

### **A decade of theatre broadcasts: issues and trends**

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In 2009, the National Theatre fundamentally changed the modes of dissemination and reception of theatre in general – and soon, of Shakespeare productions in particular – with its launch of its in-house theatre broadcast company, NT Live.<sup>1</sup> When Nicholas Hytner’s production of *Phèdre* was directed for the screen by Robin Lough in June 2009, it was relayed to 78 UK cinemas. Screenings at a further 200 cinemas worldwide reached audience members who would never have been able to travel to London to see the production in the theatre even if they had been able to purchase a ticket for the sold-out production. Even for Londoners who had seen the production on stage, the screening provided unprecedented access to Helen Mirren’s performance in the title role. Reviewing the production, Michael Billington wrote:

watching it with a rapt, packed house in London’s Chelsea Cinema, I came to a startling conclusion: the production worked even better in the cinema than it did in the Lyttelton. And the implications of that are enormous. ... the main lesson is that a theatre production can be made democratically available to a mass audience without any loss of quality: indeed because the camera can mix close-up and long shot and because we can all hear easily, the aesthetic impact may actually be enhanced. ... my hunch is that this is only the beginning of a revolution in making theatre available in ways of which we had never dreamed.<sup>2</sup>

Billington’s prediction of a “revolution” in the ways theatre is accessed has proved true. Since 2009, there has been a veritable boom in “live”, “as-live” (screenings delayed to fit the schedules of incompatible time zones across the globe) and “Encore” (repetition of a live screening at a later date) digital remediations of theatrical productions that have been broadcast to screens of all sizes: cinemas, televisions, and personal streaming devices (computers, tablets, smartphones).

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With many thanks to John Wyver for insightful conversations over several years. This article expands and elaborates on a section of my book on *Shakespeare, Spectatorship and Technologies of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2020).

<sup>1</sup> See Martin Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Kindle Book, n.pag. David Sabel makes it clear that the project that would turn into NT Live took its inspiration from the Met Live in HD screenings of opera (see Nancy Groves, “Arts head: David Sabel, Head of Digital, National Theatre.” *The Guardian*, 10 April 2012. Web.)

<sup>2</sup> Michael Billington, “National Theatre Live: *Phèdre*.” *The Guardian*, 26 June 2009. Web.

Shakespeare-lovers have been the principal beneficiaries of the trend, since “Shakespeare serves both as a guarantor of quality and a cover for innovation” that allows for significant artistic and financial risks to be taken.<sup>3</sup> Not only have more plays by Shakespeare than by any other playwright have been transmitted in this way since 2009,<sup>4</sup> but NT Live’s 2015 broadcast of Benedict Cumberbatch as the Prince in Lyndsay Turner’s sell-out production of *Hamlet* at the Barbican Theatre, London, was watched by over half a million people in cinemas across the (mainly Western) world,<sup>5</sup> with box office receipts for the screenings rapidly outstripping those of the critically acclaimed feature films of either *Macbeth* (dir. Justin Kurzel, 2015) or *Coriolanus* (dir. Ralph Fiennes, 2011).<sup>6</sup> That broadcast was just one of several Shakespeare productions by companies other than the National Theatre brought to national and international cinema audiences by NTLive, which has evolved into an umbrella company which screens high-profile stagings of classical and modern plays from an increasingly broad range of UK venues and festivals. Three in-house broadcast brands hosted by theatre companies dedicated to Shakespeare – Globe on Screen, RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon, and the Stratford Festival of Canada – now also have productions of Shakespeare as their principal focus.<sup>7</sup> Shakespeare has additionally proved to be a gateway through which smaller, experimental British theatre companies such as Cheek by Jowl and Forced Entertainment have found the financial and technical backing necessary to produce their own live streams and reach international audiences.

