

**‘TUNE IN/JOIN US’
Mobilising Liveness as a Promotional
Strategy in Film Trailer Exhibition**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the ways in which ‘liveness’ has been mobilised by the US film industry during the exhibition of film trailers on broadcast television and online. It offers a lens to understand how Hollywood is not only responding to viewers’ increased ability to evade television advertising, but also to an online landscape where users’ attention is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain. In this emerging ‘new screen ecology’, we are witnessing how the established media organisations and practices of the twentieth-century are being challenged and reconfigured by a variety of digital technologies and online platforms.

To examine this, two key research questions are asked: 1) in what ways has liveness been mobilised by the US film industry; and 2) why was liveness mobilised in these ways? Drawing together case studies that explore live moments of trailer exhibition during broadcast television ad-breaks and live-streamed online broadcasts, this thesis interrogates each case study through its ‘constellation of liveness’. This framework approaches each live moment as mutually-constructed by an interrelated array of textual, technological, institutional, and audience-related domains. Critically, this thesis contributes to two key areas of film and media studies research. The first is ‘trailer studies’, which has charted how trailers and their exhibition have moved extensively beyond the spatio-temporal boundaries of the cinema screen. The second is around ‘live and event cinema’, which has considered how liveness has been increasingly employed during film exhibition. Where the former has considered trailers but not their liveness, and the latter has considered liveness but not in

relation to trailers, this research project intersects the two by situating itself in this lacuna.

Ultimately, this thesis first argues that liveness represents one strategy through which Hollywood is ‘eventising’ trailer exhibition within converging, competitive, and highly-saturated exhibitory spaces it does not own. Secondly, it argues that the mobilisation of liveness during film trailer exhibition represents a broader move towards liveness being witnessed beyond the exhibition of film. Finally, it argues that these mobilisations of liveness represent neither standardised nor even emerging promotional practices. Instead, in light of a contemporary entertainment culture heavily invested in live events, these promotional mobilisations of liveness represent exploratory manoeuvres deployed by Hollywood as it attempts to navigate, and situate itself – and its content – within an increasingly complex, interconnected, and interactive media ecosystem.

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Introduction

Live from Party Royale's Big Screen, see the world premiere of a new movie trailer for TENET, the upcoming film from acclaimed director Christopher Nolan. [...] Stay alert and catch it before time runs out. The Tenet trailer will run at the top of every hour until 8 PM ET May 22nd.

(Fortnite 2020a)

Tenet and *Fortnite* became an unlikely duo Thursday night.

(Moreau 2020)

In May 2020, the second trailer for Christopher Nolan's *Tenet* (2020) debuted live within the popular online shooter game, *Fortnite*. The trailer was launched live on the virtual 'Big Screen' within 'Party Royale', one of *Fortnite*'s new game modes.¹ The 'Big Screen' resembles an outdoor cinema where players (through their avatars) can come together to watch content on a giant screen in real-time (Fig. 0.1). It was within this virtual environment that the trailer for *Tenet* was shown for the first time, and continued to be shown every hour for the following twenty-four hours.

In a series of tweets, Donald Mustard (Creative Director of *Fortnite*'s developer, Epic Games) explained the decision to launch the trailer live in 'Party Royale':

¹ 'Party Royale' is a dedicated game mode within *Fortnite*, separate from its main gaming environment, where players can watch live shows. It is described as a "new experimental and evolving space [where you can] get up close and connect with players and some of your favourite artists" (Fortnite 2020b). The 'Big Screen' is one of a number of virtual screens on the 'Party Royale' island on which players can watch live events.

The idea of debuting the TENET trailer came from a phone call with Christopher Nolan. We were all talking about our love of seeing new trailers in a THEATER and how sad we were that we can't do that right now - but how maybe this could be the next best thing. Hope you love it!

(@DonaldMustard 2020, original emphasis)²

Reaction to this announcement suggested that not everyone shared Mustard's 'love' for this new way of watching trailers. Much like Moreau's observation in the epigraph, trade press reaction to this trailer launch strategy was, overwhelmingly, one of surprise and confusion:

The game *Fortnite* and the fanbase of Christopher Nolan might not be the natural crossover most would predict. And yet that's where Warner Bros. (and the director) chose to debut the new trailer for his latest head-scratcher of an action-thriller, *Tenet*.

