in the way that film sometimes functions today. Is it only when theater has been beaten down by film and pushed into obscurity that it reaches its apotheosis? For Phelan, the problem goes beyond cultural influence, as she characterizes media as an entirely new way of processing knowledge: "The electronic paradigm as an epistemic event represents something more than a new way to transmit information; it redefines knowledge itself into that which can be sent and that which can be stored."⁵²

Phelan not only distinguishes performance in response to mediatization, but also states that media itself can never be considered a performance. She writes, "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of

⁵¹ Phelan, 148.

⁵² Peggy Phelan, "Introduction: The Ends of Performance," *The Ends of Performance*, Ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 8.

representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.”⁵³ Performance and media are assuredly different and separate creatures, but I also argue that media can take on performative qualities, and not only because performance goes into the process of its creation. For Phelan, the mechanism of theater’s transmission is everything. If a live audience views a performance, it remains a performance, but if it is ingested through a projector and screen (or a television), it ceases to be a performance. The content of a production is outside of this discussion, though being mediatized would, in Phelan’s view, diminish whatever political impact it may have. This diminishing is due to the performance’s entry into a mass-market frame. Part of it also has to do with the reciprocal subjectivity involved in the performance, as Diana Taylor notes, “We are all caught off balance in the spectatorial gaze, suddenly aware that the ‘object’ of our gaze is also a subject who looks back, who challenges and objectifies us.”⁵⁴

Being commoditized, it would seem, is the death of performance. Phelan compares theater to mediatized forms when she writes, “It is this quality which makes performance the runt of the litter of contemporary art. Performance clogs the smooth machinery of reproductive representation necessary to the circulation of capital.”⁵⁵ Phelan not only revels in performance’s outsider status, but also criticizes media’s participation in hegemony. Even independent films usually cost more than the average theatrical production (though Broadway productions like the seventy million dollar *Spider-man: Turn off the Dark* have rivaled Hollywood budgets), and recouping those costs is often a bottom line for many film producers. However, there are

⁵³ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 146.

⁵⁴ Diana Taylor, “Border Watching,” *The Ends of Performance*, Ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 183.

⁵⁵ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 148.

obviously film artists that make movies for reasons other than money, just as there are theater artists that are motivated predominantly by finances. It is possible that for Phelan the category of performance, particularly in the market-defying sense, would not include such profit-driven performances. Because of media's dominance in the market, Phelan sees performance's power as manifesting in its unprofitability though, as previously noted, this has not always been the case for theater.

Phelan is trying to define what gives performance its power, and in doing so, zeroes in on theater's potential in the face of media's dominance, though this also limits the defining of performance through its opposition to media. Phelan attempts to ground performance's political power in contemporary culture, and of course media must be dealt with, theoretically speaking; it is simply too powerful to ignore. Phelan's work is less a phenomenological study in the traditional sense than a look at several contemporary case studies of political activism, but it is still a useful companion to the work of States, in that it applies those qualities toward an understanding of theater's cultural potential. Throughout the spectrum of such studies, common qualities pop up, not the least of which is the "live" nature of performance and the power this gives, evidenced by its resistance to mediatization as well as the physiology of the actor performing simultaneously in front of a viewing audience.

Philip Auslander's *Liveness* reacts to the kind of thinking that Phelan exemplifies, targeting the live synchronic nature of theater as a less-than-stable site of performance theory. Auslander's goal is to historicize the term, noting its emergence as a reaction to media. Just as some of Phelan's writing about performance's market-evading power is a response to media's dominance, critics have praised theater for being live because we now have a popular example to judge it against. Auslander questions liveness as a site of power: "If 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, as Bogosian, Phelan, and others claim?”⁵⁶ To provide a thorough problematizing of the term “liveness,” Auslander presents several case studies, television and recorded music among them, to show how media and performance cross-contaminate (or pollinate) one another and in turn affect audience expectations. Herbert Blau notes this clash of expectation in describing certain theatrical experiences: “Indeed, it was apparent that the factitious reality of the figures on a screen could have considerably more vitality, as if they were truly alive, than the flesh-and-blood actors up there on the stage, whose behavior was so thoroughly coded and familiar it might as well have been canned.”⁵⁷

Auslander challenges Phelan’s definition of performance’s power without necessarily denying that performance has a power. I too believe in the potential power of “live” performance in the anti-capitalist sense, but like Auslander I am trying to trouble the distinctions that are often made between performance and media and the denial of a similar power to film projection. As Auslander puts it, “The progressive diminution of previous distinctions between the live and the mediatized, in which live events are becoming more and more like mediatized ones, raises for me the question of whether there really are clear-cut ontological distinctions between live and mediatized ones.”⁵⁸ One of his conclusions, through historicizing the term, is that media has generated much of the way scholars talk about modern-day performance, and as much as one

⁵⁶ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 7.

⁵⁷ Herbert Blau, “The Human Nature of the Bot: A response to Philip Auslander,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 24.1 (2002) 22.

⁵⁸ Auslander, 7

would like to assume that artists are in opposition to media⁵⁹, its pervasive influence inevitably finds its way in. Media shapes current definitions of performance, mostly through juxtaposition and difference.

One of the case studies that he uses involves the evolution of television from its roots in theatrical language and convention, with “liveness” among the most significant. Part of the early appeal of television, Auslander notes, was that it was live, and people across great distances could share in viewing the same live event. However, Auslander later turns the tables, showing the ways in which television has influenced modern theatrical conventions, such as when “...theatre audiences today respond spontaneously to the same sorts of cues that would be signaled by means of the “Applause” sign in at television studio because the studio audience has become the culturally engrained model for what gets applause and how audiences behave.”⁶⁰ Auslander also notes this kind of influence in the music industry, as well as attempts with videotaped depositions and testimonies in legal proceedings. Auslander’s later work deals with the liveness of internet communication and artificial entities⁶¹, but the influence of the internet is outside of the scope of this study.

In general, Auslander is opposed to romanticizing performance, particularly if such ideas in turn lead to a devaluing of media. Though he does not go into great length about media phenomenology, he clearly acknowledges media’s own set of phenomenological effects and their

⁵⁹ Bruce Barton, “Paradox as Process: Intermedial Anxiety and the Betrayals of Intimacy,” *Theatre Journal* 61.4 (2009).

⁶⁰ Auslander, 26

⁶¹ Philip Auslander, “Live from Cyberspace: Or, I was sitting at my computer this guy appeared he thought I was a bot,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 24.1 (2002).

powerful influence on audiences.⁶² Auslander's agenda is to destabilize an assumed quality of performance to which many have attributed performance's power, leading scholars to, as Jennie Klein says in her review of the book, "...begin to re-iterate the representations produced by a culture already saturated by a mediatized notion of what constitutes 'liveness.'"⁶³ However, there is little mention in his book about film projection, despite it being one of the first mediatized challenges to live performance's cultural cachet. Auslander focuses on television because it has been given little consideration in performance studies, it would seem, and he believes "...the televisual has become an intrinsic and determining element of our cultural formation."⁶⁴ He does acknowledge the way that the cinema co-opted theater's conventions in the way that television would later do, but he focuses on television in part to answer the question of why television tried to be theatrical when its closer technological relative was the cinema. Our own era has come to the point where television programs have begun looking more and more like movies than the theater⁶⁵, but television's influence is still just as potent. The cinema, however, has always been a potent challenger to theater's cultural status, but Auslander does not see the same ontological similarities between cinema and theater as he does between the latter and television. He writes, "Whereas film could only remediate the theatre as these structural levels, television could

⁶² "As a medium, film can be used to provide an evanescent experience that leaves little behind, in the manner of a live performance, or it can provide an experience based in repetition and the stockpiling of film commodities." Auslander, *Liveness*, 46.

⁶³ Jennie Klein, "Real Events," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 22.1 (2000) 133.

⁶⁴ Auslander, *Liveness*, 2

⁶⁵ Perhaps most telling is the evolution of the sitcom from theatrical mini-plays being performed in front of a "live" studio audience to single-camera cinematic productions, from *I Love Lucy* to *The Office*, and so on. Studio audiences and laugh tracks are still in practice, but have seen their dominance wane in recent years.

remediate theatre at the ontological level through its claim to immediacy.”⁶⁶ The structural levels he refers to are on a narrative level, as film borrowed many storytelling and performance conventions from American melodrama as the American film industry was developing in the 1910s.

Auslander’s book is a major influence on my own work, and it is this absence of film projection that I will attempt to fill during the following chapters. It is my contention that, just as television did in the days of its emergence, cinema has and continues to share phenomenological and ontological characteristics with the theater that are illuminated and compounded through the use of film projection within the theatrical space. Just as television found some of its appeal in the “liveness” of its broadcasting, cinema also achieves a kind of “liveness” to which Auslander devotes too little attention. Liveness is not the only essential quality of performance that projection potentially borrows, as emerging technologies in theatrical productions as well as the movie industry reflect a desire to create space, depth, and substance out of the projection of light. I will attempt, in the chapters that follow, to problematize distinctions between the cinema and theater in the way that Auslander did with television and theater. Auslander highlighted television’s “liveness,” and I will attempt to do the same with film, despite the objections of others, including Auslander, who writes that, “Unlike film, but like theatre, a television broadcast is characterized as a performance in the present.”⁶⁷ The viewing of a projection is an act in the present, and in the coming chapters I will attempt to highlight its performative nature.

I asked earlier if the only way for performance to achieve its full potentiality is by being obscured and oppressed. This question assumes that performance is in fact facing this kind of

⁶⁶ Auslander, *Liveness*, 13

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15

challenge. There is no question regarding the kind of position that media forms like film and television have achieved in contemporary society, from their market value to their cultural influence. Film artists, as will be discussed later, have their own techniques of appealing to the qualities of live theater in an effort to revitalize and innovate. There is distrust, at times, on the theater side of those who go into media forms. In a documentary interview, Elia Kazan noted that every step he took away from the Group Theatre and into film was seen as a betrayal, but was also accompanied by jealousy.⁶⁸ No matter the relationship between the two as it has and continues to develop, it is still a widely accepted belief that theater, as a popular form of art and entertainment, has diminished in the face of film and television. This is not to say that the quality of the work is less but that theater is not and possibly will never be in the cultural position it once held.

While theater as a popular art form has declined, our definitions of performance have expanded. This is in part due to the evolution of cultural theory, but it cannot be a coincidence that such advances have come at the same time that the theater has faced an identity crisis of sorts. Clearly, there are attempts within the more commercial parts of the theatrical industry (i.e. Broadway and the West End) to appeal to audiences who are more accustomed to the spectacle of film. As Ben Brantley writes, “The public appetite for spectacle that directly recalls the artificial thrills of movies and amusement parks has shifted the emphasis away from the charismatic performer who sings, dances and charms.”⁶⁹ Some productions attempt to copy this

⁶⁸ *Elia Kazan: A Director's Journey*, Dir. Richard Schickel, Narr. Eli Wallach, Lorac Productions, 1995. Kazan is very clear in the interview that all the time he was working in the theatre, his greatest desire was to make movies.

⁶⁹ Ben Brantley, “CRITICS NOTEBOOK; A Broadway Battle: Stars vs. Spectacle,” *The New York Times* 28 Aug. 1995.

spectacle through special effects, and many through projections. We tend to devalue spectacle in favor of strong character development, plot structure, innovation, etc.⁷⁰ Whether this is due to Aristotle's initial devaluing of spectacle, placing it last in his "parts of drama," is hard to say. One mistake, however, would be to rope in all contemporary uses of spectacle as attempts to appeal to a wider market. While there are certainly producers working today who see profit as an important goal, I do not think many would automatically equate capital with theatrical quality.

As theater scholars and artists continually try to locate and make use of the sites of performance's power, they have also had to question and analyze the place of media within the spectrum of performance. Media can be a tool of theater artists, but for scholars a more complicated issue arises. Should film and television be included within this field of study? I have discussed film's place within English studies, but television is another matter, as a study of television programs beyond news media and broadcast journalism is not currently rooted in a strong scholarly discipline. With Auslander's analysis of television's heritage within live performance, it would seem that theater departments might be well equipped to study dramatic and comedic television programming.⁷¹ Along with television, though, I would assert the importance of including film within our field due to its performative elements.

The question then becomes, what would my position be toward this object of study, when theater scholars have for so long staunchly established themselves in opposition to it? Would including film be an admission of defeat or a compromise of values? Is film better left to other disciplines, or is this a missed opportunity for the field? Some might view studying film and

⁷⁰ Productions that feature spectacle over substance would likely be termed "deadly theatre" by writers like Peter Brook, who established it as a category in his most famous book: Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1968) 9.

⁷¹ For Example: Abigail de Kosnik, "Drama is the Cure for Gossip: Television's Turn to Theatricality in a Time of Media Transition," *Modern Drama* 53.3 (2010).

television as antithetical to the goals of theater, a betrayal of what is valuable within performance. If one believes in the power of “liveness” and its potential to buck the system by refusing to be recorded and commoditized, then why draw attention to less “powerful” types of performance, if they would be considered performances at all? Just because film may have a larger audience and may play a bigger role in cultural discourse, should it become a part of performance discourse? In a time when the most talked-about theatrical production of the past several years has been *Spider-man: Turn Off the Dark*, with the budget of a major motion picture, it is possible that scholars have conditioned themselves to reject theatrical productions that look too much like film and television. However, often such similarities lie in the realm of spectacle than whether the production deals with political and social issues. Structurally and dramaturgically, theatrical productions in our time have begun to mirror films, but it is accepted as long as they achieve the kind of power and relevance we hope for in “live” performance.

What happens when film and television seem to achieve this kind of power? Are political relevance and visibility solely the by-products of a live performance, or can recorded material achieve this “magic” as well? Perhaps media has this potentiality, but the most pervasive media does not use this quality in an appropriate way. Perhaps media is locked into the market, and seeing as the most popular films are at the same time often the highest grossing ones, cultural power and financial power are inextricably tied in a way in which they seldom are in the theater. If liveness is not a stable source of theater’s power, why is it assumed that film cannot reflect loss and defy commoditization in the way that performance does? Is it possible that film can produce a ghosting effect while also achieving a kind of presence? Many equate the film industry’s power with its global reach and visibility, but what are its other essential qualities that have given it that power?

It is for this reason, to get beyond common perceptions of film's marketability and the assumed complicity of projection in the film industry, that I turn to phenomenology as a way of appropriating the art of film as a new way to study both it and performance. I do not pretend that live performance and recorded media are exactly the same thing, but rather part of the same continuum of cultural performance practices. Part of the difficulty in integrating media may lie in believing film and television to have different goals, and part may be the belief that they have less power than live performance. But phenomenologically, both performance and media share common traits, and perhaps the best way to get past the strictures of the market may be to focus on phenomenology rather than the possible content of each form. Hybrid theater allows one to look at both phenomenologies at once and examine the overall phenomenology of productions that utilize both.

States saw phenomenology as being just as important as semiotics, and a vital piece of the overall portrait of theatricality. He writes, "The problem with semiotics is that in addressing theater as a system of codes it necessarily dissects the perceptual impression theater makes on the spectator."⁷² Because of this, I will also find it useful to avoid, generally, discussions of performance's political power. While some writers like Phelan link theater's phenomenological qualities with political agency, I feel that kind of analysis produces the same effect that States references; it breaks down the overall effectiveness of theater in favor of serving one's political agenda. Theater and performance are not powerful if and only when they are able to provide positive political power and visibility. If they have power, they have that power at all times, no matter what the agenda being served. It is the reason that theater is just as effective when used in gender-based performance art as it was when used for propaganda in Stalin's regime. I am not so

⁷² States, 7.

naïve as to think a piece of theater can be entirely free of political influence, but I believe that if its power comes from its ontological and phenomenological characteristics, then the power some interpret as being political or anti-capitalist is really much bigger than its potential political resistance. By looking at the phenomenology of both film and theater, I can locate the overall “theatrical” phenomenology, no matter what kind of performance is being exhibited.

A phenomenological study will also examine media in a new light, beyond the stain of Hollywood as a business. There is more to film in general than the influence of the American film industry, established in the days of the studio system in the early 20th century. Hollywood’s dominance has clearly not snuffed out similar (if smaller) industries in other countries. One can certainly not ignore the impact of Hollywood’s capital and cultural cachet, but the commercial live theatrical productions that may contradict our ideas about performance’s power cannot be ignored. As I will show in future chapters, the binary between media and live performance has never been a stable one, and current performance and filmic practices are proving that the two worlds are drawing ever closer, or perhaps in the midst of revealing commonalities that always existed. So in the process of questioning this binary further, I will abandon popular presuppositions about the power of media. Just as one should not attribute theater’s persistence to its political potential, so one should not assume that media’s persistence and dominance is due solely to its commercial power.

In looking at the phenomenology of projection and its use in live theater in the following chapters, it will be useful to focus on three essential features of performance. The first will be the “liveness” of performance. Philip Auslander has done much to destabilize this term, but as previously noted his analysis does not include film projection. The exhibition of projection always includes a live component, and I will examine ways in which this compares to live

theater as well as current cinematic practices that try to exploit this connection. The second essential feature will be the space and features created in which a performance and the action of a play occurs. I will be looking at, as Stanton Garner puts it, “the phenomenological parameters” of the stage which are “oriented in relation to the gaze.”⁷³ Scenery in the Western tradition previously experienced a shift from two-dimensional settings to three-dimensional scenery, and contemporary uses of projection oscillate between adding to three-dimensionality and hearkening back to flats. The third feature will be what is often considered to be the most important component of any live performance: the body. Liveness is often wrapped up in the presence of the body, and nearly all of theater’s phenomenological effects rely upon it. Theater companies around the world are experimenting with projection technologies that create the form of the body on stage with light, removing the materiality while emphasizing the ephemerality and ghostly nature of acting. The rest of the chapters will examine these technologies and mechanisms that challenge and simulate these essential features of performance.

Chapter Two will focus on the phenomenology of film projection, both in its theatrical exhibition as well as the nature of its transmitting mechanisms: the projector and screen. My approach will be to look at film’s similarities with the phenomenology of live performance. The work of film critics like Jean Goudal, Andre Bazin, and Sergei Eisenstein will help to illuminate the hallucinatory experience of the cinema. These writers evoke much of what States, Rayner, and Phelan describe as the essential qualities of live performance. This chapter will also give consideration to the physical properties of light, in its complementary nature as both wave and particle, as matter that can be perceived and manipulated by artists in much the way that material objects, in the traditional sense, are manipulated in theatrical productions. Projections employ

⁷³ Garner, 46.

light to create worlds and bodies that perform for the benefit of the audience. These performances of light always happen in a live manner, rooted in temporality and the simultaneity of the audience's presence.

The third chapter will be the first in a series of case studies meant to trouble traditional distinctions between live performance and mediatized forms in those essential areas I previously mentioned. The first essential quality under consideration is that of "liveness," and it is complicated by the live broadcasts created by theaters around the world that mostly take place in movie theaters. The specific focuses of the chapter are the "Live in HD" series developed by New York's Metropolitan Opera and the series created by Shakespeare's Globe in London. In the Met broadcasts, the "live" nature of the transmissions is the central attraction, and the experience of watching these performances emphasizes the live nature of projection. The trappings of performance are there, but through a mediatized lens. Also, the direction of the broadcasts turns the theatrical conventions into cinematic ones, using close-ups and editing to create a more cinematic experience. The chapter will make use of my own attendance at the aforementioned broadcasts, as well as publicity materials published by the Metropolitan Opera and commentary by journalists on the success of that program. Through it all, the chapter will challenge the assumed "not-live" depiction of film projection within performance studies.

The fourth chapter and second case study will focus on the ability of film projection to create space and setting, traditionally the purview of physical scenic elements. These projected settings are similar to numerous scenic techniques throughout history, from perspective painting to the use of theatrical lighting. In the case of projected scenery, the screen not only adds to the feeling of dimension within the stage, but also changes in such a way as to transport characters and audience members to different locations. The projections create a world in which the

characters inhabit and interact. Thus, the actors and performers are working within a space that mediatization defines. Sometimes, artists use this technique to comment on the pervasiveness of media within everyday life, such as in *The Elephant Vanishes*, a joint production by *Complicite* and the Setagaya Public Theatre. In other cases, artists use projected scenery in much the same way as traditional scenic painting, and this use is becoming more popular among large-scale musicals on Broadway and in the West End, such as in *The Woman in White* by Andrew Lloyd Webber. While projections do not create more physical space (as that is physically impossible), the projections do define the world of the play in ways that expand upon the physical parameters already laid out by the stage while also filling the pre-existing space.

The fifth chapter and third case study deals with one of the most basic essential characteristics of live theater: that of the performing body. The body remains one of the fundamental components of performance due to its physicality. As the cinematic broadcast series and even internet communication and entertainment can produce a sense of liveness, it is widely assumed that the physical presence of the body is the defining characteristic of live performance. Emerging technologies have increased the potential for projected performers interacting with live performers on the stage. One of the most notable examples of this is the work of Montreal-based theater company Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art, which uses projections to create holographic effects on stage to represent characters. As the Met Opera broadcasts challenge the assumptions about liveness and projected scenery expands the traditional definition of space, projected bodies trouble the live physical body as a requirement for performance. In productions such as *La Tempete* and *La Belle et la Bête*, projections appear as performers and interact with the onstage performers, often as ghosts or other supernatural characters. This chapter will analyze the ways in which projection techniques are given agency in both a phenomenological and narrative sense,

often to increase the visceral nature of a paranormal occurrence. In these cases, projections constitute either the physical or the supernatural, once again grounding the phenomenology of projection as hallucinatory and rooted in illusion. These illusions, when combined with “live” actors, produce a unique phenomenological effect that enhances the overall theatricality of the event.

The sixth chapter will bring together the central topics of the other chapters in the final case study of the project, focusing on the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver. Each of the ceremonies used projections alongside live performers in order to achieve the effects found in the other case studies: creating spaces, representing characters, and both adding to and challenging the sense of liveness within the production. In the case of the 2008 ceremony, the vast number of cast members (over two thousand) is the main event, so to speak, and so projections help to move along the narrative as well as create a space for the performers in certain scenes. With the 2010 ceremony, the cast is much smaller, and thus the projections create both larger spaces as well as do more to help the narrative along, in a way filling in the gaps created by having fewer cast members. However, the projections not only correlate to cast size, but also to the development of an image of nationhood present in both ceremonies. In the way that States talk about the theater bringing in physical materials and processing them into signs through theatrical frames, the opening ceremonies try to encompass all of the people and places of a particular nation, and projections function as an important tool in bringing vast materials into a relatively small space. The opening ceremonies of the Olympics are some of the biggest and most technically daunting theatrical productions of all time, and the ways in which they use projection point toward emerging trends and future possibilities for the use of the cinema within live performance.

All of these examples constitute some level of hybridization, and their emergence into contemporary conventions of performance will signal the invasion (or corruption) of the stage by mediatized forms. Where the practice of theater will go in the future is difficult to say, but the academy must be ready to deal with these phenomena in a way that acknowledges the potential power of such integration, rather than dismissing it as pure spectacle or a cheap grab for marketability. In the process, we may rediscover the power of performance, whether it is in a “live” or a mediatized form.

CHAPTER TWO: THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

Soon after the invention of the moving picture, when speculation was rife about how the medium would develop, Henry V. Hopwood, in his 1899 book *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-Production, and Practical Working*, wrote about the potential for the camera and projector to capture and present not fictional material, but the very history of the world. He writes, “So a continual record of the earth’s history in its slightest details is continually streaming off into the eternal void, and, granted an eye capable of perceiving an object under a minute angle, infinitely sensible also to vibrations, it will be seen that at some point or other in space everything that has happened is yet visible.”¹ For Hopwood, the moving picture had the ability to expand human understanding of the universe; it was a tool of enlightenment. At this point, the possibilities of film were not completely oriented toward entertainment, but rather expressed through modernist aspirations. We can also note from Hopwood’s title that the appeal of film was not simply the movement of the pictures but the sense that they were *living*. As a natural descendant from still photography, moving pictures were images brought to life.

Under this rubric, movement indicates life. The definition of performance is not often discussed strictly in terms of motion, but I would argue that this characteristic could naturally separate performance from the so-called “plastic arts.” Contemporary definitions of performance, as I have shown, rely on distinguishing it from media, drawing on metaphors of ghosts and doppelgangers.² Phenomenological writings on film yield similar metaphors that describe film

¹ Henry V. Hopwood, “Past, Present, and Future,” *Living Pictures: Their History, Photo-Production and Practical Working* (1899), Rpt. In *Technology and Culture: The Film Reader*, Ed. Andrew Utterson (New York: Routledge, 2005) 16.

² For some examples of this, see: Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004) 279. Also: Simon Shepard and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 193.

not as something dead or in the past but as something living, thriving, and existing in the moment. As the art form of film was blossoming into the global cultural force it is today, writers and artists tried to determine what the essential nature of that art form was, along with its effects on the audience. In a way, it was a process akin to trends in theater and performance studies since the rise of recorded media. As I will make clear in examining early film criticism, critics grappled with the medium's evolution by making comparisons with one of its most closely related ancestors: theater. I will continue this line of thought to link the act of film projection with the life-in-motion of performance.

The film theory used here will challenge the performance/media dichotomy that I outlined in the previous chapter, making a case for including the cinema in the continuum of performance, as well as illuminating the cinema component of hybrid performance. Contemporary theorists have defined performance mainly by its status as a live event, something they say cannot be duplicated. In that sense, the cinema is nothing more than the duplication of past events. However, I will demonstrate that film theorists from the early and mid-20th century thought about the cinema as a live event that cannot be repeated or reproduced, no matter how the same filmstrip is run through the same projector. Despite Auslander's refusal to consider film as a challenge to the liveness of performance, its live creation on the screen, a technological genesis akin to psychological processes, marks it as a kind of live performance. I will employ the ideas of the early film theorists to bolster my argument for the inclusion of projected film in the discourse of live performance. Their texts, along with certain contemporary writings, are some of the most passionate and experiential considerations of film, and I will point to them as the most potent descriptions of film's phenomenology.

In addition, just as performance scholars like Phelan have distinguished live theater through its resistance to capital, film theorists have also negotiated cinema's relationship to the market. Before and during the rise of the studio system in Hollywood that would put the profitability of film front and center in the minds of producers and artists, early film critics considered the cinematic experience outside of audience appeal and box-office grosses, an approach that is rarely seen today. This chapter will look at film criticism before the current predominance of text-based approaches, as is often seen today in film studies. This phenomenological approach began in early descriptions of proto-cinematic technology and continued through the work of the surrealist critics, who emphasized the hallucinatory experience of watching a movie. However, I will also show that phenomenological considerations of film are not always so easily divorced from film language, the construction and rhythm of film shots and sequences. One of the fathers of film language, Sergei Eisenstein, who tied montage and the dialectical synthesis of individual shots to proletarian causes, saw cinema as a natural stimulant of the masses due to its nature, and not necessarily its content.

Before I look at cinema in its fully-fledged form, it is useful to examine the art of projection before the pictures moved. While movement will be a very important part of any theory of film projection, the formation of shapes and forms through light is also a key phenomenological characteristic, due to projection's ability to create an incredibly realistic visual representation separate from its own referent. When I discuss these kinds of issues with students, I often ask the question, "When you go to a movie theater and watch a film, what are you looking at?" The first response I most often get is "the screen," to which I reply, "The screen is a blank plastic rectangle. What's there to see?" This eventually leads the students to realize that they go to the theater to see what is in front of the screen: light, the most important component of

cinema's transmission. However, in the context of performance, is such a manipulation of light merely spectacle, or something more? At the outset I will consider the ways in which light has been viewed in the eras leading up to the advent of film, in which it evolved into an object of observation, rather than just the means of that observation.

The All-Seeing Eye

For many people, light, outside of religious and literary imagery, is merely something to see by, something to illuminate the rest of the world for observation. However, in the nineteenth century, writers started to regard light as something in itself that might be observed, something to be seen. Jonathan Crary, in *Techniques of the Observer*, outlines the stages of human observation in the nineteenth century that revolutionized notions of seeing and the objectivity or subjectivity of human sight. He writes of the moment in which light and sight were divorced from their seemingly inherent bond, that when "...light began to be conceived as an electromagnetic phenomenon it had less and less to do with the realm of the visible and with the description of human vision."³ As the study of physics grew, light's supplemental status diminished and mankind's empirical dominion over it increased, making it as valid an object of study as the objects it illuminated.

Science transformed light into an object of observation, and this transformation, coupled with an emerging mechanical mastery of light through advances in electricity, allowed light to be used for numerous purposes throughout the twentieth century. This paradigm shift reorients previous instances of light manipulation, as with the use of fireworks. However, it is important to foreground all these instances with the phenomenological status of light as something that can be

³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990) 88.

observed and experienced viscerally. It is often taken for granted that light is an object, since its existence permeates most all of our surroundings, whether in its absence or presence. In his essay, “The Otherness of Light,” philosopher David Grandy writes: “Thanks to light, material objects visually present themselves to our senses. For this presentation to be effective or ‘clear,’ light also must be clear, but in a different way.”⁴ The study of light has progressed through an understanding of light as a wavelength, similar to radio waves, to a present understanding of light as also having a complementary particle nature, containing mass (albeit a miniscule amount). This makes the understanding of light’s nature a difficult one since light’s particle mass is unobservable to the naked eye. However, the nature of light within projection has allowed it to achieve a kind of materiality that is more felt than casually measured.

Light achieves a kind of haecceity in itself, though that quality is not readily definable. Grandy continues, “Sunlight, for example, is never seen in isolation. It is seen in conjunction with the white snow that reflects it, the atmospheric air molecules that scatter its blue component, the atmospheric haze that scatters its reddish component, and the material, gaseous backdrop of the sun itself.” Light becomes something different when its ability to create visibility is compromised. This allows light to achieve its haecceity, to become something to be seen. In the instances I will discuss, light is not used for visibility, but becomes visible. This visibility, within the realm of human observation, gives light its materiality. Just as the existence of other objects is verified from their visible nature through light, so light declares its existence through the transmission of material. Like Grandy, I would contend that light’s visibility of itself achieves a different kind of essence that opens our eyes to different levels of existence. Instead of merely viewing what we consider to be our world, we are opened to a world of light that

⁴ David Grandy, “The Otherness of Light: Einstein and Levinas,” *PMC* 12.1 (2001).

makes our own notions of vision problematic. Light's otherness has been showcased in performative ways throughout previous centuries, perhaps not more palpably than in the case of fireworks.

Fireworks as public entertainment have saturated public consciousness to the point that they are often not regarded as artistically significant. However, their persistence presents one of the most prominent examples of the materiality of light in performance. We employ fireworks in some of the largest public celebrations in existence, from commemorations of independence to political rallies to the opening ceremonies of the Olympics, as I will further detail in the sixth chapter. During fireworks demonstrations, explosives take the form of brightly colored lights, accompanied by loud booms and crackles. They light up the sky in different shades and for a few moments light is the center of the crowd's attention. Few moments present light as an object of observation as powerfully as a fireworks display.

The history of fireworks is a long and storied one, tracing back to China around the early 13th century, when pyrotechnics were used in exploding missiles.⁵ The art spread to Japan and India, and the use of fireworks extended to religious and social celebrations. Their use in Europe seems to have originated in Italy possibly around the 15th century.⁶ An extensive history of fireworks is beyond the scope of this study, but it is easily seen that the use of fireworks in public performance has been a social institution for centuries.⁷ Michael Lynn writes about the place of

⁵ Alan St. H. Brock, *A History of Fireworks* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1949) 20.

⁶ Michael R. Lynn, "Sparks for Sale: The Culture and Commerce of Fireworks in Early Modern France" *Eighteenth-Century Life* 30.2 (2006) 77.

⁷ Michael Lynn writes: "One reason the Revolutionaries accepted the continued use of fireworks was because they had shifted from a strictly monarchical symbol and had taken on additional meanings associated with their commercialization and new, larger, audience composed of the 'middling sorts'." *Ibid.*, 76.

fireworks in public celebrations in revolutionary era France. He positions fireworks within the framework of political movements, such as in the transition from the monarchy to a nationalist, republican power.

Fireworks achieve their place in national performance, contributing to the shifting political structures and values of revolutionary France. However, they had other purposes, such as their use on the stage in eighteenth century France.⁸ Despite their use as a theatrical effect within a larger dramatic framework, their use as a singular performance persisted. As fireworks became more of a public enterprise, with members of the lower classes being able to afford them, their cultural meaning changed. They became less of a means of relating state power and more of a private performative in the hands of the people.

In the United States during Fourth of July celebrations, citizens are able to purchase their own fireworks (depending on the local laws), and various government bodies often put on their own shows. Thus, state and public are both linked in a unified performative with inherent political meaning. While the political implications are not inherently vital to the discussion of their use as performance, they demonstrate that fireworks, and by proxy, light, are part of a public celebration with the ability to hold and communicate meaning. The use of fireworks as signals of independence is part of the fabric of the national conscience, and for many citizens the viewing of a display is a holiday tradition, a performance that is repeatedly shown and viewed year after year. Inherent in the displays are qualities of light, such as intensity, color, and breadth, that, when mastered by human technology, become impressive to the viewer.⁹ There is

⁸ Ibid., 82.

⁹ Similar to fireworks in their use of light is the short-lived phenomenon of laser-light shows. Very little has been written about their history, but their popularity was widespread, at least for a few years in the late 1970s and early 80s. Some were featured in planetarium-like installations

also the intense visceral phenomenology, connotative of war, violence, and weaponry, which makes the experience incredibly sensory rather than merely symbolic. The loud sounds associated with fireworks give them an even greater phenomenological impact that can be heard and felt as well as seen. However, what distinguishes fireworks from any other type of explosion is their visual component, the brightly colored lights in the sky.

Just as light changed into an object of study in its own right, so too did early forms of projection change the ways in which people could create art and capture images. The camera obscura, with its long history of use by both scientists and artists, manipulated light to separate the images of nature from their natural context as well as explain the workings of the human eye. From viewing solar eclipses to framing a landscape for painting, the camera obscura reflects Hopwood's assessment of the cinema's potential to aid in historical and scientific pursuits. In this instance, light is not used as an object of spectacle, but a tool through which other objects could be made manifest. Instead of simply revealing the world, light was the mechanism of its transmission and existence, and easily manipulated by its masters. As Jonathan Crary notes, "The camera, in a sense, was a metaphor for the most rational possibilities of a perceiver within the increasingly dynamic disorder of the world."¹⁰

Crary also notes other proto-projection technologies, namely the phenakistiscope and its direct descendant, the zootrope, early developments in moving pictures through the use of spinning images, as well as the stereoscope, which "aimed to simulate the actual presence of a

with displays timed to rock or disco music. Some shows were used in larger, public demonstrations such as the display at Stone Mountain, Georgia, in which laser lights were shot onto the face of the mountain in the shapes of civil war heroes. While the form did not endure in popularity to the present day, laser light shows are similar in their use of light as a performance to fireworks displays.

¹⁰ Crary, 53.

physical object or scene, not to discover another way to exhibit a print or drawing.”¹¹ In these two inventions, emerging in the 19th century, movement and the illusion of presence were considered as advancements over the still image and managed to be popular attractions despite the obviousness of the illusion. As I will discuss in later chapters, virtual presence can be a strong phenomenological effect of projection in the theatrical space, and movement is often considered one of the chief phenomenological effects of the cinema. The inventions, with their artistic capacity, were also steps away from the modernist objectivism of the camera obscura, foregrounding the illusion rather than its ability to duplicate an image accurately.¹² These experiments with light and vision led to a reconsideration of their role in both science and art, and “allowed them to conceive of an abstract optical experience, that is of a vision that did not represent or refer to objects in the world.”¹³

The filtering of nature through the camera obscura and other proto-projection technologies anticipates States’ view of the gestation of objects into the frame of theater. The act of projection creates a virtual double of an object, creating a sign out of its referent, so to speak, and recontextualizes it through technology. As the pictures began to move (and live), early film artists recognized the potential for marketing the films for profit. However, the beginnings of the cinema did not foreground the audience or the theatrical experience. With the rise of film as an art form, the idea of spectacle took its place front and center at the heart of the battle over cinema’s legitimacy. Early cinematic experiments would focus on thrilling audiences through the projections themselves rather than through any narrative context. In the next section, I will show

¹¹ Ibid., 122.