As a result, there has indeed been a “revolution” in the cultural economy and our way of experiencing stage productions of Shakespeare’s plays. Obvious casualties in this revolution are audiences in the Southern hemisphere – specifically, in Africa, South America, across the Indian subcontinent and the bulk of Asia excepting Hong Kong and Japan – who, because it is difficult to organise dissemination and find large enough clusters of audiences in those regions, miss out on a cultural phenomenon that is often branded as having a “global” reach. But there are also local casualties in the UK, where theatre broadcasting, especially in the first half of the 2010s, was often seen as a threat small to mid-scale regional theatre companies and touring companies whose mission is to nurture home-grown

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<sup>3</sup> Greenhalgh, “Guest Editor’s Introduction”, p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> For a list of Shakespeare theatre broadcasts to 2017, see Rachael Nicholas, “Appendix: Digital Theatre Broadcasts of Shakespeare, 2003-2017.” *Shakespeare and the ‘Live’ Theatre Broadcast Experience*. Eds. Pascale Aebischer, Susanne Greenhalgh and Laurie Osborne. London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2018. 227-242.

<sup>5</sup> National Theatre Live, “About Us.” Web.

<sup>6</sup> David Hutchison, “Benedict Cumberbatch Hamlet takes £3m at NT Live box office.” *The Stage*, 9 December 2015. Web. Whereas live and Encore screenings of *Hamlet* generated £2.93 million in box office revenue, *Macbeth* earned £2.82 million and *Coriolanus* a mere \$1.049 million (see “Box Office Mojo: Coriolanus,” Box Office Mojo, Web, accessed 7 October 2016).

<sup>7</sup> For an account of the history of recording productions at the RSC and an overview of companies engaging in live relays by 2014, see John Wyver, “Screening The RSC Stage”, p. 286-89. On 13 October 2016, the Comédie-Française joined in with its own broadcast, in collaboration with Pathé Live, of *Roméo et Juliette* to cinemas across Francophone Europe (including Verona).

talent in a broad repertoire that includes Shakespeare and “the classics” for the benefit of a local audience. While large-scale research for the benefit of Arts Council England, UK Theatre and the Society of London Theatre (published in October 2016) suggests that overall, among the over 131 companies consulted for the study, most reported no change to touring practices (43%) or even an increase in touring (38%), a minority (19%) “experienced decreased touring.”<sup>8</sup> This is what prompted Elizabeth Freestone, Artistic Director of Pentabus, one such regional touring company in the UK, to appeal to the “big companies” to work with smaller companies in the regions and in rural areas “to invent a new form of reciprocal, mutually beneficial theatre-making, live and on screen.”<sup>9</sup> In 2016, industry respondents were still reporting their “disquiet about the impact of live streaming and playback on regional theatre.”<sup>10</sup>

The perception of the threat theatre broadcasts pose to live performance is not confined to the UK: as Eddie Paterson and Lara Stevens note, the Australia Council’s *Don’t Panic: The Impact of Digital Technology on the Major Performing Arts* warned in 2008 that “local Australian companies may find it increasingly difficult to make a case for the value of attending a performance live.”<sup>11</sup> What is at stake here is not theatre broadcast *per se*, but rather how it risks building cultural monopolies at the expense of smaller players and, in the end, at the expense of rural/provincial audiences for whom “democratic” access to theatre broadcasts may increasingly mean being locked out of having access to live performance. In September 2016, an Arts Council England report documented a desire to increase the currently “relatively small proportion of theatre organisations ... involved” in broadcasts and to use the technology “strategically to bolster the profile of high quality producing and touring companies across the country, rather than ‘taking

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<sup>8</sup> Brent Karpf, Reidy, Becky Schutt, Deborah Abramson, and Antoni Durski. “From Live-to-Digital: Understanding the Impact of Digital Developments in Theatre on Audiences, Production and Distribution.” Arts Council UK, October 2016, p. 11; see p. 16 for a reflection of how smaller companies are hit harder than larger ones. Also see the report Hasan Bakhshi and Andrew Whitby compiled for NESTA in 2014, in which the authors assert that “National Theatre Live appears to have boosted local theatre attendance in neighbourhoods most exposed to the live broadcasting programme” (*Estimating the Impact of Live Simulcast on Theatre Attendance: an Application to London’s National Theatre*. NESTA Working Paper 14/04, June 2014, p. 1). Since then, a report for the Arts Council England and the BFI, which takes account of Bakhshi and Whitby’s research, finds that “There is ... no evidence that [event cinema] is growing new audiences for live theatre performances, but there is an indication that it may inspire further attendance at event cinema screenings” (Mitra Abrahams and Fiona Tuck. *Understanding the Impact of Event Cinema: An Evidence Review*. Arts Council England, Web, 2 November 2015, p. 1.). Overall, then, the evidence to date points to some detrimental effect on smaller companies in a cultural economy which, on the whole, is benefiting from the rise in theatre broadcasting.