(White 2020)

Nolan himself is a stickler for the theatrical experience [so] it's hard to imagine how [he] might feel about the first look some people get of his movie [being] in *Fortnite*.

(Goslin 2020)

Industry commentators elsewhere were less objective:

Christopher Nolan, a filmmaker known for high-concept science fiction for adults, is premiering the latest trailer for his upcoming time-bending thriller *Tenet* on *Fortnite*, a cartoon shooter game played primarily by children. No, I do not understand this strategy either.

(Reimann 2020)

² Alluded to by Mustard here is the COVID-19 pandemic which, at the time of the trailer's debut, had led to the temporary closure of cinemas around the world, including in key markets such as the US, Europe, and Asia (GOV.UK 2020; McClintock 2020).

This was not the first time that *Fortnite* had hosted a live event within its gaming environment, having hosted a number of live music concerts in the months preceding *Tenet*'s trailer launch.³ However, as the quoted industry responses suggest, there was a general uncertainty about whether *Fortnite* was an appropriate platform on which to launch and show a film trailer, particularly given the director and the thematic premise of the film.

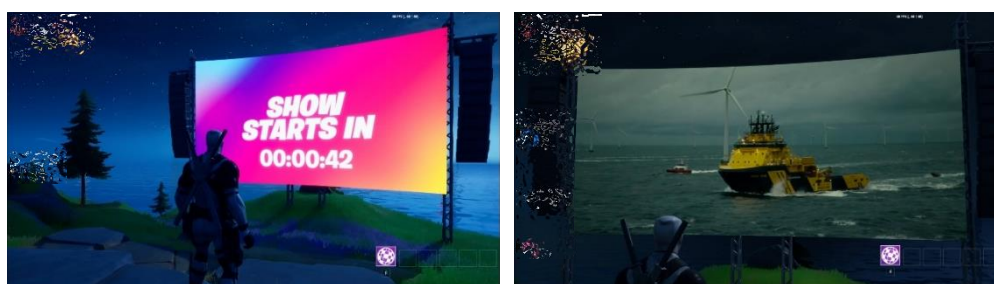


Fig. 0.1 Screenshots of the 'Big Screen' in *Fortnite*'s 'Party Royale' game mode, showing the screen itself in the context of its surrounding virtual landscape (left) and how the trailer appeared on the 'Big Screen' (right). Images taken in the game's desktop application.

The live launch of the *Tenet* trailer in 'Party Royale' represents the first time that a Hollywood studio has partnered with *Fortnite* to launch and show a new film trailer. It serves as a useful starting point to this thesis for the way it illustrates how the US film industry is branching out onto different media platforms. More specifically, it is demonstrative of how Hollywood is increasingly engaging with new media platforms it does not own, may not fully understand, and may not have used before.

This concern has been theorised in recent film and media scholarship in relation to what has been termed the 'platform society' (van Dijck et al. 2018). José

³ Amongst the most recent of these had been a virtual live concert by US rapper Travis Scott, which drew a live audience of 12.3 million players – the biggest audience (at the time of writing) that *Fortnite* had drawn for a live event (Spangler 2020; Webster 2020).

van Dijck et al. argue for a recent shift whereby digitally-connected online platforms have been increasingly bypassing, infiltrating, and converging with what they describe as “legacy institutions or companies” (2018: 2). They propose that this platform society is driven by a core group of ‘infrastructural platforms’⁴ who, together, have come to dominate and control the flow of data, content, and social and economic transactions within a complex “platform ecosystem driven by algorithms” (ibid.: 4).⁵ Through these algorithms, the core infrastructural platforms not only “automatically [...] connect users to content, services, and advertisements” (ibid.: 10), but their technological features such as “search-ranking visibility” (ibid.: 15) now determine the conditions in which users/audiences and content operate within and across this ecosystem.

More specifically within this platform society, the intersection of Hollywood and the online platforms of Silicon Valley has been conceptualised by Stuart Cunningham and David Craig in relation to what they term ‘Social Media Entertainment’ (SME).⁶ They suggest that this new proto-industry has emerged within a new ‘screen ecology’ which is being “shaped by a set of newly prominent online screen entertainment platforms” (2019: 4). This new screen ecology, they go on to argue, is “challeng[ing] the dominance of legacy media companies” (ibid.: 20) such as major film studios and television broadcasters. Whilst distinguishing between the industrial cultures of ‘NoCal’ (the Silicon Valley tech giants) and

⁴ This core group of infrastructural platforms is comprised of Alphabet-Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft; or the ‘Big Five’ (van Dijck et al. 2018: 5).