¹² Ibid., 149.

¹³ Ibid., 141.

how projection technologies took a mastery of light and created spectacles of a theatrical nature that would continue to foreground the role of light's phenomenology in the cinematic experience. These would be the first steps toward creating spaces and bodies that could simulate presence and life on the screen.

The Oncoming Train

Before its development as a popular media form, cinema was an optical curiosity, similar to the stereoscope or the phenakistiscope of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ According to Roberta Pearson, magic lantern devices combined slide projection with movement of cardboard figures through an elaborate pulley-system within the projector to become one of the most significant progenitors of the film projector.¹⁵ In this case, the projection's movement was completely contained within a singular image, and so narrative context was negligible.¹⁶ Early moving pictures were first shown in a cross between a projected image and a stereoscope, a device known as the kinetoscope, developed by Thomas Edison in 1891.¹⁷ Early inventions like the magic lantern and kinetoscope were featured among other curiosities at World's Fairs and other exhibitions, contextualizing early cinema as one spectacular novelty among many emerging technologies. In a lengthy description of a kinetoscope gallery by Brander Matthews in 1895, we see the moving pictures described as "visions" and see surprise expressed "...not only at the

¹⁴ Ibid., 132.

¹⁵ Roberta Pearson, "Early Cinema," *The Oxford History of World Cinema* Ed. Gregory Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 21.

¹⁶ Pearson also references the magic lantern's innovation of long slides being pulled across the lens to simulate a long pan.

¹⁷ Paolo Cherchi Usai, "Origins and Survival," *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Ed. Gregory Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 6.

marvelous vividness with which the actions had been repeated before my eyes, like life itself in form and in color and in motion, but also the startling fact that some of the things I had been shown were true and some were false.”¹⁸

The Lumiere Brothers in France started showing public displays of cinematic projection through an invention known as the cinematographe, with simple shots of real life events such as the films that showcased a train pulling into a station and workers leaving a factory. The mythology surrounding this moment of cinematic history has given the impression that the first audiences of the short train film were terrified at the prospect of a train coming at them.

Contemporary scholars like Martin Loiperdinger, who credits the popularity of the early image to its fantastic nature rather than in its ability to mimic reality, have challenged this anecdote. In short, the technology of film projection was just as much a draw to audiences as the images on display.¹⁹

In this early instance, it is the form of projection that wows the audience, the ability to see a moving image in front of them through a projected form. It is important to note, such as in this example, that film had the ability to impress audiences rather than any of its content. The projected light was performative before the introduction of narrative as a means of entertaining audiences. In other words, what initially attracted audiences was the performance of projecting, not the subjects being projected. Tom Gunning, in his essay “The Cinema of Attractions,” writes,

¹⁸ Brander Matthews, “The Kinetoscope of Time,” *Scribner’s Magazine* 18.6 (1895) Rpt. In *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film*, Ed. George C. Pratt (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973) 11.

¹⁹ Martin Loiperdinger, “Lumiere’s *Arrival on the Train*: Cinema’s Founding Myth,” *The Moving Image* 4.1 (2004) 102.

“Rather, even the seemingly stylistically neutral film consisting of a single-shot without camera tricks involved a cinematic gesture of presenting for view, of displaying.”²⁰

The object on display was the projection of light. However, as evidenced in the curiosity surrounding one of the first film images, there was an underlying tension in the implied realism of the cinematic image. Just as photography seemed to be a more realistic way of documenting nature than landscape painting, the cinematic image recorded the speed and direction of movement in a way that still photos and written descriptions could not. This was also a focal point in early comparisons between live theater and film. Allardyce Nicoll writes in 1936, “The film has such a hold over the world of reality, can achieve expression so vitally in terms of ordinary life, that the realistic play must surely come to seem trivial, false, and inconsequential. The truth is, of course, that naturalism on the stage must always be limited and insincere.”²¹ It is worth noting that even at these early stages of the cinema, writers were wrestling with the respective abilities of each art form to process and represent the world. Writing in *Film Form* in 1949, Eisenstein argues, “We have agreed that the first sign of a cinema tendency is one showing events with the least distortion, aiming at the factual reality of the fragments.”²² The content of the filmic image was grounded in realism, according to Eisenstein and others, but the technology and transmission of the cinema had the potential to undercut this “tendency” toward realism.

²⁰ Tom Gunning, “Now You See It, Now You Don’t: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions,” *The Silent Cinema Reader*, Ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (New York: Routledge, 2004) 42.

²¹ Nicoll, 183.

²² Sergei Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, Translated and Edited by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1949) 6.

Other early cinematic exhibitions foregrounded this tension between the realism of the content and the fantastic nature of the projection. Before the integration of longer narratives during the transitional period between 1907 and 1913, exhibitors largely determined the order of content in a given exhibition, contributed their own music and sound, and sometimes interfered with the title cards included.²³ Any narratives that filmmakers did present were often very simple and dependent on the audience's knowledge of a well-known story. From accounts of the period, we see that the images were often those of real life, and the exhibition of them was the main appeal. For instance, Herman Casler's Biograph machine, very similar to the kinetoscope, was exhibited in New York City in 1896 and largely presented images of New York City which most viewers could see for themselves after a short walk, such as Herald Square, the Empire State Express, and famed actor Joseph Jefferson playing Rip Van Winkle. In the account of this exhibition in *The Illustrated American*, the journalist writes, "...as a recorder of history its value cannot be overestimated."²⁴

These contexts support the idea that the audience's initial attraction to these "attractions" did not come from stories being told or the ideas being expressed. Writers and audiences found the appeal of film in the essential qualities of cinematic projections: movement, temporality, and transmission through light. Movement, through both space and time, is a shared characteristic of live performance and the cinema, as is temporality.²⁵ The transmission through light represents

²³ Pearson, 22.

²⁴ "The American Biograph," *The Illustrated American* 20.355 (1896) rpt. *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film*, ed. George C. Pratt (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973) 20.

²⁵ By temporality, I refer to the quality of an action occurring over a period of time, whether it is a live performance or the projection of a film.

the biggest difference between the two practices, though as I referenced in the previous chapter, in the work of Merleau-Ponty the revelation of the world to us through light makes this distinction less than absolute. As Martin Loiperdinger puts it, "...the audience's interest in the projected *documentary* images of the Cinematographe Lumiere was of a primarily *fantastic* nature."²⁶ This emphasis on the images of reality rather than reality itself echoes States's description of the theater's gestation of objects to bring them to life. In this way, the cinema takes what it records in nature or in society and brings it to life through technology and light.

As the moving pictures made their way from inside the box of the kinetoscope to being projected onto screen in front of an audience, narratives did start to find their way in. While they were not fully-fledged stories right from the start, film companies staged events rather than simply capturing them in real life, such as when Edison gathered popular stage actors to be filmed for the devices. The exhibitions of the films made their way into the theatres and music halls, particularly in the American vaudeville circuit, finding their place in between live performing acts, both human and animal. When the nickelodeons sprang up in the first decade of the 20th century, filmmaking became its own fledgling industry, hailed in 1905 as "...the very highest branch of photographic art—that of bringing before the eye lifesize reproductions of life motion with all its accompanying effects of light, shade and expression."²⁷ However, the political and cultural ramifications of the new art form were also under consideration, such as in a 1907

²⁶ Loiperdinger, 102.

²⁷ "Motion Picture Films," *Complete Illustrated Catalog of Moving Picture Machines, Stereopticons, Slides, Films* (Chicago: Kleine Optical Company, 1905), Rpt. *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film*, Ed. George C. Pratt (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973) 40.

article in *The Saturday Evening Post* by Joseph Medill Patterson, who reflected, “Today the moving-picture machine cannot be overlooked as an effective protagonist of democracy.”²⁸

Cinema’s early emphasis on the mechanism of projection over the narrative content of its images led to phenomenological considerations of film in subsequent decades. Rather than seeing film as a copy of something else, or simply a means of transmission, these early film writers granted film a unique ontological status free from dependency on other art forms. For the audiences and critics of early cinema, film was full of possibilities for not only recording images, but also transporting audiences via magical and technological fantasies. Such a characterization would continue to find its way into film writings of subsequent decades, such as in the surrealist movement. In an effort to describe the group and individual experience of watching a film, surrealist writers experimented with unique movie-going practices and behaviors, and also linked film to dreams in the way they processed subconscious images. As we will see through their writings, these writers were concerned with the gestation of objects into cinematic images, or as film critic Paul Hammond puts it, “...the movie camera’s power to instrumentalize the commonplace object by making it photogenic, to confer a dignity and poetic value on the things of everyday life, to turn them into what Freud called ‘thing-representations,’ indices of the unconscious.”²⁹ As narrative became the dominant way of arranging these images, surrealists kept holding to the spectacle and curiosity of the early days of moving pictures as a way of processing the phenomenological effects of the cinema. Their ideas and characterizations will be

²⁸ Joseph Medill Patterson, “The Nickelodeons: The Poor Man’s Elementary Course in the Drama,” *The Saturday Evening Post* 180.21 (1907) Rpt. *Spellbound in Darkness: A History of the Silent Film*, Ed. George C. Pratt (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society Ltd., 1973) 50.

²⁹ Paul Hammond, “Available Light,” *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* 3rd ed., Ed. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000) 7.

useful in tying the phenomenologies of cinema and performance together through presence and movement.

Shadows, Sorcery, and the Surreal

Reading French surrealist film criticism is almost like reading a fairy tale. There are numerous references to magic, sorcery, and illusion, and little allusion is made to the inherent realism found in cinema by writers like Nicoll. Many of the most notable pieces come from the period between the World Wars, because in the period directly after World War I, France was opened further to the work of the growing American film industry.³⁰ American silent comedians like Charles Chaplin and Buster Keaton were entering their prime, and the studio system was steadily becoming the film factory that its Hollywood creators desperately wanted it to be. The surrealists responded to the virtues of the American films while also keeping in mind the dangers of such commercialism to their beloved art form. While there were certainly other people writing about film at the time, the surrealists penned the most explicitly phenomenological writings of the period, focusing on the experience of the cinema, rather than just the technological breakthroughs (which had been the focus of certain writers at the medium's genesis, as I have just shown). The surrealists function as a predecessor to my own phenomenological appraisal of hybrid theater, in their characterization of film as a live event with much of the same potency as performance.

At the heart of their approach was a focus on dreams and their hallucinatory quality, in a way reversing the process of creating dreams as outlined by Freud. Rather than processing sensory experiences into dreams, dreams are made into sensory experiences for audiences.

³⁰ Paul Hammond, in his introduction to the collection *The Shadow and its Shadow*, locates the appeal of the American films in the absence of “the dead weight of the European theatrical tradition.” Hammond, 5.

Hammond writes that the material ingredients of a dream found in everyday life are made manifest once again in the creation of film. He writes that the surrealists "...wanted everyday life to be emphatically and consciously permeated by the dream, by its scabrous language, its transgressive remodeling of normative constraints."³¹ However, this reprocessing of dreams was not just found in the images on screen, but also the experience of watching those images projected in a darkened theater.

One of the key points for the surrealists was the role of light in the creation of the hallucination. In his 1927 essay "Introduction to Black-and-White Magic," Albert Valentin writes,

The miracle is within reach of all eyes, within reach of every pocket. Above our heads the projector generates a transparent cone in which electrical atoms are suspended, a sort of seed, a kind of pollen that precipitates and starts to blossom on the rectangular surface of the screen. Still lives are still no longer, a universe crystallized in film and reduced to its simplest expression is suddenly torn from its slumber, separated from its husk and, regaining its original dimensions, enters into our existence, our thought.³²

Valentin pinpoints the interaction between audience awareness and the materiality of light. He goes further to distinguish this relationship from the normal theatrical relationship: "No curtain here, as in the theater, where the real is separated from the imaginary: you are on the same plane as the fiction, you treat it as an equal."³³ For Valentin, both the audience and the film function on the same phenomenological plane, with no attempt at separating the audience from the means of film's transmission, like one might hide scene changes in a play. While the surrealists go to great

³¹ Ibid., 9.

³² Albert Valentin, "Introduction to Black-and-White Magic," *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* 3rd ed., Ed. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000) 96.

³³ Valentin, 97.

lengths to explore the “magic” of the cinema, writers like Valentin still ground that sorcery in the physical properties of illumination.

The illumination also requires darkness in all of the other parts of the theatrical space. Coupled with the act of projection, darkness plays a large role in the hallucinatory effect, allowing the audience to block out everything but the images on the screen. For Jean Goudal, the illumination and darkness contribute to an experience that is decidedly unrealistic. He compares the cinema to the live performance in which actors have a three-dimensional presence. He writes, “The persistence of images on the retina, which is the physiological basis of cinema, claims to present movement to us with the actual continuity of the real; but in fact we know very well that it’s an illusion, a sensory device which does not completely fool us.”³⁴ Film projection exploits the inability of our eyes and brain to distinguish between one image and the next when projected rapidly, thus creating the illusion of motion. However, it is an optical illusion, and the viewer does not accept the images as reality. This distancing effect in a sense anticipates Bertolt Brecht’s use of projections to achieve his alienation effect, but it is important to note that Goudal is emphasizing the cinema’s capacity for dreamlike spectacle rather than its ability to achieve a sense of realism.

This tendency toward fantasy also contributes to the overall description of the cinema as a place of dreams. Jacques Brunius describes in detail what is involved in the creation of the dream effect in his 1954 essay “Crossing the Bridge”, saying that the feeling is an “involuntary stimulation.”³⁵ He describes the darkening of the auditorium as similar to the “closing of the

³⁴ Jean Goudal, “Surrealism and Cinema,” *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* 3rd ed., Ed. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000) 88.

³⁵ Jacques Brunius, “Crossing the Bridge,” *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* 3rd ed., Ed. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000) 100.

eyelids” or “the darkness of the unconscious.” Brunius carries the dream logic of film to the conclusion that audiences will soon carry the fiction that they see into the real world, creating a seemingly paradoxical blending of the real and the fictional. He writes: “For the spectator the mental representations elicited by the images on screen tend to get mixed up with the usual representation of the external world he develops from his perceptions.”³⁶ The cinematic world, in Brunius’s view, is just as real as the physical world, but still manifest through a dream. From the perspective of the surrealists, this alternate reality’s visceral nature stems from the form of projection and the conditions that traditionally accompany it.

Any survey of French film theory must reference a strong contribution from famed writer Andre Bazin. His writings in the 1940s and 50s helped lay the foundation for the French New Wave through the journal he co-founded, *Cahiers du Cinema*. While not technically a surrealist, his work follows the strain of thought from his more avant-garde predecessors. Bazin challenged the assumption that cinema was the natural technological outgrowth of the novel or theater, much as the surrealists had located its more direct inspiration in poetry. In terms of the realism offered by either the cinema or the theater, Bazin did not necessarily cite cinema as the most realistic, but also denied theater that claim. In his essay “Theater and Cinema- Part One,” he writes that the fourth wall of theater and the staging of events as fiction undercuts the supposed realism of physical presence.³⁷ Bazin instead locates part of the realist tensions between cinema and the theater in the level of identification with the protagonist in each form. For Bazin, “It is to the extent to which the cinema encourages identification with the hero that it conflicts with the

³⁶ Brunius, 101.

³⁷ Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, Ed. And Trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) 89.

theater,” though he acknowledges that each form has ways of getting around their respective tendencies, such as theater’s “lessening the psychological tension between spectator and actor.”³⁸ Bazin is very open about theater’s need for an audience and cinema’s relative existence without one.

However, Bazin also challenges one of the major assumed differences between cinema and theater: that of the physical presence of the actor. Bazin believed in projection’s ability to create objects that had a real presence that could be felt by the viewer. This was most often seen as the province of theater with its live actors, but Bazin affirmed the phenomenological effects of the cinema as giving the audience a similar experience. Essential to this presence was the object’s existence over time. Bazin writes, “The cinema does something strangely paradoxical. It makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object.”³⁹ The object or location exists in front of the audience for a period of time before it disappears, but it is also existing in small moments as each frame flicks in front of the light twenty-four times a second. The persistence of vision gives the feeling of presence by perceiving the accumulated time.

Bazin continues to assert that simultaneity is also central to this presence. It is not only that the projection presents objects over a period of time, but also that the audience is present at the same time to perceive it. He claims that the cinema reflects the presence of an actor in much the same way that a mirror reflects our own presence, though film does this with an added time delay.⁴⁰ As we recognize that the image in the mirror is our reflection, we feel its connection

³⁸ Ibid., 100.

³⁹ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 97.

with us, the simultaneity. The cinematic image carries the same sort of feeling brought by the simultaneous transmission of light above our heads and onto the screen. Space is also a factor, as Bazin argues that the kinds of shots found in the cinema make up for the seeming lack of physicality.⁴¹ An extreme close-up, framing the human face, gives a sense of proximity that can make up for the lack of direct physical presence.

Rudolf Arnheim echoes similar ideas about the phenomenology of projection. He aligns himself with the belief in the dream-like hallucinatory quality of film, and its decidedly unrealistic nature: “By the absence of colors, of three-dimensional depth, by being sharply limited by the margins on the screen, and so forth, film is most satisfactorily denuded of its realism.”⁴² At the time he was writing, the lack of color and two-dimensionality robbed cinema, in Arnheim’s view, of its potential to be realistic. He also anticipates Bazin’s ideas about time and closeness, linking these to the general expressive tendencies of film.⁴³ Arnheim refers to the movement of a film through time and the movement of the camera in reference to the stage, when directors choreograph motion to achieve focus and meaning. While a theatrical director would stage action to place the audience’s attention on a certain character, a film director accomplishes this through composition and editing.

The ideas expressed in the writings of Bazin and Arnheim contain many similarities with those found in contemporary performance phenomenology, affirming cinema’s potential to be a kind of performance. As we have seen with States, Rayner, and Phelan, performance is built on the physical presence of the actor and the simultaneous presence of the live audience. From these

⁴¹ Ibid., 98.

⁴² Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957) 26.

⁴³ Ibid., 182.

writings we can see that film phenomenologists believe some of the same things about film: its simultaneity, its simulation (however palpable) of presence, and its existence during a duration of time. However, a discussion about the nature of film must also contend with the role of film language in the creation of these phenomenological effects. The functions of direction, editing, and cinematography have their roots in the theater but have become very different from their “live” counterparts. While the surrealists, Bazin, and Arnheim laid the groundwork for a performative phenomenological understanding of cinema, textual analysts like Eisenstein would tie that sensory power to film’s dialectical nature, uniting both in an understanding of how film could function. The way that cinema orders and presents its images creates a phenomenological experience similar to that of performance, while still maintaining representational independence.

The Flicker of Motion

Sergei Eisenstein remains one of the foremost writers on the subject of montage and film language, having pioneered a great deal of it himself. Though his own achievements in the art form would remain limited under the Soviet regime, his contribution to film theory has been incredibly significant. At age 18, having enrolled in an engineering school in Petrograd, he saw his first Meyerhold production, *The Steadfast Prince* by Calderón. At the cusp of revolution in 1917, he was becoming involved in the Petrograd theater community himself, beginning work that would lead him to a successful design career. Eventually Eisenstein found work as a scenic designer at the Proletkult Theater. While he was uncomfortable with any movements toward naturalism, he found two heroes in Vsevolod Meyerhold and Vladimir Mayakovsky, whose innovative and surreal productions became the talk of Moscow. One of his first opportunities to put these ideas into practice was his assignment as designer and assistant director of an adaptation of Jack London’s story *The Mexican* in 1921. Not content to be realistic, Eisenstein

clothed all the characters in circus garb, having been inspired by seeing the circus at age twelve. A story concerning Mexican revolutionaries fixing a boxing match to raise funds for their revolt became populated by clownish figures.⁴⁴ Rather than faithfulness to the text, Eisenstein favored the creation of a unique theatrical experience.

Eisenstein followed *The Mexican* by enrolling in a directing workshop under the tutelage of Meyerhold. He became fascinated with his teacher's approach to theater, particularly in his desire to destroy the gap between artist and audience that a traditional proscenium created. Before leaving, Eisenstein had functioned as apprentice director for Meyerhold's production of Sukhovo-Kobylin's *The Death of Tarelkin*, with Eisenstein trying to add circus routines and acrobatics to the production, sometimes behind Meyerhold's back.⁴⁵ Through his process of cutting and turning the pieces of the drama into a series of circus acts, Eisenstein started to formulate one of his most famous cinematic theories: the "montage of attractions." This was based on the idea of a series of images or theatrical moments that a director would have at his disposal. As he described it in "A Personal Statement," he "tried to dissect cubistically a classical play into separately affective 'attractions.' The action took place in a circus."⁴⁶

Therefore, Eisenstein the director could choose what attractions he would use to highlight certain sections of the play, and combine certain attractions to achieve specific thematic effects. This translated to his film work by highlighting the editing process for a film director, that of

⁴⁴ Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978) 42.

⁴⁵ Alma Law and Mel Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein, and Biomechanics: Actor Training in Revolutionary Russia* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1996) 80.

⁴⁶ Sergei M. Eisenstein, "A Personal Statement," Trans. Jay Leyda, *Twentieth-Century Theatre: A sourcebook*, Ed. Richard Drain, (New York: Routledge, 1995) 87.

choosing the order and timing of scenes and images in order to create suspense, anticipation, and emotional momentum. In a book on Eisenstein's montage, Jacques Aumont emphasizes the importance to Eisenstein for a director to choose and foreground images as a way to translate traditional representation into cinematic language.⁴⁷ For a film director, this choice is essential, especially in Eisenstein's pioneering of cinematic montage. The montage became one of Eisenstein's trademarks in his film work, helping him to popularize an innovative new use of film editing. Perhaps his most famous example of the technique came in his 1926 film *Battleship Potemkin*, chronicling the mutiny on a battleship in 1905.

The young director's goal was to provoke an emotional response from the audience. Simply playing one long take of a long shot of people running down steps pursued by soldiers was unacceptable; it kept the audience in a safe place. Eisenstein's theater work, with his focus on the attractions and his reinterpretation of traditional texts, had made him acquainted with how to deal with an audience, and he often based his directing techniques on the audience's reaction to other productions. Aleksandr Levshin chronicled a rehearsal where Eisenstein watched the audience, rather than the stage, in order to see how a production was going.⁴⁸ Eisenstein's pioneering work in film editing gave him endless possibilities in his quest to provoke the audience. One of the central reasons for his use of montage was to bring the audience into a scene, into a moment, to show them the gritty details of a battle scene or a moment of horror.

Thus, Eisenstein was interested in the emotional state and journey of the audience during a play or film. Like all good propagandists, Eisenstein knew the role of emotion in generating

⁴⁷ Jacques Aumont, *Montage Eisenstein*, Trans. Lee Hildreth, Constance Penley, and Andrew Ross (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987) 37.

⁴⁸ Law and Gordon, 170.

revolutionary ideology in the public, and while emotional reaction is not exactly a phenomenological effect, it shows that Eisenstein saw film language as an immediate stimulus for the viewer rather than something only appreciated through textual analysis. While montage originated in the theater, its evolution into the basis for film language inextricably linked the cinema as a primary example of audience engagement. In *Film Form*, Eisenstein writes that the cinema is well suited for “the richness of actuality”⁴⁹ and able to compel intellectual process in its viewers through its essence and conventions. An emotional effect for Eisenstein was a palpable force that generated its own sensations similar to the phenomenological effects of the cinema.

Eisenstein considered the effects generated by montage and film language to have a material nature, equating them with phenomenological effects. Emotion for him was not divorced from either ideological and textual engagement or the experience of watching a performance. Within a montage, Eisenstein believed that though individual shots were not the same, they combined to create a homogenous whole, one that achieved an almost physical essence based on its overall effect on the audience.⁵⁰ The way that the audience responds to the cinematic image is, to Eisenstein, similar to the way in which they respond to a live performance. He continues to compare cinematic montage to the combination of elements within a Kabuki performance, and ultimately roots the genesis of montage in dialectical thought, in which opposing shots join to create a cinematographic synthesis. However, this synthesis is only

⁴⁹ Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 186.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 67.

achievable in the projection of the film, comparing this act to “the performance by a symphony orchestra.”⁵¹

Eisenstein links montage to both dialectical synthesis and a live performance, seeing the latter as the apparatus of the former. Eisenstein also sees the projection, in its similarity to a symphony, as a more direct way of impacting the viewer than live theater. Rather than privileging the physical manifestation of the actor, he sees it almost as an obstacle to audience engagement. In discussing the achievements of the cinema in *Film Form*, he compares film to other art forms, and writes that it has an advantage over the theater, which is limited by its physicality and its inability to manifest consciousness and emotion in the way film can.⁵² Eisenstein believes that the directness of cinematic images trumps most stage constructions in stimulating the audience. He later refers to the method of the theater as “...patterned on the behavior and activity of people roused by outer and inner motives.”⁵³ While States and other phenomenologists would praise the theater for its physicality, Eisenstein saw it as theater’s ultimate limitation. It is not to say that film contends with theatrical realism in the same way, with an accumulation of physical details, but rather for Eisenstein it is a more accurate depiction of human thought. It is a different kind of realism, and both performance and media manage to be realistic, again producing similar phenomenological effects. However, rather than rejecting that kind of phenomenological effect for theater, Eisenstein saw a similar effect in the projection of film, the nature of which allowed artists to go further into the human soul than through action being portrayed physically on the stage.

⁵¹ Ibid., 69.

⁵² Ibid., 183.

⁵³ Ibid., 184.

Another Soviet writer, Viktor Shklovsky, in his book *Literature and Cinematography* ultimately sums up film in this way: “As everyone knows, a movie reel consists of a series of momentary shots succeeding one another with such speed that the human eye merges them; a series of immobile elements creates the illusion of motion.”⁵⁴ Motion is one of the fundamental characteristics of film, and one that produces, through the projection of flickering images, the phenomenology of film. What ultimately distinguishes film from other art is the movement of the pictures, and not just the figures moving within the frame, but the movement of the waves and particles of light that make up the projection. Rudolf Arnheim writes there are significant differences between the images that a camera captures and what is projected for audiences, differences that artists can exploit to mold the viewing experience.⁵⁵ The phenomenology of the cinema is created in the act of projection.

Ultimately, however, one cannot divorce film language from the mechanisms of its transmission, and we can find, through the work of Eisenstein and others, that film language is an integral part of the phenomenological effects of the cinema. It may seem that this stands in the way of the cinema being an object of study for the performance scholar, that textual analysis of the literary variety is needed to interpret the effect of a film on the audience. However, the idea of film language, as Eisenstein notes in his discussion of dialectics in film, exists not only in the contextual level but also in the basic construction of projection. Therefore Eisenstein’s discussion of montage has implications not only for text but also for phenomenology. Akin to performance phenomenology, projection has a kind of materiality rooted in its use of light that is

⁵⁴ Viktor Shklovsky, *Literature and Cinematography*, Trans. Irina Masinovsky (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2008) 31.

⁵⁵ Arnheim, 127.

reinforced by the flicker images across that light. However, the element of projection that is most closely tied to performance's simultaneity and transience is the film's existence over a singular moment of time, the experience of which, despite the unchanging nature of the content, cannot be repeated. In many ways the culmination of the previous theories I have discussed here, modern film theory has dealt with cinematic phenomenology in performative terms, just as performance scholars have dealt with theatrical phenomenology using the language of mediatization.

Presence and Temporality

Just as a photograph freezes a singular moment in time, Bazin sees the cinema as preserving several moments, calling it "objectivity in time,"⁵⁶ contrasting it with the way photography captures only one moment. Motion produces the ability to preserve more than one moment at a time, and so the duration of a previous moment is recreated through the projection. I referred earlier to Bazin's assertion that film makes an "imprint of the duration of the object," and this is essential to understanding what is being re-performed through projection. In a way film bridges both time *and* space to bring an event from another place and moment to the audience as it is currently assembled. Of course, film content has a way of interrupting a natural flow of time through digressions like flashbacks,⁵⁷ but the events in the narrative timeline nonetheless occur in real time in front of the audience during a projection.

I have referenced movement many times, but it is worth emphasizing just how important it is to this notion of temporality. Film theorist Siegfried Kracauer talks about movement as

⁵⁶ Bazin, 15.

⁵⁷ "Within any one film sequence, scenes follow each other in their order of time—unless some digression is introduced as, for example, in recounting earlier adventures, dreams, or memories." Arnheim, 21.

having an effect on human biology,⁵⁸ such as the quickening of the heart during a suspenseful scene or a stirring moment. Note that Kracauer, writing in 1959, is referring to multiple senses besides just sight. For him, the experience of viewing a film has an effect on the whole self, and movement is the gestus of this effect. Kracauer echoes the surrealists when he continues to refer to these phenomenological effects: “Material existence, as it manifests itself in film, launches the moviegoer into unending pursuits.”⁵⁹ Kracauer believes that the moving image raises several types of desires within the viewer, hardly any of which can be achieved in any physical sense, since the image is mostly illusory. The viewer is invited to engage with the projected material, but is unable to interact in a direct way. Is this much different than the live performance, which is also illusory in the way that it ceases to exist once it is over?

This difference between engaging with cinema at the textual level and engaging with it in this physical, biological level is illuminated by Vivian Sobchack in her essay “The Scene of the Screen.”⁶⁰ For Sobchack, the audience is engaging with two types of perception, in both presentational and representational terms. At the microperceptual level, the viewer senses the phenomenological effects of projection, while at the macroperceptual level the viewer engages with the semiotic content. The audience is watching a world on screen move and change but also feeling that world come into being every second. For Sobchack, this generates a sense of

⁵⁸ “The effect itself appears to be well-established: representations of movement do cause a stir in deep bodily layers. It is our sense organs which are called into play.” Siegfried Kracauer, “The Spectator,” *Film: Book 1, The Audience and the Filmmaker*, Ed. Robert Hughes (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1959) 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁰ Vivian Sobchack, “The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Cinematic and Electronic Presence,” *Technology and Culture: The Film Reader*, Ed. Andrew Utterson (New York: Routledge, 2005) 128.

presence through the continual announcement of its existence.⁶¹ This two-fold perception in a way reflects our own two-fold existence as biological entities and singular identities. This duality gives Sobchack an avenue ultimately to sum up the cinematic experience in physical, fleshly terms, echoing States's discussion of the physiology of the actor. She refers to the cinema as a living body created by the coherence of its images, with the camera, projector and screen as its vital organs.⁶² The projection-as-body takes the idea of perceived presence to a new level, and puts the cinema on the level of live performer. One of the central phenomenological effects of theater, the live presence of the actor, is, for Sobchack, also inherent in the transmission of film.

Besides the presence of the actor, theater scholars like Phelan also cite the unrepeatable nature of the live performance as part of its essence. One might assume, because of the ability to show a film more than once in more or less the same manner, that the viewing experience would remain essentially the same. Most anyone who has ever viewed a film, or the same film more than once, can testify to the fact that one's circumstances play a large part in the viewing experience. Everyone, when choosing something to watch, has been "in the mood" for a particular genre or style. If one were to watch *Miracle on 34th Street* in August, it would not be the same as in December. With the decline of trained projectionists in mainstream theaters and the rise of digital projection, problems with traditional film projection can interfere with an otherwise "normal" cinematic experience. Furthermore, if you see a particular theatrical production more than once, despite it technically being different from time to time, the goal of most actors and directors is to achieve the same product both times. There are, of course, performances that strive to adapt to the audience when and if they involve them in the

⁶¹ Ibid., 135.

⁶² Ibid., 136.

production, but I would wager that the majority of theatrical productions rehearse as much as they do to be able to duplicate the performance as similarly as possible each night.

The distinction between different circumstances and different performances may be the point for Phelan and others. A film is different from viewing to viewing based on the circumstances of the viewer, while a live performance will be, in and of itself, a different product altogether. However, does the audience see this kind of distinction? When I discuss the nature of live performance with introduction to theater students and hear them talk about the potential for a performance to be different each night, they mostly refer to actors forgetting lines or technical elements messing up. If a production is different in dynamic and fascinating ways when compared to the night before, will the audience pick up on that? That would partly depend on whether a viewer saw it more than once, but also whether they were aware of any changes from the night before. Anytime I have attended a Broadway show or tour, any announcements of understudy replacements have elicited some kind of vocal disappointment from at least one person around me. Whether or not they knew the original performer in question, the fact that they are going to see the second-string is disappointing to them. Whether or not they end up being pleasantly surprised at the results, in that moment the viewer may be hostile to the prospect of seeing a different performance than the night before.

My point is that when theater and performance are praised for being unrepeatable and different with every iteration we are not really talking about a true phenomenological effect, rather a characteristic that we identify only in comparison to media or other performances of the same type. If a performance is singular to an audience, it will most likely be due to direct audience involvement, mistakes or disasters involving actors or technicians, or the individual audience member's circumstances. Direct audience involvement is likely something that the

cinema has not and will not duplicate, but the other two factors seem to cross over (if we substitute projectionists for actors and technicians). In that regard, the cinematic experience is just as unrepeatable and singular as a live performance, especially when we take into account the makeup of the audience. Seeing a movie a second time will be a different experience because it will be with a different audience. If I go to see the premiere of a horror movie at a midnight screening it will be different (and probably more enjoyable) than if I saw it at a matinee screening two weeks after its release.

Returning to the idea of temporality and its role in film phenomenology, running time is one of the most obvious differences between the cinema and theater, as a movie has a fixed duration (barring projection problems or a delay) and the performance can fluctuate due to actors or audience response (though this may be less possible with musicals and opera, as one would hope the music would be at the same tempo every night). Even so, this potential difference is also one of the primary shared characteristics between the two forms; they both occupy time in similar ways. Malin Wahlberg devotes his 2003 book *Figures of Time* to the subject of temporality and its phenomenological effects. He distinguishes two types of time in film: narrative time and ocular time, or the time experienced by the viewer. He positions himself in opposition to those who strictly view time within the framework of the semiotic structure of a movie: “Finally, the phenomenon at hand—the figures of time in cinema—can hardly be isolated in terms of narrative structure, or static form. They have to be recognized as created expressions in *statu nascendi*, that is, as events ultimately realized within the encounter between film and

viewer.”⁶³ Just as a performance does not exist unless an audience sees it, so does the phenomenon of cinema remain dormant until presented to viewers.

Film tracks its time in the changes that occur before the viewer, not just in its images but in the projection. Wahlberg writes: “As an image-object in constant change, cinema automatically evokes the event of metamorphosis, a matter that is masked by the fact that transformation is a prerequisite to the moving image.”⁶⁴ This perception of change has a great deal to do with how the human eye notices changes in space and arrangement. Wahlberg cites Jean Mitry as a progression from the work of Bazin that seemed to privilege “realistic” cinema, as someone who links narrative time with the rhythm generated by montage.⁶⁵ Wahlberg notes that cinema takes up a definite unit of space-time, but mentions that this phenomenon is not specific to the cinema. One could assume that the same perception could be applied to live performance, once again linking the two in their arrangement of objects in space over time.

Ultimately, most if not all films are edited in some way. Time is interrupted, hours far apart are brought together, and the whole project, having taken place in the past, is brought to the audience, hurtling endlessly toward the future. In semiotic terms, this serves to tell a story or to relay a message. In phenomenological terms, it is time travel; it is the bending of both space and time. Janet Harbord writes “In these films, editing is primarily a crafting of spatial relations, cleaving open questions of how, in an historical moment in which time is thoroughly traversed

⁶³ Malin Wahlberg, *Figures of Time: On the Phenomenology of Cinema and Temporality* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 2003) 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 106.

and collapsed by technologies of communication, connective relations are forged.”⁶⁶ Anyone who has viewed home movies has had this experience, of being transported to a past moment, and in a way all films do this. They take a performance that has occurred in the past and bring it to the present. For the audience, it is a live experience. I have discussed here several examples in film theory that highlight similarities between performance and film, but those theorists themselves focused on the theater and its potentially close relationship with the cinema in several instances, analyzing the ways in which they engaged audiences and generated meaning.