<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Freestone, “What Live Theatre Screenings Mean for Small Companies.” *The Guardian*, Theatre Blog, 20, January 2014, Web. See also Freestone, “The Bitter Taste of Live Screening,” *Arts Professional*, 5 June 2014. Web.

<sup>10</sup> Arts Council England, *Analysis of Theatre in England*, p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Eddie Paterson and Lara Stevens, “From Shakespeare to the Super Bowl: Theatre and the Global Liveness.” *Australasian Drama Studies*, 62 (2013): 147-62, p. 157.

London out to the regions’.”<sup>12</sup> It is a sign of the challenge theatre broadcasts represent for regional theatres that some regional theatres have invested in large screens and digital reception equipment to become receiving venues for broadcasts of performances that now share these spaces with live shows.<sup>13</sup>

A sign of the extent to which the tension between dominant cultural players in key “Shakespearean” locations and smaller regional companies is ongoing that, in the interval of the RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon broadcast of *Hamlet* in 2016, a short documentary film, *All the World’s A Stage*, was dedicated entirely to celebrating the relationship between the RSC and those regional theatres. Featuring interviews with creatives at the RSC who had become their careers at Northern Stage (Newcastle), the Tobacco Factory (Bristol), Theatre Iolo (Cardiff), and the Belgrade Theatre (Coventry), and who reiterated passionately the belief in the “sense of place” of “all good theatre” (Erica Whyman, Deputy Artistic Director, RSC) and the ways stories “so specific to [a] local area” like Birmingham or Newcastle may still have “incredibly universal” themes (Anna Girvan, Assistant Director for the RSC *Hamlet*), the documentary protested rather too much about the need for regional theatres to continue producing local work. When Kate Denby (Executive Director, Northern Stage) asserted that “culture is not something that is created somewhere else and handed to us” and Justine Themen (Associate Director, Belgrade Theatre) agreed that a theatre is all about “having local engagements, local creatives, mixing with creatives from other places, and actually being exposed to the creative *process*, not just the product”, the positioning of these passionate pleas within a broadcast of the RSC’s *Hamlet* – the product, not a local creative process – struck an awkward note that threatened to undermine the positive message about the interdependence of larger and smaller, central and regional, theatres in the age of the theatre broadcast.

But there are winners, too. For struggling arthouse cinemas in the UK, event screenings such as theatre and concert broadcasts “have become the difference between survival and closure.”<sup>14</sup> For the theatre companies that have managed to break into the market, the gains can be financial, as evident from NT Live’s box office receipts for the Turner/Cumberbatch *Hamlet* and the continued popularity of Josie Rourke’s *Coriolanus* starring Tom Hiddleston, which remained in cinematic circulation as an “Encore” several years after its first screening.<sup>15</sup> The huge expense

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<sup>12</sup> Arts Council England, *Analysis of Theatre in England: Final Report by BOP Consulting & Graham Devlin Associates*. 13 September 2016, p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> One case in point is the Exeter Northcott Theatre, a mid-size regional theatre serving a community of 250,000 audience members in South West England, which invested in the technology in 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Mitchell, “At Cinemas Worldwide, Survival Is an Event.” *Variety LA*, 23 September 2014, p. 70-71, p. 70. See also Abrahams and Tuck, *Understanding the Impact*, p. 4, who additionally note that event cinema may represent a challenge for the arthouse/independent film sector and for film distributors (p. 28).