⁵ In this context, the term ‘platform ecosystem’ is understood as “an assemblage of networked platforms, governed by a particular set of mechanisms [‘datafication’; ‘commodification’; and ‘selection’] that shapes everyday practices” (van Dijck et al. 2018: 4).

⁶ SME, they posit, is an emerging ‘proto-industry’ where previously amateur content creators are using video and social networking-enabled entertainment and communicative platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat “to develop potentially sustainable businesses based on significant followings that can extend across multiple platforms” (Cunningham & Craig 2019: 5).

‘SoCal’ (the legacy institutions of Hollywood), the authors propose that this new screen ecology demonstrates a clash, convergence, and increasing interdependence of and between the two, where one industrial culture is attempting as much as the other to newly navigate each other’s respective strategies and practices (ibid.: 22). Central to these debates is a concern around how new online platforms are reconfiguring the ways in which traditional media industries such as film and television are needing to operate in the twenty-first century.

This is not a new area of concern for film and media scholarship. The broader notion of ‘convergence culture’ conceptualised by Henry Jenkins has offered a paradigm through which to understand “the flow of content [and migratory behaviour of audiences] across multiple media platforms” (2006: 2). Other areas of research related to this have also examined Hollywood in relation to the increasing social, cultural, and industrial influence of digital platforms.⁷ However, film trailers have not been granted any sustained consideration within these areas of debate. Where they have surfaced, they have been largely regarded as peripheral materials, and often within examinations of broader promotional practices. Yet, I propose that trailers offer a lens through which we can understand how the US film industry is attempting to navigate the platform society. Specifically, trailers afford a way of examining some of the practices and strategies that Hollywood is using as it responds to, and engages with, platforms it does not

⁷ Some of these areas of research include, but are not limited to: ‘transmediality’ (see, for example, Evans (2011), Freeman (2017), and Freeman & Gambarato (2019)); ‘connect(ive/ed) media’ (see, for example, van Dijck (2011, 2013) and Couldry (2019)); and ‘participatory culture’ (see, for example, Jenkins (1992), Jenkins et al. (2013, 2016), and Carah & Louw (2015)).

own or fully understand, but which have become increasingly dominant and influential in the twenty-first century media landscape.

One strategy in particular that Hollywood has mobilised in response to the platform society is 'liveness'. As the following case studies will demonstrate, trailer exhibition is one area in which this mobilisation has been particularly prominent. With this in mind, the central concern of this thesis is to ask two overarching questions: in what ways is the US film industry mobilising liveness in the exhibition of film trailers; and why is liveness being mobilised in these ways? By examining the 'constellation of liveness' underpinning a series of case studies, this thesis traces the ways in which Hollywood has actively mobilised liveness as a promotional strategy in the exhibition of film trailers on broadcast television and online. In doing so, it makes two principal arguments. Firstly, that liveness represents a mechanism through which trailer exhibition is being 'eventised' within a broadcast television landscape struggling to retain viewers and an online landscape vying for users' attention. Secondly, it argues that these practices are more broadly emblematic of a Western film industry which is attempting to navigate, and situate itself and its content, within an increasingly complex media ecosystem.

Examining how and why liveness has been mobilised in trailer exhibition in the context of the platform society brings together two key areas of academic debate. The first is 'trailer studies', which has emerged over the past two decades as a discrete area of research within film scholarship. Even in the twenty-first century, the hundred-year-old film trailer has retained its status as one of the most important forms of film promotion (Marich 2013: 125; Grainge & Johnson 2015:

172).⁸ Yet, only since the turn of the millennium have trailers come forth as a legitimate area of academic enquiry. Scholars have increasingly turned to the trailer as a way of understanding not just the trailer text itself and its role within promotional culture, but also the broader social, cultural, economic, industrial, and technological changes that the Western film industry has undergone. To these ends, scholars have approached the study of trailers in three broad and often intermeshed ways. Textualist-led studies have examined the “visible textual features [of trailers] in order to discern underlying assumptions that can be read therein” (Kernan 2004: 14).⁹ Others have adopted a wider lens to consider trailers in their meaning-making role as “vital part[s] of the interpretive and consumption process” (Gray 2010: 79) during audiences’ textual journeys.¹⁰ It is often within such examinations that the distribution and circulation of trailers – the way(s) in which they move from one media platform to another – have been considered. Elsewhere, industry-orientated studies have critically analysed the “industrial and production cultures that sit behind trailer-making” (Grainge & Johnson 2015: 151), as well as the trailer’s function within broader promotional and industrial strategies.¹¹ Through these approaches, the ways in which trailers are made, what they mean, and how they move have been widely considered.

However, little sustained consideration has been given to where and how trailers are shown: their exhibition. Trailer exhibition is a concern that can be traced across trailer studies literature. Yet, this concern is generally implicit or under-explored. Where more explicit reference is made, this is done so in relation

⁸ Finola Kerrigan has furthered this by suggesting that “forms of the film trailer are and will gain increasing significance in the digital economy” (2017: 93).

⁹ See, for example, Kernan (2004) and Johnston (2009).

¹⁰ See, for example, Gray (2010) and Pesce & Noto (2016).

¹¹ See, for example, Marich (2013) and Grainge & Johnson (2015).

to a broader investigative agenda.¹² The act of trailer exhibition, the spaces in which it occurs, and the strategies underpinning it, have remained largely under-examined. Yet, I propose that trailer exhibition – specifically *live* trailer exhibition – represents a valuable site through which we can understand how Hollywood is navigating a media landscape being increasingly reconfigured within the platform society. ‘Liveness’ – a term I use throughout this thesis to denote the “instantaneous or near-instantaneous transmission of an event in the moment of its unfolding” (Marriott 2007: 57) resulting in a “technologically mediated temporal co-presence with others known and unknown” (Auslander 2012: 6) – thus presents itself as a lens through which this can be examined. However, much like the subject of trailer exhibition, the concept of liveness is also largely absent in trailer studies research.

This brings trailer studies into conversation with a second key area of academic debate; one to do with liveness and its relationship with cinema. As Barbera Klinger has affirmed: “film’s liveness has not materialized until recently as worthy of vigorous inquiry in film and media studies” (2018: xvi). It has done so in response to wider cultural and industrial shifts “towards an increasingly participatory cultural and creative economy” (Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 139). As a result, a body of work has emerged over the past decade around the phenomenon of ‘live and experiential cinema’. Studies in this area have adopted a number of methodological approaches, often empirically-led, to examine:

¹² For example, in foregrounding the trailer text as a site through which to understand film history, Keith Johnston (2009: 8) considered the “historical situation of [trailer] production, distribution and exhibition [...] to explore the range of textual meanings that may have been available in that trailer’s temporal and historical moment.”

the creation of a cinema that escapes beyond the boundaries of the auditorium whereby film-screenings are augmented by synchronous live performance, site-specific locations, technological intervention, social media engagement, and all manner of simultaneous interactive moments.

(ibid.: 139-40)

Research on live and experiential cinema has examined the ways in which cinema's 'quest for liveness' has reshaped the cinematic spectatorial experience. It has charted an "ontological shift in the status of cinema in which deliberate ephemerality and time-based and temporal access are organizing principles" (Atkinson 2016: 51), and has contextualised this within "a contemporary cinematic culture especially invested in immersive, participatory and interactive experiences that draw upon co-presence, forms of embodiment and fellow technologies in different spaces" (Klinger 2018: xvii). The evolving relationship between liveness and cinema is playing out within a cinematic experience in which the exhibition of film is being increasingly consolidated into ephemeral, time-constricted windows of access, often in spaces beyond the cinema auditorium.

Yet, just as liveness has not been considered within trailer studies research, trailers have not been considered within live cinema scholarship. The dominant focus of live cinema scholarship has been on the exhibition and exhibitory experience of film, examining the "emergent forms of unbounded cinematic exhibition and the alternative sites of spectatorship in non-auditorium [...] spaces" (Atkinson & Kennedy 2018: 17).¹³ Film trailers are almost entirely absent across this research. I propose that trailers (and their exhibition) offer another

¹³ Some exceptions to this are works by Sarah Atkinson (2017, 2018) in which she aligns concerns around live film production and distribution with that of live exhibition.

perspective through which to examine and understand cinema's evolving relationship with liveness. Indeed, the study of trailers and their live exhibition offers a direct response to Atkinson and Kennedy's call for the "continued mapping and critical study" (ibid.: 267) of the ever-evolving field of live cinema. I argue that film promotion is part of this field, and that live trailer exhibition represents a lens through which we can discover and explore the other industrial contexts in which cinema's 'quest for liveness' is being manifested.