The Cinema and the Stage

I referenced earlier Eisenstein’s assertion that the theater was hindered in comparison to the cinema because of its physical nature, its need to show inner action through external motion and sound. For Eisenstein, the tension continues into the nature of realism in both art forms. After praising the capacity for cinema to combine emotion and intellect in a rich way, he writes, “This is not a task for the theater. This is a level above the ‘ceiling’ of its possibilities. And when it wishes to leap over the limits of these possibilities it also, no less than literature, has to pay the price of its life-like and realistic qualities.”⁶⁷ When the theater attempts to be as ambitious as the cinema in terms of breadth of emotion and intellect, to Eisenstein this weakens the form because of its reliance on physical manifestation. The theater is limited by what it can physically accomplish, unlike the cinema, which can create impossibilities out of camera and editing tricks.

However, theater’s ambitions are apt challenges for cinema’s potential. He criticizes Paul Fort’s Theatre d’Art for attempting and failing at producing a synthetic theater, leading to

⁶⁶ Janet Harbord, *The Evolution of Film: Rethinking Film Studies* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007) 69.

⁶⁷ Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 186.

“...absurd and superficial excesses.”⁶⁸ In short, Eisenstein sees a problem in the attempts of theater artists to create a unified vision, as this makes things decidedly anti-realistic. The chief synthesis that cinema succeeds in is the unity of sight and sound.⁶⁹ For Eisenstein, the cinema is able to combine sound from sources other than the actor’s mouths, creating a unity of vision, rather than the simple cause and effect of speaking and hearing. Eisenstein’s assertion that sound in the cinema is more unified is potentially problematic, as one would assume that the unity of sight and sound in the performing actor would be more complete than in the projected image and the amplified soundtrack that most likely come from two different directions. However, Eisenstein is more focused on the unity of artistic vision, as a director would likely have more control over the sight and sound in a film than in a theatrical performance where an actor could potentially do and say anything. The real issue here is that of speed and efficiency. It is not that the theater is inherently unable to hold such an artistic unity, but that it has to do so, as Eisenstein noted, through physical means rather than through film projection. No matter how unified and efficient a production might be, it can never match the speed of light.

Other writers have commented on this issue of speed, most notably of which was Antonin Artaud. In his essay “Sorcery and Cinema,” Artaud discusses the potential for each art form to investigate the workings and processes of the mind: “If the cinema isn’t made to express dreams or everything that in waking life has something in common with dreams, then it has no point. Nothing differentiates it from theater. Yet the cinema, a direct and rapid-fire language, has no

⁶⁸ Ibid., 187.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 190.

need of a certain slow and ponderous logic in order to subsist and prosper.”⁷⁰ Siding with the French surrealists, Artaud praises cinema’s tendency to reflect dreams and the subconscious rather than the realistic details of everyday life. This is partially due to Artaud’s belief in language’s degradation and the need for a new way of communication: “The cinema arrives at a turning point in human thought, at the precise moment in which an exhausted language loses its power as a symbol, in which the mind is sick and tired of the play of representations.”⁷¹ Artaud’s answer to the problem of representation is not the actual physical representation inherent in performance, but rather the cinematic representation, which Artaud considers quicker and more direct.

Artaud does address the creation of signs and representation in the cinema that is similar to how States writes about the gestation of images in the theatrical frame. Artaud’s essay infers that cinematic images are created and function in much the same way, having a long-lasting effect upon the viewer.⁷² Objects on screen are able to transcend their usual physical usage and become symbolic in a way that objects on stage, according to Artaud, cannot. While States would later argue that such symbols can and are created within the theater, Artaud is privileging the directness with which the cinema communicates those symbols to the viewer. Because he wants art to appeal to the subconscious, film is a prime candidate because of its dream-like nature: “The kind of virtual power images have goes rummaging in the depths of the mind for

⁷⁰ Antonin Artaud, “Sorcery and Cinema,” *The Shadow and Its Shadow: Surrealist Writings on the Cinema* 3rd ed., Ed. Paul Hammond (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000) 104.

⁷¹ Ibid., 104.

⁷² Ibid., 103.

hitherto unused possibilities. In essence, the cinema reveals a whole occult life, one with which it puts us directly in contact.”⁷³

Bazin does reflect, in “Theater and Cinema—Part Two,” on the necessity of the audience for the theatrical performance in contrast to the relative autonomy of the cinema: “A film calls for a certain effort on my part so that I may understand and enjoy it, but it does not depend on me for its existence.”⁷⁴ This seems to be one of the central differences between the two forms that scholars on either side have been unable to challenge completely. No matter the number of an audience for a film, the projection will still run and appear on the screen. However, this leads one to the classic “if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there to hear it, is there a sound?” dilemma. If a film is projected and no one is there to see it, does it exist? If we think of existence and observation in the vein of Merleau-Ponty, if no one is there to observe the light, is it really being propelled through the air over the empty seats?

This also raises a dilemma for the projection used alongside the live actor. What happens to the audience during the act of projection? Are they aware of or affected by the relative autonomy of the projection, or do they respond to it in similar ways? Do they come to regard the live actor differently when he or she is juxtaposed with the cinematic event? These are questions that I will be raising in later chapters, and the question of the audience’s involvement in the live performance will be a central focus of my discussion of live broadcasts in theatrical spaces in the next chapter. However, we should first note the concerns about the tendencies of acting in both mediums in writings of the period. Notably, Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” recognizes the stage as a site of illusion, while the soundstage is a

⁷³ Ibid., 103-4.

⁷⁴ Bazin, 114.

place where actors present themselves, as they really are, to the camera rather than taking on a character.⁷⁵

This is a strange claim to make in light of some of the previous discussions of illusion and unity in film. Whereas Artaud and others see the speed and efficiency of film in its unified nature, Benjamin sees it in terms of its factory-like production, perhaps commenting on the Hollywood studio system. Still, the claim that film acting is somehow less illusory or character-based than stage acting is puzzling, especially in light of the acting one typically sees at the cinema. However, Benjamin, writing in 1936, may have seen a more realistic psychological style on the stage, while such a trend would not reach the screen until later. As he writes later in the essay, the distinction lies in the placement of the audience during a performance. Because the actor is so divorced from the audience in film acting, Benjamin claims that a strange feeling of separation and transportability overtakes the actors as they realize the consumer implications of their art.⁷⁶ While a survey of contemporary film actors would probably challenge this claim that the market is forefront in their minds, it is a potent reminder that despite the speed and efficiency of film projection, the gap in time and space between the original performance and its technological reconstruction is sizeable.

As we begin to look at contemporary performance trends that represent a hybridization of the cinema and live performance, the questions and claims of these film phenomenologists take on a prescient nature. I have demonstrated that the fantastic nature of film reflects the “magic” of live performance, and the early focus on projection over content foregrounds some of the

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, Trans. Suhrkamp Verlag (1955), Rpt. In *Technology and Culture: The Film Reader*,” Ed. Andrew Utterson (New York: Routledge, 2005) 113.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 113.

similarities that the cinema holds with live theater, similarities that later theorists expound upon. Temporality, presence, and the dialectical nature of film projection all challenge the assumptions about film made by performance theorists. The dream space of the movie house, with its sorcery and illusion, becomes the theater in cases where the live actor interacts or confronts the technological projection. Whether it is through montage and film language or the simple transmission of light onto a screen, the film projection retains its strange kinship with live theater in phenomenological terms. As we look at instances in which performances are beamed to numerous locations at the instance of their live enactment, we find that time and space become less distinct, and the “rapid-fire language” of film projection both enhances and challenges our basic assumptions about live performance.

CHAPTER THREE: COMING TO A THEATER NEAR YOU

On two Saturdays in November 2008, I went to my local movie theater. I bought my ticket, got a drink, and then sat down to watch the opera. On the screen, my fellow audience members and I could see other audience members, 1,360 miles away, finding their seats as well. Images of the opera flashed on screen with a minute-by-minute countdown to the start of the show. The moment arrived, and a woman appeared on screen, welcoming us to the Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center in New York City. The conductor took his place in the orchestra, and the overture began. We heard it play at roughly the same time as those other people 1,360 miles away did. At another location, roughly 920 miles away from us, and roughly 1,214 miles away from the Metropolitan Opera, another set of audience members heard the music play at roughly the same time. This also occurred at numerous other locations not only in the United States but in other countries as well. We all sat in our respective theaters watching a single stage. We saw the same performances and heard the same music as those people 1,360 miles away. But did we see the same opera? Were these installments of *The Metropolitan Opera: Live in HD*¹, in fact, opera at all?

Experiences such as this one have become more commonplace within the last few years and have extended beyond opera to include dramatic and musical theater, as well as televisual events that blend journalism and mediatized town halls. While the content of each broadcast varies, the key components of the events remain the same: a live broadcast taking place in front of theatrical audiences in locations across the country. One of the central characteristics of the live performance, the presence of the audience, becomes problematic as the broadcasts unite multiple audiences physically disconnected from one another and the artists involved. In some of

¹ “2011-12 Live in HD Season,” *The Metropolitan Opera*, 5 February 2012, <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/liveinhd/LiveinHD.aspx>.

these cases like the Globe series, the broadcast itself is not a live one other than in the sense of the live simultaneous act of projection within the theater; in these instances it is a prerecorded event which nonetheless takes on a live component when the audience is assembled. In the case of live broadcasts, the performances often occur in front of physically present audiences of their own, so there is a dual audience dynamic, in which a performance is being constructed simultaneously in both a traditional way and in a cinematic or televisual way for the broadcast audience. In addition, the producing organizations advertise the theatrical experience and, in many cases, the liveness of the broadcast, emphasizing the phenomenology of the event in an attempt to attract audiences through the cultural cachet of liveness, whether such a claim is accurate or not.

These broadcasts call into question the nature of a performance's audience. Where exactly is the audience located? Does the knowledge that another audience is watching their performance at another location affect the actors in some way? How is the performance constructed for the benefit or exclusion of either audience? As I will explain later, there is a phenomenological contrast between a live broadcast in cinemas and a pre-recorded one. The audience is aware of the distinction, particularly when the "liveness" of a broadcast is interrupted and the audience is in danger of missing something that is happening live at another location. The price of tickets also distinguishes the live and the prerecorded broadcasts, while both are differentiated from conventional cinematic experiences through the exclusivity or specialty nature of the events. In these live and prerecorded theatrical broadcasts, both audience and performer are engaged in a disjunctive relationship with no clear avenue of transmission. The broadcasts both sever and reconstruct the seemingly direct contact between the two through the expectations and realities of simultaneous digital transmission. As hybrid performances, these

cinematic broadcasts highlight the liveness of projection when coupled with a synchronicity constructed by conventions of performance.

In this chapter I will examine the ways in which both the *Live in HD* series from the Metropolitan Opera and the *Shakespeare's Globe* series, representing live broadcasts and prerecorded transmissions respectively, attract audiences by emphasizing certain phenomenological characteristics of live performance. Though media and live performers are not present at the same time in the same physical space as with most other hybrid performances, the presentation of cinema as a live event problematizes the traditional performance/media binary in much the same way. I will look at each cinema event in light of liveness and phenomenology, and then look at their implications for theories of audience dynamics. The appeal to theatrical experience by the producing companies reveals one of the dominant perceptions of live performance at work in society today, and these hybrid performances demonstrate that this perception is phenomenological rather than based in content. I will argue that the branding of these live cinema events as “live” troubles the appeal of the live physical performance as it claims the equivalency of a mediatized replacement.

Liveness Revisited

In looking at the nature of “liveness” within the cinematic broadcast events, it is useful to turn to one of Auslander’s main concerns: television. Auslander feels that television is one of the theater’s most closely related kin in the world of media, and the live broadcasts tend to resemble television rather than resembling films. Even though the Internet may also traffic in “liveness,” the nature of live interaction on the web does not deal in concepts of presence and temporality in

the way television does, as Auslander notes in his updated, second edition of *Liveness*.² In looking at the opera broadcasts created by the Metropolitan Opera, the *Live in HD* series capitalizes on some of television's essential phenomenological qualities in the way that television itself did in its early days. This also relates to the potentially diminished place of opera in the spectrum of popular entertainment. In the introduction to his book, Auslander acknowledges the encroachment of mediatized forms onto the turf of live performance, and in turn questions the backlash from those who value live performance. While it had been different in the past, live performance has somehow gained the reputation of being on the fringe of culture, always bucking against the system and refusing to be restrained by technology. Opera, on the other hand, has not had that reputation, often seeming to be conventional in its historicity and classical nature. Could it be then that opera is the perfect candidate for mediatization? The answer is not so easy, because there is still the liveness to contend with.

Through Auslander's analysis one can see connections between the cinema broadcasts and television. He writes in his second chapter:

Television's intimacy was seen as a function of its immediacy—the close proximity of view to event that it enables—and the fact that events from outside are transmitted into the viewer's home. ... The position of the television viewer relative to the image on the screen was often compared with that of a boxing fan sitting ring side or a theatre-goer with the best seat in the house.³

The camerawork in the broadcasts, giving the viewer access to angles and details that they could not hope to see for the same priced-ticket in the real opera house, is similar to the early appeal of

² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Second Ed., (New York: Routledge, 2008) 62. In it he writes: "It may be that we are at a point at which liveness can no longer be defined in terms of either the presence of living human beings before each other or physical and temporal relationships. The emerging definition of liveness may be built primarily around the audience's affective experience."

³ Auslander, *Liveness* (1999), 16.

television that Auslander outlines. Television, in its early days, was described more in theatrical terms rather than cinematically. The set-up of the cameras, the live studio audience, and the fact that, at least in the early days, it was coming to the viewer live, were all part of the appeal of television, which strongly resembled the theatrical experience. The Met clearly wants to make the liveness part of the appeal of the broadcast experience, hence the title of the series: “Live in HD.” In this rationale, part of the “liveness” of a televisual or cinematic event is the proximity to the event that the camerawork and projection brings to the audience. As I discussed with cinema’s ability to focus on objects and contextualize them like the theater frames objects, proximity reconfigures the context of the audience’s point of view to allow it previously unforeseen vantage points within the live performance. In addition, it is also coming to the viewer in high definition, making the images more “accurate” representations of the original performance.

However, the broadcasts are clearly not television programs, at least not the experience of watching them. The experience of going to the movie theater and watching them live does indulge in certain characteristics of television, but the theater setup, with an audience and auditorium, mimics the theatrical experience. By producing these broadcasts for movie theaters, the Met and other companies privilege the theatrical experience over the televisual, by acknowledging that an audience in a theater is the way to see the events, whether they are televised or not. The experience is not just seen as essential to viewing opera, but also as more enjoyable than watching on television or listening on radio. As Chris Waddington of *The Times-Picayune* admits, “These HD broadcasts won’t replace the thrill of hearing an un-amplified human voice fill a hall at a live performance. Still, the theatrical high-def experience is a lot

more fun than watching a DVD at home.”⁴ Waddington’s comments reflect a preference for one mediatized experience over another, though he does not seem to realize how much mediatization through amplification seems to occur in live performances. While finding previous success with its radio and television broadcasts, these organizations use mediatization to expand their audience while at the same time cashing in on the cultural capital of liveness and the phenomenological experience of viewing with an audience.

Proximity and cinematic context, however, pale in comparison to the emphasis placed on the synchronicity of the cinematic experience with the live performance. The advertising for the events make it clear that the event is coming live from New York City or whichever other location the performance is based in. In rare occasions, usually in simulated symposia promoted through broadcast distributor Fathom Events⁵, performers or speakers from multiple locations are linked live through the broadcast and then beamed all over the country. Thus, the broadcasts bring together not only audience members but artists as well. In all of these instances, the companies promote the liveness of the event, and an implied and assumed quality of theater is reappropriated for mediatized entertainment. As Auslander noted, this was common practice in the early days of television, but it is rare in the case of the cinema. However, the only liveness being promoted in the projected performances is in its televisual nature rather than the phenomenological effects of the projections themselves. At most, the “HD” nature of the projections is meant to refer to the detail and quality of the projections in their resemblance to the live event.

⁴ Chris Waddington, "The Palace Opera: Local movie theaters will put live performance on the big screen," *The Times-Picayune*, 11 Oct. 2008.

⁵ “Fathom Events- Upcoming Events,” *NCM Fathom*, 5 February 2012
<http://www.fathomevents.com/upcoming/>.

The emphasis on the liveness of the event in relation to the premier performance going on in New York City is meant to increase the event's cultural cachet, something that is also indicated by the prices for the tickets. At my local cinema, where an adult evening ticket usually costs around nine dollars, tickets for the Met broadcast cost twenty-two dollars. As the average theater ticket often costs much more than the average movie ticket, the increase in price for these events makes them seem more exclusive than a usual trip to the cinema. However, in terms of the cost of viewing an opera at the Met, the price becomes quite the bargain. While the Met does offer some twenty-five dollar tickets in its "Family Circle," some of which are partial view, most tickets range from eighty to \$120, with the most expensive reaching prices of \$430.⁶ The ticket to one of the Met broadcasts is much cheaper than an average ticket at the Met and most large-scale opera companies. Some smaller companies may offer tickets cheaper than that, but the prestige of the Met and the caliber of its performers can make the twenty-two dollar price very enticing, especially for opera aficionados.

The Met capitalizes on this benefit in their advertising campaign, with some posters carrying the slogan: "Your ticket to the Met." This in turn plays on the cultural capital involved in having a ticket that would normally be available only to the rich. Those not living in New York City and those who do not have the money for a normal ticket are now given a chance to be a part of an insider event. With the Globe broadcast series, the bargain becomes considerably greater as it purports to give you access to an event you could normally only see in London. However, seeing as the Globe series is prerecorded rather than live, its televisual nature is problematized (as I will discuss later), making the price more about the theatrical surroundings

⁶ "How to Order Single Tickets," *The Metropolitan Opera*, 5 February 2012, http://www.metoperafamily.org/uploadedFiles/MetOpera/season_and_tickets/subscriptions/2011-12/singletickets_form.pdf.

rather than exclusive access to a live event happening far away. The event's theatricality, though, makes it an exclusive event, as you only have one evening on which you can experience that recording in those surroundings.

The liveness and the exclusivity of the events promote the Met and Globe series as products of high culture that are now available to patrons through a lower cultural venue. The theory behind power relationships in cultural production has been well established by Pierre Bourdieu in works like "The Production of Belief," in which he writes, "...it is the field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated."⁷ The producer generates the power of the broadcasts, especially in the case of the Met. By advertising it as "live," they tap into the cultural power that the format of performance generates by its very nature. It is co-opting the phenomenology of performance to advertise a mediatized event. This is not to say it is a lie, as the projected experience is a live one, but it has another level of liveness in that it is being broadcast simultaneously from New York as the production is happening. This sense of liveness consecrates the event as exclusive, and gives it a certain cultural power, the feeling that it is beyond the reach of everyone, only open to certain audiences at certain times even if it is far more accessible than the actual event.

Other types of performances and public events use televisuality and live simulcasting to achieve a similar effect of liveness, but with less exclusivity. For instance, audiences at professional (or sometimes college, depending on the size and funding) sporting events often see the action on the field on jumbotron screens at the same time it is occurring, and also in instant

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, Ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 78.

replays, allowing those far away from the field or court to see a particular play more closely than they are physically able to. The same technique is used at popular music concerts, often in large arenas, to allow viewers farther away the chance to see the band or singer's expressions. The musician performs alongside the projected representation of their likeness, both simultaneously engaging the audience in a performative relationship. The audience is aware of the connection between the real and the virtual, as they can see both happening at once.

Matthew Causey describes the relationship between the two performances as a fracturing of the subject.⁸ In such uses of jumbotron screens and simultaneous projection within the performance space, it would seem that the subject is in multiple locations at once, while not being entirely perceptible in a clear way to all of the crowd at once. However, in the case of the theatrical broadcasts, the original performer is not physically present with the cinema audience, and so the virtual representation constitutes the entire experience. Live television, along with online simulcasts, could also be said to function in much the same way, and it does manage to create the sense of a communal audience all witnessing the same live event, such as important political events, or even the final episode of a popular television program, as noted by media historian Jerome Bourdon.⁹ However, that communal audience is also virtual, and the theatrical broadcasts establish a real audience along with a virtual audience of viewers linked across the country to the physically present audience at the performance site. Though they are not able to see physical proof that the performance is really happening at the same time, as one would have

⁸ Matthew Causey, "The Screen Test of the Double: The Uncanny Performer in the Space of Technology," *Theatre Journal* 51.4 (1999) 390.

⁹ Jerome Bourdon, "Some Sense of Time: Remembering Television," *History & Memory* 15.2 (2003) 6.

with a rock concert that featured jumbotron screens, the audience believes it is live because they are told so, and this feeling permeates the phenomenology of the event.

Because of the emphasis on liveness, in the case of the Met broadcasts the attempt to replicate the theatrical performance in a movie theater raises a number of issues. On one hand the events are doing many of the same things as a live television broadcast. The presence of the projection in a movie theater contributes to the theatrical replication, but the dynamic of the shared but disconnected audience engaged in the viewing of media is decidedly televisual. On the other hand, asserting that a projected image can replicate the live performance emphasizes the phenomenological experience of watching a projection as something akin to the original event. The Met hopes to draw people to movie theatres because of the appeal of its live performances, but in a way it may be devaluing the live event by claiming the mediatized version is a decent substitute. In either case, the theatrical experience of watching the broadcast has its own set of phenomenological experiences, no matter what the status of the images projected. In the following pages I will be analyzing the experience of watching these broadcasts, both live and prerecorded, in an attempt to look at how the theatrical setting frames the phenomenology of projection. When placed in the context of a “live” broadcast event, the experience of being part of an audience takes on a different kind of importance in relation to the performers and raises a central question: is either the audience or the performer more essential in the live performance?

Live in HD

The experience of going to one of the opera broadcasts reveals several instances of the privileging of liveness and its engagement with mediatized forms. One of the most central issues is that of audience expectation. What should people who go to one of the broadcasts prepare themselves for? Are there different standards of decorum than that of a movie? Based on my

experiences, it seems that audience members are aware of the liveness of the performance, but take advantage of the live-but-not-live atmosphere. While many would show respect in a live performance by observing any rules the theater had regarding food and drink, broadcast viewers take advantage of the snack bar before the show and during intermission and take the food and drink inside the theater during the performance. While this may seem like a surface observation, it is a good introduction to the kind of audience atmosphere created by the transmissions and their location. Immediately, there is a disconnect between audience and performer, as the audience seems to be preparing for a cinematic event rather than a live (contemporary) theatrical one.¹⁰

Today, the audience conventions for a cinematic event mirror many of the conventions of live theater. Audience members are expected to remain silent during both movies and plays, with their whole attention fixed upon the performance. In the last decade, they have been asked to put away their cellular phones and other electronic devices for the duration of the event so as not to disturb other audience members or the performers, in the case of live theater. In both situations, the audience is in the dark while the performers are illuminated (or are illumination), an innovation of the 19th century which is said to have led to the rise of the passive audience, rather than the active audience of previous centuries.¹¹ In the early days of film, audiences at nickelodeons were asked to observe proper theater etiquette and to refrain from loud talking or

¹⁰ Audience behavior at a contemporary theatrical event mirrors much of the conventions of film audiences, though this trend for live theatre is a relatively recent one. For a look at changing audience conventions, see: Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre, Ninth Edition*, (New York: Allyn and Bacon, 2003) 366.

whistling.¹² The crossing of performance into the cinema in this instance does not require a drastic change in audience behavior, as cinemagoers are used to behaving as if they were in a contemporary theater. If one side is experiencing a sea change of audience behavior, it is the live theater, whose artists must appeal and contend with a crowd that is used to being stranded on one side of a temporal and spatial divide from the performers. The parallel sets of etiquette serve to ready the audience for the meeting of performance and media, though there are still differences that arise when the audience arrives without the expectation of encountering the performer.

For instance, no one shows up to the broadcasts dressed particularly fancy; no one wore a tuxedo or evening gown. In the lobby, both the opera attendees and conventional moviegoers share the same space, and it can be difficult to tell the two apart, aside from certain demographic differences. While the average movie audience is decidedly younger in its composition, the opera audience is much like the typical elderly Baton Rouge theater audience. I was the youngest in the audience, by far, in both my experiences, though the rest of the audience members were not necessarily all receiving senior citizen discounts. There is a generally relaxed atmosphere compared to the anticipation that sometimes accompanies a live performance, but that does not mean the viewers were expecting an experience somehow inferior to that of a live performance. In other words, these opera aficionados did not suffer fools gladly just because they were not at the *real* Met. They believed in the consecration provided by the event's "liveness."

In my first experience at the broadcast of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic* on November 8, 2008, the pre-show countdown ended and the broadcast began, but due to a mix-up in the projection room, we were soon treated to trailers for horror movies like *Saw V* superimposed on the broadcast images. The appearance of the Jigsaw killer at the Lincoln Center was shocking, to

¹² David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) 92.

say the least, and panic soon set in. The resounding disgust was incredibly vocal, and soon numerous people were dispatched to the manager to complain. The problem was soon corrected, though the parts of the broadcast that had already been shown were irretrievable, a disappointment for opera fans who were eager for the Met experience. The anger at the mishap was so apparent that after the broadcast each viewer was compensated with two free passes to either future movies or opera broadcasts. In this case the effect of the “liveness” was palpable, as there was no potential for simply rewinding the opera and seeing what we had missed. The lost images were gone forever, or at least until the encore broadcast in the middle of the following week.

This was not the only time the opera audience encountered a cinema staff that was unfamiliar with the expectations of its operatic audiences. In my second experience, the broadcast of Berlioz’s *La Damnation de Faust* on November 22, 2008, the lights came on in the theater at intermission but were not turned off again once the second act began. I decided to go ask the manager to turn them off, and when I returned to the theater the lights were being dimmed. As I made my way to my seat I felt a general wave of relief and heard a chorus of whispered thanks as well as a few handshakes of appreciation after the broadcast had ended. The movie theater I attended is notorious for projection room mishaps and managerial mistakes, and it was not the first time that I had to speak to them regarding my movie going experience. This time was different; there was a distinct feeling of audience community. This feeling accompanied a realization that while we were being privy to the prestige and professionalism of the Met, we were on our own, left to work out our own experience while those directly responsible for the broadcast at the Met were oblivious to our plight. In this instance the audience and myself took on a more active role in the creation of our theatrical experience,

attempting to perfect the overall phenomenological experience that the cinematic setting might provide, especially considering the increased price we were paying to attend the cinema.¹³

The phenomenology of the events, however, is not simply produced by the audience's surroundings, but by the projection. Considering the views on projection outlined in the last chapter, it would seem that by broadcasting a live theatrical performance some of the general effect of a live performance would be reproduced in some way. However, the context of a movie theater seems to influence the content of the transmission. One issue is raised by the camerawork done for each broadcast. One might expect a panoramic shot of the stage, simply showing the viewer what is seen by the average audience member. While there are some panoramic shots throughout each broadcast, they are vastly outnumbered by the number of close-ups and zooms. Such camerawork blurs the line between cinema and performance, altering the view that an audience member usually has and limiting their ability to choose what to focus on. In the broadcast, the "Director of Live Cinema"¹⁴ chooses what the focus will be and in turn makes artistic decisions quite different than those of the stage director. Some critics have decried the damage this seems to do to the art form of opera in its transformation into a mediatized form. In a special issue of *The Opera Quarterly* on opera and media, Melina Esse writes "Getting up close and personal, in other words, is antithetical to the work of opera as fantasy. These critiques

¹³ This is not to say that other cinematic experiences do not need the same kind of vigilance and care, as is advocated here: Roger Ebert, "Why I'm So Conservative," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 6 February 2012, http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2008/10/why_im_so_conservative.html.

¹⁴ The cinematic director of many of these broadcasts is Gary Halvorson, an Emmy-nominated television director who is also Julliard-educated. He is mostly known for his work in television sitcoms like *Friends*. See: "Gary Halvorson," *IMDb*, 5 February 2012, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0357143/>.

confer a special status on live opera, cordoning it off from the commercial pandering to short attention spans represented by cuts and close-ups.”¹⁵

The Met considers close-ups to be a way to increase the immediacy and intimacy of the performance for the broadcast viewer. As it states in the program guide: “Nothing compares to the immediacy and power of a live Met performance in the opera house. But with a dozen HD cameras to capture the action (many of them robotic and on dollies to provide previously unseen angles) and multi-channel surround-sound audio, the HD transmissions may be the next best thing.”¹⁶ The mediatization provides a clearer image and possibly better sound that one would get at the Met itself, but the advertising must still code the broadcast as inferior to the live physical performance. The closeness to the performer provided by the filmed image echoes Bazin’s thoughts about artificial proximity and its relationship to live presence. Rather than trying to mimic the position of the audience member at the live performance, the broadcast creates its own phenomenological experience that plays to cinema’s strengths.

The broadcast also contains exclusive content. For instance, in the transmission of *Doctor Atomic*, a contemporary opera concerning Oppenheimer and the creation of the atomic bomb, the Met produced a documentary to be aired at intermission about the Manhattan Project. Also, during intermission in both *Atomic* and *La Damnation de Faust*, the cameras followed the actors as they went backstage, where other notable opera singers (not appearing in that particular production) interviewed them. The cameras also showed backstage shots periodically between acts and before the show of the stage manager and other backstage crew members readying

¹⁵ Melina Esse, “Don’t Look Now: Opera, Liveness, and the Televisual” *The Opera Quarterly* 26.1 (2010) 70.

¹⁶ “2008-09 HD Program Guide.” (New York: Metropolitan Opera, 2008), 3.

scenery or running the cues. Such shots are aimed at furthering that sense of intimacy and immediacy established by the tighter focused shots during the performance. At the end of the show, the viewer gets a sense of what it is like for the performers, as the camera looks out at the audience during the curtain call to show the applauding patrons. It is during this last moment that the presence of the audience in New York is made most apparent, and the audiences in movie theatres around the country are invited to join them in one massive communal moment. In the screenings I went to, there was scattered applause at the end of each production.

In the resulting artistic form, aspects of both cinema and live performance are present, showing the Met's use of mediatized forms. The end of the program featured credits like that of a traditional movie. The camera angles and shots seem to indicate a cinematic style. However, at some instances, a performance experience was clearly the objective. During a few shots, you can see the heads of audience members watching the performance in New York, giving the viewer the visual experience they would have seeing it live. Some audience members in the movie theater seemed to regard the broadcast as a type of performance. However, some took advantage of the absence of performers by talking more loudly to each other than they would at a live performance, for a moment violating traditional audience etiquette for live performance. While one would hope audience members would not talk loudly during a film, there is a greater expectation for audience silence (save gasping and laughter) during a live performance due to the presence of the actors.¹⁷

In this melding of cinema and performance, does one impinge upon the other? With such close camera angles, despite the intimacy it gives, something may be missed. In some instances,

¹⁷ In a way this is a reversal of previous audience behaviors, as audiences talking during a performance is a feature of previous centuries in the theatre, but is not a primary characteristic of early film audiences.

the cinema director and the producing organization may censor a broadcast to remove content that would be possibly be less acceptable to movie audiences in other parts of the country than for a live audience in New York City. During a broadcast of Richard Strauss's *Salome*¹⁸, the title character began her dance of the seven veils. As the opera is traditionally performed, she is nude at the end of the dance, having cast off her veils. However, during the broadcast, as the last veil was dropped, the camera cut away to the reaction of another character, thus, in a way, censoring the scene for its worldwide audience. However, even if potentially objectionable content is not the issue, there is the chance that any kind of filmic representation involves editing out some portions of the performance. In an article on space and time in the broadcasts, music historian Emanuele Senici writes "It should be clear that there could be no less 'objective' choice than that of a fixed-position camera. Videos—even those made with only one fixed-position camera—create spaces and rhythms no matter what, and in so doing choose among parameters—they highlight, hide, confuse, clarify, promote, demote, ignore, contradict, and so on. They simply cannot help it."¹⁹ For Senici, no matter what kind of camera angles the director of live cinema may employ, transmission through a camera will always change the nature and content of a production.

Despite the muddying of the medium, the synthesis of media and live performance becomes a unique experience that has numerous supporters, though they may not necessarily believe it compares to a live performance. This is something that the Met has taken lengths to express as well. In its program guide, the Met says that the new form has given rise to a new kind

¹⁸ "Salome," *The Metropolitan Opera*, 5 February 2012, <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/season/production.aspx?id=10054>.

¹⁹ Emanuele Senici, "Porn Style? Space and Time in Live Opera Videos," *The Opera Quarterly* 26.1 (2010) 70.

of patron: “But in the past two years, a new kind of opera devotee has emerged: the ‘Live in HD’ addict, for whom the ‘new art form’ (as the *Los Angeles Times* calls it) of live Met performances shown in movie theaters is an irresistible sensory experience.”²⁰ With this, the Met acknowledges the need to attract and please aficionados as well as new audience members, and tries to classify a new kind of fan in the process. By referring to the broadcasts as a new art form, it classifies its patrons not as stalwart supporters of opera but as hip consumers on the cutting edge of entertainment, and classifies itself as the pioneer of such innovative approaches to mediatised performance. By emphasizing the “sensory experience,” it is pinpointing the unique set of phenomenological qualities produced by the broadcasts, consisting of a virtual audience, proximity through cinematography, and naturally the phenomenology of film projection as the medium of transmission.

The Met emphasizes, as do others, that the broadcast does not replace the live performance. This may raise the question: why should the Met, which has a solid reputation built on over a century of live performance, bother with such a medium? In addition to the aforementioned economic and marketing strategies, the broadcasts can also serve as a good companion to or visual record of the performances. In fact, those that attend the broadcasts without expecting them to be a replacement for the live may enjoy them better. However, the broadcasts could still raise doubts and fears in the minds of those who think that media has been encroaching upon live performance, and may have the ability to replace it. In an article on video recordings of operas, Christopher Morris writes, “In this sense, the term ‘media technology’ constitutes a double threat to the traditional humanism evident in so much scholarship on theater and performance: not only does it threaten as a machine but its explicit function is to (re)mediate,

²⁰ “2008-09 HD Program Guide,” 4.

raising the specter of dispersal, of distribution, of blurred boundaries—of *transmission*.²¹ Does the Met's strategy have the potential to backfire and replace the live performance altogether? Are audiences attracted to the notion that the performance is going on somewhere at the same time, or do they just want to see it regardless of when it was performed? The Met seems to think so, as they are appealing to viewers on the basis of liveness, using this phenomenological distinction to brand this new form, a link directly back to the original performance that the cinematic experience cannot replace.

In looking at other broadcasts that are prerecorded rather than live, we will be getting to the heart of whether synchronicity is the creator of the liveness of a broadcast transmission. The differences between live broadcasts and prerecorded theatrical events will highlight the liveness of both the transmissions and the theatrical experience, challenging the assumption that a live experience is solely the domain of the physical performance. With the Globe series of cinematic events, the live transmission from the original performance site is not the reality, but the virtual position of the cinema audience as part of that original audience is part of the draw of the exclusive event. In this case, the virtual audience is not only bridged across great distances, but also across gaps in time.

The Globe on Screen

The *Shakespeare's Globe London Cinema Series* features prerecorded productions originally performed at the reproduction of the Globe in London, all plays by Shakespeare rather than any other playwrights occasionally featured at the theater.²² The legacy of Shakespeare and his work at the original Globe is a primary emphasis of the broadcasts and a clear selling point in

²¹ Christopher Morris, "Digital Diva: Opera on Video," *The Opera Quarterly* 26.1 (2010) 115.