<sup>15</sup> Hutchison, “Benedict Cumberbatch,” n.pag. Mitra Abrahams and Fiona Tuck note that “The National Theatre estimates each broadcast cost to range from £250,000-£300,000, though they are now in a position where most productions are returning a surplus”. *Understanding the Impact*, p. 8.

of producing quality theatre broadcasts means that not all companies make an immediate profit that covers their expenses and that, for example for RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon, the reputational gain as brand awareness is created and reinforced across an international constituency of potential theatregoers trumps immediate financial gain.<sup>16</sup> For the RSC, cinematic distribution of live productions, followed by broadcasts to schools and DVD releases, serves the purpose of widening access to their productions. For the National Theatre, as David Sabel, Head of Digital, explained in 2012, broadcasting was a way of fulfilling the theatre's "mission – making the National a truly national theatre." NT Live's international distribution, for the company's business model, was merely a means of "subsidis[ing] UK access", which itself is a precondition of its funding.<sup>17</sup>

More recent research suggests that NT Live's international distribution "has helped to build their brand in the US, which means that their touring shows have since had a better reception";<sup>18</sup> more generally, NT Live's screenings have been successful in "reaching a wider audience" and have, as for most other companies engaging with this technology, served the aim of audience development rather than primarily income generation.<sup>19</sup> For his part, Dominic Dromgoole has described the "Shakespeare's Globe on Screen" cinema and TV screenings, pay-on-demand streams from the Digital Theatre platform and Opus Arte DVDs as "a long, slow earner over the next 20, 30 years."<sup>20</sup> As recipients of Arts Council funding, both NT Live's National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company benefit from extra financial security that allows them to take risks<sup>21</sup> and partake in the policy of "democratising" culture entrenched in the Arts Council mission by promising broadcast viewers, as the NT Live website proclaims, "the best seat in the house" and the best sightlines in return for a uniformly medium-band ticket price. Contrary to the ticketing policies for live performances that aim to attract younger audiences by offering significant discounts, theatre broadcasts' pricing and their traditional framing with introductions by well-known British broadcasters appeals to an older, predominantly female,<sup>22</sup> "middlebrow" audience marked by a

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<sup>16</sup> Wyver, "Screening The RSC Stage", p.290. Wyver notes that the RSC is deliberately creating an archive of high quality recordings of all of Shakespeare's plays and that financial gain from this endeavour is a "medium term" goal.

<sup>17</sup> Sabel quoted in Nancy Groves, "Arts Head", n.pag. According to Abrahams and Tuck, "NT Live has ... enabled the National Theatre to grow the total audience for its productions by over 50%" (*Understanding the Impact*, p. 7).

<sup>18</sup> Abrahams and Tuck, *Understanding the Impact*, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Arts Council England, *Analysis of Theatre in England*, pp. 5, 74.

<sup>20</sup> Dromgoole cited by Stephen Purcell, "The Impact of New Forms of Public Performance." *Shakespeare and the Digital World: Redefining Scholarship and Practice*. Ed. Christie Carson and Peter Kirwan. Cambridge: CUP, 2014. Chapter 16, Kindle Book. See also Greenhalgh, "Guest Editor's Introduction", p. 258.

<sup>21</sup> This is a key factor identified by Reidy *et al.*'s "From Live-to-Digital" report: organisations that are part of the Art Council's National Portfolio are much more likely to have taken risks with theatre broadcasts than organisations that don't benefit from this level of financial stability (p. 35).

<sup>22</sup> On the age and gender make-up of the audience for theatre broadcasts, see Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*, n.pag.: "They are overwhelmingly not traditional cinema audiences. Older, and with different cultural interests, they are demanding, and likely to become

combination of “cultural dynamism and social mobility”.<sup>23</sup> For vast aspirational audiences previously locked out of access to high-quality metropolitan theatre because of limitations of geography, mobility, or time, theatre broadcasts offer the opportunity to participate in communal cultural events and acquire cultural capital.<sup>24</sup>