In sum, this thesis makes a number of original contributions to existing film and media studies research. This thesis aligns two distinct yet emergent areas of film and media scholarship, addressing lacunas in each. Where trailer studies research has considered trailers but not in relation to liveness and live cinema research has considered liveness but not in relation to trailers, this thesis situates itself at the intersection of the two, making a number of interventions in the process.

Considering trailers and their exhibition in relation to liveness provides a way of exploring one of the strategies that the US film industry is using to navigate a complex media landscape being reconfigured by and within the platform society. Notably, in the context of a media ecosystem in which there are immeasurable other calls for viewer attention, live trailer exhibition draws out one of the ways in which film trailers are being made to stand out. This is an area of research which is noticeably lacking in existing trailer studies and live cinema scholarship. In exploring this, this thesis makes the first of two principal arguments. It argues that the mobilisation of liveness in film trailer exhibition represents one strategy through which the US film industry is attempting to 'eventise' trailer exhibition. The construction of 'eventfulness' around trailers and their exhibition represents

one mechanism through which Hollywood is attempting to navigate, and situate, itself and its content within an increasingly competitive and saturated media ecosystem brought on by the emergent platform society.

Conversely, considering live cinema research in relation to trailers enables us to understand the various ways, beyond film exhibition, in which the US film industry is mobilising liveness in relation to its content. Doing so helps illustrate how the mobilisation of liveness extends beyond merely the exhibition of film, broadening the scope of live cinema research and practice to include live promotional practices. Here, a second principal argument is made: that the mobilisation of liveness during trailer exhibition is part of a wider concerted effort by the US film industry in the deployment of liveness as an industrial strategy. It argues that live trailer exhibition represents not just a mechanism through which a sense of eventfulness is constructed around trailer exhibition, but that it also represents a broader industry response to a contemporary entertainment culture heavily invested in live events. As the case studies throughout this thesis will demonstrate, the mobilisation of liveness during trailer exhibition commonly takes place in connection to other forms of live entertainment.

At a broader level, this thesis positions these arguments in direct relation to a broader debate concerned with the emergent platform society. Within this new screen ecology, both established and emerging online platforms are increasingly impacting and reconfiguring the long-standing practices of legacy industries. This thesis foregrounds trailers as an industrial site through which we can understand how legacy media institutions are rethinking their industrial practices in view of a rapidly evolving media ecosystem. Whilst this thesis argues that live trailer exhibition signifies a promotional strategy which both ‘eventises’

trailers and is part of a broader industrial move towards liveness, the following case studies also show how this experimentation with liveness in the exhibition of film trailers is predominantly taking place in and around spaces over which the US film industry has little-to-no ownership or control, but which have become increasingly dominant and influential. More specifically, the case studies reveal how it is in two specific spaces beyond the cinema in which this experimentation is taking place: on broadcast television, where trailers have been exhibited since the 1950s but where television's propensity for liveness has rarely been exploited; and online, where trailers now ubiquitously operate alongside a plethora of other content vying for user/viewer attention.

Aligning with how previous academic studies have conceptualised the 'film trailer',¹⁴ 'trailers' in the context of this thesis are defined as short-form pieces of audio-visual content designed to promote an upcoming feature film. In support of this definition, whilst it has been observed how the changing applications and promotional uses of the (term) 'trailer' are blurring the distinction between trailers and other forms of advertising,¹⁵ each of the case studies considered in this thesis have also been explicitly defined and/or described as 'trailers' by the industry stakeholders involved in their exhibition. In turn, the following case studies have been chosen because they represent the first instances in which liveness has been mobilised in their respective ways, in relation to the exhibition of film trailers. They span a period from 2014 to 2019, with half of them taking place in December 2016 alone.¹⁶ Furthermore, the films being promoted through

¹⁴ See, for example, Staiger (1990), Kernan (2004), Johnston (2009), Gray (2010), and Grainge & Johnson (2015).