²² "Theatre- On Screen," *Shakespeare's Globe*, 5 February 2012, <http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/theatre/on-film>.

promoting the series across the world, particularly in America because of the cultural cachet the name of Shakespeare brings. The plays featured in the series in the summer of 2011 were *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry IV* (both parts), and *Henry VIII*, with the Globe counting on its own reputation to attract seasoned theater audiences who would leap at the chance to see work from the company. The productions themselves were performed live in 2010, and the recordings were broadcast a year later. These broadcasts were still exclusive in that they only took place on one evening rather than being repeated like a traditional movie, but still differed from the exclusivity of the Met broadcasts. Because of the time difference between America and London, live broadcasts would be inconvenient unless they were performed earlier than usual at the original site, but to do so would likely lose one of the key features of the recordings: the presence of the audience at the original performance site.

It is curious that the original audience would play in to the recordings so much considering the feel of the event upon first arrival. When arriving at the broadcasts for the Met, I observed a live feed of the audience in New York waiting for the performance. I waited as they waited, and a sense of community was developed. However, with the Globe series the broadcast/projection did not begin until the scheduled show time. In a way this was like any other movie I had seen at the theater. There was no preliminary content prior to the performance. I simply waited in the dimly lit theater for the show to begin, along with the few other audience members. These early moments emphasize the non-liveness of the event, particularly in comparison to the Met series. There was no ongoing event that we were tapping into; rather, we were simply waiting for the appropriate time for the projector to be switched on by an attendant in the projection booth. The event was clearly defined by the cinema operators, not by the

original theater artists and promoters. If a horror movie villain were to be superimposed onto the Globe's stage, there would be no danger of being unable to review the footage that was lost.

The ultimate control over the broadcast is given over to National CineMedia, a corporation that produces advertising content for movie theaters across the country. Its original entertainment arm, NCM Fathom, is in charge of the various "cinema events," including the Met series and the Globe series as well as similar programs by the National Theatre in London and occasional Broadway productions. Fathom even helps facilitate the use of movie theaters by church groups. Fathom's website details a company mission that focuses on exclusivity and profitability: "Fathom is a compelling and valuable entertainment experience -- high-quality entertainment shown in a convenient, comfortable and cost-effective environment."²³ From this description, the events are seen as separate from normal cinematic showcases, something they emphasize later in addressing audience expectations in their curious online FAQs: "Since Fathom events aren't movies, feel free to act like you are actually at the event--applaud, dance, sing!"²⁴ I mentioned scattered applause at the Met series, and also witnessed the same at the Globe series, and it would seem that the applause, which is absent from the end of most movies, is a holdover from the theatrical conventions that the audience has in mind when viewing the event. They know the performers cannot hear them, but because applause is the customary end to a play or opera, they engage in that behavior.

As with the informative introductions before the opera and during its intermission, the Globe series also contains brief histories of the play and the Globe, as well as interviews from some of the actors, the director, and some of the staff members of the reconstructed Globe. The

²³ "Fathom Events- FAQs," *NCM Fathom*, 27 Sept. 2011, <http://www.fathomevents.com/faq/>.

²⁴ "Fathom Events- FAQs."

video segments talk about the original Globe as well as the efforts to rebuild it, and then go into the current programs and initiatives seen at the theater. Some background on the play is given, and the artists give their perspectives, and it is during this portion that some clips from the production are shown. As a viewer, this practice was a bit of a problem, even though the clips could be seen as a kind of teaser trailer before the feature presentation. However, the main effect of seeing these previews was to undercut the liveness and exclusivity of the event. With the live opera, with the exception of the history of the Manhattan Project in *Doctor Atomic*, all of the backstage segments and interviews were part of the live experience. With the Globe mini-documentaries, seeing clips of the performance we were about to see was a major reminder that what we were about to see was essentially a video recording, able to be shown and repeated in any location at any time. The contextual effect of the mini-documentaries also framed the performance as part of a larger documentary, so that seeing it was less of a performance than viewing part of a video archive. Seeing as the original performances occurred in summer of 2010 and the broadcasts were presented in the fall of 2011, this assessment is not far off.

This documentary feel culminates in the feeling that the Globe series is meant to promote the reconstructed Globe for tourism and patronage. The artists and administrators interviewed in the segments were repeatedly emphasizing the experience of watching *Henry IV* in its original location. Broadcast audiences are encouraged to come and see the Globe for themselves (as well as their new Blackfriars reconstruction opening in 2013). Instead of privileging the experience of watching the broadcast, the documentary segments foreground the original performance space, both as the historical context of Shakespeare's original productions as well as the proper space in which to view their production of *Henry IV*. The theater artists emphasize the energy of the audience as felt by the actors, as well as the bond created in the mutually shared physical space.

Though they do indicate the current cinema audience as part of the collective audience of the production, there is no shared communion between the audience and artists in London and those in America and elsewhere. One of the artists refers to the audience as a character in its own right, but there is no indication that the cinema audience is a part of that character.

The broadcast's foregrounding of the original London audience extends into the content of the recording, where the groundlings and even those in the stalls are on full display. Because of the circular nature of the building and the audience members standing so close to the stage, cropping them out of the frame is often impossible when wider shots are desired. However, in certain portions of the play the actors interact with the audience. Again, the cinema audience is not a part of this interaction, only the original London audience. In one particular scene when the action of the play moves to the countryside, the change of scenery involves characters and animals entering through the audience; the on-site viewers react as the performers enter their midst. There is obviously no feasible way of recreating this for the vast cinema audience, but it is another element of being an audience member at the Globe that the broadcast series cannot faithfully recreate. All of these elements contribute toward this central idea: being in the movie theater is nothing like being at the Globe. This is an obvious point, but rather than try to seamlessly unite the two audiences as the Met series often does, the Globe series constantly reminds the cinema audience that their experience is an inferior one. Part of this is due to the difference in location, but the non-live recorded nature of the broadcast is also responsible for this effect. While the Met series often uses technology to its advantage in making its content shine, the Globe series in many ways resembles sitting down in a classroom to watch an educational video, an experience that is decidedly untheatrical.

In a way, rather than being a part of that original audience, we are watching their experience minus a few conventions. An intermission is skipped, as are lengthier scene changes, so all of a sudden new scenery appears fully formed on the screen. About halfway through the screening, we notice that some seats in the stalls are empty, indicating a departure of certain audience members at intermission. We hear the audience react, laughing and applauding, as no attempt is made to edit out their responses as with the Met broadcasts (though one would assume an audience in the Globe is a bit more responsive than an audience at the Met). In terms of the content and editing, there are numerous close-ups, as with the Met, and there are naturally things left out of the frame. However, as there is less scenic grandeur than an opera and more intimate character moments, I do not feel as if I missed as much. In fact, one of the people interviewed in the mini-documentary segments talks about the ways in which Shakespeare uses language to frame his characters in “widescreen” and “close-ups.” This marriage of narrative context and editorial framing in a way makes the Globe broadcast more like a conventional Hollywood film, creating “star moments” during particularly notable monologues and famous lines, such as in the “chimes at midnight” scene.

The resulting content seems to exist somewhere between a telecast and a documentary archive feature, with a tension between the potential target audiences: a casual viewing audience interested in seeing a replica of the show and theater artists interested in preserving the original performance for future artists and scholars. On a spectrum between archival videos and performances recorded to be films in their own right, the Globe series exists somewhere safely in the middle. As pieces of cinema, they are lacking in polish and filmic artistry, while as projected performances they seem to lack some of the phenomenological qualities generated by the liveness of the Met series. While the Globe’s *Henry IV* on screen produces its own set of

phenomenological qualities produced by the method of its transmission, it also represents a less direct complication of the dichotomy of live versus mediatized performance because it is prerecorded. As Christopher Morris writes, “Video, too, carries a memory and a promise: a commodity, it is both an inert object and one that, with intervention, can be transformed into an event. Or it can sit on a shelf, the sight of its packaging triggering a memory of a past engagement or the promise of a future one.”²⁵ The Globe series seems to be made up of video recordings that NCM Fathom transforms into events. However, because of the lack of “liveness” and the archival nature of the content, the events may fail to attain the status of cinema or live performance.

In contrast to the Met series, the Globe series may not prove a powerful example of the tenuous distinction between performance and media, but it can still serve as a reminder of the precarious position of mediatized performances within our spectrum of theater. Moreover, the differences between the two highlight the problems with trying to establish ontological differences in similar media types. At their most basic level, the Met series and the Globe series are the same: they are both projections presented in front of an audience at a movie theater. However, the differences that I have assigned to them throughout this chapter thus far are located solely in the domain of the audience and their preconceived notions about the format. The way that the audiences encodes and decodes their own experience creates the phenomenological effect of liveness or not-liveness.

A prior knowledge of the Met series as live broadcasts produces the phenomenological effect of liveness within the viewer, and the Met has reasons (like its appeal, its exclusivity) to play up this effect. While it would be difficult for a viewer to think the Globe series is live (due

²⁵ Morris, 102.

to the jumps in time), it is still transmitted through the same kind of technology as the Met series, but does not try to produce a sense of liveness so as to emphasize the phenomenology of seeing the production live at the Globe. Both traffic in their own particular phenomenological effects for different purposes, while both privilege the live physical experience. Despite the non-liveness of the Globe series, it serves to highlight the phenomenology of live performance, using it in a similar way to the Met, but in a much more indirect way. It also maintains its own exclusivity by taking place only on one evening at select locations. To further illuminate why these two mediatized theatrical events seem so different I turn to the study of audience conventions and their effect on the reception of projections on a phenomenological and contextual level.

Where Two or More Are Gathered

In analyzing how audiences receive the effects of both performance and media, the distinction between context and phenomenology becomes more problematic than previously thought. If we are defining phenomenological effects as those produced by the processing of one's surroundings through one's senses, then as I discussed in the previous chapter the line between film projection and live performance is very thin. But as with the Met series and Globe series, the audience's phenomenological experience is no doubt affected by the projection's context. No matter what the content of each projection, the audience's experience in digesting it as a mediatized event is shaped largely by the setting of each broadcast series, a setting that mimics the architecture and seating arrangements of a theater. While public film exhibitions began in less than theatrical settings, they later adopted the format as a cost-effective and efficient means of exhibiting longer narrative films. While modern-day film exhibition has its own conventions and codes, our ideas about audience behavior and expectation are shaped by the conventions of theater going.

It is useful to refer to the work of Susan Bennett, whose *Theatre Audiences* remains one of the most significant studies of the audience as a convention. Bennett explores both the historical evolution of the audience as well as the theory behind their response to theatrical signs. Early in the book, Bennett echoes the seemingly clear distinction between performance and media set forth by theorists like Phelan. In talking about film, she writes, “It is not modifiable in the same way as theater. Where the theater audience can (and does) always affect the nature of performance, this cannot take place in the cinema.”²⁶ Despite Bennett’s assertion that audiences cannot affect a film, I am concerned here with how one audience member’s phenomenological experience is shaped by the audience as a whole. As I mentioned in the last chapter, the circumstances of an individual audience member can affect their theatrical or movie going experience. The circumstances of the audience as a whole can be equally powerful in shaping the collective experience.

In short, I want to challenge the idea that the audience, as defined and analyzed by Bennett, should be limited in classification strictly to live theater. If we look at the cinematic audience as a natural descendant of the theatrical audience, then it stands to reason that as certain conventions have remained the same, the two types of audiences must also be sharing some of the same types of phenomenological experiences in each theater. The central difference, as Bennett notes, is in the impact on the content or presentation of the performance by the audience. It is true that the presentation of a film is unlikely to be affected by the audience, barring people walking in front of the projector or asking for adjustments in focus and framing (as I myself am likely to do if I see something is amiss). It is obvious that in a theatrical performance the actors feed off of the energy of the audience, but we should also remember that the audience in a way

²⁶ Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 1997) 75.

responds to its own energies, through its composition as both a homogenous and heterogeneous mass. The audience is at once both the generator and receptor of its own impulses. This process takes place in both the live theater and the cinema and is one of the defining factors of a performance's phenomenology in both cases. In both the Met and Globe broadcasts, there is a liveness to the audience's experience that transcends whether the footage is being transmitted live or from a recorded source.

Bennett expounds upon the audience's impact on a performance by employing reader-response theory²⁷, most often suited for literary analysis. In this method, the audience (or the reader) creates the meaning of a text beyond what the author may intend. In theatrical terms, this is akin to the deprivileging of the author and the text by theorists like Artaud, as Bennett notes. The "interaction between text and reader"²⁸ is at the heart of reader-response phenomenology, and through analyzing these interactions through audience responses, scholars can construct histories of reception. Of course, by text, in the theater we do not only mean the work of the playwright, but also the production choices made by the actors, director, designers, and other artists. For our purposes, reader-response theory helps to frame the audience as one of the primary generators of not only texts, but the reception of those texts, theatrical or otherwise. On a practical level, Bennett explains, audience reception decides what gets produced:²⁹ On a theoretical level, such an approach foregrounds the role of the audience in creating their own phenomenological experiences.

²⁷ For founding works of reader-response theory, see: Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," *Image, Music, Text* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, LLC., 1977). Also: Stanley E. Fish, "Interpreting the Variorium," *Critical Inquiry* 2.3 (1976).

²⁸ Bennett, 43.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

The predilections of the audience frame their reception of the respective broadcast series, and their accessibility to the live, physically present versions of the performances may factor into the way they perceive the mediatized versions. Bennett writes, “A crucial aspect of audience involvement, then, is the degree to which a performance is accessible through the codes audiences are accustomed to utilizing, the conventions they are used to recognizing, at a theatrical event.”³⁰ There may not be a resident opera company in some cities in which the broadcast series are featured. There is certainly not a Globe theater in most cities of the United States (San Diego being the notable exception), though Shakespearean productions have been a staple of American theater since its beginning. Though large portions of the attendees of the Met series are no doubt already opera fans, there are certainly a few who only experience opera regularly (or ever) through the broadcasts. In either case, the way the audience responds to the opera on screen is molded by both their operatic experiences as well as their cinematic experiences. For many audiences, movies are the primary encoder of theatrical conventions, so their definitions of “liveness” and performance are largely defined by their mediatized encounters, in some sense juxtaposing the things they do not regularly encounter.

As the audience creates its own conventions, in terms of the broadcast series one must ask whether there is a clash within the audience between the conventions of live performance and the conventions of movie going, though as I have noted these sets of behaviors are not mutually exclusive. Bennett herself notes certain similarities between the two experiences, such as the way each form “...makes its audience aware of the double presence of actor/character”³¹ (though Bennett sees this effect as reduced in the cinema). She also makes distinctions seen in

³⁰ Ibid., 104.

³¹ Ibid., 152.

the work of both theater and film theorists, such as when she cites Bazin's idea about the increase in visual proximity in film leading "...to fuller engagement with the spectator."³² In the hybrid form created by the broadcast series, the audience is essentially caught between responding to the performance as usual without the responsibility of bolstering the live performance. In traditional performance, the actors are said to feed off the audience's energy and cater a particular performance to a particular audience in both obvious and subtle ways depending on the production. With the simulcasts, the performers do not respond to or feed off of the energy of the virtual audiences across the country. This does not, however, excuse the audience from its usual obligation to itself.

Just as movie going etiquette and conventions have been formed by a history of theater going audiences, so too are theater going conventions being formed by movie going practices, and in these broadcast series the locale of the movie theater is a dominant force in shaping the hybrid audience response. The broadcasts are sites of ongoing audience evolution, as the performative nature of film projection is highlighted through the content it is transmitting. Fundamentally, the audience is watching a film, but based on some of their responses like applause and responding to the liveness of the event during projector mishaps the audience is responding to the projection as a performance. Though they likely only make that connection because of the content displayed, it still foregrounds the fleeing nature of *that* projection at *that* moment. Even with the Globe series, as a prerecorded event, the audience still experiences a kind of liveness because it is an exclusive event that is projected for only one night. This sense of liveness, as I have noted, is partially dependent on the producing organization advertising the

³² Ibid., 15.

event as being live, a strategy aimed at giving the mediatized event a higher cultural capital than the average film, but the filmic transmission is still a live event without such trappings.

The audience is the ever-changing variable in the projected performance equation. Though we may assume the projection remains the same, the projection event never does because of the varieties of audiences that experience each one. Bennett notes this as purely a live theatrical phenomenon: “No two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement. In much contemporary theatre the audience becomes a self-conscious co-creator of performance and enjoys a productive role which exceeds anything demanded of the reader of the cinema audience.”³³ Bennett sees the changing of performance from event to event as a function of the audience, and sees this as divorced from cinematic experiences. However, if the key to the ephemerality of theater were in the audience, the cinematic audience would have to generate this as well, as it is also constantly changing. The performers may not be aware of this, but nevertheless every single showing of a movie or broadcast is a unique performance event.

Other ways that Bennett characterizes the theatrical audience also remind one of the cinematic audience as characterized by some of the surrealist writers. Bennett spends a portion of her book talking about how a performance is constructed in relation to the audience, how the event is always in process and never a finished product in the way that literature tends to be. Again, she reserves this phenomenon strictly for live theater, as she sees the cinema as fixed, similar to literary works. She writes, “Unlike the printed text, a theatrical performance is available for its audience only in a fixed time period. Furthermore, the event is not a finished product in the same way as a novel or poem. It is an interactive process, which relies on the

³³ Ibid., 21.

presence of spectators to achieve its effects.”³⁴ Bennett notes the temporal nature of performance as part of its relationship to the audience, but as we have seen in the work of film theorists, this characteristic also exists in the projected performance. The film is only available as a theatrical projection for a specific length of time, and for the collective audience, that experience is never repeatable. With the Met and even the Globe broadcast series, this exclusivity and temporality is heightened, as they are typically “one night only.”³⁵

Toward the end of her work, Bennett talks about a “hybrid performance”³⁶ present in the intercultural exchanges of international theater, in which the performance traditions of multiple cultures converge to create a work that is intelligible to multiple types of audiences. Perhaps this is a good way to think of the Met and Globe broadcast series and the convergence of audience conventions that they represent. However, it should not be forgotten that, in most communities, movie theaters and their offerings far outweigh the opportunities for live theater exposure. Despite the theatrical audience being initially developed for live theater, its sublimation into current cinematic practices likely means that the broadcast performances may function more as cinema than as theater for their audiences. Nevertheless, they highlight the tenuous distinction we make between media and performance through the blending of audience conventions, not to mention the performative nature of the broadcasts themselves. Bennett writes, “But the expansion of non-traditional theatre into many different communities brings theatre to people who may never before have had the experience of the theatrical event and who therefore assign

³⁴ Ibid., 67.

³⁵ It should be noted that certain Met broadcasts have an encore screening on a weeknight after their initial weekend transmission. In these cases the “liveness” is gone, outside of the liveness of the projection that we are discussing in the context of all projections.

³⁶ Bennett, 198.

theatre a place in their cultural boundaries which is little restricted with traditional definitions and expectations.”³⁷ No doubt the creators of both sets of broadcasts hope that cinematic attendance and revenue will translate into an increase in patrons for the live performances in New York and London, but time will tell whether that occurs. In the meantime, the broadcasts continue to expose audiences to performances they are otherwise geographically and, in some cases, temporally cut off from.³⁸

From a business standpoint, this marriage of mediatization and performance seems to have paid off for the Met. In a study published in *Opera America*, it was found that about one in five people attending the *Live in HD* series had not recently attended live opera, and some had never attended it at all. People who regularly attend opera make up the core audience, meaning that the series is able to attract its traditional audience as well as bring in new ones. What is more, over half the viewers expressed interest in attending a live performance if they are in New York.³⁹ The series seems to be working in transcending certain cultural boundaries, increasing the capital of the Met through traditionally low means, the avenue of the popular cinema. Such results come not just from the quality of productions at the Met, but from the relationship of the series to its audience, rooted in convenience, accessibility, and cultural prestige. In this case, the

³⁷ Ibid., 208.

³⁸ Other scholars have built upon and added to Bennett’s theories, using her theories as the basis for strategies for building and engaging with audiences, such as the process described by Leah Lowe in introductory theatre courses for the general student population: Leah Lowe, “Toward ‘Critical Generosity’: Cultivating Student Audiences,” *Theatre Topics* 17.2 (2007). Also, Monica Prendergast discusses the implications of the way theatres treat their audiences, trying to develop an active approach to studying the audience as opposed to Bennett’s more theoretical approach: Monica Prendergast, “From Guest to Witness: Teaching Audience Studies in Postsecondary Theatre Education,” *Theatre Topics* 18.2 (2008).

³⁹ Shugoll Research, “*The Metropolitan Opera Live in HD: Who Attends and Why?*” *Opera America* (Fall 2008) 39.

audience is the determinant of the program's success, even if much of the audience is not physically present at the original production site. The audience's experience consists of their access to their local movie theater and its own responses while watching the simultaneous transmission.

The status of the cinema broadcasts as part of the spectrum of hybrid performance is still in flux, as numerous variations on the idea have popped up in recent years. But what does this mean in regards to other types of performance, such as dramatic theater? An operation on such a grand scale would be unfeasible for most theaters. In one sense, opera is better suited for it because there will be higher demand due to the relative scarcity of opera houses in comparison to regional and community theatres. In addition, the prestige of the Met makes the demand for the broadcasts more palpable, allowing new audiences to see what was before an exclusive event. The possibility of implementing such a series for Broadway shows or regional theatres has been relatively unexplored, with a few notable exceptions. In 2008, a broadcast of one of the final performances of *Rent*⁴⁰ was transmitted to movie theatres, featuring some members of the original cast, again highlighting the ability to see an exclusive event. Considering that a film version featuring much of the same cast had premiered just two years before, the fact that the event took place (and was later released on DVD) shows the potential market for such broadcasts. Highlighting the televisuality inherent in some of the broadcasts, certain pay-cable movie channels found success in recent years with broadcasts of select shows, such as the production of *Death of a Salesman*⁴¹ starring Brian Dennehy, shown on the Showtime network.

⁴⁰ "Rent: Filmed Live on Broadway (2008)," *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1273675/> (accessed on February 12, 2012).

⁴¹ "Death of a Salesman (TV 2000)," *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0229328/> (accessed on February 12, 2012).

The final performances of the recent rock musical *Passing Strange*⁴² were filmed by Spike Lee and the resulting documentary film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2009. Recently, the 25th anniversary performance of *The Phantom of the Opera*⁴³ was broadcast live from London. Perhaps most notably, a large-scale broadcast series by the National Theatre in London has had relative success, particularly in conjunction with distinguished American venues like The Guthrie in Minneapolis.⁴⁴

As examples of hybrid performances, the Met and the Globe broadcast series, among others, represent an instance of performative qualities being foregrounded in the cinematic space. The audience is the chief generator of these performances as unique experiences, as they are given more reign than usual to create the phenomenological experience. As we look at the ways in which film projection creates space and bodies, the role of the audience in determining projection's phenomenology will always shape the way we can consider both liveness and presence. While it is tempting to center our focus on the performer and their relationship to media, the audience is the ultimate arbiter of the effectiveness of both. That arbitration, however, is constantly being shaped by both their own previous theatrical and cinematic experiences, as well as the influence of the producing organization's claims of liveness, appealing to the phenomenology of the event as a way to attract audiences. The *Live in HD* series, for many, would naturally have more cultural capital than a summer blockbuster, but would not necessarily

⁴² “‘Great Performances’ *Passing Strange* (TV Episode 2009)” *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1259583/> (accessed on February 12, 2012).

⁴³ “The Phantom of the Opera at the Royal Albert Hall (2011)” *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2077886/> (accessed on February 12, 2012).

⁴⁴ “National Theatre Live,” *NCM Fathom*, <http://www.fathomevents.com/performingarts/series/ntlive.aspx> (accessed on February 12, 2012).

attract larger audiences as a result, necessitating the need to foreground that phenomenology.

The audience may not be completely conscious of their being drawn by this, but the liveness of the event nevertheless brings them nearer, temporally speaking to the event than they would otherwise be able to get. This mediatized hybrid experience seems less mediatized as a result of the simultaneity, as there is less chance that the product will have been tampered with than if it were recorded and played later on. This hybrid form may not be the most explicitly theatrical, in physical terms at least, but still represents a complicated phenomenological encounter for 21st century audiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINAL FRONTIERS

In the fourth edition of his *Theatrical Design and Production*, J. Michael Gillette writes, “Projections enhance the visual texture of a design immeasurably. They can provide the stage with seemingly unlimited depth or create an aura of surrealism as one image dissolves into another. They can be used to replace or complement other visual elements of the setting, or as an accent.”¹ Gillette frames his description of projection in stage design through a relationship with the physical scenic elements. It is either a complement or a replacement to the set. This also means that the use of projection design, for Gillette, is based totally on the goals of traditional scenic design. While he references “an aura of surrealism,” projection concerns the changing of scenery in a quicker and more ephemeral way than moving walls and platforms. Immediately, the potential of projection is defined by its ability to reference its real-world counterparts. However, when this “surrealism” and the real appear simultaneously, do they combine neatly, or find themselves at cross-purposes?

This combination of the “real” and the mediatized forms the core of what I term hybrid performance, the use of film projection and physical performance as near-equal partners in creating theatricality. In the next chapter I discuss the implication of mediatized bodies within a “real” space, but here I focus on the performance of actors alongside cinematic projections of locations and spaces. The combined liveness of both the projection and the performers creates the unique theatricality of hybrid performance while also troubling the notion of a unified construction. As Steve Dixon notes, “The inclusion of media screens or digital projections introduces yet another coded sign system to the stage space, which further stimulates and

¹ J. Michael Gillette, *Theatrical Design and Production*, 4th ed., (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 2000) 374.

complicates the decoding activity of the spectator.”² While a hybrid performance may not foreground technology in the way an intermedial or cyborg performance does, it still contains two different modes of viewing with two very different sets of expectations for the audience.

The material dimensions of the theatrical space provide their own atmosphere, from the arrangement of the stage to the décor of the house. The presence of the actors energizes the stage, but scenery also imbues the theatrical structure with a mimetic dimension. In both cases, the reality of the space undergoes a change that is both semiotic and phenomenological, transporting the audience into an otherworldly and extraordinary place. The scenery for a production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* will usually provide us with many semiotic details and markers about 1940s New Orleans and the people who lived there, but it also provides an atmospheric layer of heat, sensuality, and community. Stanton Garner writes about this dual nature of the stage: “If theater is the disruption of actuality, actuality nonetheless infiltrates theatrical play by constituting its ‘ground’ (...) The insistence of this presentness can be felt during those moments when actuality emerges from within the outlines of fiction, when background oscillates into foreground.”³ This oscillation between actuality and artifice is doubly evident with the dual use of performer and projection, creating the feeling of materiality out of illumination and adding on another level of representation. Projections used as scenery and other effects function not only as objects in and of themselves but representations just as any other object on stage. Projections, however, are so transitory and evolving that they can form an infinite number of places and objects.

² Dixon, 336.

³ Garner, 42.

Thus, because of the potentials of both stage and screen, I frame my discussion of projected scenery along this chief tension between actuality and illusion. From its earliest days critics heralded the moving picture as a site for the realistic display of images, capable of much more fidelity than the theater or other art forms. How do the realistic tendencies of the cinema gel or clash with some of the more presentational tendencies of the theater? On a spectrum of actuality to illusion, is the cinema completely beholden to illusionistic representation? Is it ever capable of being absorbed by the theatrical frame as with other objects, or will it always function as a frame within the larger frame? If so, what phenomenological effects are produced by multiple representational frames competing with and within each other? The materiality and presence of projection both adds to and complicates the physicality of the theatrical space.

The history of projection onstage stretches back to the days of cinema's inception, and though advances in digital projection have made it easier to implement, projections have been a part of theatrical scenography for over a century. Their use has ranged from creating scenic elements to functioning as purveyors of meaning, such as in projecting text and non-environmental images. In semiotic terms, the use of projections is quite varied, but the essential qualities of film and performance are also varied, potentially changed by the placement of screens, the frequency of use within a production, and their integration into the physical theatrical space. I examine some of the most popular histories of projection onstage, looking at the ways historians have constructed narratives of cinematic encroachment, genre evolution, and the place of this new technology in the goals of the artists. I will then look at how these narratives are interrupted by the innovations of German directors Piscator and Brecht, who used projections in a drastically different way. While the early innovators tried to further their stage

illusions and add to realistic effects, Piscator and Brecht sought to break the illusion by using projections to directly address the audience, giving abstract ideas a material space onstage.

Because this is a phenomenological study, I will focus closely on two productions I have seen live, so as to incorporate my personal experience of viewing them: Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Woman in White* and Complicite's *The Elephant Vanishes*, both performed in 2004 in London. In analyzing these productions, I will demonstrate how the two aforementioned strategies are still very much at work in contemporary theater, albeit in more technologically sophisticated ways. I will also explore the effectiveness of these hybrid performances in creating unified theatrical visions. While some of the goals remain the same, a new concern for hybrid theater is that of finding a balance. How do artists juggle the expectations of the audience when presented with projected images, along with their expectations of a live theatrical production? In short, while previous studies have focused on the semiotic value of the incorporation of projection, my concern, as the use of projection becomes more commonplace and hybrid performances exist not just to call attention to their own technologies, is whether this form is drastically different from traditional theater. On one hand the use of projection seems to offer up a host of infinite possibilities for designers and directors, while on the other hand it may threaten the precious physicality of live theater. It currently exists in a precarious position, echoed by designer Rob Shakespeare: "...new challenges to the traditional audience/actor/scenery relationship are upon us, because computers will shift audience expectation and, as a consequence, will affect the 'live' stage experience."⁴ What kind of experience is forged or preserved when the cinema meets the stage?

⁴ Adam Watkins with Kristen Watkins, "Virtual Limelight," *Computer Graphics World*, March 2000, 40.

Proto-projections and Moving Melodrama

One of the most popular early historical narratives about the introduction of projection to the theater comes from A. Nicholas Vardac in his 1949 study *Stage to Screen*. In late 19th century scenography, Vardac traces a trend toward detail and successful illusion that led producers and designers to employ projection techniques in an effort to complete their stage picture of a given environment. As the melodramas played out in front of adoring crowds, designers took viewers from place to place through both virtual and physical scenic features. Vardac writes that the use of projection in the theater also in some ways mirrored the spawning of narrative film from turn of the century melodrama, with the two forms cross-pollinating for decades. He writes, “The fusion of stage and screen is to be found in the years which saw the preliminary exploitation of the realistic and spectacular scenic style in the theater, the natural assumption of this mode by the motion picture, the decline of its theatrical popularity, and thus its eventual withdrawal from the boards.”⁵ According to Vardac, film supplanted the theater as a site for realistic detail while also adopting its popular dramaturgical strategies. Though it would later be used for a variety of purposes, the earliest uses of projections in theatrical productions would be as extensions of the scenic environment and additional layers for special effects.

Gwendolyn Waltz identifies film being used in the 1898 melodrama *Chattanooga* by Lincoln J. Carter, using projection to send a train down its tracks into the distance in a curious reversal of one of the first notable film exhibitions.⁶ However Waltz identifies other proto-projection technologies being employed by the Victorian stage earlier than that. In fact, Waltz

⁵ A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949) 69.

⁶ Gwendolyn Waltz, “Filmed Scenery on the Live Stage,” *Theatre Journal* 58.4 (2006) 547.

represents a strain of historians rejecting so-called “Vardacism” and the notion that film replaced the theater’s realistic tendencies.⁷ Reversing this conventional wisdom, Waltz says that part of the early appeal of projection was actually its unrealistic tendencies and the impossibility it could bring to the stage, such as with the interaction of onstage and projected characters like Winsor McCay’s Gertie the Dinosaur (an animated projection that McCay “interacted” with during his vaudeville routine).⁸ Rather than using projection in this way to achieve a real presence or a real environment, artists sometimes used projections to achieve what the audience surely knew could never be physically achievable onstage. So, instead of adding to a detailed realistic environment, the projection served as a technological trick, a combination of novelty and magic. Waltz notes this foregrounding of cinema’s fantastic nature, as I referenced in the second chapter, as stemming from the means of transmission rather than the content being transmitted.

Though his positivist conclusions remain problematic, Vardac does record several fascinating instances of projection being used as part of scenery. He notes the use of the stereopticon by David Belasco in 1901 in a production of *Under Two Flags* to create a sandstorm effect.⁹ Steele MacKaye also achieved motion in projected effects to create the illusion of moving clouds through a device called a “nebulator,” which was designed “... ‘for creating clouds or cloud shadows moving upon or over a landscape or sky foundation or other scenic arrangement, for the improvement of realism in land and water scenic effects.’”¹⁰ Henry Irving is

⁷ Ibid., 550.

⁸ Ibid., 551.

⁹ Vardac, 113.

¹⁰ Ibid., 143.

credited with employing magic lanterns in 1877 to depict a “phantom ship.”¹¹ However, all of these uses of projection are proto-projection technologies, not motion pictures in the conventional sense. Rather, they are evolutions of the camera obscura meant to cast an image rather than achieve any kind of cinematic effect. It is curious that in these instances projected images do not seem to be considered cinematic but theatrical in nature, but nevertheless Vardac sees them as part of the same strain of filmic evolution.

Greg Gieseckam details several uses of film projection proper on the European stage in the early 20th century. He notes the 1913 use of film to create wave and waterfall effects in Hoffmann’s *Undine*.¹² Beyond the use of film for scenic effects, Gieseckam also sees the early use of film to bridge scene changes and extend the fictional world of the stage into a cinematic realm. For instance, a 1911 production at the Hamburg Operetta Theatre opened with a film showing the protagonists rushing to the doors of the theater, followed by the actors entering the physical space after the film concluded, bridging the cinematic extension with the real location through narrative sequence. This usage of film raises implications about the reality of a projection for its audiences. Gieseckam’s analysis claims that “...the film here extends the offstage space of the stage: where the proscenium normally operates as a border to delimit the world of the play and the rest is left to the spectator to imagine, this device links the real world of the theater’s particular location with the supposedly fictional world of the stage.”¹³ Because the film featured the actual theater where the production was taking place, going so far as to include

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² Greg Gieseckam, *Staging the Screen: The Use of Film and Video in Theatre* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) 33.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

the theater in its narrative, does that make the world of the film as real as the world of the theater? If a film is used to extend the scenography or the world of the narrative, do the projections discredit such extensions through a kind of unreality when compared and composed alongside “real” performances?

Waltz details further uses of film in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mostly involving the projection of moving backgrounds akin to more traditional rolling panoramas developed earlier in the 19th century.¹⁴ Part of the appeal of projection, even in these early days, was the cost-effectiveness of film over the physical scenic effects, despite the problems presented by front-projection (namely lighting the actors with the film). Waltz writes, “No other scenic apparatus offered the stage the same degree of complexity or fluidity of motion nor had the potential to integrate the actor into an illusionistic environment that appeared, with great flexibility, to obey the same rules of spatial perspective as those experienced in reality.”¹⁵ This illusionistic mimesis seems to have been at the heart of film’s early usage on the stage, adding to the degrees of realism represented there. The integration of the actor, however, is a surprising claim considering the lack of interactivity that seems to be inherent in film projection. This interactivity seems to be rooted in narrative, alternating between onstage actor-based representations of characters and their filmic equivalents. This also involves, as previously mentioned, the extension of the fictional world into offstage spaces, which may or may not be identifiable in reality to the audience.

These early innovations of film in theater highlight issues also found in contemporary uses of projected scenery, namely the interactivity between performer and projection and the

¹⁴ Waltz, 559.

¹⁵ Ibid., 563.

degree to which projected scenery can be integrated into other physical pieces of scenery. However, as theater moved into the 20th century, film would also be used for less illusionistic and more didactic purposes, particularly on the European stage. Film would become more complicated and increasingly challenged as its market status would continue to rise, threatening the dominance of theater as a popular institution. In addition, the possibilities for the construction or destruction of traditional narratives are highlighted by Gieseckam: “Aristotelian and naturalistic approaches to storytelling or character depiction are often displaced, as multiple stories or no stories are told, performances become more presentational than representational, and notions of unity of plot or character are overthrown.”¹⁶ The use of media always challenges the traditional construct of live performance, but can do so on multiple levels. In creating theatrical effects, film was used as both a spectacle in itself as well as a tool to add to the spectacle of scenic constructions, unified with the aesthetic vision while also asserting its own phenomenological power.