While many more people can now claim to have “seen” a production thanks to a theatre broadcast, Billington’s review of Lough’s *Phèdre* for NTlive also pinpoints the fundamental tension in responses to theatre broadcasts between the suggestion that such broadcasts do nothing more than “mak[e] theatre available” to a “mass audience” in a “democratic” manner and the recognition that there is much more to this new cultural form than mere transmission or “relay” – a term with which John Wyver takes issue because it “suggests the absence in the pathway from stage to screen of either any determining technological factors ... or any creative agency.”<sup>25</sup> The former view is actively encouraged by the self-effacing techniques used by the leading theatre broadcast directors, who seek to make the camerawork and thus the fact of remediation as “invisible” to the broadcast viewer as possible. Since the beginning of television, the medium from which theatre broadcast derives,<sup>26</sup> an enormous investment has gone into erasing the traces of remediation, using “invisible technique” to ensure no film equipment is caught in a shot, no noises caused by camera operators and crew filter through to the soundtrack, and - crucially – that “unobtrusive shot transition and camera movement” should follow standard continuity editing conventions shared with classical Hollywood cinema, thus ensuring that audience attention is always directed “to the action rather than to the mechanics of production.”<sup>27</sup> Specifically, this technique involves the inclusion of wide-angle establishing shots of the whole stage at the beginning of scenes to lay out their spatial configuration,<sup>28</sup> positioning the cameras in such a

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increasingly so.” Barker cites the NESTA figures that show that whereas a typical theatre audience consists of 50.9% women, the figure rises to 70.7% for event broadcasts in cinemas.

<sup>23</sup> Sally Faulkner, "Introduction: Approaching the Middlebrow: Audience; Text; Institution." *Middlebrow Cinema*, ed. Sally Faulkner. London: Routledge, 2016, 1-12, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> See also Barker, *Live to Your Local Cinema*, n.pag., on the “experience of privileged access” conferred on audiences by theatre broadcasts.

<sup>25</sup> John Wyver, “All the Trimmings?": The Transfer of Theatre to Television in Adaptations of Shakespeare Stagings." *Adaptation* 7.2 (2014): 104-20, p. 109.

<sup>26</sup> John Wyver distinguishes between theatre broadcasts or “theatre television”, his preferred term, which “is a transmission medium” akin to television (a medium which, as Philip Auslander has explained, is ontologically live) and cinema, which “is a medium that captures, stores, and later re-animates moving images.” “‘Straight from Theatre’ Stuff”: Television, Cinema and Live outside Broadcasts of Shakespeare." Seminar paper, World Shakespeare Congress, Stratford-upon-Avon and London, 2016, p. 5; Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 48-49.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Ward, *Studio and Outside Broadcast Camera Work: a Guide to Multi-Camera Work Production*. Second edition. Oxford: Focal Press, 2001, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> See also Erin Sullivan, who remarks that wide-angle shots create a “perspective that offer[s] a fuller understanding of the theatrical space and the actors within it”. “Stage, Space, and Celebrity: Coriolanus at the Donmar.” *Digital Shakespeare* blog, 4 April 2014, Web. She reiterates the point in her review of the RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon *Richard II* (2014), noting how the “more open, contingent, unpredictable” point of view

way that viewers can easily orient themselves within the space, and providing eye-line matches and matches on action in the editing that effectively camouflage cuts between shots, making them appear “seamless”.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, no performer may acknowledge the presence of a camera by looking at it directly – a rule which represents particular challenges in the moments of direct address to the audience in the theatre that are a distinguishing feature of early modern dramaturgy.<sup>30</sup> The application of these rules of “invisibility” explain “the rhetoric of minimal difference” in the promotion and discussion of live theatre broadcasts. It is therefore not surprising to learn that for the RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon broadcasts “the assumption was made, although never explicitly discussed, that the cinema audience should see nothing of the mechanics of the broadcast” and that Gregory Doran would enthuse about the fact that watching a broadcast “is no second-hand experience. You do not sit back in the cinema thinking how much better it would be to be sitting the theatre, because you feel part of the same live audience.”<sup>31</sup> On the “supply-side” of theatre broadcasts, there is thus a conviction that the broadcasts offer a “same”, first-hand, experience of the performance in which “liveness” performs a central role.<sup>32</sup>

However, as Billington acknowledges, the affordances of digital film – the quality of sound mixing, the alternation between close-ups and long shots – are key to the “aesthetic impact” of the theatre broadcast that sets it apart from its theatrical counterpart. The technology of digital film, in the hands of multi-camera directors and their teams, evidently affects the broadcast audiences’ experience of the productions so as to create distinctive interpretations of the remediated performances: fundamentally, the broadcasts by NT Live and RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon are adaptations.<sup>33</sup> They are also different from cinema, as their now standard embedding in pre-performance interviews of the director and lead performers by a broadcast host (a televisual convention)<sup>34</sup> and their additional provision of paratextual information such as paper or downloadable cast lists (a theatrical convention) suggests. Even when screened in cinemas, the paratexts of theatre broadcasts thus distinguish them from ordinary films, justifying the higher ticket prices they command as part of the venues’ “event cinema” programme strand targeted at their constituency of older “middlebrow” viewers.