¹⁵ See, for example, Vollans (2015) and Kerrigan (2017).

¹⁶ This period coincides with the latter end of a particularly busy period of live-streaming service launches. Gaming platform Twitch had launched in 2011, followed by YouTube Live in 2013. In

these mobilisations of liveness all stand out as being different exemplars of big-budget, spectacular cinema. Ranging from musicals, through action cinema and fantasy/space-operas, to war films, it is notable how the following experimentations in eventising trailers and their exhibition have (unusually) taken place in relation to similarly-eventful forms of cinema.

With this in mind, this thesis is structured into three parts. Part One sets out the theoretical and methodological parameters of this study across two chapters. Chapter 1 provides a more in-depth review of the literature discussed above in relation to trailer studies and live and experiential cinema. It brings these discrete areas of research into dialogue with each other to reveal core concerns to do with the space and time of exhibition. In doing so, it cements the focus of this thesis as being trailer exhibition practices which take place beyond the cinema screen and within ephemeral and time-restricted windows of access. Chapter 2 lays out the methodological framework through which each of the following case studies will be examined. To do so, it draws on the work of Karin van Es (2017a, 2017b), which proposes a methodological construction termed a ‘constellation of liveness’. This constellation, she argues, offers a better way of understanding the complexity of liveness within the contemporary socio-digital landscape by approaching it as a “construction informed by technologies, institutions, and users” (2017a: 5). Whilst drawing out the critical gains that her framework offers, the chapter goes on to interrogate, refine, and reconfigure her constellation of liveness into a

2015, Twitter acquired and launched Periscope, with Facebook Live launching to public figures in the same year before rolling out to standard users in 2016.

methodological framework which can more acutely examine the live moment surrounding the exhibition of trailers on broadcast television and online.

Having established the critical and methodological framework of the thesis, Part Two focuses on instances of live trailer exhibition on broadcast television. Across two chapters, this part charts the ways in which trailer exhibition strategies are exploiting and experimenting with broadcast television's propensity for liveness during the television advertising break. The case studies across this part foreground liveness as a mechanism through which both the US film industry and the US/UK television industries are together attempting to mitigate against "literal and figurative ad-skipping" (Grainge 2008: 39) in order to reify broadcast television's role as an anchor medium for advertising (Heyer, in Jenkins 2006: 72). These case studies are illustrative of a concerted mobilisation of the liveness inherent to what Jenkins et al. call an "appointment-based model" (2013: 116) of watching television. Chapter 3 considers instances on UK and US television where 'live trailers' – trailers which were partly or wholly produced, distributed, and exhibited live – were mobilised during television ad-breaks. Examining live trailers for the film adaption of *Assassin's Creed* (2016) and for the film musical, *The Greatest Showman* (2017), this chapter draws on Lisa Kernan's work around trailer 'modes of address' (2004: 18) to examine the impact that liveness has on a trailer's mode of address when its exhibition occurs at the same time as its production and distribution, and how liveness can underpin experimentation with the structural form of the trailer and the television ad-break (Grainge 2008). Chapter 4 explores how trailer exhibition strategies on UK broadcast television have navigated an increasingly multi-screened living-room where multiple devices and services are competing for viewer attention. Drawing

on debates around ‘social TV’ (Proulx & Shepatin 2012; van Es 2017a), ‘second-screening’ (Evans et al. 2017; Blake 2017), and the ‘procrastination economy’ (Tussey 2018), the chapter considers live trailer exhibition strategies for Twentieth Century Fox’s *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014) and *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017) on UK broadcaster Channel 4, charting how viewer attention was returned to the television set, first through second-screen activity and then by the television (content) itself.