Projecting Ideas in the 20th Century

It is useful to look closely at both the productions and the theory created by some of the artists of the mid-twentieth century, as their written texts illuminate their approach to projection, a set of techniques largely aimed at disseminating ideas. The tension between actuality and illusion becomes even more convoluted here, as abstract concepts are given an actual spatial presence within the mise-en-scene of a production, giving semiotic values a phenomenological weight. In the European tradition, most scholars cite Erwin Piscator as the pioneer of projection in theatrical production¹⁷, particularly through his contributions to theme and meaning. While

¹⁶ Gieseckam, 10.

¹⁷ Ibid., 32.

there were certainly theater artists before Piscator that used moving pictures, Piscator was one of the first to break projection from strictly representational or illusionistic use. Rather than crafting it to represent location or blend in with other scenic pieces, projection came to represent itself, in a way. It was no longer representing something else, but communicating meaning in a form that was decidedly cinematic, conscious of the means of its transmission. With the use of projections in Germany and other parts of Europe prior to World War II, film's place and potential within the theater would be brilliantly realized.

One of Piscator's most notable innovations was his use of film projections, both still and moving, as pieces of information within the thematic context of the play, as direct messages to the audience. In his 1925 production *Trotz alledem!* he used pictures from World War I projected on screens to communicate the atrocities of combat to an audience who was not normally exposed to such imagery due to the scarcity of newsreels at that time.¹⁸ Similar projections appeared in the 1926 *Sturmflut*, with films made especially for the production and projected through multiple projectors, and the 1927 *Rasputin*, with films ironically juxtaposed against the statements being made by the central characters.¹⁹ Such a use of projections and the "reality" of the footage would lead Piscator to coin the term "documentary theater" to reference the production as a political document.²⁰ Piscator's philosophy of using film revolved around a desire to contextualize rather than represent. Rather than adding to the world of the play, he sought to make connections with historical and political realities not necessarily identified within

¹⁸ Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1933* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) 125.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

²⁰ Thomas Irmer, "A Search for New Realities: Documentary Theatre in Germany," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50.3 (2006) 18.

the text. Michael Patterson characterizes this tendency as such: “The theater, even with Reinhardt’s huge casts, can only present a number of individuals; it cannot adequately portray mass movements nor show, for example a nation at war. Film could reflect the new collectivist society by providing the historical background to the lives acted out before it.”²¹

Bertolt Brecht would go on to use projected words and images in a similar way to Piscator, using the direct messages to the audience through the projections to add to his alienation effect. Often the projections featured still intertitles or photos meant to contextualize, as in Piscator’s productions, or move the speed of the narrative along at a disarming rate. For instance, in 1931’s *Mann ist Mann*, Brecht used slides of equations to symbolize different power dynamics within the narrative.²² Patterson describes projections in the eighth scene that “...marked the passing of time usually at 2-minute intervals, and by repeatedly interrupting the flow of the action prevented the spectator from becoming too involved in the suspense of the situation.”²³ In a sense, film projections were used to create a broader kind of montage within the flow of the live production. The use of projection by both Piscator and Brecht signals a consideration for the dialectical nature of film and its capability for inspiring political action and debate. Referencing Piscator’s *The Political Theatre*, Gieseckam says that Piscator “...also suggests that the use of film contributes to establishing theatre as a contemporary form, with the increased pace created by dynamic cutting between live scenes and filmed sequences reflecting the greater pace of a technological society.”²⁴

²¹ Patterson, 125.

²² Ibid., 165.

²³ Ibid., 166.

²⁴ Gieseckam, 47.

The innovations of Piscator, Brecht, and their contemporaries represent a change within German theater in thinking about the nature of film and its relationship to live performance. While the projections of the age of melodrama were used to create the illusion of more space and spectacle, the projections of Brecht and Piscator added to the intellectual dimension of a production. Rather than extending the spectacle of a production beyond the limits of traditional materiality, the projections of the German theater interrupted the illusion, breaking in to give philosophies an experiential dimension. Ideas were given a physical space within the stage, a visualization of abstract concepts or dramaturgical structures. The ideas became part of a production's atmosphere and environment. With Piscator's contextualizing footage, the stage theatricalized the journalistic imagery of the first World War. With Brecht's intertitles, audiences experienced the declaration of the playwright's intentions in a very visceral way, with each scene being framed within a certain thematic development. The semiotic codes of a play's design were made a part of the theater's environment in a way potentially as palpable as the scenic spectacle of American melodrama. In each case, the phenomenology of film brought its own ephemerality to the physical space, creating dreamlike settings or fleeting, otherworldly messages from the narrative's architect. Despite these advances, however, some theater artists were generally unsure about film's place within performance, with Brecht himself expressing reservations about Piscator's use of it: "Such a theatre of effects is basically anti-revolutionary, because it is passive and imitative. It depends on the mere imitation of existing types..."²⁵ Based on his political reasoning, much of hybrid theater might be deemed anti-revolutionary by Brecht's standards, but the use of projections, at one time, represented the way of progress and the future.

²⁵ Patterson, 154.

The father of the New Stagecraft movement Robert Edmond Jones envisioned a theater in which both types of projection use, the illusionistic and the didactic, would find a home in a synthesized production. In a 1941 essay entitled “A New Kind of Drama,” he saw the combination of actor and performer as, “...a wholly new theatrical art, whose possibilities are as infinite as those of speech itself.”²⁶ He also saw the ability for cinema to represent new dynamics of thought and communication: “Some new playwright will presently set a motion-picture screen on the stage above and behind his actors and will reveal simultaneously the two worlds of the Conscious and the Unconscious which together make up the world we live in—the outer world and the inner world, the objective world of actuality and the subjective world of motive.”²⁷ For Jones, cinema could help flesh out certain subtexts inherent in a drama, as well as providing multiple perspectives for interpretation and presentation. The worlds he mentions, both conscious and unconscious, in a way echo the illusionistic and didactic modes of scenic projection. As theater artists tried new ways to show the inner workings of the human mind, Jones thought about film in ways akin to the surrealists in his belief that film could function as human thought made manifest through light.²⁸

Moving pictures would reflect the audience’s processing of the ideas of the play and would be an integral part of the audience’s mental and emotional experience. They would be able to represent the psychology of a play’s characters while the onstage action would “...express the behavior of the characters set against a moving background, the expression of their subconscious

²⁶ Robert Edmond Jones, *The Dramatic Imagination: Reflections and Speculations on the Art of the Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 15-6.

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

mind...”²⁹ Both physicality and dreams could inhabit the audience’s reality during a production that featured film. As with Piscator and Brecht, ideas would be given a spatial existence alongside their human counterparts, but Jones’s point is that the medium of film is ideally suited to this task because of its phenomenological characteristics, complementing the physical nature of the stage.

As far as the total experience of theater is concerned, it is possible such use of projection is akin to a reading/imagining of the play combined with a physical production. States, in a section of *Great Reckonings* describing an individual reading *Macbeth*, writes, “In one respect, a play read and enacted in the mind’s eye is more ‘real’ than one seen on stage. By ‘real’ I mean nothing palpable or objectively real, obviously, but only that our mental enactment of *Macbeth*, however vague or fleeting, has something of the realism of a succession of dream images...”³⁰ This language echoes the descriptions of film found in surrealist criticism and mentioned by Jones, affirming the phenomenological idea of one’s perception determining one’s reality. So if the projections used onstage are similar to a viewer’s own mental processes and realizations, what is the experience of watching reality and a mental image at the same time? Is it the same as a hallucination? Does it simulate the experience of a mental illness? States notes that a personal reading may be actual in the case of our own perceptions, “Whereas a theatrical presentation of the text is precisely marked by the limits of artifice: the frontal rigidity of our view, the positional determination of everything on stage, the condensation of *Macbeth* into a real form,

²⁹ Ibid., 17-8.

³⁰ States, 28.

the fact that the play has already passed through the screen of an interpretation by director and actors.”³¹

Here, interpretation seems to be the key difference between a reading and a production, but the projections used are also interpreted by artists just as the scenery, performances, and other production elements are. Does their interpretative nature sacrifice some of the dream-like qualities that writers have described? Do the projections instead become more like the physical realities that surround them? As the projections have the potential both to represent environmental realities as well as express abstract ideas, what is the nature of the reality that is generated when they appear on stage? How does that reality work in conjunction with the performers? Again, the key questions that arise with hybrid theater are phenomenological ones, rather than purely semiotic ones. What happens when two realities, which are real in two different ways, coexist simultaneously? Film phenomenologists have had much to say about film’s capacity for realism and representation, and looking at those views may help us to understand better the tensions created by both uses of film onstage.

Projecting the Real

Despite the characterization of film as dream-like by some of its early phenomenologists, as I noted in chapter two, several theorists have declared film as one of the most realistic of the arts in terms of its mimetically accurate representations, while others have compared it to the theater’s brand of selective realism. Rudolf Arnheim, writing in the 1950s, describes the stage’s capacity for realism: “It reproduces nature, but only a part of nature—separate in time and space from the actual time and space of the ‘house,’ where the audience is located. At the same time, the stage is a showcase, an exhibit, the scene of action. Hence it comes into the domain of the

³¹ Ibid., 28.

fictitious.”³² Selectivity and specificity are the theater’s limitations from being able to present things totally realistically, according to Arnheim, but because it works in time and space, it is more realistic than the photograph, which is a realistic representation but only as a signification, not a three-dimensional reality. Arnheim says that the cinema “...comes midway between the theatre and the still picture. It presents space, and it does it not as on the stage with the help of real space, but, as in an ordinary photograph, with a flat surface.”³³

Thus the cinema shares some of the theater’s illusory capacities, but like the theater it is unable to make the illusion complete. Arnheim compares the fiction of the stage to the non-physical nature of film. He writes, “So long as the people on the screen behave like human beings and have human experiences, it is not necessary for us to have them before us as substantial living beings nor to see them occupy actual space—they are real enough as they are.”³⁴ Taking Arnheim’s stance, it would seem that there is not much difference between film and theater. So when they are used together on stage, perhaps the screen and the actors do not clash. Though they partake of different ontological characteristics, the degrees of illusion could be considered very similar. However, Arnheim notes that the reality of the cinematic image is a by-product of its technology, in contrast to the stage, where artists often have to work hard to achieve a sense of realism: “The film producer himself is influenced by the strong resemblance of his photographic material to reality. As distinguished from the tools of the sculptor and the painter, which by themselves produce nothing resembling nature, the camera starts to turn and a

³² Arnheim, 25.

³³ Ibid., 25-26.

³⁴ Ibid., 29.

likeness of the real world results mechanically.”³⁵ The camera is designed to produce images accurately and realistically, and distorting is most always the result of an artist’s intervention.

Bazin also notes the relationship of the cinema to photography, but refers to it as a creation myth that should not limit or define cinema’s future ambitions. He writes: “If the origins of an art reveal something of its nature, then one may legitimately consider the silent and the sound film as stages of a technical development that little by little made a reality out of the original ‘myth.’”³⁶ Bazin believes that the realistic photographic nature of film is the cause, rather than the effect, and that the total experience of the cinema is found in its projection, sound, audience, and hallucinatory qualities. Just as a theatrical experience is not generated solely through the physical presence of objects, but through their gestation into sign status, films do not exist merely as frames on a filmstrip, as a succession of translucent photographs. This allows it to transcend its technological apparatus and become an art, allowing Bazin to claim “...the cinema owes virtually nothing to the scientific spirit.”³⁷ For Bazin, the impulse toward the development of cinema did not come from a technological or research-oriented mindset, but from an artistic one. This may seem a bold claim considering that film relies totally on technology in order to exist, but Bazin is also writing at a time where there is much nostalgia for the silent era, as if film had existed in a more pure state before the advent of sound.³⁸

However, this rejection of film’s reality based on its photographic nature does not make its illusion less convincing. In fact, Bazin claims that the cinema creates worlds more realistic

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Bazin, 21.

³⁷ Ibid., 17.

³⁸ Ibid., 21.

than anything the stage can conjure, despite its lack of physicality. Part of this is due to the suspension of disbelief required in the theater, the knowledge and acceptance that the actors onstage live different lives when they exit offstage: “The stage and the décor where the action unfolds constitute an aesthetic microcosm inserted perforce into the universe but essentially distinct from the Nature which surrounds it. It is not the same with cinema, the basic principle of which is a denial of any frontiers to action.”³⁹ Characters continue to exist even if they exit the cinematic frame. The director’s choosing of the focus through cinematography and editing does not destroy the possibilities of the fictional world. Rather, it simply limits the audience’s perspective. One could possibly make the same argument about the stage, that the fictional world of the play continues on *ad infinitum*, but ultimately the material that leaves the stage must go somewhere, while the projected film is not bound by such strictures. As Bazin puts it, “There are no wings to the screen. There could not be without destroying its specific illusion, which is to make of a revolver or of a face the very center of the universe.”⁴⁰ Therefore, if an actor plays in front of a projection, the actor’s illusion may somehow be broken, while the subject of the projection continues on, outliving and stretching further than the character or physical setting.

Eisenstein writes about another type of realistic tendency in the cinema, a kind of *über-realism* that outshines anything achievable on the stage: the union of character and setting through the mastery of nature through technology. Eisenstein emphasizes this unity as the foremost characteristic of film as art. He writes, “Here is a unity of man and space. How many inventive minds have striven unsuccessfully to solve this problem on the stage! Gordon Craig,

³⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

Adolphe Appia, and how many others! And how easily this problem is solved in cinema.”⁴¹

Eisenstein references the attempts of scenic and lighting designers and directors to achieve a sense of totality, of a unified work of theatrical art, and claims that what they are searching for is what the cinema does as part of its very nature.

In further discussions of early 20th century scenic practices, Eisenstein references the combination of flat or abstract scenery and lighting with three-dimensional actors, again noting that the cinema conquers this problem with its unity through projection. He writes, “The ‘mystery’ of the gauze stretched across the stage of the *Theatre d’Art*⁴² apparently lies in a desire to ‘unify’ the diversity of the materially real environment of painted scenery, three-dimensional people, and real textures (such as gilded surfaces).”⁴³ Eisenstein implies that the unification of elements of different dimensions is a problem for the theater. Even though the cinematic projection is two-dimensional, it still achieves realism because the image is real. There is no illusion about it, the image being displayed is the image being displayed, not masquerading as anything else. The cinema, to Eisenstein, “...is able to solve the problem with the greatest of ease, operating as it does with photographically captured images equally as real in appearance as the objects themselves.”⁴⁴

Naturally, some theorists writing later in the 20th century have questioned the idea that photographs or film images provide exact copies of the objects they are representing. Noel

⁴¹ Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 182.

⁴² Eisenstein is referring to Paul Fort’s *Theatre d’Art*, which was a key site in the Symbolist movement for the production of non-realistic plays.

⁴³ Eisenstein, 189.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 189.

Carroll rejects the idea that there is a link between the object and its projected representation because the perception of light in both cases cannot be considered unequivocally the same. He writes, “There is not an essence of photographic media or of photographic representation that directs the evolution of these media or our proper appreciative responses to these media. The media rather are adapted to the cultural purposes and projects we find for them.”⁴⁵ No matter what kind of technological process the cinema employs and no matter the mimetic implications of that technology, there is still the intervention of artistic attitudes and cultural intentions to be reckoned with. In his discussion of cinematic temporality, Malin Wahlberg reflects on the phenomenology of the photograph: “The famous notion of *punctum*⁴⁶ certainly addresses the photograph as an uncanny presence of the past, but a pastness that inevitably results from an extra-textual knowledge of what the image represents...it is a phenomenology radically modified by a semiotic perspective, implying the recognition of the social and ritual function...”⁴⁷ The reality of the projection may affect the cinematic experience, but not necessarily the realism inherent in a photographic representation, as at its heart that is a semiotic influence.

While some writers have claimed that the cinema would put an end to theatrical realism,⁴⁸ both art forms have practiced their own brands of realism for decades, with neither capitulating but both experimenting with varying degrees of illusionistic and presentational styles. However, the phenomenology of both forms implies two different kinds of realistic

⁴⁵ Noel Carroll, *Theorizing the Moving Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 48.

⁴⁶ Here Wahlberg is drawing on Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, and the idea that a photograph’s *punctum* conveys the subject within in an emotional way.

⁴⁷ Wahlberg, 83.

⁴⁸ Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946). Bentley champions a poetic, socially-engaged theatre over a realistic cathartic kind of theatre.

mimetic presence that seem to challenge one another. As previously mentioned, when both live performers and projections are used on the stage, they are usually meant to blend in either a scenic or didactic vein. In these situations, do the different strands of realistic representation clash? Does the unity of projected film, in the Eisensteinian sense, complement the physical reality of the actor, or does the boundless fiction of the projected image clash with the limitations of the physical theater space? While it might seem that the stage would be more actual than the screen, due to its materiality, based on the work of these film theorists it seems that this dichotomy could be reversed, with the images of the cinema seeming more actual than the images of the stage. In the following sections I will look at two different notable uses of projection in theatrical productions, uses that will illuminate the tensions between reality and realism and the struggle for theatrical unity. Can projection and performance behave harmoniously together, or will they always function as competing experiences for the audience?

The Woman in White

The first production I examine used projections to create the environment of the story. Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Woman in White*, directed by Trevor Nunn, opened in the fall of 2004 in London's West End, where I saw it in October at the Palace Theatre. An adaptation of Wilkie Collins's Victorian novel, the production featured the typical romantic Webber style of music amidst a plot featuring hidden identities, love triangles, and Gothic atmosphere. The scenery was notable for consisting of white walls which moved about the stage into different configurations with projections being used to create rooms and outdoor settings, and sometimes even moving from place to place within the film image. This technique received mixed reviews,

and sparked a snarky response from New York Times critic Ben Brantley: “Hey, real furniture can be heavy and expensive. Anyway, you have to keep up with the times.”⁴⁹

The projections and walls were used in conjunction with certain physical pieces of scenery, such as trees, benches, barrels, and other accoutrement to give an added sense of depth to the mise-en-scene.⁵⁰ The walls glided effortlessly, usually ending up in a semi-circular formation, separating and joining together in different locations. However, despite the movement of the walls and the physical scenic objects, the cinematic projections dominate the stage. Critic Michael Portillo reflected that the use of projections in the production “...is transforming the theatregoing experience into something more like cinema.”⁵¹ What originally starts out as a tool to facilitate dramatic action reaches beyond the screens to change the entire experience of the production. Watching the production live, I was underwhelmed by the projections as a scenic tool, and more interested in their evolution of traditional West End scenic styles, with walls moving about the stage on motorized tracks. However, the novelty tended to wear off as my interest in the story and performances faltered. The projections were always changing, a quality that was sometimes a detriment considering the changes in lighting and other pieces of scenery. When coupled with something as ephemeral as fog or smoke, I started to long for something to remain still for more than a minute.

In short, I found the ability of the projections to evoke place and period to be less effective than traditional physical settings. In fact, with all of the advanced technology being used on the

⁴⁹ Ben Brantley, “Theater Review; Lloyd Webber’s Emoting Victorians,” *The New York Times* 17 Sept. 2004.

⁵⁰ For photos of the production, see: “The Woman in White,” Mesmer, http://www.mesmer.co.uk/projects/The_Woman_In_White/15/ (accessed February 24, 2012).

⁵¹ Michael Portillo, “Rude Awakening,” *The New Statesman*, 13 Dec. 2004.

stage, I found it ironic that the highlight of the show was a trained rat running down one of Michael Crawford's arms across his shoulders and down to the tip of his other arm. It was a small moment that garnered great applause from the audience, all without the aid of computerized visual technology. The animal is not only juxtaposed against the technology, but against the conventional theatricality of the play, as noted by States: "...the living encrusts itself on the mechanical—mechanical here meaning the prefabricated world of the play."⁵² Performance is often characterized as the home of possibilities, a place where anything can happen, and that is never more explicitly seen than with the presence of an animal onstage, where the self-control and discipline of the performer seem tenuous at best. It is also a marvel that the moment received such attention, considering the relative size of the rat to the size of the space. While the projections created proximity through enlargement and zooms, the rat maintained its same size but was still noticed by everyone. Through lighting and the training of the animal, the moment went off without a hitch, making it at once a moment of both rigorous manipulation and potential chaos, more theatrical than the projections.

One of the most confusing and jarring aspects of the use of projections for me was the way the scenery changed on the screen. At times both the images and the screens themselves were moving, causing a much more tenuous mise-en-scene than the average theatrical production. Michael Portillo, while admiring the technological innovations, describes the experience thus: "The impact is more like an Imax. The images change at dizzying speed. We careen over open fields as though riding in a helicopter."⁵³ Portillo is referring the tendency of the scene to change within the frame of the screen, moving down hallways and flying over landscapes as the wall

⁵² States, 33.

⁵³ Michael Portillo, "Graphic Tale," *The New Statesman* 18 Oct. 2004.

moves or remains stationary. Charles Spencer of *The Telegraph* also complained of the dizzying side-effects, while also noting that “This is a production in which the scenery moves more than the actors, who are too often rooted to a spot downstage centre as they belt out Webber's tunes of passionate love and yearning.”⁵⁴ Michael Billington of *The Guardian*, however, praised the projections over a weak libretto, writing “At times, as when the whole perspective rapidly shifts during Laura's ill-fated wedding to Sir Percival Glyde, the effect is reminiscent of early Cinerama.”⁵⁵ But Dudley's transitions from baronial interiors to sunlit cornfields are impressive and open up new possibilities in the marriage of theatre and cinema.”⁵⁶

In commenting to others later, I reflected upon how closely the images resembled a popular Microsoft Windows screensaver depicting the navigation of a maze. It seems I was not the only one to make such a connection, as Ben Brantley notes the approach of the scenic designer William Dudley: “He said he got the idea for using three-dimensional animation onstage after watching his son play a video game. He became fascinated by the power of moving images to draw in viewers. He also thought video-game-style animation might attract young people to the theater.”⁵⁷ Partly because the production was set in the Victorian era, the virtual landscapes seemed out of place in a relatively domestic 19th century mystery. Though they clearly evoked the proper location and indicated the appropriate mood, the gloss and virtuality of the images

⁵⁴ Charles Spencer, “All White on the night? No, direly trite,” *The Telegraph* 17 Sept. 2004.

⁵⁵ Cinerama featured three different projections side-by-side (to project movies filmed by three different cameras mounted on the same apparatus) to create an ultra-wide widescreen effect. See: John Belton, “Technology and Innovation,” *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Ed. Gregory Nowell-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 259.

⁵⁶ Michael Billington, “The Woman in White,” *The Guardian* 16 Sept. 2004.

⁵⁷ Brantley.

stood in the way of complete acceptance of their reality. The period details rang true, but the experience of watching them was decidedly artificial.

Another of the issues at work here is the problem of perspective. When the projections move from one room in a house to another or fly over a field, from whose perspective are we witnessing these changes? In narrative cinema, unless indicated otherwise⁵⁸ we assume that the camera is acting as an omniscient third party entity with no particular bias or allegiance. If this is true, does this singular vision seen in *The Woman in White*'s projections clash with the directorial vision of the stage? The instances in which the movement was most jarring were usually at the same time actors were moving onstage, or while the walls were moving. Again, in the cinema, we are used to a stationary screen that frames the action, but if the screen is moving about the stage and interacting with live actors, the movement of the camera suddenly becomes confusing, as the cinematic perspective moves through the house while that same perspective is moved across the stage. The separate conventions of film and theater, when combined in this manner, prove to be problematic for the audience.

Ultimately, the projections work semiotically in that they correctly indicate time and place, letting the audience know where the scene is set. The problems that arise are largely phenomenological ones, causing the audience to be distanced from rather than absorbed in the environment of the play. In this iteration of hybrid performance, the stage and the screen seem to exist as two separate spaces at conflict with one another. While this is not indicative of every use of projections in performance, as I will show with *The Elephant Vanishes*, it does represent the hazards of trying to unite two separate art forms. From a production standpoint, the rise of the

⁵⁸ Here I refer to shots from a character's point of view, such as in Delmer Daves's 1947 noir *Dark Passage*, or in found-footage films like *Paranormal Activity* or *Cloverfield*, which feature tapes shot by characters in the film.

projection designer has created new problems and possibilities for theatrical collaboration, requiring scenery, costume, and lighting designers to consider the effects of the cinematic components. Projection designer Wendall K. Harrington reports reticence at being brought into the collaborative team in favor of scenic designers who could design their own projections.⁵⁹ Lighting designer Patrick Dierson also highlights the dangers of collaboration gone wrong when it comes to projections, and describes instances in which he designed both lighting and projections.⁶⁰ Lighting in particular can be difficult to match between the stage and the projected environment.

The design of *The Woman in White* was undone by a muddled experience for the audience. It is not that the projections took away from the physicality of the performance, or that one overpowered the other, but that the total experience was not a cohesive whole. I am not implying that a production has to have unquestionable aesthetic unity, or that fragmentation and disharmony cannot play a role, but in terms of a show's theatricality, in this case the projections created confusion in the direction and focus. This confusion was rooted in the viewing experience rather than the production's semiotic dimension, creating phenomenological problems that compromised the production's theatricality. As one of the most notable large-budget uses of projections, *The Woman in White* carried great potential for pioneering new digital techniques, while another, less-commercial production performed in London around the same time used projections that were integral not just to the aesthetic and story but also to the experience as a whole, creating a unique and visceral theatrical encounter.

⁵⁹ Wendall K. Harrington, "Have We Become Redundant?" *Entertainment Design* (July 2004) 27.

⁶⁰ Patrick Dierson, "Variations on a Scene," *Entertainment Design* (May 2004) 25.

The Elephant Vanishes

A collaboration between the British company Complicite and the Japanese company Setagaya Public Theater, *The Elephant Vanishes* opened in Tokyo in 2003. It made its New York premiere in the summer of 2004⁶¹ before performing in London in the fall of the same year. The production was an adaptation of three short stories by Japanese writer Haruki Murakami: the titular story, “The Second Bakery Attack,” and “Sleep.” In each of the stories, the protagonists deal with modern culture in poignant and humorous ways, and the production used a plethora of projection techniques to surround the characters with a mediated environment, isolating them from meaning and connection. It was performed in Japanese with English supertitles, requiring an initial level of mediation in order for the audience to understand the dialogue and action. As it toured the globe, critics praised it for its innovative staging techniques. While *The Woman in White*’s melding of older aesthetics with new technologies proved problematic, *The Elephant Vanishes* succeeded in that regard, as noted by Ben Brantley: “But there is also something purely and traditionally theatrical in the show that seems especially appropriate to the depiction of a Tokyo in which a centuries-old aesthetic infuses computer-dominated homes.”⁶² The use of projections and other technologies seems at home within the narrative, rather than simply being used as a design tool.

There are certain instances of the play in which the artists use projections to represent an environment or enhance the action, similar to their intended use in *The Woman in White*. For instance, in “The Second Bakery Attack,” the two protagonists set out to rob a McDonald’s to

⁶¹ Mary Fleischer, “*The Elephant Vanishes*,” *Theatre Journal* 57.1 (2005) 115.

⁶² Ben Brantley, “Lincoln Center Festival Review; Sifting through the Splinters of a Fragmented World,” *The New York Times*, 23 July 2004.

satisfy a midnight craving. As they make their getaway in their car, a projection behind them shows the streets and other cars fading into the distance at high speeds, in a way mimicking the classical Hollywood way of depicting people driving. The projection functions both as environment and a depiction of action. Mary Fleischer describes the way the characters “...frantically drive down a Tokyo freeway created by pulsating lights and sound with several video monitors and projections showing careening drives down streets and through a neon-lit tunnel.”⁶³ In another sequence, in “The Elephant Vanishes,” a television screen displaying the elephant’s eye stands in for the animal. The television, one of several in the production, drifts across the stage suspended from above.⁶⁴ By using multiple types of screens in a myriad of ways, the production surrounds the characters with mediatization, making it an integral part of their world.⁶⁵

The production foregrounded media in the lives of the characters, such as in “Sleep,” in which an insomniac records a video diary about her encounters with *Anna Karenina*, a diary that is then displayed behind the multiple actors who portray the character. The overall effect, created by both the presence of multiple performers and media, evokes the fracturing of the main character. Also in that story, the Japanese text of *Karenina* is overlaid on the action, adding to the dim illumination and wrapping the actors in the context of the scene in a visual way. Part of the production’s engagement with media came through the use of cameras in the rehearsal

⁶³ Fleischer, 117.

⁶⁴ Brantley.

⁶⁵ For pictures, see: “The Elephant Vanishes,” 2004, It’s a Sickness Productions, <http://www.itsasickness.com/theatre-d-complicite/content/elephant-vanishes> (accessed February 28, 2012).

process, a move that inspired some of the design choices.⁶⁶ It also springs from the themes inherent in the stories, and in much of Murakami's work, of isolation and urban life. At times the media seems to overwhelm the stage, spurring Rosie Millard to describe the production as "cacophonous nonsense."⁶⁷ The production as a whole, however, uses projections in a much more natural way than *The Woman in White*, letting the technological components spring from the text rather than being a solution to a design problem.

In terms of the previously mentioned dichotomy between illusion and actuality, *The Elephant Vanishes* falls within both camps while favoring the latter. While there are moments, such as in "The Second Bakery Attack," where projections represent a location or are used to create an illusion, the way film is used in stage composition and narrative points more toward a presentational style. Rather than standing in as an environment, the projections become theatrical entities that have a palpable presence. When they are used to project text or stand in for a character, they hearken back to Piscator and Brecht, communicating directly to the audience. In "Sleep," a character converses with her past self through the creation and viewing of video diaries. Director Simon McBurney creates a mediated environment where technology exerts a force on its denizens, and the audience feels that force. The total effect of the technology is that of a dream, similar to the surrealist depiction of projection. Mary Fleischer notes this, writing that "...McBurney and his company of Japanese actors have not tried to dramatize these stories, so much as they have created a multimedia dream play that allows us to experience how the characters' sense of reality shifts in each of the episodes."⁶⁸ Just as the technology that surrounds

⁶⁶ Davi Napoleon, "Designing on Your Feet," *Entertainment Design* (Feb. 2005) 28.

⁶⁷ Rosie Millard, "Notebook," *The New Statesman*, 13 Sept. 2004.

⁶⁸ Fleischer, 116.

people in everyday life creates parallel realities and mediated experiences, Complicite uses technology to comment upon its effects on the human soul.

This mediated environment is part of a trend in 20th century theater as noted by Stanton Garner: “In response to realism’s scenic innovations—innovations which worked to particularize the stage through its physical elements—the twentieth-century theater has concerned itself to an unprecedented extent with stage materiality and the relationship between actor/character and environment.”⁶⁹ Creating an environment out of technology furthers an evolution from a pictorial tradition. The use of multiple types of screens breaks the production out of a painterly or proscenium mindset (even though the theater where I saw it, the Barbican, was a proscenium space). Screens have come to constitute a large part of how we receive and process information and ideas. McBurney and his team create a three-dimensional screen world, breaking both the theater and the cinema out of two-dimensionality, blending together in a truly hybrid manner. Projection designers Bob and Colleen Bonniol reflect on the limitations of the screen shape: “...entertainment, theatre, performance-this is the place of dreams; and dreams are curvaceous, luscious, frosted, soft, bodacious, liquid. Yet we look at the average workday application of projection and media in design, and it occurs in the predictable rectangle.”⁷⁰ While many of the projections in *Elephant* occur in rectangular screens, it defies the traditional limitations and creates depth by layering these screens beside and sometimes on top of one another, and even using the entire stage, along with its actors, as a screen for the projection of text (particularly in “Sleep”). By creating such layers and refusing a strict demarcation between physicality and mediatization, the artists draw the audience into each an often-hallucinatory journey.

⁶⁹ Garner, 88-9.

⁷⁰ Bob and Colleen Bonniol, “Ruminations on the Rectilinear,” *Entertainment Design* (May 2005) 30.

Part of the difference between *Elephant* and *The Woman in White* exists in the media forms being used to represent themselves, while *Woman* uses technology that does not exist within the narrative. This is the reason Lloyd Webber's production sits firmly in illusion while *Elephant* challenges that. Stanton Garner writes, "Whereas illusionism sought to suppress the mundane materiality of the object, to incorporate it in the displaced materiality of dramatic fiction, the 'actualized object' precipitated an alienation of the illusionistic field from itself, through ruptures of the 'otherness' to which it was supposedly transparent."⁷¹ *Elephant*'s use of technology made it a much more poignant experience than that of *Woman in White*, which alienated its audience with its technology, and not in a good way. As theatrical experiences, *Elephant* created spaces for its characters to inhabit much more naturally than *Woman*, letting the inherent theatricality of the projections shine through in their interactivity and presence rather than existing merely as backdrop or set dressing. Ultimately, in both productions, designers used projections in a variety of ways that challenged the traditional realistic composition of the stage, even in a large budget musical. Rather than achieving the unity that marks so many theatrical productions, both shows created multiple viewpoints on stage: the theatrical perspective and the cinematic perspective.

The Problem of Perspective

As previously discussed, there is a marked difference between the perspective achieved by directorial stage focus and the usual perspective of the camera in the cinema. What makes hybrid performances so fascinating is the ways in which they either meld these perspectives, as several moments in *The Elephant Vanishes* did, or unwittingly divorce them, as in *The Woman in White*, which, while proving problematic for the viewer, represents a unique issue in the incorporation of cinematic projections on the stage. Traditionally, both theater and cinema have been geared

⁷¹ Garner, 93.

toward creating unified perspectives and cohesive mise-en-scene. In the theater, even though the audience can choose to look at whatever they please, the director tries to direct their attention to certain areas of the stage depending on the narrative or the stage picture they have in mind. In the cinema, most shots are composed from a unified perspective. Multiple perspectives may exist within a given film, but very seldom do multiple perspectives exist within a given shot. If they do, they are usually still oriented around a kind of unity of narrative.

Perspective in the theater has always been fraught with complexity, as each actor has their own physiological perspective as well as the point of view of each character, with the audience often being asked to identify with multiple people. The physical body of the actor represents an embodied perspective that includes the audience in its gaze, as Garner notes, “From a phenomenological point of view, the living body capable of returning the spectator’s gaze presents a methodological dilemma for any theoretical model—like semiotics—that offers to describe performance in ‘objective’ terms.”⁷² In the cinema, the audience is made to identify with the (often-male) protagonist through the well-documented narrative gaze.⁷³ The gaze cannot, in a physical sense, look back as with a live actor, but the audience is no less engaged with the perspective offered by the camera, whether it be strongly tied to the protagonist or in a more detached, documentary-style way. When the two art forms are combined on stage in a hybrid performance, what perspective ultimately wins out? Must the two always be muddled as with *The Woman in White* or can they achieve a kind of unity as evidenced in *The Elephant Vanishes*? Can they be combined into one supreme perspective? If so, would this resemble typical theatrical perspective or its cinematic equivalent?

⁷² Ibid., 49.

⁷³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16.3 (1975).

One of the key differences between the two is a difference in the position of the viewer. In *Visuality in the Theatre*, Maaïke Bleeker writes, “The institution of perspective theatricalizes the field of vision. It creates a scenographic space in which all that is seen is staged for a viewer.”⁷⁴ As with the Husserlian strain of phenomenology, what is seen and perceived by the senses constitutes the reality of the viewer, and in the theater, the world of the play is staged for the viewing audience. Everything is arranged for the benefit of the viewer by the director and other artists. Nothing in the theater exists out of view or earshot. The perspective of the audience forms the mediating relationship between the seer and seen, according to Bleeker.⁷⁵ She also notes the possibility that “Within this relationship, ‘presence’ is an experience of confirmation of the body seeing rather than a quality observed or present in a body seen.”⁷⁶ It is a twist on the phenomenology of the theater in the strain of States, as it roots the concept of presence in the viewer, rather than in the performer.