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created in these shots is inherently “theatrical”. *Richard II*, Royal Shakespeare Company (RST).” Special Reviews Section: Live Cinema Relays of Shakespearean Performance, ed. Susanne Greenhalgh. *Shakespeare Bulletin* 32.2 (2014): 272-75, p. 274.

<sup>29</sup> Orpen, *Film Editing*, p.17, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Don Fairservice, *Film Editing: History, Theory and Practice*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001, p.308.

<sup>31</sup> Wyver, “Screening the RSC Stage,” p. 295 and Doran cited by Wyver, p. 298; Doran makes a very similar statement in his Director’s Commentary dialogue with John Wyver on the DVD of the RSC *Richard II*. See also Greenhalgh, “Guest Editor’s Introduction”, p.259.

<sup>32</sup> This is borne out by Reidy *et al.*, “From Live-to-Digital,” p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> David Sabel in NESTA, *NT Live: Digital Broadcast of Theatre: Learning from the Pilot Season* (2011), p. 9, where he proudly noted the “artistic merit” of the audience experience which he described as “different” from that in the theatre. See also Purcell, “The Impact of New Forms”, n.pag.

<sup>34</sup> Wyver, “Screening the RSC Stage,” p. 298.

Audiences, the most recent survey has shown, are less likely than suppliers to fixate on “liveness” as a key ingredient of theatre broadcasts.<sup>35</sup> Instead, they are increasingly accepting them as a new, hybrid, artistic form governed by distinctive conventions of production and reception that offer “a very different experience” which “opens up new ways of seeing the art form”.<sup>36</sup> It is telling that, by 2016, the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company Plays at the Garrick Live – a newcomer in the ever more crowded market – allowed the hybridity of the planned broadcast to impact on the stage production from its inception. If, reviewing the stage production of Rob Ashford and Kenneth Branagh’s *Romeo and Juliet*, Michael Billington thought that its 1950s design and Italian setting meant that “[y]ou feel Fellini is due any moment to film it with a movie camera”,<sup>37</sup> that is because, as a voice-over introducing the production in the cinema screening told his broadcast audiences at the 7 July 2016 live screening, the production deliberately mimicked 1950s Italian neorealist cinema in its design. In fact, Branagh and Ashford had from the start of the production worked with screen director Ben Caron to create a look that would translate into aesthetics of black-and-white film: as Laurie Osborne predicted in 2006, the collaboration between Branagh, Ashford and Caron evidences how, in the context of the ever-closer convergence of media, “staging and acting choices ... betray an increasing awareness of ‘to-be-filmedness’ in live theatre.”<sup>38</sup>

Certainly, the liveness and theatricality of the broadcast were explicitly emphasised when Branagh walked onto the stage to announce that the production’s Romeo, Richard Madden, had injured his ankle two days earlier and that therefore the blocking of certain scenes had to be changed in order to ensure that he could appear on the night of the broadcast (“Ladies and gentlemen, this is live theatre, live cinema, ... and the show must go on!”). The staging in the Garrick Theatre of a particularly pictorial *Romeo and Juliet* with a climactic scene in which a top-lit Juliet, laid to rest on a centrestage raised tomb, woke while Romeo lay dying without the Friar being present, additionally ghosted David Garrick’s influential staging of that scene in 1748.<sup>39</sup> In drawing attention to its locality and the

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<sup>35</sup> Reidy *et al.*, “From Live-to-Digital,” p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Reidy *et al.*, “From Live-to-Digital,” p. 57.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Billington. “Romeo and Juliet Review – Branagh Gives Tragedy a Touch of La Dolce Vita.” *The Guardian*, 26 May 2016. Web.