In light of this, what of the perspective seen in the cinema? As I mentioned, film orients the viewer in the narrative gaze, which is often gendered as male regardless of the viewer. The perspective is not based on the viewer necessarily, but in an unseen presence that directs the vision for us, though we of course are able to ignore that vision and look at any part of the screen we wish. However, while in the theater we are free to look at objects other than that which the directors wishes us to look at, in the cinema we cannot look at the things offscreen. If we want to see anything, we must look at what is given to us. This is similar to the way Bleeker writes about

⁷⁴ Maaïke Bleeker, *Visuality in the Theatre: The Locus of Looking* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

perspective in art: “Classical perspective orients the field of vision to the viewer’s invisible body, as if the scene seen had emanated from the viewer’s own eyes, while at the same time, this eye is erased from implication within the visual field.”⁷⁷ Most often in film, the seer’s perspective has no identity, and the audience’s gaze is absorbed into that vacuum. While presence can be felt through the projection of light, as Bazin would claim, it would seem that the presence generated by the viewer’s perspective, as claimed by Bleeker, would be somewhat lost with film.

So what happens to presence and perspective in hybrid performance? It would seem that film projections, as with all of the other stage elements, become reoriented as objects and are brought into the viewer’s theatrical perspective. Film is put onto display not just as a piece of cinema but as a technology alongside other technologies and the actors onstage. As for the cinematic perspective, rather than being totally subsumed by the theatrical perspective, it becomes an additional layer of focus and direction, and can be brought in line with the other elements while still retaining its own phenomenological effects. In this instance, it has a presence all its own by being observed by the theatrical viewer. While the traditional cinema orients the audience in such a way that the projection dominates their field of vision, in hybrid performance the audience is forced to reckon with the onstage performers and projections together, as part of one perspective. *The Elephant Vanishes* best realized this potential blending of hybrid performance. By using projections as textual layering, doubling, and substitution, the production managed to create a unified perspective by orienting all projections toward the directorial vision, coordinating onscreen and onstage action to draw the audience into the twisted reality of the narrative. In *The Woman in White*, the competing perspectives of screen and stage failed to create this unity, causing confusion in the viewer. While the line between the two usages may be

⁷⁷ Ibid., 106.

relatively thin, and while it is impossible to know the intent of the designers involved in each production, the final products and my own personal experiences of watching them point toward categorically different theatrical effects.

It might seem, then, that I am implying that non-realistic modes of projection work better in creating hybrid performance than do representational modes, but that is not the case. The success of *The Elephant Vanishes* as a hybrid stems not solely from its presentational style, but from its consideration for film projection as an onstage object with a perspective all its own that must be reoriented to fit the theatrical frame. This might seem like a triumph of theater over film, but the use of film technology in this way is, in a sense, an admittance of a power akin to live performance. However, what does a hybrid performance mean for a general phenomenology of space? Does the stage take on a new identity because it uses technology in this way? Can the theater, in its most conventional sense, accommodate film projections without drastically changing the theatrical experience? I am not claiming that every theatrical performance creates the exact same phenomenological effects. Rather, I am questioning whether the inclusion of projection technology in some way destroys the wonders of the “empty space.”

The stage, in a manner of speaking, has always been a hybrid. Gay McAuley identifies the “...constant dual presence of the physical reality of the performance space and the fictional world or worlds created.”⁷⁸ While we can draw a line between representational and presentational styles, the latter is not necessarily devoid of mimesis, while the former retains the palpable feel of actuality. The perspective of the stage is always multiple, always influenced by our own predilections and the guiding hand of the artists. While we would love to believe in a

⁷⁸ Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) 27.

pure “empty space,” there is really no such thing. Even a physically empty stage is immediately filled, upon our perception of it, with our conventions, codes, and modes of understanding. Hybrid performances illuminate this truth, perhaps best of all. The inclusion of film not only adds to the complex meanings of the theater, but also challenges our basic definitions of it by bringing those meanings into a visceral format. Projection is pure mimesis, but still manages to fill the theatrical space.

Numerous productions have used projections in recent years, in part because of the aforementioned accessibility to digital projection technologies, but also because of the ability of projection to create exciting new possibilities for designers. Projections have recently been used in Broadway productions like the most recent revival of Sondheim’s *Sunday in the Park with George*, using the projections to illustrate the creation of Seurat’s famous painting and the character’s habitation within and without it. This production seems to have combined both the illusionistic tendencies of the early 20th century as well as the didactic tendencies of Brecht and Piscator, to a certain extent, causing reviewer Ben Brantley to describe the projections as “...thought made visible.”⁷⁹ The 2011 production of *War Horse*, which I had the opportunity to see in person, used projections to accent the edges of the mise-en-scene. The tops of houses and hills were projected across a cloud-shaped screen above the mostly bare stage, providing a semiotic referent rather than trying to create an illusion that would have no doubt drawn attention away from the true highlight of the show: the puppetry.⁸⁰ The relative ease of projection has even allowed community theatres to use projection, such as the production of *Camelot* I saw at Baton

⁷⁹ Ben Brantley, “Down By the Purple Blue Yellow Red Water,” *The New York Times*, 22 February 2008.

⁸⁰ Ben Brantley, “A Boy and His Steed, Far From Humane Society,” *The New York Times*, 14 April 2011.

Rouge Little Theater in 2010, where virtually all of the backgrounds were computer generated. None of these productions featured projection to discuss the prevalence of multimedia in our own lives, and represent a turning of the corner to hybrid performance, where projection is used just as any design tool, but because of the properties of the cinema, creates a phenomenologically unique experience.

This is not to say that the use of film detracts from a production's overall theatricality. Garner writes, "If...the stage craft of realism/naturalism foregrounded the body's physiological and phenomenal actuality, scenographic movements toward the pictorial and the architectural pressed this body toward the inanimate, seeking to subordinate it, as image and instrument, in a stage conceived as visual field."⁸¹ In this way of thinking, film projection, while vibrant, is on the same plane as any other object in the theatrical frame. It is an object, a sign, and a force. The uniqueness of the hybrid performance's phenomenology comes in the uniting of separate perspectives in a much more visual way than that which goes on unconsciously for the viewer. Film's dual capacity for illusion and presentation can accomplish this unity by functioning as environment and text, both taking on a definite physical space among other theatrical elements.

⁸¹ Garner, 60.

CHAPTER FIVE: STAGE AS SCREEN

Like many people of my generation, I was first introduced to the concept of the hologram through *Star Wars*. Whether it was Princess Leia asking Obi-Wan Kenobi for help or Chewbacca playing chess with two droids, the holograms functioned as three-dimensional projected images in the place of traditional screens. Because of this association, the idea of the hologram seems futuristic to me and, very likely, to most people. Despite the existence of holographic technology in the present day, it does not seem to have a practical usage that would necessitate its integration into everyday life. The holograms in science fiction movies are novelties that, at most, increase accessibility to an image. While it might be simpler for R2-D2 to have a built-in screen, Luke's first sight of Princess Leia (familial relationship notwithstanding) is a memorable and visceral one because she is projected holographically in front of him, taking up part of the space he inhabits. To a 1970s audience, a hologram was something that seemed to be of the future, a world of media beyond the two-dimensional rectilinear screen

Holographic projection's futuristic connotations have remained to the present day, despite the technology being used in less fantastic ways. Practical uses for holographic technology range from measuring stationary light waves¹ to creating holographic images of terrains for analysis by SWAT teams.² However, recent advances in 3D home viewing systems have brought holographic projection to the mundane world. The technical specifications of

¹ V. V. Orlov, "Superimposed Volume Holograms for Measuring the Phase and Degree of Mutual Coherence of a Light Wave," *Optics and Spectroscopy* 108.1 (2010).

² Sven Furhmann, Nevada J. Smith, Mark Holzbach, and Terry Nichols, "Investigating Geospatial Holograms for Special Weapons and Tactics Teams," *Cartographic Perspectives* 63 (2009).

holography involve the use of lasers and radiation to create projected shadows of objects³, and so three-dimensional viewing in television and film does not explicitly fall into the technological continuum of holography. However, the appearance of an otherwise flat image in three-dimensional space echoes the same goals even though it is an optical illusion, and so the hologram becomes the best way of classifying the type of phenomenological experience involved. At its heart, our perceptions of the hologram indicate two important characteristics: spatial presence and interactivity. From *Star Wars* to *Star Trek*, the hologram interacts with physical characters through a spatial relationship, acting as a phenomenologically unique mode of communication. Thus, while some of the uses of projection technology I will discuss would not *technically* be specified as holographic in the field of optical engineering, the phenomenological goals make them *essentially* holographic, particularly when used to project bodies.

For instance, while they are still tied to mostly rectilinear screens, 3D technology aims to bring the cinematic images into the space of the viewer, or at the very least give the flat screen more depth. There are obvious gimmicks involved in movies geared toward three-dimensionality, mostly characterized by objects or people pointing or advancing toward the viewer. These products are still geared toward the cinema, rather than communication as seen in the aforementioned *Star Wars*. Compared to the Emperor communicating with Darth Vader, the degree of interactivity and personalization in 3D entertainment is still low, though 3D video gaming is an emerging practice with the advent of 3D TVs and handheld 3D consoles.⁴ Still, the

³ Sean F. Johnston, "A Cultural History of the Hologram," *Leonardo* 41.3 (2008) 223.

⁴ The Nintendo 3DS is a portable system with varying 3D capability, while some other console games work with 3D televisions.

most obvious and popular uses of three-dimensionality in entertainment are rooted in cinematic and televisual entertainment. The technological advances in holography largely focus on performance, with the final products looking more and more like live theater, grounding in it a spatial relationship that is more interactive than images on a flat surface.

Thus, because of the lack of practicality, the idea of the hologram seems best suited for performance and entertainment, though that was not always the case from the outset. Sean F. Johnston has traced the history of the hologram from the late 1940s and has noted the evolution of the hologram from scientific beginnings to the entertainment-oriented focus that permeates its public perception today.⁵ While the technology to create three-dimensional images was used for military purposes in radar equipment and in security encoding by financial institutions, the hologram grew into an aesthetic practice with its own artistic communities.⁶ Visual artists like Paula Dawson have used holographic technology to create three-dimensional art installations, such as with her *Shadowy Figures* and *Luminous Presence* which aim to “lend a sense of complex temporality to a figure,”⁷ letting the viewer determine the animated quality of the image by negotiating their own pace of spectatorship. Often with holographic images on cards or posters the viewer senses motion or space in the image by moving it or moving around it, thus making the special effects of the image dependent on the viewer. This is one of the reasons the images are likely never mistaken for reality; the viewer knows there is no real substance there because they are in control of its dimensionality.

⁵ Johnston, 227.

⁶ Sean F. Johnston, “Shifting Perspectives: Holography and the Emergence of Technical Communities,” *Technology and Culture* 46.1 (2005).

⁷ Paula Dawson, “Holographic Chiaroscuro: Figures in Virtual and Pseudoscopic Space,” *Leonardo* 41.3 (2008) 302.

As previously mentioned, upcoming advances in 3D technology aim to make the image more substantial, with less of the flickering of traditional projectors. Film artists and exhibitors seem to want the 3D image to attain some of the presence and physicality of live performance, though this presence is mostly achieved through a closer and more complex spatial relationship rather than responsive interactivity. The relationship to live performance, however, is most tested when depicting human performers. Does the three-dimensionality of a cinematic image come close to simulating the physicality of an actor? Holograms in science-fiction seem to simulate the body more realistically than do current holographic images. In certain contemporary hybrid performances, the images are no more substantial than a normal cinematic projection, but the spatial relationship and/or interactivity seem to aim at the kind of accuracy and illusion seen in science-fiction holograms. However, does the manipulation of light as a performance achieve the same effects as the presence of the performer? When live actors interact with their holographic counterparts in hybrid performances, what kind of relationship is formed? Can it be an equal partnership, or will the real and virtual performances always function on separate planes, such as the realistic and the supernatural?

In one sense, the body of the actor in itself is a kind of media, as the body becomes a vehicle for the text or a director's intentions. If one were to think of a human being in a dual mind-body sense, the body is an instrument the mind uses to telegraph its meanings and ideas, the media through which the performer communicates. The body has taken center stage in discussions of agency, gender, and performance. Do the ideas and distinctions given to the live body apply to the mediated body, particularly when projected in a holographic manner in certain cutting-edge contemporary performances? Just because the projected body does not have the physicality of the performing body does not mean it lacks human form and cannot carry the same

semiotic and mimetic weight. In some cases, simultaneous motion capture can lend the hologram a liveness similar to live televisual broadcasts, in which case the hologram may have the same ephemeral quality.

For instance, in one of the performances I will discuss, a 2000 production of *The Tempest* at the University of Georgia, a projection of the character Ariel does not take on a spatial relationship through three-dimensional projection, but rather foregrounds the other key component of holography as seen in popular fiction: interactivity. Through the performance of the projection alongside the motion-capture performance of its physical double, the simultaneous rendering of the image emphasizes the interaction between media and the physical performers onstage. In contrast to productions by Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art, where the three-dimensional projections are prerecorded, the projection in the 2000 production of *The Tempest* functions as a true stand-in for the performer (even though she is still visible) despite being tied to a rectilinear screen. Just like with a physical performer, liveness and space form the backbone of these bodily projections and shape our perception of them as holographic.

In this chapter I will give a brief overview of the current discourse on the body in media and its relationship to the liveness and phenomenology of performance. I will then look at how the holographic projection of the body is both similar and different to the actual presence of that body by looking at puppetry and its manipulation of the human shape. This manipulation of form will also feature into my examination of current holographic projection technology in the work of Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art in Montreal and the Interactive Performance Laboratory at UGA. Finally, I will interrogate assumptions about such technology and its implications for live performance. In holographic technology, projections step beyond the screen to enter the domain of both actor and audience in hybrid performance.

Bodily Discourse

Much has been written on the “body” as a concept and site of cultural meaning. Historically, the attention paid to the body as opposed to the emphasis on the mind coincides with the advent of modernist thought, as noted by Harold B. Segel, who traces a near cult of the body near the beginning of the 20th century.⁸ The mastery of the mind through rational thought led to a similar mastery of the body through fitness and physical development programs, later resulting in a trend of nonverbal theatrical performances and pantomime.⁹ Political and public concern for private bodily matters would mark late twentieth century politics, while in performance the body as an object of display and communication would define postmodern theater. Performance scholars expressed theater’s status as an embodied art form that defied traditional representation, though this trend developed at the same time as media in performance became more prevalent. Elin Diamond writes in her book *Unmaking Mimesis*, “Theater itself may be understood as the drama’s unruly body, its material other, a site where the performer’s and the spectator’s desire may resignify elements of a constrictive social script.”¹⁰ The connection between the viewer and the performing body is, for Diamond and Phelan, at the heart of theater’s potential for challenging traditional social structures. Instead of a standard object/viewer relationship, Diamond imagines the body as a subject in flux that resists conventional semiotic practices. Rather than being processed passively by an audience, the

⁸ Harold B. Segel, *Body Ascendant: Modernism and the Physical Imperative* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) 3.

⁹ Segel, 14.

¹⁰ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997) iii.

performing body creates a dialogue between viewer and subject in a way that performance scholars think media cannot.

The elusiveness of the body as a sign was at the core of the dichotomy of live performance vs. recorded media. Phelan's assertion that performance resists commodification because it cannot be recorded is bound up in theater's status as an embodied practice. Because the body communicates with the spectator differently than any other object, the exact nature of a performance cannot be replicated through a technology that creates a commodified object. Because a media object does not have the subjectivity of the human body, certain performance scholars like Peggy Phelan maintain it does not produce the same phenomenological effects as a live actor. It may be true that an object of recorded media cannot interact or respond to an audience, however, as I have maintained, it may be possible for film projection to produce similar phenomenological effects, leading to a blurring of the performer and media within hybrid performance. In these productions, however, what happens to the power of the body onstage? With the emergence of holograms, we are forced to reexamine appropriations of the body that do not rely on physical proximity, but rather another kind of presence. This presence is not material in nature, but neither is it entirely void of material. It is a space filled with light, which, as I have discussed, declares its presence by carrying with it the traces of a performer's persona.

Another point made concerning the body on display is its fluctuation along a spectrum of gender during a theatrical performance. In *Unmarked*, Peggy Phelan discusses the way a performance challenges traditional representations: "Performance uses the performer's body to pose a question about the inability to secure the relation between subjectivity and the body *per se*; performance uses the body to frame the lack of Being promised by and through the body—

that which cannot appear without a supplement.”¹¹ The very existence of the body on display is in flux; its status as either an object of representation or an ontological entity in its own right cannot be completely certain. I have made similar points about the continual evolution and change inherent in the cinematic projection, thus calling the identity of the cinematic object into constant question. There is always a lack at the heart of projection; the screen is always blank, the space in front of it always empty. So, in a projected bodily performance, despite the appearance of a figure, there is always an empty space that the other performers are interacting with. So there may in fact be more similarity between the absence in a performance and the absence within cinematic projection.

The holographic body appears to challenge the idea of cinematic absence, as it seems to take up space on stage, or interacts in some way so as to create a narrative space for itself among all the fleshly bodies. In a way, the projected body takes on both absences at once. It is a construction of identity as with the physical performer, and it also constitutes an absence of materiality as with all cinematic projections. This performing absence, both something and nothing at once, functions as the heart of a performance, as some scholars currently understand it. Phelan asserts that performance “...marks the body itself as loss. Performance is the attempt to value that which is nonreproductive, nonmetaphorical”¹² Though the film itself as it is copied and distributed may seem to us a reproductive process, the act of projection never produces anything. As with theater, there is always an empty space. While physical bodies fill the theatrical space, projections create the illusions of bodies through the molding of light over time. While I will not be engaging in a broad analysis of all cinematic bodies, the holographic

¹¹ Phelan, *Unmarked*, 151.

¹² *Ibid.*, 152.

projection presents us a unique opportunity to look at how projection can create an interactive body in space with some of the same representational qualities as a real body.

When the live body and the projected body meet each other in the empty performance space, it serves as a blurring of the essential element of live performance. There are two figures onstage, but only one body, *per se*. Still, the projected body is a live event, moving in the space, observed by both performer and audience. The key differences between performance and media break down in this, one of the most explicitly unique features of a hybrid performance. As we continue to look at the phenomenology of this event, the discourse of the body will serve as a reference point to characterizing the projected human form. Despite its composition in light, the form will always retain an encoded persona. That persona fluctuates, however, just as the particles and waves of light constantly shift and swirl, escaping easy codification and, in its ghostliness, defies a definite placement in the categories of either performance or media. In terms of its phenomenology, we must, of course, contend with the issue of physicality, as that is often the site of the phenomenological effects of the performing body. We will see that just as with a discourse of the body's representational qualities, the discourse on the physical body yields similarities with projection phenomenology, once again making hybrid performance a challenge to traditional definitions.

Bodily Presence and the Cyborg

As I discussed in the first chapter, performance phenomenologists have identified the body as a primary component of the unique theatrical experience. The presence of the performer makes theater unlike other art forms, and seemingly unlike the cinema, which lacks that kind of presence. However, as I have shown with film phenomenology, cinema has its own kind of presence, and here I will explore the similarities of the two kinds of presences, the physical and

the virtual, and their bearing on the phenomenology of hybrid performance. Obviously, there are fundamental differences between the two bodies, as the virtual body is obviously strikingly different from a living, breathing physical body. However, as I have distinguished before, the use of both within a performance makes differentiating between them problematic, at least in theory. In looking at the virtual body onstage, I will return to some of the major phenomenologists that created the performance/media dichotomy.

The cinema could be thought of as illusion personified. It takes pure light and presents the illusion of objects and spaces on the screen. States talks about the actor's body in a similar way: "Gesture is the *process* of revelation of the actor's presence—in view of our earlier discussion one might say of his 'usefulness'—and this presence, as the organ that feeds on the dramatic text."¹³ For States, the actor's presence is felt when the actor moves and acts, just as the cinematic projection is only present when light is moving and hitting the screen. He also talks about "feeding" on the text, using it to catch the audience's attention and give meaning to his gestures, much the same way that the projection is given meaning by its narrative or the things it is representing. The body reveals itself onstage through action, and this action generates presence. Projection is always moving, and thus always revealing itself and creating its own special brand of presence.

Despite this similarity, we must still contend with the inherent difference between the two, and the kind of phenomenological tension that might result from the meeting of the real and the virtual. States references this in discussing filmed versions of Shakespearean plays: "What happens when our two fundamental forms of scenery collide at the pitch of their unique powers? What happens when a dense metaphorical world collides with a dense real world (real, of course,

¹³ States, 138.

only in the sense of the explicitness of photography)?”¹⁴ Though he is discussing the “realism” of film production, the conflict between the two types of artistry is similar to the tension between the real and virtual bodies. Sometimes, as we will see later, the virtual body is done so because as a character it is supposed to be less physical, so the virtuality of it complements the way it fits into the overall style of the play. Still, the viscosity of the virtual body is very different, so that even when depicting something decidedly unrealistic, the audience is still aware of the illusion, the unreality of the theatrical object. States claims that a tension of styles results in a “phenomenal strangeness,”¹⁵ but what does this mean for the virtual body in and of itself? What kind of presence is achieved, phenomenologically speaking?

Virtual presence and performance have recently been associated with the internet and online communication. Auslander’s aforementioned “Live from Cyberspace” reflects on the existential problems presented by “chatterbots” on the Internet that mimic human conversation based on messages they receive from other users. This virtual entity creates a sense of liveness by constructing a real-time online encounter with responses being generated as the conversation happens, rather than playing from a predetermined product. He writes, “Since bots are virtual entities, they have no physical presence, no corporeality; they are not dying in front of our eyes—they are, in fact, immortal...They perform live, but they are not a-live, at least not in the same way that organic entities are alive.”¹⁶ Though the virtual body performs onstage, it seems to function in much the same way that Auslander describes the chatterbot. The main distinction that I would make, based on an understanding of film phenomenology, would be that the

¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶ Auslander, “Live from Cyberspace,” 20.

performance of the virtual body is a live event, just as any use of film projection is. Still, in some cases the content of the projection is not being broadcast live, but sometimes that performance too is live, albeit in a different spatial location.

Alice Rayner, too, talks about online presence in a way reminiscent of virtuality onstage. She writes about a kind of cyberspace theater in which participants, all online in different locations, interact live online. In talking about the idea of a shared online space, she writes, “As the corporeal exchanges between apparatus and persons accelerate, the site of the person becomes more ambiguous, as does the identity. Interactive performances are engaging in a crisis of place as well as in an opportunity for new kinds of connections, a crisis of identity as well as an opportunity for the ‘extension’ of the body.”¹⁷ In many cases, the virtual body onstage is also an extension of a physical body, whether simultaneously performing elsewhere or prerecorded. Though we often think of theater as occurring in one place at one time, these kinds of hybrid performances as well as the cyberspace interactions destabilize the notion of a unified location as a prerequisite for theater. While one of the unique features of the projected hologram is its spatial relationship to the performer and viewer, the location can never be absolutely fixed or certain, as the appearance and presentation of the performer is subject to the viewer’s vantage point, visibility, etc.

Scholars have used the term “cyborg performance”¹⁸ to label some of what I have termed hybrid performances. It is a broad term, connotative of a science fiction milieu, and can be used

¹⁷ Alice Rayner, “Everywhere and Nowhere: Theatre in Cyberspace,” *Of Borders and Thresholds: Theatre History, Practice, and Theory*, Ed. Michal Kobialka (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) 284.

¹⁸ Borrowing the “cyborg” label from: Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

to describe "...intersections and mergings of live performance with film, video, internet connections, and other technologies."¹⁹ Performances that take place entirely on the internet, created through interactions between a user and specially-created digital installation, complicate traditional understandings of the performer/viewer relationship by increasing the gap in space and sometimes time, a phenomenon explored by Gabriella Giannachi.²⁰ Rayner compares cyberspace theater to cyborg performance but ultimately decides that the two have less in common than one might assume.²¹ I would like to extend Rayner's critique of the term to the use of film projection with theatrical productions without excluding the cyborg label entirely. I believe hybrid performance is a more useful term when exploring the phenomenology of these uses of film projection, partly due to some of the connotations involved with the term "cyborg," with this distinction made explicit when considering the holographically projected body.

Under the more general term of multimedia performance, the holographic body in performance could be categorized as a type of cyborg performance, but in its phenomenology it I am less concerned with the melding of technology and biology than it is the projection of a persona by means of technology. While with the cyborg the human form has been complemented or completed with technology, in a hologram, the body is transmitted by technology. Technological advancements constitute its very existence, rather than being grafted onto an already-existing physical entity. Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, one of the scholars who has popularized the use of the term, characterizes some uses of film in performance as cyborg: "By referring to and using the strategies of screen(ing) bodies—closeups, animation, airbrushing,

¹⁹ Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, "Becoming-Animate: On the Performed Limits of 'Human'," *Theatre Journal* 58.4 (2006) 649.

²⁰ Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2004) 25.

²¹ Rayner, 293.

Photoshopping—in juxtaposition with live, sweaty, fleshy bodies, both the techniques used in film as well as the bodies themselves can be exposed so that they might be reincorporated in new ways.”²² While some of the uses she describes may seem suited to the term cyborg (separating bodies through mediatization, breaking down parts with cameras and screens), the overall transformation of a body into a projected image seems to me to be deserving of a different term. If the techniques she describes are part of a process, then the holographic projection is the apotheosis.

Naturally, cyborg performance could be used as a lens when exploring the cultural and semiotic implications of such technologies, but when looking at the use of projection in performance phenomenologically, I am more concerned with the meeting of two distinct, unique, but similar sets of effects. Rather than the juxtaposition and grafting of the cyborg, the phenomenology of these performances is much more fluid and complicated considering the similarities between the two forms. For Parker-Starbuck, cyborg theater focuses on the body with technology as “an ongoing materializing construction, subject to regulatory norms that are reiterated and reinforced to maintain the boundaries...”²³ Rather than focusing on the boundaries and intersections inherent in many multimedia performances, I use hybrid performance as my terminology for exploring the total phenomenological package that is marked more by similarity than difference when inhabited by film projection.

Thus, ultimately, cyborg theater, as Parker-Starbuck would classify a particular technological performance, is more suited for multimedia performances that foreground technology as part of the meaning of a piece and use technology to emphasize those points.

²² Parker-Starbuck, 658.

²³ Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre*, 43.

Productions that use projection as I have been describing, such as to transmit the performance, to create the setting for a performance, and to project the performer, are more deserving of the term “hybrid,” in that phenomenologically they are neither a pure performance or a piece of pure cinema. The two are lenses with different concerns but valid claims on some of the same objects, as a production like *The Elephant Vanishes* can yield fascinating insights when looked at through both frames. In short, however, I believe cyborg to be a term more useful to describe current and recent performances, while hybrid looks forward to emerging and future trends that see technology not as a hindrance or something to be dissected onstage, but rather tools to transmit the performer and audience to new possibilities. I have waited to discuss this terminology until this point because the projected body presents so many new possibilities, and any discussion of the body and technology would immediately raise the issue of the cyborg distinction. As I continue looking at the implications of the holographic performance, I will continue to distinguish the two terms and highlight reasons why the cyborg term is ultimately not as useful for my purposes.

The Puppetry of Projection

At the heart of the projected body is the manipulation of nature to create a representation. In one sense, the hologram could be seen as an elaborate prop rather than a costume or lighting effect. Even though light plays a heavy role, it is not meant for the illumination of action or the creation of a production’s mood. Projection technology harnesses natural forces to create an aesthetic reality, an active onstage entity. It is for this reason that I turn to the field of puppetry to examine the ways in which holographic projections function as a type of performance along the same lines. Just as puppetry involves the crafting of moving, active characters from various materials, projection is a puppetry of light made out of a less-tangible but no less potent type of

matter. Seeing holographic projections as puppetry may seem a roundabout way toward seeing them as performances, but just as we would not deny the category of performance to a puppeteer and his tools, so the projected body is the avenue of performance for digital artists and the original performers.

Puppetry has been a focus for theater artists and scholars²⁴, particularly since the early 20th century and the fascination that certain avant-garde pioneers had with Asian puppetry forms, such as the ideas expressed in Edward Gordon Craig's "The Actor and the Uber-marionette," in which he writes: "There is something more than a flash of genius in the Marionette, and there is something in him more than the flashiness of displayed personality. The Marionette...appears to me to be the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization."²⁵ Rejecting the notion that puppets are inherently comical, Craig praises them for attaining a level of seriousness and serenity that few human actors are able to achieve. He later refers to a new breed of actor that will mimic the marionette through a trance-like state, describing the aim of such an approach as "...to clothe itself with a death-like beauty while exhaling a living spirit."²⁶ Craig envisioned the human body being used by a director as a kind of marionette, turning biological material into a kind of inanimate object, albeit one with a fuller range of motion and emotion than any puppeteer could conjure. While some might want to create material that mimicked the human body faithfully, Craig, in a way, wanted it the other way around. A projected body works in a

²⁴ For histories and writings on puppetry, see: *Puppets, Masks, and Performing Objects*, Ed. John Bell (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001). Also: *American Puppetry: Collections, History, and Performance*, Ed. Phyllis T. Dircks (McFarland & Company, 2004).

²⁵ Edward Gordon Craig, "The Actor and the Uber-marionette," *The Mask* 1.1 (1908), *Theatre in Theory 1900-2000*, Ed. David Krasner (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008) 96.

²⁶ Craig, 97.

similar way. It springs from an original performance in many cases, a performance captured on a soundstage or motion-capture studio, and is transformed into material. Its appearance through light instantly results in a transformation, though further alterations are possible through digital artistry. At any rate, it represents the human body made manifest as an element of nature that has been captured and manipulated onstage.

The discourse on puppetry has mainly focused on its representational qualities and cultural backgrounds. One common agreement is that puppetry achieves a kind of directness unseen in other types of performances, as Craig maintained in the aforementioned essay on the Über-marionette. John Bell writes that 20th century artists have used puppetry "...as a means of articulating political ideas by means of the direct communication of live performance."²⁷ While many see puppets as tools of children's entertainment, puppeteers can use them for any sort of entertainment, including political ideas. It is important to get past the notion that puppetry is only for children, just as it is important to get past the idea that film and the cinema only promote the ideals of Hollywood and American industry. The appeal of puppetry's directness makes it an ideal fit for both educational children's programming and political performance art. It also functions as an animated extension of the performer, extending from his or her actions while remaining separate as a representation. It is a kind of projection of the performer, more removed than the character an actor inhabits but more tangible in its materiality. This kind of projection retains much of the persona of the performer while still being transformed into another form entirely. This act foregrounds the materiality of a projection, making it able for an object to project a persona while not having one itself. The projection of a psychology makes clear the

²⁷ John Bell, *American Puppet Modernism: Essays on the Material World in Performance*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) 1.

potential for material and immaterial projections to take place simultaneously and in the same space.

Bell makes further claims about the manipulation of material and nature inherent in puppetry. He characterizes the relationship as "...humans coming to terms with the material world, a momentary alliance or bargain between humans and the stuff of, or literally stuff *in* performance."²⁸ In this sense, the relationship seems to be one of conquest, with human performers bending nature to their will. Rather than the ingestion of objects in States's estimation, puppetry in the theater is the transformation of otherwise normal materials to take on new mimetic values. This transformation is obviously not as seamless as film projection seems to be, nor does it take place in full view of the audience, but in many cases the puppeteer can be seen by most every viewer, making that part of the transformation part of the magic. Bell also includes the discourse of death in performance in his analysis of modernist puppetry: "...performing with objects requires us to recognize that when we play with them we are simply animating the dead things for a little while, before *they* come to rest again, and, ultimately, before *we* come to rest, and ourselves become dead things too."²⁹ I have previously referenced the ghostly nature of some film projections, in the way that they bring dead beings to life, and that aspect is no more evident than in the holographic projection, which is sometimes used to portray ghosts and other supernatural beings. In both cases, the natural world is used to create otherworldly creatures: puppets that resemble cartoonish characters or real-but-not-quite-real humans alongside the apparitions.

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁹ Ibid., 6.

The relationship of puppetry to the mastery of nature carries modernist overtones, reflecting humankind's manipulation of natural materials for our own purposes. However, some scholars have viewed the performance of nature as mutual constructions that give agency to both sides. In an anthology on ecologically based performances and ways of viewing natural processes as performances, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim, and Claire Waterton write, "But once we view performance as obtaining not just to culture but to a life which encompasses the human and the non-human, then many things we think of as human activities (...) begin to look more like mutual improvisations that highlight the agency of the non-human."³⁰ The use of materials in puppetry is obviously different from ecologically-based performance pieces or the use of animals in performance, but in both cases artists interact with nature to explore the connections between people and the natural world. In one case the environment is at center stage, while in the other, material objects represent a kind of intermediary between the biological human form and the natural world. In the latter, nature is used to recreate a human or other kind of form, brought to life by human manipulation. Just as film projection troubles the binary between live performance and media, so too natural performance "...troubles the delicate boundary between the staged event and the world outside that event, at times, bringing a too material and presenced 'reality' into a crafted simulacra."³¹ The puppet is something created by a human being that seems to gain its own agency when brought to life by the performer, ever containing the threat of breaking free from human control.

³⁰ Bronislaw Szerszynski, Wallace Heim, Claire Waterton, "Introduction," *Nature Performed: Environment, Culture and Performance* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 4.

³¹ Szerszynski, Heim, and Waterton, 12.

That potential freedom, however, is always an illusion. In a similar vein, despite the seemingly impossible task of harnessing the forces of light for aesthetic purposes, the film projection is always pre-planned and under human control, both by the digital artists that create it and the performer who is being represented by the projection. The discourse of puppetry helps us consider the act of film projection as a refiguring of natural materials rather than simply a mediatized copy. It also helps us consider the presence established by not just film projection itself, but projection in the form of a human being. This form has a kind of independence but is still brought to life and controlled by human performers, as Bell notes: “It means that the puppeteer is playing with a certain *lack* of control, and experimenting with the different possibilities of the puppet while constantly being aware of how the puppet’s structure determines movement.”³² Phenomenologically, this does not exactly copy the effect of the human body onstage, but it approximates it in certain ways that remind us of live performance. With current cutting-edge techniques, that means bringing the projection into a new spatial relationship with new levels of interactivity.

A Tale of Two Tempests

In looking at projections of the body onstage, both on a screen and walking free of it, I return to the key concepts from science-fiction depictions of holograms I referenced at the beginning of this chapter: spatial presence and interactivity. In the first decade of the 21st century, two productions of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* used film projection to create both traditional projections and explicitly holographic projections, both highlighting the space and interaction in unique ways. Further, both used the technology not to make claims about the melding of human beings and digital media in a cyborg fashion, but to create commentary about

³² Bell, 7.

the text's representations of reality, illusion, and relationships. The two productions presented a centuries-old story through technology that is state-of-the-art.

The technology to capture performances digitally in order to manipulate and reconstruct them later is fairly advanced, and out of reach for the average theater company. General audiences are most familiar with the technique through its use in popular cinema, such as the technology used to accompany Andy Serkis's performances as Gollum and Caesar in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, respectively. James Cameron's *Avatar* used the technology to notable effect to create numerous digitally enhanced performances within a single movie. Even within the world of film, there is controversy surrounding whether such performances should in fact be considered performances at all, with debates about whether the practice constitutes animation manipulated by other artists or a kind of digital makeup that merely puts a new face, so to speak, on the original performance.³³ Despite the confusion over the nature of this emerging practice, some theatres are starting to employ techniques similar to that what you might see in a Hollywood blockbuster.

Performance scholar David Saltz has written about his work with the Interactive Performance Laboratory at University of Georgia. The facility has state-of-the-art sensory equipment that translates actor movements to create digital representations and cue other technical elements. One of the goals for the facility, as Saltz expresses it, is "...to incorporate digital media into theatre without compromising the spontaneity of live performance."³⁴ Saltz,

³³ Tim Appelo, "Andy Serkis on Who Sends Him Hate Mail; Why Oscar Should Rethink Animated Category (Q&A)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/andy-serkis-oscars-adventures-of-tintin-268750> (accessed on December 1, 2011).

³⁴ David Saltz, "Live Media: Interactive Technology and Theatre," *Theatre Topics*, 11.2 (2001) 110.

who also co-founded the laboratory, places the phenomenology of theater at the center of his considerations, and recognizes a potential for media to impinge upon it. At the heart of his approach is an attempt to make mediatized performances just as interactive and responsive as real performances, in terms of their relationship to the audience. The technology is used for a variety of purposes, but the real-time projected bodies are the most explicitly interactive, particularly for the onstage physical performers.

One of the key productions Saltz mentions is *The Tempest* in 2000, which used digital media to depict Ariel, due to the supernatural nature of the character. In this case, the projection functioned as a kind of digital puppet, with the puppeteer in full view of the audience. The actress playing the spirit wore motion-capturing sensors and acted onstage while her digital form, altered to reflect the character's design, was projected on a large screen upstage. Both were visible to the audience, but the actors onstage only acknowledged the digital projection. While the physical performer had a spatial relationship, phenomenologically, to the actors onstage, she was not an acknowledged part of the narrative world of the play. Only the digital projection was interactive, a twist on the perceived dichotomy. The projection itself was rectilinear, and the sensors were also used to create and control images of the storm at the beginning of the projection. Thus, what might have been more traditional projected scenic effects were given a performative layer as the audience witnessed the human manipulation firsthand. Saltz himself describes the portrayal of Ariel in his production as "virtual puppetry," contrasting it from what he calls "instrumental media." He writes: "The difference is that while an instrument is an extension of the performer, a kind of expressive prosthesis, a virtual puppet functions as the

performer's double."³⁵ Thus, while not being three-dimensionally holographic, it allows interactivity with media as seen with science-fiction holograms.

Saltz claims that the use of this technology in *The Tempest* constitutes a live media event, as the action of digital transformation is happening in front of the audience, and the animated form is clearly a double of the onstage performer being captured. That simultaneity is key to Saltz's claim. He writes: "At the same time, though Ariel's physical presence is not live, its actions are by virtue of not being prerecorded. The animated Ariel has the same capacity to react, improvise, and make mistakes that a live performer does."³⁶ A layer of mediatization does not mean a performance is not authentic to Saltz, rather it is the issue of reproducibility after the fact, the prerecording of the performance, that he claims is the dividing line between a virtual projection being a performance or not. Ultimately, I argue that this does not distinguish him from the basic dichotomy as much as one might think. He is relying on some of the same principles as Phelan while challenging liveness in the same way as Auslander. However, like Auslander he does not acknowledge the liveness of a projection inherent in its phenomenological qualities. For Saltz, the holographic projections of Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art would be a form of media and restricted from the category of performance. However, as I have explained, the spatial relationship and the phenomenology of projection characterize a performance of media that is palpable in a similar way to the live performer.

Started in 1983, the Montreal-based Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art specializes in multimedia performances that feature holographic projections that interact with the physical performers. They are an internationally renowned company founded by Michel Lemieux and Victor Pilon

³⁵ Ibid., 126.

³⁶ Ibid., 127.

and have collaborated with companies like Cirque du Soleil.³⁷ The company is one of the most notable examples of emerging technology that allows for not just the representation of bodies, but the movement and interaction of them. As we will see in looking at some of their productions, worlds and realities are demarcated in a way that is seldom seen on stage with such potent illusionistic power. Whereas the 2000 production of *The Tempest* highlighted the interactivity of the projections, this 2005 production by Lemieux.Pilon adds on a spatial relationship, making it more explicitly holographic in the sense that audiences are familiar with.

The Tempest, or *La Tempete* in the French, used what the two designers call “virtual reality explorations”³⁸ to depict certain characters in a much different medium than the others. The production is an adaptation rather than a traditional mounting, and while the creators are eager to foreground the relevance of the play for today’s audiences, the technological wizardry on display is clearly the main attraction. The official website for the production describes the show thus: “A double universe is created onstage to illustrate the moving border between reality and fantasy. Real actors play the inhabitants of the island, but their lives are unsettled by the presence of virtual characters, actors projected onstage without the use of any visible screen!”³⁹ In a twist on what one might assume about the nature of projection, the virtual bodies are used to portray all of the visitors to the island, while the human performers portray Prospero, Miranda, Caliban, and Ariel, the latter, of course, being a supernatural spirit. Rather than using virtuality to indicate a lack of physicality, as with the UGA production, the holograms depict realistic

³⁷ “Company,” *Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art*, <http://www.4dart.com/company.html> (accessed on January 11, 2012).

³⁸ “La Tempete,” *Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art*, <http://www.4dart.com/shows.html> (accessed on January 12, 2012).

³⁹ “La Tempete.”

outsiders who visit a magical, less-realistic place. The above description also immediately frames the distinction between physical performers and virtual reality bodies in terms of reality and fantasy, perceiving the holographic bodies as less realistic, and seeing physicality as indicative of an entity's real existence. The absence of a screen, rectilinear or otherwise, distinguishes the production from other kinds of multimedia performances.

In looking at photos and videos of the production on the company's website, one sees that the projections do not just function as normally constructed human forms, but often expand and twist to fill the space and work in atypical angles with the human performers. In some scenes, projected forms are overlaid on top of a human performer, while in others giant heads confront Prospero and dominate the stage picture. Additional effects are used when Prospero summons his powers, and at times the projections are used to display flashbacks, covering the stage in bodies of various sizes and fragments, sometimes with giant figures harassing the performers of normal size. In these scenes, both audience and characters are witness to a cinematic illusion. In short, the performers are surrounded by virtuality most often representing other human beings, but sometimes creating special effects. The holographic nature of the projections brings the forms into the middle of the stage amidst the performers, breaking free from traditional screens. The overall experience is especially indicative of the hybrid performance type, with the company itself describing the production as a "hybrid...between theater and cinema."⁴⁰

The response to the techniques and the productions of Lemieux.Pilon has been relatively enthusiastic, with reservations. Frank Rizzo of *Variety* praised *The Tempest* production as "the future of live theater" and remarks: "With 4D art's latest integration of technology and theater, the mechanics further recede into the dark, leaving just the ghosts in the machine in search of a

⁴⁰ "La Tempete."

text to make them whole.”⁴¹ Critic Matt Radz interrogates which actors on stage qualify as real, and also asks, “What is the role of projection technology in the theatre, before it’s yet another cold-blooded spectacle? When does theatre stop being its ever changing hot-blooded self and become one more cool video on the DVD rack?”⁴² Thus, even when critics are impressed by the productions, they express reservations about what the new technology means for the future of live performance, fearing the evolution of such hybrid performances into something closer to pure cinema rather than pure theater. Charles Isherwood, in a review of their *La Belle et la Bête*, questions the future of his own profession: “Not long into the production the head-scratching question of how-did-they-do-that was supplanted in my mind by a more persistent one: Why did they bother? If this trend catches on, I’d be willing to willing to cede my seat on the aisle to a virtual theater critic.”⁴³ While predicting the ultimate demise of theater at the hands of hybrid performances like these would be a bit drastic, it does expose the underlying tension between performance and media that is still pervasive even in mainstream theater criticism.

Other Hauntings

The use of projection technologies to create bodies has continued to develop, forming the crux of several contemporary productions. A more recent production by Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art, as referenced by the Charles Isherwood review, has been *La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast), a story which was already adapted with memorable cinematic wizardry by Jean Cocteau in 1946, a legacy that cannot be ignored when presented with equally impressive magic in this stage version from 2011. As with *La Tempete*, the founding members Michel Lemieux and

⁴¹ Frank Rizzo, “The Tempest (La Tempete,” *Variety*, 19 June 2006.

⁴² Matt Radz, “4D or not 4D? That is the quest,” *The Gazette*, 27 February 2005.

⁴³ Charles Isherwood, “THEATER REVIEW; Those Floating Images Onstage Seem Very Much Like the Stuff in Dreams,” *The New York Times*, 17 November 2006.

Victor Pilon directed the show, a co-production with Theatre du Nouveau Monde.⁴⁴ Throughout the production, projections are used to represent other artistic forms. The character Belle is a painter in this adaptation, and her works of art are projected in space, as are certain sculptures and other seemingly mundane objects in the castle of the Beast. Character transformations, animals, ghosts, and memories of lost loved ones inhabit the space through holograms, distorting not just the production's physical reality but also its temporal stability. The whole production is seen through the view of an art scholar known as "La Dame," who is in some way connected to the Beast and examines the story through the paintings of Belle. Thus, the show is framed as an object of visual art, making both the performers and the holograms part of the same aesthetic continuum, blurring the two.

In contrast to *La Tempête*, there are many more seemingly traditional screens in *La Belle et la Bête*, though they are often mobile drops rather than stationary installations. Projections create a variety of locations much more than in the Shakespearean production, perhaps in a nod to the verbal scenery so often praised in Shakespeare's work. There is also thematic accompaniment in the holograms. For instance, in one scene Belle and the Beast are kissing as flames appear, flowing upwards along their bodies and over their heads. The overall effect is less of a world inhabited by supernatural spirits than a visually-striking piece of art that presents its symbolism and ideas in a visceral way. The company's official description highlights the blending of the cinematic and the theatrical, as with *La Tempête*, calling the directors masters of "osmosis."⁴⁵ While they employ some of the same technological approaches, the two productions

⁴⁴ "La Belle et la Bête," *Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art*, <http://www.4dart.com/shows.html> (accessed on January 13, 2012).

⁴⁵ "La Belle et la Bête."

differ in the worlds they are depicting and in their perception of reality. Both appear to bend time and space, but with *La Belle et la Bête* reality is much more tenuous, and determined by the perception of a particular character. The line between real and virtual performer is as much of an issue for the performer as it is for the audience.

The human forms that appear in the holograms are often photo-realistic, in that they are images that have been recorded rather than animated. This means that members of the cast (who may or may not appear on stage in the flesh) recorded them to be used as such. This makes the connection between the two particularly palpable, such as in *La Belle* when a male holographic figure caresses a reclining female performer. The realism of the images also contributes to the blurring of the real and the virtual, though the relative opaqueness of each is usually a clear indicator as to which is which. Still, the sheer amount of projections used in the productions makes them some of the most explicitly hybrid performances, in that each approach is used in near equal measure. The live use of projections among the real performers foregrounds the liveness of those projections, establishing a spatial presence for the cinematic images that emphasizes the phenomenology of cinema.

Other companies and artists have experimented with similar technology, with varying results. Steve Dixon chronicles several such endeavors, many involving digitally projected doubles that accompany onstage actors, a practice which Dixon links to the theories of Artaud and Freud.⁴⁶ Some feature a performer dancing with their double, which is sometimes pre-recorded, as in the case of Ivani Santana's *Corpo Aberto*,⁴⁷ or simultaneously projected next to

⁴⁶ Dixon, 242.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 251.

the dancer, as with Joan Jonas's *Left Side, Right Side*.⁴⁸ He also describes one installation that used simultaneous projection in an interactive way, when artist Susan Kozel projected the feed of her laying in a bed onto another bed which viewers were invited to lie on. When they did, she interacted with them through her digital extension. The viewer interacted with the artist in a semi-intimate setting, but without the presence of an actual body.⁴⁹ The use of doubling and the projection of the body in performance art seem to accompany a contemporary interest in presence, corporeality, and other issues that performance scholars are exploring.

The projected body is something that audiences are very used to, due to their commonplace exposure to the cinema, but interacting with such a body or seeing it exist onstage is a new experience, provided by advances in the internet and digital projection. The audience does not necessarily interact with the projections, but sees the performers onstage interacting with them and experiences it on some level vicariously. In some sense, the performers function as an extension of the audience's own senses. Since the projections appear to be there but are most likely not, it is up to the performers to act as the explorer on the audience's behalf. This mixing of realities is a highly phenomenological process, as noted by Mark B. N. Hansen, who notes that it "...foregrounds the constitutive or ontological role of the body in giving birth to the world."⁵⁰ So as with the science-fiction hologram, one of the appeals of such technology is not just how it can be displayed, but how we can engage with it.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 244.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁰ Mark B. N. Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006) 5.

The use of projection in all of these settings lends itself to theatricality. The presence of a virtual performer onstage does not lessen the overall theatrical effect, but rather adds on unique phenomenological characteristics that make the performance more unique, more one-of-a-kind, not less. John Jesurun's internet-based live performances, in which the actors' internet activity is projected onto screens, along with their images from time to time, use media in a very live way, as the audience sees both the actors and their representations at the same time, grounding the virtual in the physical.⁵¹ The comparison to real, physical bodies may be complicated but whether the body is projected onto a screen or walking around among the performers it is a live theatrical event. In the end, however, the virtual body will still not be the same as a physical one, as Dixon is quick to remind us: "There is no disembodiment, images are still just images, virtual worlds are still clunky, and the web is still primarily a lot of Web pages rather than a *Neuromancer*-style, high-adrenaline, mind-blowing cyberspace of swimming databodies—at least to those who do not easily separate their minds from their bodies."⁵² While the essential nature of each may be different, the question still remains about whether the virtual body can produce the same phenomenological experience as the live body.

Virtually the Same

T. Nikki Cesare sees the mediatization of bodily representations as a boon to a performer, extending their influence beyond what the normal physical universe allows. She writes: "And though, in its mediated state, the body is still a "volume in disintegration," vulnerable to the fragmentation of interpretation and the video projections that alter and enhance it, it is because of

⁵¹ Bonnie Marranca, "Performance as Design: The Mediaturgy of John Jesurun's *Firefall*," *PAJ* 96 (2010).

⁵² Dixon, 212.

mediation that the live body, that of the actor / singer and of the musician, performatively exceeds the dramatic boundaries and speaks...beyond the limits of the stage.”⁵³ Scholars often envision performance as a barrier-breaking interactive experience that holds endless possibilities for both performers and audience members alike. Does the introduction of technology betray that possibility, or enhance it? If performance can hold the same power across cultures and subjects and time periods, then a virtual performer is either something entirely different than a performance or changes the potential of performance very little. When an actor uses a microphone, they still have a voice, so if a performer is represented by a projection, why would they no longer be performing?

Gabriella Giannachi sees the relationship between the real and the virtual as the defining feature of most virtual performances. She writes: “Yet the most exciting experience of virtual reality is not so much the one that totally alters the viewer’s perspective on the real as the one that is able to expand, augment, and enlarge the real. In other words, it is in its *relationship* with the real, rather than in its attempts to substitute itself for the real, that the most original use of virtual reality is found.”⁵⁴ The viewer, as I have mentioned, is never fooled into thinking the virtual performer is real, but it does not make it a less-effective representation than the one created by the performer. Not every use of virtuality means that a production is focusing on technology as a subject, but virtual bodies are often positioned in narrative relationships to real bodies in a way that highlights that virtuality as Other, such as with the projected Ariel in David Saltz’s *The Tempest*, or in its reverse use in 4d Art’s *La Tempete*. Uses of projections that

⁵³ T. Nikki Cesare, “‘Like a Chained Man’s Bruise’: The Mediated Body in *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Anatomy Theatre*,” *Theatre Journal*, 58.3 (2006) 456.

⁵⁴ Giannachi, 125.

comment upon the threat of dehumanizing technology that projection may represent may be called “cyborg,” but the overall presence of a projection does not pose a threat to the human subject. This kind of optimism about projected bodies may fly in the face of the theories of Phelan and others, but it seems clear, from a phenomenological standpoint, that virtual bodies share such a strong bond with physical bodies that they must assume some of their power.

The technology of performance capture has other implications as well, including the recording of gestures and movements for archival and research purposes. Gongbing Shan has experimented with such a technique to create visual representations of Indian classical dances. She and her collaborators characterize this process: “Effectively, such images can be understood as signatures of human movement containing latent and communicative content related to bodiliness—gestural representations that may be understood in a manner that is experientially or culturally dependent.”⁵⁵ For Shan, the procedure allows the essential bodily movements that make up a performance to be mapped and catalogued. Phelan asserts that performance cannot be captured or reproduced, and while these drawings are not performances, the phrase “performance capture” is more than ironic in this context. The performance objects are changed as they are recorded in three dimensions, but this is ultimately a better archive of its phenomenological spatial existence than a normal written description, or even a normal two-dimensional video recording.

However, when performance capture is used in theatrical performances or in the popular cinema, is it truly capturing a performance, or merely recording certain traces of it? Usually, motion capture technology, when used in entertainment, involves the placement of numerous

⁵⁵ Gongbing Shan, Peter Visentin, and Tayna Harnett, “A Novel Use of 3D Motion Capture: Creating Conceptual Links between Technology and Representation of Human Gesture in the Visual Arts,” *Leonardo*, 43.1 (2010) 42.

sensors all across a performer's body and face in an effort to record the uniqueness of that performer's movement into a computer to then translate it into an animated form. The technology is meant to create a complex animated portrayal, allowing for a human actor to add their take on a character to the work the animators are doing. Despite the advances in technology, are the sensors really able to pick up every choice and nuance to a performance? Is the resulting product, with its animated layer, an accurate representation of the original performance, or is the actor's contribution meant to be simply one part of a large collaboration?

Such questions do not seem at first to apply to scholars of live theater, but with the advent of this technology through productions like the 2000 UGA production of *The Tempest*, stage performers are suddenly forced to contend with how to deal with and interact with their digital counterparts. Is seeing the physical performer live onstage being captured at the same time as their animated image is being projected a necessary component? Do the projections of Lemieux.Pilon 4d Art suffice in creating theatricality? When actors talk to and walk amongst ghostly projections, are they performing with other actors, or taking their cues from a movie? Should an actor even allow themselves to be captured, or should they insist on being physically present in some way during each performance? Should the playing of a projection count as rehearsal time under union guidelines? It seems that if any part of this process truly challenges Phelan's assertion that performance cannot be recorded or reproduced, it is not so much the initial digital capturing of the actor, but rather how that performance is then projected or showcased within a production.

The ability to capture a performance for archival purposes or for a cinematic animation is still quite different from the presence of a projected performance interacting with performers onstage. How do we characterize this presence, and how does it compare to live performances?

In an essay on re-enactments, Amelia Jones writes, “The belief that the meaning of the body in action can only be known to the spectator through its authentic live enactment, as performance theory suggests, contradicts the fact...that this body’s actions can only be known if they are recognizable, if they are reiterating or repeating previous gestures that have salience to viewers, as coded from accepted past traditions.”⁵⁶ As I mentioned in my previous discussion of the body onstage, virtual and physical bodies are bound together by a common form, by encoded meanings and responses to the image of the body whether embodied or represented by a projection. This allows digital artists to appeal to the audience’s responses while creating a different (but similar) phenomenological experience.

How, then, do we characterize virtual presence in a phenomenological sense? Don Ihde characterizes a fantasy of virtual living that tries to attain “...the powers and capacities of the technologizing medium without its ambiguous limitations.”⁵⁷ Ihde is describing people who want the boundary-breaking instantaneousness of cyberspace without having a separation between their online experiences and their bodily sensations. Perhaps that is what artists may strive for with projected bodies: figures that can take on any size, shape, color, opaqueness, or transformation while seeming as palpable and material as physical bodies. Projected bodies have the greatest effect on sight, as they cannot be touched, smelled, tasted, or heard. Additional technologies can be employed to give them voice, but in the end a projection is usually always silent. Certain virtual reality experiments aimed at extending the body on a phenomenological

⁵⁶ Amelia Jones, “The Artist is Present: Artistic Re-enactments and the Impossibility of Presence,” *TDR: The Drama Review*, 55.1 (2011) 33.

⁵⁷ Don Ihde, *Bodies in Technology* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) 15.

level have dealt primarily with sight and projecting one's vision across great distances⁵⁸, but is there a way to give phenomenological weight to the other senses in a virtual performance?

In short, we have these projections that are attempting to be human and not human, fleshly in form but not in spirit. There is no deceiving the audience as to the physicality of these virtual beings, but advances in technology seek to make up for that in interactivity and spatial presence, two hallmarks of our popular science-fiction perception of holographic technology. The term "presence" seems to give most writers pause when considering the projected body, but as with any kind of projection, as we have seen with film phenomenology, there is a presence which may be different from the performer but can provide many of the same phenomenological effects. In an essay on dance and Baudrillard's theories, Thomas Heyd writes "We might say that a simulacrum is a 'dishonest' copy, one that hides some of the knowledge about the nature of the original that a faithful copy would transmit."⁵⁹ If a projected body is a simulacra, it is a strange one in that it does not hide anything. It is, in a way, nothing more than its appearance. It is being transmitted through light which forms the very basis of the visual phenomenological experience, and its formation into the human form represents the form itself walking free of any materiality. This is both an exciting and frightening experience when that form breaks free of our conventional rectilinear screens and enters the actor's personal space, which makes the innovations of Lemieux and Pilon so fascinating. Whether seen as an ephemeral puppet or a singular double walking free from its host, the hologram remains a vision of the future as well as

⁵⁸ Kurt Vanhoutte and Nele Wynants, "Performing Phenomenology: Negotiating Presence in Intermedial Theatre," *Found Sci* 16 (2011).

⁵⁹ Thomas Heyd, "The Real and the Hyperreal: Dance and Simulacra," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 34.2 (2000) 16.

the distillation of the very essence of performance. The experience of watching it is a unique and unrepeatable experience, just like any other live performance.

CHAPTER SIX: GLOBAL SPECTACLES

Outside of the numerous theoretical differences between performance and media, breadth of exposure is one of the foremost practical distinctions between the two forms. People inevitably see media more than live theatrical productions due to the former's reproducibility and potential for ceaseless life in the cultural landscape. There are possible exceptions, as it's likely more people have seen *The Phantom of the Opera*, through its transatlantic presence and touring companies, than a small independent film like *Quiet City*. However, there are problems with the claim for *Phantom*'s dominance, as each performance could be classified as a separate product. With film, ostensibly, the same product is seen, though film phenomenology has problematized this. Rather than an audience seeing the same film each time, it becomes a different experience due to time, context, and audience makeup. Still and all, most any one film or television program is seen by more people than any one performance. The productions I have referenced thus far have been relatively limited in their influence; however the productions I will discuss here reach a much wider and more diverse audience due to their sheer size, international notoriety, and often-simultaneous mediatized transmission.

Simply put, the opening ceremonies of the Olympic games, both summer and winter, are among the largest, most ambitious theatrical productions in recent history. They are seen by a live crowd of world-class athletes, political dignitaries, and adoring fans, while they are simultaneously or later (depending on location and time zone) broadcast to a worldwide audience limited only by television access. They combine live artistic performance and mediatization, with both functioning toward the same end: to introduce the world to a particular time and place where the limits of human potential will be challenged. This combination of the live and the mediatized in one form is also echoed on the arena floor, as recently these productions have

utilized film projections to create unforgettable spectacles worthy of the efforts of an entire nation. Because of this, the opening ceremonies represent the biggest examples of hybrid performance, showcasing the possibilities of projected performances.

In particular, the last two opening ceremonies in Beijing, China and Vancouver, Canada used projections in similar yet strikingly different ways. The Beijing ceremony was notable for its use of thousands of performers in large choreographed production numbers staged around an enormous LED screen that featured into the production's thematic content. The Vancouver ceremony had far fewer participants but used the projections to fill the arena with environmental images representing the geographic diversity of Canada. In both ceremonies, projections served to encapsulate each nation within a relatively confined space, communicating the identity of its people for the worldwide audience. While the Beijing ceremony showcased the discipline of its people and the dominant artistic and philosophical achievements of the nation, the Vancouver ceremony presented aboriginal groups and geographic diversity rather than focusing on a single cultural narrative. These statements of identity used symbolism through the performers and projections to convey national pride. In the case of the Beijing production, one goal was to change the nation's image in the eyes of the world. More than in any other instance, these are moments where a nation relies on its prominent artists (and sometimes artists from other countries) to construct a definitive portrait of nationhood that will frame the entire Olympiad, including the participation of other nations.

For the most part, these productions have been largely ignored within theater studies, despite their scale and prominence. Perhaps because of the ceremonies' connection to the world of athletics, theater scholars consider them outside of their general purview. Athletics and cultural scholars have largely focused on the Games' connections to politics and their bearing on

international relations.¹ The Games also represent the commercialization of sports on a global scale, tying all participating nations to a well-meaning but profitable enterprise.² Perhaps this gap in performance scholarship exists because the largest audience for the ceremonies is the television audience, and their status as live performance is not foregrounded as with conventional live theater. From a phenomenological standpoint, this mediatization presents a challenge for the theater scholar. It is difficult for the average person to see the ceremony live, and so it is possible that people perceive the show mostly as a televisual product rather than a theatrical event.

It is also possible that because the shows are state-sanctioned, they are not politically resistant in the way that usually attracts the attention of performance scholars. They may seem to be, rather than opportunities for unique personal expression, the performative tools states wield to enforce what performance scholar Jon McKenzie calls “normativity and domination.”³ It may be that the events are simply so exposed and popular that they do not seem to require the attention of the academy. It is for many of these reasons that the opening ceremonies fit nicely into this study. Because of their mediatized exposure to the worldwide audience, they achieve a liveness of transmission simultaneous (sometimes) to the liveness of the physical performance. That original performance is itself a hybrid performance through the use of film projection alongside live actors. They also represent a mainstream example of hybrid performance outside of the usual strain of theatrical practice.

¹ See: John Hoberman, *The Olympic Crisis: Sport, Politics, and the Moral Order* (New Rochelle: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1986).

² For more on this, see: Robert K Barney, Stephen R. Wenn and Scott G. Martyn, *Selling the Five Rings: The International Olympic Committee and the Rise of Olympic Commercialism* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2002).

³ Jon McKenzie, “Democracy’s Performance,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 47.2 (2003) 117.

In this chapter, I will look at both ceremonies in light of the techniques discussed in earlier chapters. As I referenced in the second chapter, the manipulation of light has long been used for political and patriotic purposes, as we have seen with fireworks. While fireworks often still figure into the ceremonies, artists now often use the technology of projection for displays of nationalism within the events. Each of the ceremonies I will discuss employed projection to emphasize different aspects of each nation, but both created a common hybridity that is indicative of the merging of the live and the mediatized at work in 21st century performance. Patricia Ybarra has noted that viewing state-sponsored performances in a monolithic homogenous fashion may be oversimplification⁴, and I believe that hybridity is representative of the kind of complexity inherent in these events despite their sometimes propagandist overtones. As both nations looked back on their histories and cultural backgrounds, they employed groundbreaking technology to communicate their legacies to the world at large, making hybrid performance the common language.

China's Coming Out Party

My own experience with the opening ceremony of the XXIX Olympiad was mediatized through broadcast television, as were most people's experiences. Tuning into NBC on August 8, 2008, I watched the tape-delayed transmission of the hybrid spectacle from China's new Beijing National Stadium.⁵ Matt Lauer and Bob Costas provided the commentary during the American broadcast, and frequently referred to the event's political significance for the People's Republic

⁴ Patricia Ybarra, "Re-imagining Identity and Re-centering History in Tlaxcalan Performance," *Theatre Journal* 55.4 (2003) 634.

⁵ Tang Yuankai, "Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony: Zhang Yimou Keeps Everyone Guessing," *China Today* (March 2008) 53.

of China, naming it their “coming out party” after decades of relative isolation.⁶ The presence of a record number of heads of state, including then-President George W. Bush, underlined the political importance of the evening, a guest list that proved to be controversial considering China’s record of censorship and human rights abuses.⁷ The road to the ceremony had been rocky, with politics sometimes muddying China’s plans, as when Steven Spielberg, a hired consultant for the opening ceremony, resigned over China’s stance on the genocide in Darfur.⁸ The repression of Tibet also caused embarrassment for the Chinese when human rights groups opposed the running of the Olympic torch through a region that many believed China should not be occupying. The Dalai Lama was among those who spoke up about continuing human rights abuses in response to this inclusion of Tibet in China’s plans.⁹

Headed by noted film director Zhang Yimou¹⁰, the ceremony was planned, like many other opening ceremonies, to be a celebration of the host country’s culture and history. The committee overseeing the opening ceremony chose Yimou as the general director, and planning for the event began three years in advance, four years after Beijing was chosen as the host city.¹¹

⁶ *2008 Summer Olympics*, NBC, 8 August 2008.

⁷ Cesar R. Torres, “Morally Incompatible? An Analysis of the Relationship Between Competitive Sport and International Relations at the Olympic Games,” *SAIS Review* 31.1 (2011) 3.

⁸ David Miller, *The Official History of the Olympic Games and the IOC: Athens to Beijing, 1894-2008* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company Ltd., 2008) 414.

⁹ Miller, 414.

¹⁰ Trained at the Beijing Film Academy, he is mostly known for his work in film, such as *Raise the Red Lantern* and *House of Flying Daggers*. For more, see: “Yimou Zhang,” *IMDb*, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0955443/> (accessed March 14, 2012).

¹¹ “Press Conference on the Overall Operations of the Beijing Olympic Games Opening Ceremony,” *Chinese Law and Government* 42.4 (2009) 55.

The ceremony was rigorously planned, with a cast made up of artists and students from around China who rehearsed in harsh climatic and domestic conditions for over six months.¹² Rehearsing sixteen hours a day, some performers were even given adult diapers to avoid bathroom breaks.¹³ The broadcast itself was, of course, broken up with advertising and peppered with commentary, trying to translate Chinese cultural practices for an American audience. The delay, due to difference in time zone, cut into the liveness of the event, other than the liveness of the transmission simultaneously around the country. The event itself had been over for hours, but the spectacle was still awe-inspiring. In this analysis, I will be focusing on the events as I was able to observe them through the broadcast, and will be focusing less on the broadcast itself, though it did represent an initial layer of mediatization for the live theatrical event.¹⁴ In short, my object of study is not the television program, but the live performance being observed by the cameras, though I must contend in a moment with a part of the transmission that had significant implications for the reception of the performance as a “live” one.

Overall, the event followed a narrative of Chinese history and culture, focusing on its philosophical and artistic accomplishments as well as its advancements in trade and technology. The ceremony used projections to illustrate this dual legacy, its ability to enrich and compete simultaneously. Though there were no explicitly militaristic portions of the program, the

¹² “Beijing International Media Center Press Conference on the Circumstances of All Organization Work for the Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympic Games,” *Chinese Law and Government* 42.4 (2009) 82.

¹³ Associated Press, “Opening Ceremony performers faced harsh conditions,” *ESPN*, 20 August 2008, <http://sports.espn.go.com/oly/summer08/news/story?id=3543618> (accessed March 18, 2012).

¹⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all references and material about the ceremony itself have been gleaned from the broadcast itself. I will link to specific online videos where available and appropriate.

discipline of the performers proved intimidating for the viewer. As the event began, 2,008 drummers occupied the stage with traditional drums that lit up when beaten.¹⁵ The drummers used the light-up instruments to form numbers during a countdown in the beginning of the ceremony.¹⁶ The drummers also shouted the countdown, adding to the awe-inspiring display. It was the first of many instances in which light served as the object of observation, the means by which a performance was communicated. As the stadium darkened, the light-up drums counted down in increments of 10 until reaching the final ten seconds. Each drum flickered, and the overall effect was akin to the flickering of a film projector.

Light was the indicator of presence, motion, and coordination, as all 4016 drumsticks were raised and lowered in unison. At the end of the sequence, fireworks went off to signal the start of the games, accompanied by loud fanfare. The totality of this opening “scene” foregrounded light as a primary element of this performance. Fireworks often appear in sporting events and public rallies, as I have previously discussed, as patriotic and celebratory markers, and so their presence here is no surprise. However, their use alongside other lights-as-objects makes them part of an overall aesthetic approach to hybrid performance, a style in which the ambition of physical performance and the latest in projection technology receive almost equal footing. This use of light is a visual echo to the primary symbols of the torch and flame. The synchronization of the drummers served to highlight the discipline of the Chinese performers, and in turn, the Chinese people in the eyes of the world. This discipline was complemented by

¹⁵ As noted by the American commentators, the drum is a type of traditional Chinese drum unearthed in an archeological excavation and reproduced in recent years.

¹⁶ For an audience member’s viewpoint of the countdown, see: “2008 Olympics Opening Ceremony- part 2,” Youtube, HanmoLi, 29 November 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUy9OgRRXnw> (accessed March 18, 2012).

the lighting effects in both the drums and fireworks to send a message of power; in this instance China proved both dominance over its people and mastery over light.

Fireworks soon appeared again, but in a way that highlighted the mediatization that most of the worldwide audience engaged with. The problem of capturing fireworks on film problematized the live phenomenological qualities of light. As the main portion of the ceremony after the countdown was about to begin, viewers at home saw fireworks leaping up from different parts of the city in the shape of footsteps, symbolizing a “march of history” from the center of Beijing to the stadium. This shot, as seen by audiences in the broadcast, showed an aerial view of the footsteps as they traveled to the arena. However, the American audience on NBC was informed that the footsteps were created digitally and were a cinematic recreation rather than a live aerial shot over Beijing. Other broadcasts in other countries did not include this information, leading to some confusion. It was later clarified that the fireworks display did take place outside the stadium¹⁷, but because of the dangers posed to the helicopter pilot and the difficulty in videoing through the infamous Beijing smog, the artists decided to insert a virtual recreation into the broadcast to each nation.¹⁸

In this case, a recreation of a pyrotechnic lighting effect was projected through light at the same time the real lighting effect was happening outside of the performance space.¹⁹ The audience within the arena saw the cinematic recreation on a screen showing the same video that

¹⁷ Tang Yuankai, “An Explosive Opening,” *Beijing Review* (14 August 2008) 22.

¹⁸ “Part of Olympic display altered in broadcast,” *MSNBC*, 8 August 2008, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26139005/#.Ttv62mBuGSI> (accessed December 4, 2011).

¹⁹ For a street-level view of the actual footsteps, see: “Beijing Olympics Opening Ceremony Footprint Fireworks,” Youtube, shijmus, 12 August 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3rTVy2khW8> (accessed March 18, 2012).

was inserted into the broadcast.²⁰ In the televised version, it was a continuous part of a mediatized transmission, while in the live event it would seem to be a virtual interruption into an actual performance. However, as we have discussed previously, the phenomenological effects of projection carry their own kind of presence, and so the projection of such images within the event fits nicely into the overall hybrid phenomenology. The fact that the shot of the footsteps seemed actual to some of the viewers shows just how well the artists mastered the manipulation of light and projection within the performance.

However, the confusion over whether the footage in the broadcasts was actually a reflection of what was happening in Beijing represents a clash between what audiences expect from live performance and from mediatized performance. An attempt to film the actual fireworks would most likely have resulted in poor images and technical difficulties. The attempt to counter this with a digital recreation betrayed the expectations of “liveness,” even for the viewers of the broadcast. Indeed, it was because of the broadcast that questions were raised, as the audiences at home expected to see what was actually taking place in Beijing, not something that had been created by computer technology. The actuality inherent in the liveness of television competed with the virtuality in the transmission, and it was for the audience’s benefit that those images were created in the first place. Hybridity, in the sense of the combination of actuality and virtuality, created problems when applied to broadcast television. It is an example of hybrid performance at times creating tensions and problems rather than fluid union, but also a sign of the uniqueness of performance hybridity, as this technique seemed to work in the Olympic Stadium, but not in a purely mediatized form.

²⁰ For the aerial, recreated broadcast view, see: “Beijing Olympics Footprint Fireworks,” Youtube, godzillahk, 15 August 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRpRDirHPH4> (accessed March 18, 2012).