<sup>38</sup> Laurie E. Osborne, “Speculations on Shakespearean Cinematic Liveness.” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24.3 (2006): 49-65, p.54; see also Philip Auslander’s suggestion that live performances are often designed as “camera-ready” in anticipation of their subsequent remediation (*Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. Second edition. London: Routledge, 2008, p.30), and Christie Carson’s observation that towards the end of his tenure as Artistic Director of the National Theatre, Nicholas Hytner was notable for “simultaneously direct[ing] a production to work on stage and screen” (“Creating a Critical Model for the Twenty-First Century.” *Shakespeare and the Digital World: Redefining Scholarship and Practice*. Ed. Christie Carson and Peter Kirwan. Cambridge: CUP, 2014. Chapter 17, Kindle Book; NESTA, too, describes how at the National Theatre under Hytner, “the camera script was devised and rehearsed in tandem with stage rehearsals” (*NT Live: Digital Broadcast of Theatre*, p. 18).

<sup>39</sup> See the description of Garrick’s staging by George C. Branam, “The Genesis of David Garrick’s *Romeo and Juliet*.” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35.2 (1984): 170-179.



production's haunting by a giant of the eighteenth-century stage, the production thus emphasised the "double quality of being both local and located" that McAuley has identified as "theatre's strength in these days of mass media manipulation."<sup>40</sup>

But pulling against that stage-awareness with much greater force were heavy-handed signposts that advertised the broadcast's ambitions as cinema. Branagh's star persona as a Shakespearean actor and film director made it unsurprising that attention should be drawn to the presentation "in BLACK and WHITE CinemaScope within a 16:9 frame" both in the screen programme and the mock-silent-cinema title sequence.<sup>41</sup> This situated the broadcast within the conventions of early to mid-twentieth-century film and also fed on the nostalgia for black-and-white cinema that had, in 2011, led to the Oscar win of Michel Hazanavicius' black-and-white silent feature *The Artist* and that had, more recently, given a retro look to Joss Whedon's *Much Ado About Nothing* in 2012. The broadcast itself, with its interval feature consisting of dramaturgical information about 1950s Italy presented on flickering title cards superimposed on the Garrick Theatre's proscenium curtain, provided a peculiar blend of Italian neorealist and silent cinema, combined with the feel of proscenium theatre. Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company Plays at the Garrick Live's *Romeo and Juliet* thus demonstrated a new confidence in the ability of live theatre broadcast to affirm the potential primacy of cinema over theatre and to offer its cinema audience an experience of the production that was avowedly different from that of the theatre audience.

In embracing the equivalence between the Garrick's proscenium arch and the frame of the cinema screen, however, the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company Plays at the Garrick Live broadcast of *Romeo and Juliet* also showed how, in a proscenium setting in which no camera can access a non-frontal point of view, there is a risk of flattening the three-dimensional plane of theatre to the two-dimensional plane of the screen image, with an impact on the remediation of the early modern dramaturgy of direct address. The flatness of the screen was accentuated in the framing of the production as a silent film with title cards and also by the positioning of the cameras outside the frame of the proscenium arch. Even though repeatedly, zoom lenses were used to isolate parts of the stage and create mid-shots and close-ups of individual performers or small groups, thus creating a sense of spatial proximity to the action and in particular to the lovers, everything was filmed from outside the frame of the proscenium and was invariably shot from a static point of view (i.e., while there was occasional panning to follow the movements of a performer, there was no tracking or movement of the camera itself). At the same time, and presumably with a view to making the broadcast "cinematic", the cameras carefully avoided showing either the audience or even the frame of the stage once the production was underway. As result, the broadcast failed to convey a sense of the depth of the stage or its relationship to the building and its users. The gaze of the camera could only look at, but not penetrate, the

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<sup>40</sup> McAuley, *Space in Performance*, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Ironically, there is nothing special about 16:9 frames: they are the standard aspect ratio of television and cinema screens today and have no nostalgic resonance.

performance space and remained separated from it by the imaginary fourth wall of the Garrick Theatre's proscenium arch.