Light again took center stage within the next sequence, which featured an Olympic logo being projected onto a screen in the center of the arena. What was set up as a traditional cinematic projection, however, took on new life as the interlocking rings rose from the floor to take on three-dimensionality as they were lifted into the air.²¹ The rings seemed to be composed of individual light particles, the same kinds of particles covering aerial performers who floated above the screen around the Olympic rings. In this sequence, light and projection had a definite presence and spatial relationship to the live audience as they broke out of the traditional screen. It would be the first of several moments in which objects from the screen would be lifted up and out of two-dimensionality. Just a few minutes into the ceremony, light had proven to be the defining parameter of the performance's reality, but the most striking moments would come in the interplay between two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality.

The centerpiece of the arena/stage was a 147-meter long and 22-meter wide LED screen²², shaped like an ancient scroll and functioning in a variety of representational and presentational ways. Essentially a huge television screen, it was not used for traditional film projections but rather for the display of digitized illuminated images. Rolling out and unfurling like a scroll, the screen first displayed traditional Chinese calligraphic images while several dancers dressed in black and covered in ink made similar markings and drawings on a large piece of paper laid at that time on top of the screen.²³ Both two-dimensional, the "real" markings and the mediatized markings existed on the same plane, both coming into being through either

²¹ For footage of this, see: "Best of the Best: Dream Rings," Youtube, zgjygzgjy, 19 December 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1RDgFF9Src> (accessed March 18, 2012).

²² Jing Xiaolei, "Beauty of Tech," *Beijing Review* (21 August 2008) 45.

²³ For footage of this moment, see: "olympics opening dancing beijing 2008," Youtube, ajwijaya, 11 August 2008, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7scUIT7z23Y> (accessed March 18, 2012).

physical movement or televisual manipulation. This side-by-side hybrid interplay blurred the lines of live and not live for the original audience, as both techniques functioned as symbolism through the creation of signs. Though the signs were only intelligible to a Chinese-speaking audience, the creation of those signs was a live event in both regards. The appearance of the calligraphy on the LED screen became a part of the live performance in this context, and represented the blending of contemporary and ancient Chinese visual forms.

Director Zhang Yimou made the decision to use such a technology in conjunction with physical performers for a number of reasons, including an attempt to appeal to younger audiences. In a press conference the day after the event, Zhang told reporters, “Using high-tech means is a must, because we already find ourselves in a period replete with high-end technology. We feel that the use of such methods to display ancient and traditional culture is better able to attract young people and better able make these appear fashionable, chic, cool.”²⁴ Whether Zhang and his team achieved this goal is difficult to ascertain, though many came away more impressed by the live performers rather than the use of new technology. Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson comments, “Throughout the entire event, the most spectacular performances involved the synchrony of primarily human movement, rather than digitally enhanced or modified movement.”²⁵ Both elements can be admired, but it is their combination in hybrid performance that gives the performance its overall unique effect, that of the breadth of Chinese history and culture playing out before the audience’s eyes.

²⁴ “Press Conference,” 57.

²⁵ Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson, “Music in Ritual and Ritual in Music: A Virtual Viewer’s Perceptions about Liminality, Functionality, and Mediatization in the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games,” *Asian Music* (2011) 14.

The screen-as-scroll was perhaps the most potent symbol of the cultural legacy at work and also functioned as the site of most of the moments of hybridization. Continuing a section on the cultural and philosophical legacy of China, the screen continued to expand and roll out (sometimes giving the illusion of this through the electronic display) and later opened up to allow a large arrangement of boxes to rise up from below the stage for a sequence about the travels of Confucius, one of the most significant philosophers and spiritual figures in Chinese history. In one of the most impressive sequences of the ceremony, the boxes were lifted and lowered in coordinated waves and formations. The movements were so tightly choreographed that it could be assumed they were being controlled by a computerized system, but at the end the boxes popped open to reveal a human performer inside of each one. During the movement of the boxes as waves, the portions of the LED screen on either side depicted waves of water, again linking the images on the screen with the physical objects being manipulated in the center of the screen, making the live and the mediatized one complete moving picture. This was also one of several moments in the American broadcast where the commentators referred to the ceremony as “cinematic,” characterizing the complete performance product in mediatized terms.²⁶

While the section depicting waves utilized the screen for representational purposes, to create the illusion of water on the floor of the stadium, in the earlier calligraphic section and later moments Zhang and his team used the screen in a more presentational manner, such as in a segment on China’s ancient dynasties, during which symbols and icons floated across the screen. It was not an attempt to create any kind of environment, but rather to give Chinese characters a presence within the performance. As the ceremony moved into a section on modern China, the screen would serve as the floor for the performance. As brightly-lit people crowded onto it, it

²⁶ NBC.

took on a bright green and blue hue, with waves of color sweeping onto it. The light from the screen and the light from the performers were very similar, both part of a spectrum of lighting effects and again challenging a separation between the content of the screen and the content of the live, physical performance.

The fluidity of the projection and the performers is more pronounced in this sequence than it is in some of the previous segments, where the lines between screen and performer are often clear. When dealing with China's history, the use of technology seems to point to future technological and industrial dominance. As a twofold goal, the expressing of a rich cultural background along with the ability to compete in a globalized market foregrounds the importance of China to the world both culturally and financially. The use of masses of performers also links the ancient disciplines with the current discipline provided by a strong government. Hybrid technology in this sense accomplishes both goals throughout the ceremony: it shows that China can be on the cutting-edge of technology while also being bolstered by its cultural legacy. The use of screens portrays ancient symbols and high technology in equal measure.

While the LED screen was often the center of each sequence, an overhead LED screen that stretched around the Bird's Nest (as the stadium was affectionately named) showcased images that extended the spectacle of the floor and complemented the thematic content. For instance, during the countdown to the start of the ceremony, the scrim (as the American commentators called it) showed images of a sundial to correspond with the passage of time. During the drum sequence, the scrim was used in a presentational manner, projecting texts in different languages to welcome all the nations to Beijing. The scrim and LED floor screen are both atypical because of their configuration, the former wrapping around the heads of the audience, and the latter because of its placement perpendicular to the audience on the floor, best

visible from overhead (from the vantage point often shown in the broadcast). Both break from the usual rectilinear configuration seen with most film projections. Other screens throughout the ceremony served the same function to lesser extents, such as the multiple screens that appeared across the arena floor during a segment featuring hundreds of martial artists performing Tai chi.

The most unconventional screen, however, was utilized in the final segment. Before the images of schoolchildren were shown, a large globe rose from the floor into the air, and later featured singers standing on top of it and aerial performers running across its surface. At first the globe featured projections of the earth's surface, but later morphed into other images, finally settling on the pictures of children being shown by the performers and the scrim. Throughout the ceremony, performance and media were not only linked in content and representation, but also through a unique spatial relationship that defied the conventional placement of screens. Both elements moved and had a presence within the arena, and the three-dimensionality of the screens made for greater interaction with the other performance elements. Again, this blending of the traditional and the atypical places China's feet firmly in both past and future, able to bend both people and technology to its will.

The entire production cost the equivalent of hundreds of millions²⁷ of U.S. dollars, roughly the cost of the average Hollywood blockbuster, and the similarities between the two were not lost on some writers. Noted film critic Roger Ebert praised the production, in particular the precision of the performers and the freedom given to film director Zhang Yimou.²⁸ As previously mentioned, the American commentators Costas and Lauer noted that the show

²⁷ Sborgi Lawson, 3.

²⁸ Roger Ebert, "Zhang Yimou's Gold Medal," *The Chicago Sun-Times*, 9 August 2008, http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2008/08/zhang_yimous_gold_medal.html (accessed December 6, 2011).

resembled a “cinematic presentation played out in real time.”²⁹ The critics of the production mostly focused on the show’s political implications, such as the *Tibetan Review*, which pointed out inconsistencies in the program, calling it “fake” and a “work of Han supremacist fiction.”³⁰ Despite such controversies, critics and spectators praised Zhang Yimou and his team for crafting an ambitious hybrid production that used the union of performance and technology to portray a nation rich in history and also on the cutting-edge of contemporary industry.

Bert States wrote about the tendency of the theater to ingest objects from everyday life and recreate them as signs. In their own way, both the live performers and the televisual projections in the Beijing ceremony ingested centuries of Chinese history and culture along with modern day achievements and aspirations, creating theatrical signs that encompassed a portrait of nationhood. It is a supremely symbolic product to be sure, and created from a distinct political and ethnic point of view, but the use of technology within the production resulted in a unique phenomenological effect. The space became one of past and present coexisting, of actuality and virtuality side by side. Despite the technology, however, the highlight of the production for many remained the synchronicity of the human performers due to their enormous numbers. In the following opening ceremony, film projections and screens would once again take center stage, but in a different relationship to the far-fewer performers.

²⁹ NBC.

³⁰ Like many nations, China has a complex ethnic legacy, and this writer is referring to the exclusion of certain ethnic groups like the Tibetan people in favor of a more unified racial depiction. The repression of Tibet is certainly a political issue, but this racial homogenizing may not be as absolute as the writer depicts, as children from many different provinces and ethnic groups are incorporated into the latter portions of the program. See: “Olympic show exposed as work of Han supremacist fiction,” *Tibetan Review* (Sept. 2008) 28.

Fields of Dreams

As with the Beijing ceremony, I viewed the opening ceremony of the Vancouver games on television together with the majority of its audience on February 12, 2010. Because I was in the same hemisphere as the games, I was able to watch the production live rather than delayed.³¹ This opening of the XXI Winter Olympics was, like the Chinese ceremony, a welcome to the world coupled with celebrations of Canadian identity. These statements were unique in their inclusion of the native groups who occupied Canada before its European colonization, but some form of mediatization accompanied all statements of heritage, building on the techniques of the Beijing ceremony while using them for different means. Using a vastly reduced number of performers compared to the Beijing show, the ceremony was less about the discipline of a population and more about the pride of a collection of various peoples. The use of media asserted the geographic diversity of the host nation while providing an environment for more individualized performances.

An unconventional aspect of the Vancouver ceremony was that the director, David Atkins, was not a Canadian national but rather an Australian director specializing in large-scale spectacles. Atkins spent two years traveling around Canada, searching out distinct performance practices to include and experiencing firsthand the geography of the country he would be representing onstage.³² Part of his reason, he said, for using projections to create large-scale environments was an attempt to control the environment, as outdoors he would not have been

³¹ *2010 Winter Olympics*, NBC, 12 Feb. 2010.

³² Paul Wells, "The Show of Shows," *Maclean's* (1 March 2010) 28-31.

able to control the elements and create the images he wanted.³³ In this production, virtual environments were preferred to natural environments because of their versatility. While the performance was undeniably live for its present audience, large portions of the images were mediatized, with performers almost constantly engaging with virtual representations. Movement, interaction, and relationships were developed through film projection, a strikingly non-physical approach to a ceremony devoted to physical feats of strength and agility. Overall, the Vancouver ceremony highlighted diversity and culture over industrial strength. While Canada is certainly important to world markets, it is less of a superpower than China or the United States. Rather than using the performances and projections to illustrate the cultural and technological dominance of a unified people, Atkins used them to explore the symbols and icons of the diverse peoples of Canada.

One of the unique features of the performance was the involvement of the audience in the creation of the performance space and the manipulation of lighting sources. At the beginning of the ceremony, a countdown was projected onto the crowd, making its way around the stadium before reaching its end, accompanied by a burst of fireworks. This technique made the audience seating area a part of the performance space. While no performers ever entered the stands, the projected countdown made the audience virtual participants, a status seen throughout the event. Audience members were given close-ups throughout the broadcast and were seen holding small flashlights that were given to them by the organizers.³⁴ Throughout the ceremony, thousands of

³³ Hannah Kinnersley, "Projecting the Ceremonies, Part 2," *Live Design*, 22 Feb. 2010, <http://blog.livedesignonline.com/designing-vancouver/2010/02/projecting-the-ceremonies-part-2/> (accessed December 9, 2011).

³⁴ Marty Cortinas, "Shining a Light on the Opening Ceremony," *Wired*, <http://www.wired.com/playbook/2010/02/shining-a-light-on-the-opening-ceremony/> (accessed March 14, 2012).

lights could be seen moving and waving in the audience, creating a lighting effect that was beyond the director's control but added another level to the aesthetic of the performance. The flickering light surrounding the stage mimicked the artificial snow that fell during the show, while also providing a general background of ephemerality for the television viewers at home. If light determined the reality of the production on a phenomenological level, the audience was made a semi-active participant in the determining of the production's content and overall aesthetic. While welcoming in its own way, the Beijing ceremony was rarely so open in its statements to the other nations in the performance.

After the countdown, the next section of the performance utilized the large Jumbotron screen at one end of the arena, a screen arranged in a much more rectilinear, conventional fashion than many of the screens in the Beijing performance, though the Vancouver show would later employ some of the non-rectilinear innovations. This section also borrowed a technique from Erwin Piscator and his use of film projection in narrative theater. The screen's content was fed directly into the television broadcast while being shown on the screen in the arena, and depicted a snowboarder making his way down a steep mountainside amidst a formation of people holding torches. Once lit up, the torches, as seen from afar, formed the shape and color of the maple leaf from the Canadian flag. When the broadcast cut back to the arena, the same (presumably) snowboarder from the video was seen at the top of a ramp under the screen before sliding down the ramp onto the stadium floor.³⁵ Just as Piscator depicted two of his characters making their way to the theater before the actors entered through the main doors, the

³⁵ For footage of this moment and the countdown, see: "Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games Opening. Countdown," Youtube, MuzBuff, 16 February 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgSDagNLR_A (accessed on March 18, 2012).

snowboarder made the transition from virtual presence to real presence, from mediatization to physicality.

The maple leaf from the opening video was not the only national symbol to be mediatized during the ceremony. After the snowboarder's entrance, a welcome speech to dignitaries was delivered in front of a projected Canadian flag on a large screen, moving as if being blown by the wind. Though real flags would later be used as staples of the parade of nations, this virtual flag functioned as the primary Canadian emblem for much of the early portion of the ceremony. In the next sequence, symbols of many of the first-nation aboriginal groups were projected onto the then-white arena floor, changing as each nation entered and greeted their faux ice sculpture totem. Just as fireworks, with their ephemeral transient nature, have been used for patriotic purposes, so were film projections used in the Vancouver ceremony as nationalistic symbols. However, the ceremony made little mention of the colonization of Canada by European groups, such as the French, who even now have a strong cultural presence in Quebec. The central focus was the aboriginal groups and their traditions dating from before the period of colonization. Rather than trying to trace a unified through line of cultural history, the ceremony instead highlighted the diversity of cultures in a bygone era. The use of projections allowed for including an infinite multitude of symbols within the performance space over time rather than forcing designers and directors into choosing to promote one group over another, and so on. The space, with projections, becomes an at-times neutral location, open to any political or national representation.

While the entire arena floor would function as a screen throughout the production, several more localized screens appeared, such as a large drum-like platform in the center of the performance space. In this case, projections would stand in as national symbols as well as create

the illusion that the platform was, in fact, a giant percussion instrument. In the Beijing ceremony, physical movements and projections often complemented each other to create a single image, but in this case the projections completed the illusion of a physical action. As performers on all sides of the platform beat their hands on it, the projections created a vibration effect. While the conventional wisdom of hybrid performance might be that the physical actions are more “real” than the projected images, in this case they come together to create a complete illusion. While the performers were certainly hitting the surface of the platform, its use as and appearance as a drum would be impossible without the projections. It is a rare case of actors working with projections to give credence to their physical acts, and contributed to the feeling that the ceremony had a “...rhythm. A pulse.”³⁶

While there were certainly environmental images used in the Beijing projections, the Vancouver ceremony used these in a much more striking way. LED screens hanging from the ceiling projected the shapes of constellations as a large bear rose from the arena floor. The LED screens were positioned above the heads of the performers as if in the sky, creating a starlit canopy as the scene’s environment. In this scene, the flashlights held by the audience were also highlighted, and created another kind of star field. Not all of the environmental elements were subtle, however, as one sequence depicted a forest in which giant leaves fell to the ground. Physical representations of the leaves surrounded the stage where a fiddler played, but the projections on the floor depicted the same types of leaves falling next to the surrounding dancers, again using physical scenery and props along with projections to create a complete effect.

The goal of these sequences, as stated by some of the American commentators, was to highlight the geographic diversity of Canada, from its mountains to its forests. Perhaps the most

³⁶ Paul Wells, “Quite an Introduction,” *Maclean’s* (15 March 2010) 20-23.

notable use of projections was the creation of a much more unforgiving terrain, that of frozen lakes and rivers in Northern Canada. After the constellation sequence, the snow-white arena floor began to break apart into a series of ice floes created by projections. Water appeared as the performers (as Inuit inhabitants) positioned themselves on ice floes, arranging their movements around the projections that created the setting. As the whole surface became a simulated ocean, whales were seen peeking up above the surface, coordinated with compressed air built into the floor to mimic blowholes. Both the physical and the projected were joined to complete a fleeting illusion, both moving and environmental. These representations then turned into symbols, transforming into aboriginal drawings of whales.

As with the Beijing ceremony, multiple types of screens were used. While the sheer size of the arena floor and its use as a screen was impressive, the director, David Atkins, chose several moments to break from that perpendicular spatial relationship. A large ring of fabric hanging from the ceiling was lowered down in several scenes to have images projected onto it, such as when the rings were joined with vertical strips of fabric to form the trunks of trees and the canopy of leaves above. The ring later represented clouds hanging over other fabric stretched to form mountains, with suspended snowboarders simulating their tricks on the sides of the projected mountainsides. For the most part, projections in the ceremony were used for environmental purposes, and used in such a large scale that the overall effect of them rivaled the scale of the Beijing ceremony. Over sixty separate projection systems were used in the production.³⁷ The environments created by the projections put the focus of the ceremony largely on the geography of the nation. The presentational, non-illusionistic projections were often used

³⁷ Hannah Kinnersley, "Projecting the Ceremonies, Part 1," *Live Design*, 9 Feb. 2010, <http://blog.livedesignonline.com/designing-vancouver/2010/02/projecting-the-ceremonies/> (accessed on December 9, 2011).

to create images of Olympic events. In the mountain sequence, the projections changed from mountains to films of skiers and other athletes, projecting Olympiads past against a foreground of performers as athletes.

Despite all this scale, the production found moments to highlight individual performers, as opposed to the Beijing show that delighted in its collective. One of these moments came in a sequence that also featured some of the most memorable environmental projections in the entire ceremony. Set to Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now," a young man suspended from the ceiling performed an aerial ballet, only briefly touching the ground in various places of the arena floor. Each time he touched the ground, the blue floor opened up into a windswept wheat field. Each place he landed became a rectangular image of this wheat field until soon the whole arena floor depicted one singular image. It was a unique marriage of an individual performance and high-tech projection technology, something mostly unseen in the Beijing ceremony. The environmental projections were most potent in this sequence because they seemed to envelop and dwarf the performer. It was one of many sequences where the size of the projections encapsulated the image of nationhood the artists wanted to display. While the number of performers in the Beijing ceremony reflected the most populous nation on earth as well as a communist sense of political homogeneity, the large projections in the Vancouver ceremony reflected the amount of open spaces found in Canada as well as a more capitalist sense of individuality. Each set of projections was tailored for what each nation wanted to show the world about itself, elevating the technique from mere technological trickery to an integral part of the overall phenomenology and aesthetic quality of the production.

It was not the only time the Vancouver ceremony highlighted an individual, and in one sequence they lighted a pair of individuals: one real, and one virtual. As a fiddler stood in a

canoe floating high above the arena floor, a circular screen dropped down behind him, upon which a moon was projected with the fiddler's shadow. As the fiddler played, his shadow followed him closely until breaking off from the performer, leading to a duel between the original artist and his virtual doppelgänger. Though the virtual performer's music was pre-recorded, and he did not have the kind of three-dimensionality seen in some of the previously discussed examples of virtual bodies, his relation to the fiddler in the canoe, both spatially and mimetically, gave him a kind of presence. It is the only example of a virtual character in either of the productions, but never achieved independence since its existence is continually tied to the physical performer. The projected body was also closely tied to an environmental projection, enclosed within the projected moon behind the canoe.

The final sequence also contained an individual performance, one that distilled many of the other statements of identity. As the mountain screens dropped to the ground, a lone poet on the drum platform delivered a charismatic original work about what being Canadian meant to him. In a ceremony full of grand spectacle, the most direct statement of Canadian identity came from a solo performer on an otherwise empty stage. The Beijing ceremony, emphasizing the discipline and size of its people, used projections more in presentational ways, using smaller (while still very large) screens to display its iconography and visual art. Most environmental projections in that show were coupled with physical performers or set pieces meant to blend in with the projections. In the Vancouver show, the emphasis is more on diversity rather than unity, diversity of land and of people. The few presentational projections were used to indicate separate first nation groups, while the large portion of projections were used to depict diverse geographic areas against a relatively small amount of performers. This juxtaposition of the individual against a large landscape is at the heart of the production's approach to projection technology, using it as

the background against which the individual forms the Canadian spirit. As the poet spoke his statement of identity, all focus was on him, claiming more attention than most any individual garnered in the Beijing performance. In contrast to many of the hybridized moments of the production, this moment stood out because of its low-tech nature.

The Vancouver ceremony, while spectacular in its own way, never garnered the kind of attention directed at the Beijing ceremony. The political implications were not as fascinating as with China, and despite having a more ambitious technological approach, the coordination of the huge mass of Chinese performers was ultimately more notable. While the Beijing ceremony focused largely on the cultural legacy of China's past, Vancouver's show focused on the current diversity of the nation. As a phenomenological experience, David Atkins and his team populated their show with physical performers wandering through dreamlike landscape, dancing among leaves or soaring above wheat fields. The arena was always changing, with only the floor remaining stationary, without the anchoring quality of a central screen or scrim. If the Beijing ceremony conveyed strength and permanence, the Canadian show emphasized diversity, transience, and change, and the versatility of hybrid performance techniques was the perfect match for its thematic thrust.

As previously mentioned, these ceremonies have curiously not received the attention from performance theorists that one might expect. As parts of sporting events, they tend to fall within a different cultural domain, though the performative elements of sports have not gone unnoticed. The Olympics in particular involve displays of nationhood from every participating country, even outside of the ceremony and its parade of nations. As Kari L. Jaksu puts it, "Through the sports medium, underserved nations across the world create for themselves an

identity and a voice, enabling them to be heard on the international stage.”³⁸ The opening ceremonies represent sport at its most explicitly theatrical and also feature a nation creating an intentional and carefully constructed statement of identity. Though there are most certainly levels of censorship involved, they are rare marriages of theatrical artistry and political initiative. Since the days of early 20th century pageantry in places like America and Russia, the world rarely sees theater on this scale, and hardly ever with such political global stakes attached.

The presence of projection within these events allows each host nation to stage the breadth of their history and culture without the limitations of physical representation. Utilizing techniques from past hybrid performances as well as pioneering their own, the Beijing and Vancouver ceremonies have set a high bar for future ceremonies, which are likely to feature projections as part of their performances. This hybridization is also seen in other large-scale spectacles, such as Super Bowl halftime shows, and the lens of hybrid theatre can provide insight into the unique phenomenological experience of viewing one of these mammoth productions. Analyzing the experience this way is essential to understanding their purpose: to appeal to large groups of people in as big a way as possible. Hybridization is almost required for these pageants in an age of mediatization, as noted by Zhang Yimou and his desire to appeal to younger crowds through media technology. In the end, they only live on in memory and mediatization, as they are performed only once, never repeated. The ceremonies come to life through projection, and afterward their traces linger within recordings, the only avenue of exposure for most of the world’s population.

³⁸ Kari L. Jaks, “Sports and Collective Identity: The Effects of Athletics on National Unity,” *SAIS Review* 31.1 (2011) 39.

CONCLUSION: DISAPPEARING WORLDS

In Christopher Guest's 2003 film *A Mighty Wind*, Jonathan Steinbloom, played by Bob Balaban, is looking over the set that his producers have created for an upcoming concert to honor his father, a titan of the folk music industry. He gazes upon a giant two-dimensional banjo next to a "real" three-dimensional street lamp, and asks his producer, "Can you have an actual three dimensional object that represents the thing that it actually is, can that be next to something that it's pretending to be? Would that be okay?"¹ Though a little jumbled, Steinbloom's question is nonetheless one that could be asked in response to hybrid performances. However, rather than a ridiculous query as depicted here, it is instead a vital concern for theatre scholars and practitioners in the 21st century. Can a purely mimetic and immaterial art form share space and time with an embodied and physical one? The answer is a simple yes: they can and do coexist, for better or for worse. The purpose of this study has not been to judge whether it is better or worse, but rather to describe and characterize this union as a fully functioning relationship rather than a series of irreconcilable differences. Both theatre and film are exciting experiences individually, and together they have the potential to open up new possibilities for the future of live performance.

This integration has been a gradual one. There have not been any singular performances that have suddenly heralded the birth of a new art form. As proto-projection technologies were developed and as film proper came into being, moving pictures were incorporated into live theatrical productions. Hybridization of performance and film projection at its most basic level has been with us for over a century. This slow burn of innovation has delayed the realization of all the implications of this fusion, and the dominance of Hollywood entertainment as the

¹ *A Mighty Wind*, dir. Christopher Guest, perf. Bob Balaban, Eugene Levy, DVD, Warner Brothers, 2003.

monolith which stands in for all of film in the minds of many has been at the forefront for scholars and artists who encounter film seeping into the theatre. Perhaps now that numerous technologies are being integrated into performance at a rapid rate, attitudes toward film and its mechanism can change.

My goal has been to characterize and interrogate this hybrid form in the hopes that scholars and theorists can begin to think of film projection as more closely related to performance than previously assumed. Hybrid theater is the natural object of analysis for breaking down the dichotomy of performance and media, as it creates a unique brand of theatricality bolstered by the phenomenologies of both practices. Whether it is in the presence of projected apparitions or physical actors wandering through a virtual environment, hybridization explicitly blurs the line between film and theater. What is more, these previous practices point toward possible future trends where the distinction may become even more problematic. The presence of film projection on the stage is certainly fascinating, but one of the most telling sign of hybridization's impact is in the trends aimed at making the cinema more like live performance.

The presentation of live broadcast events in movie theaters represents a growing concern on the part of exhibitors and producers over the devaluing of the theatrical event in favor of home viewing. 3D movies bring the images from the screen into a complex spatial relationship with the viewer, much like physical actors and scenic elements in live theatre. In some respects, movie theatres seem to want to brand themselves as both cutting-edge and old-fashioned. The kind of technology that has helped make 3D so prevalent is an updated version of previous 3D

technologies², but its desired effect comes from the ancient practice of performance. Cell phone technology has also created an unwanted excursion into the cinematic theatrical space. My local Cinemark movie theater currently runs an ad before movies asking people to turn off their phones, and tells the audience “These days, our world seems overrun with technology. There is a time and a place for it, but a movie theater is neither the time nor the place.” This statement is in some ways laughable, as movies rely on technology to exist. However, it represents an attempt to appeal to audiences who want a purer cinematic experience free from other types of technology that do not have a performative goal in mind.

The threat of piracy from digital recording devices has also posed a problem for this technologically based industry. Combatting cameras in the theater as well as hunting down online distributors reflects the movie industry’s desire to preserve their profits. However, it has the added effect of preserving the theatrical experience even though a film’s producers no doubt wish to make plenty of money off of home viewing sales and rentals. Just as live performance relies on a quality that cannot be captured or recorded, the film industry relies on people coming to see the films in theaters rather than waiting to see them at home. For all intents and purposes the film, as it is first shown, cannot be captured or recorded. It must be seen in a theater, and only later can it be released on DVD when its theatrical run has been exhausted. Measures are taken to prevent the capturing of the film before its proper time, keeping people from owning it before it is supposed to be owned.

This kind of thinking may seem odd coming from practitioners of an art form that lives and breathes by the capturing and recording of events. This privileging of the live cinematic experience is a reaction to home viewing technology, just as the privileging of the liveness of

² “About RealD,” *RealD- The New 3D*, <http://www.reald.com/content/about-reald.aspx> (accessed March 14, 2012).

performance is a reaction to the incursion of media. Before people could own copies of films they had to rely on seeing revival screenings, or possibly a television broadcast. Either way, the distribution of the film was completely under a studio's control. Now that, in some respects, a studio has to compete with itself and its future distributing practices, it is the live experience of watching the film, rather than the film itself, that must draw people to the movie theater.

Techniques of hybridization, such as live broadcast events and 3D technology, are a new strategy aimed at increasing the appeal of going to the movie house. Just as hybridization in live performance opens up new possibilities for theatre artists, so hybridization pushes traditional boundaries of the cinematic experience. In the future, I would like to expand this study to reflect the hybridization at work in the cinema, as I have just outlined. If a true hybrid form is to be considered, then the practices of movie artists must be considered as well. With these kinds of practices at work both on screen and onstage, the line between performance and cinema is blurrier than ever.

As the cinema begins to appropriate elements of live performance in an effort to maintain viability, does the theatre's appropriation of cinematic elements appeal to its audiences? Could the use of projection technology draw in audiences who have not been exposed to live theatre? It seems unlikely that someone unfamiliar with theatre would start attending simply because a certain technology was being used, though the spectacle of large-budget musicals on Broadway and the West End seems to be a draw for audiences.³ On the stage, hybridization seems to be used as either a design tool, to create an effect otherwise impossible or unattainable with physical materials, or as part of a larger commentary on media in contemporary life. However, when

³ The much-derided spectacle of *Spider-man: Turn Off the Dark* has now turned into a lucrative cash cow for its producers. See: Patrick Healy, "Turn on the Cash: After a Year, 'Spider-man' Earns its Weekly Keep," *The New York Times*, 27 November 2011.

looking beyond a production's content, shows that use film projection are deserving of the "hybrid" moniker because of their blending effects. Hybridity is the result of a union, rather than the juxtaposition of dissimilar elements.

It has been my aim to establish the myriad of similarities between projection and performance, but in the end, they are still different forms and appeal to different philosophies. Despite the relative purity of film projection, there is still the specter of Hollywood and its powerful influence to be dealt with. While we may look to Broadway as the commercialized center of the theater industry, there are still thousands of other theaters producing their own work. This work may not be free of influence from Broadway, but there is nothing that requires theaters to accept this influence in order to survive. Theater is not entirely free of economic concerns, but it is certainly freer than the film industry. For many film artists, even independent ones working outside the studio system, attracting audiences means appealing to the desires and tastes that Hollywood has cultivated. Being seen by large numbers of people may not be the goal for the director or producer of a given film, but most of the time that is how a film's success is gauged. In the theater, while artists would certainly want to attract audiences, especially if financial viability was at stake, many times the focus is on the individual performance. The power is on the stage at a single moment, not in the cumulative effect over a run. An individual film screening matters little to the film industry.

Still, technology in the theater is here to stay. Despite the fact that some performances may remain strikingly free of technology, relying on an actor in an empty space, many incorporate projections, television screens, and computer technology for both design and thematic purposes. Another advantage of the "hybrid" label is that it allows scholars and artists to judge productions according to their level of technological integration. Based on the ways in

which theater is defined, as an embodied performance in front of a live audience in a shared space, the use of technology, while it may be similar, is still a wholly different experience. Projections produce many of the same phenomenological effects as performances, and I go so far as to label them performances, but they are not the same types of performances. The hybrid label gives scholars a new kind of classification to work with. It would be wrong to classify a bare-bones production of a play and a highly mediatized one as the same. They have different goals and approaches, and will be different experiences. While they may be similar and may both be highly theatrical, they are still unique in their own ways. The term “hybrid performance” is, like the Chinese opening ceremony, two-fold in its evocation of time: *performance* links these productions to past theatrical practices, while *hybrid* points us to future possibilities.

Film projection is just one mediatized form being used in performance, but it is one of the oldest. In this respect, it may seem that this study is a step backward. Many studies of multimedia performance and intermediality deal with technologies developed later than film projection, and the current wave of cybernetic technologies is continually challenging traditional definitions of performance in increasingly innovative ways. Film projection, when judged against these technologies, may seem old fashioned, but the diminishment of its novelty has opened it up to conventional usage and the opportunity for codification. In the past, many of these instances of film projection in the theatre have been notable because of that technology. Now, with the practice more widespread and audiences growing more used to the practice, projection can become a theatrical convention in its own right rather than an anomaly. Film projection may be old fashioned, but its status as a theatrical element, alongside electric lighting and microphones, lets audiences get beyond the newness of the technology and into the theatrical possibilities opened up through the technology. Electric lighting and microphones do not create

their own phenomenological subcategories in the way that projection does; rather, projection creates new material rather than amplifying or making visible the material that already exists onstage. While certain technologies reveal worlds, projection creates them even as they disappear.

Some, like the previously mentioned Ben Brantley, have decried the invasion of the stage by tropes from film and television, namely using films as subject matter for plays and musicals. As theatre history proves, adaptations for the stage of previously existing material are nothing new, and this current trend will most likely not prove to be the death of all live theatre. Literary trends come and go, as do technologies, and film has influenced both realms. The use of projection is not the same type of adaptation as writers like Brantley criticize. Rather, the adaptation of the stage to fit cinematic frameworks would likely be of greater concern. In his book *The Cinematic Theater*, director Babak A. Ebrahimian prescribes a style of theater that harkens to the screen in both form and content, such as with the application of montage through the cinematic ordering of tableaux.⁴ He envisions this kind of stage where theater artists "...can stage and display any play, classical or contemporary, in a cinematic manner: on a cinematic stage of a cinematic theater."⁵ Ebrahimian goes on to define this cinematic nature in terms of time, fixing the theatrical experience in a temporal lock out of which it can never break free. The advantages or objectives of this style are rather obscure beyond demonstrating the ability of the stage to accommodate film language, but it nonetheless represents a move toward referencing

⁴ Babak A. Ebrahimian, *The Cinematic Theater* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004) 109.

⁵ Ebrahimian, 8.

other mediums beyond the placement of their devices onstage. Ebrahimian demonstrates a desire to make the stage more cinematic, with editing and mise-en-scene as his primary tools.

Hybrid theatre, on the other hand, brings cinema to the stage without necessarily making the stage more cinematic. This need for a liminal terminology is also necessary to quell possible fears about taking away theatre's essence with the use of projection. I have demonstrated that because of their phenomenological similarities, the union of performance and projection is a very natural one. Just as the liveness of projection does not make the cinema any less mediatized, so the incursion of media onto the stage need not make it any less theatrical. Hybridity is the place where the two meet and coexist as a separate form, ideally free from competition. Thus, Ebrahimian's call for a cinematic theater would not likely be answered by a hybrid production like *The Elephant Vanishes*. Instead, the projection techniques used in *The Elephant Vanishes* represent the tools of cinematic technology being harnessed in service of theatricality, not the other way around.

In Woody Allen's 1985 film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, an explorer named Tom Baxter, played by Jeff Daniels, walks off the screen of a movie theater to talk to film viewer Cecilia, played by Mia Farrow.⁶ Throughout the film, the "fictional" character and the "real" character discuss the nature of cinematic reality, with Tom declaring his materiality and his desire to be free from the confines of the film's limitations. A figure that seemed to be controlled and artificial becomes a fleshly being with agency, causing chaos for his cinematic co-stars and for the actor who brought him to life. All of the "real" characters in the film take his cinematic status for granted, amazed when he defies logic yet ultimately exploitative of his naiveté. Tom briefly turns all of reality on its head, and the movie confronts the audience with a question: what is

⁶ *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, dir. Woody Allen, perf. Mia Farrow, Jeff Daniels, DVD, Orion, 1985.

more real, the movie or the “real world”? Concerning the stage of hybrid performances, scholars must now ask a similar question: what is more real, the performer or the projection? It is a question that may never have a definite answer. As the mechanism of projection brings dreams to life and lets ghosts walk among the living, the notions of reality and materiality have never been more tenuous.

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VITA

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