Broadcasts like the Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company Plays at the Garrick Live *Romeo and Juliet*, or indeed Phyllida Lloyd's all-female *Julius Caesar* (2017), which was live-captured across two performances in an in-the-round set-up from the Donmar Theatre's King's Cross venue in London, and then mixed in with some footage recorded separately to create a broadcast premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival, thus ever more insistently put pressure on the distinction between the genres – and indeed, the media – of theatre broadcast and feature film. Whereas, for early high-end NT Live and RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon broadcasts, camera scripts were composed of ca. 500 cues for a full-length play, with five or six cameras used for a live mix, John Wyver reports that the script for *Julius Caesar* included over 2000 cues for each of the two live mixes produced, and deployed eight cameras.<sup>42</sup> The cost implications of this increasing hybridity and adoption of a filmic aesthetic are significant: while we know that at the lower end of the spectrum, Cheek by Jowl's live stream of *Measure for Measure*, captured with four cameras and live-mixed by broadcast director Thomas Bowles, cost £15,000,<sup>43</sup> and a more standard price tag of c. £50,000 was attached to Complicite's live stream of *The Encounter* (2016), Fiery Angel/Kenneth Branagh Theatre Company's much more complex and film-like cinema broadcasts cost an average of £450,000 per broadcast.<sup>44</sup> This means that there is an ever greater disparity, in terms of complexity of set-up, number of cameras, filmic aesthetic, and related costs, between the lower and the highest ends of the spectrum. In turn, this has implications for casting: it is unlikely that any company will produce the high-end financial support for any production that does not feature the kind of international star whose appeal to fans guarantees a safe return on the investment.

Ten years after NT Live opened up a new market for theatre broadcasts of Shakespeare, we have therefore probably reached a crossroads at which two types of theatre broadcasts part ways. The first, a relatively affordable type of broadcast which remains resolutely "theatrical" in generic terms and whose primary purpose is the dissemination of a Shakespeare production beyond the physical confines of the originating theatre, either through live stream, DVD or, occasionally, cinematic live transmission. A secondary purpose of such broadcasts is the archiving of the productions in question, making them available for posterity and as a record of a particular moment in the company's or theatre's engagement with Shakespeare. As such, they are ever more likely to also be available to audiences outside the Anglophone axis and to have a cumulative impact on theatrical Shakespeares

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<sup>42</sup> John Wyver, "Make Choice; and, See': Towards a Poetics of Multims." Paper presented at the *Shakespeare, Media, Technology and Performance* conference, University of Exeter, 14 June 2017; private correspondence, 19 June 2019.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Kirwan, "Cheek by Jowl: Reframing Complicity in Web-Streams of *Measure for Measure*." *Shakespeare and the "Live" Theatre Broadcast Experience*, eds. Pascale Aebischer, Susanne Greenhalgh and Laurie E. Osborne. London: Bloomsbury Arden, 2018, 161-173, p. 164

<sup>44</sup> Reidy *et al.*, *From Live-to-Digital*, pp. 106, 121.

worldwide. The other type, which will be much rarer but very distinctive, will be the ever more high-end, cinematic broadcast of an exceptional Shakespeare production, distributed across Anglophone regions and key hubs such as Tokyo and Hong Kong as part of an ‘event cinema’ programme,<sup>45</sup> and headed by an internationally-recognised crossover theatre and film star with a broad fan base. These will, for contractual reasons, be less likely to be made available as DVDs or online streams and will therefore be ultimately more restricted in their reach beyond Anglophone counterparts. Paradoxically, it is the more low-key online streams which may therefore ultimately have the more significant impact across the world. For British audiences, the casualty, in this predicted scenario, might be precisely the sorts of broadcasts they have now learned to take for granted: the regular diet of Shakespeare productions by the RSC, the National Theatre and other prestigious British theatre venues like the Manchester Royal Exchange that have made it possible for British audiences, especially outside London, to access much more theatrical Shakespeare without needing to travel further than their local cinemas.

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<sup>45</sup> For accounts of the reception of high-end broadcasts in some of these locations, see “Part Four: Reaction Shots” in Aebischer *et al.*, *Shakespeare and the “Live” Theatre Broadcast Experience*.