Having considered live trailer exhibition practices on broadcast television in Part Two, Part Three shifts focus to the ways in which liveness has been mobilised during trailer exhibition online. Across the final two chapters, this part examines the ways in which trailers and their live exhibition have operated in relation to a highly competitive online environment for short-form audio-visual content. Chapter 5 considers the live exhibition of trailers at embodied fan conventions and their simultaneous live-streaming via YouTube Live. Examining the trailer debuts for *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) and *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) at the bi-annual ‘Star Wars Celebration’, the chapter draws concurrently on debates around the piracy of film (Ponte 2008; Lobato & Thomas 2015) and promotional content (Davis et al. 2015; Hanna 2019), (sub)cultural capital (Thornton 1995; Gelder 2007; Hills 2010), and fan culture (MacDonald 1998; Duffett 2013; Graves 2014) to explore how Lucasfilm sought to exert greater control over the exhibition of its trailers. Finally, Chapter 6 examines how Facebook Live has been used for the live, first-time exhibition of trailers. Examining Facebook Live trailer launches for Universal’s *The Fate of the Furious* (2017) and Christopher Nolan’s *Dunkirk* (2017), the chapter draws on debates around the organisational power of algorithms (Bucher 2012; Birkbak & Carlsen

2016; Johnson 2017) and interfaces (Chamberlain 2011; Drucker 2013), as well as on 'participatory culture' (Jenkins 1992; Carah & Louw 2015), to explore how liveness served as a means by which to proactively navigate and position promotional content within an algorithmically-driven environment, and how participation and interaction were manifested by the platform's interface.

In the concluding remarks to her influential study of trailers, Lisa Kernan observed that trailer exhibition was "in the process of being reconfigured and renewed by the Internet and a general expansion of promotional venues" (2004: 209). Almost two decades later, this 'reconfiguration and renewal' continues to manifest itself in different ways as the US film industry attempts to navigate complex, converging, and competitive exhibitory spaces in the face of a new screen ecology. This thesis charts one of those ways by exploring live trailer exhibition practices on broadcast television and online. In answering how and why liveness has been mobilised in these ways, this investigation argues that liveness, as an industrial strategy, represents one mechanism through which the US film industry is eventising trailer exhibition. Liveness here aids in understanding how the practice of trailer exhibition is navigating media ecosystems saturated with other short-form audio-visual content and calls for attention. It also argues that live trailer exhibition is part of a broader mobilisation of liveness by the US film industry. Trailer exhibition helps illustrate how cinema's relationship with liveness extends beyond solely the exhibition of film. Live film trailer exhibition ultimately serves as a useful lens for understanding how the US film industry is experimenting with strategies of liveness as it attempts to navigate a new screen ecology in which its

long-standing industrial practices are being influenced and reconfigured by online platforms and services over which it has little ownership or control.

PART ONE
SITUATING TRAILER EXHIBITION
AND ITS LIVENESS

1 Trailer Exhibition and Cinema's Liveness

From the video through DVD and on to the Internet, trailers have become increasingly mobile, freed from the confines of the cinema program or the set schedule of television broadcasts.

(Johnston 2009: 143)

[L]ive cinema [...] calls attention to presence and liveness, as well as to the specificities of site, space and time.

(Willis 2016: 68)

In the Introduction I outlined how – at a micro-level – this thesis sits at the intersection of two emergent yet discrete areas of academic research: trailer studies on the one hand, and live and experiential cinema on the other. This chapter examines each body of literature in more detail, drawing out core debates that emerge across both and bringing them into dialogue with each other.

As previously noted, trailer studies and live and experiential cinema research have emerged independently of one another over the past two decades. Trailer studies – through scholars such as Lisa Kernan, Keith Johnson, and Jonathan Gray – has championed the film trailer as a viable and valuable site of academic scrutiny. Within this body of work, a concern around trailer exhibition – where trailers are shown – can be traced. Yet, this concern is often implicit and/or under-explored. The first part of this chapter draws this concern to the surface to examine more explicitly the ways in which trailer exhibition has been discussed by key scholars in the field. In doing so, it reveals two core debates which emerge in relation to these discussions; debates which respectively centre on the changing space and time (or *spatiality* and *temporality*) of trailers and their exhibition. As

Keith Johnston illustrates in his epigraph to this chapter, the spatial and temporal conditions of trailer exhibition have changed significantly since trailers first moved from the cinema screen to the television set in the 1950s. Trailers can now be largely viewed wherever and whenever audiences choose. Yet, the sense of freedom that Johnston speaks of is being complicated by and within what Michael Goldhaber (1997) has referred to as the ‘attention economy’. In the context of a contemporary media environment where an “increasing amount of media [is] competing for [consumer] attention” (Janes 2016: 190), it has become increasingly difficult for promotional film content to stand out. The first part of this chapter concludes by proposing liveness as one strategy through which trailers and their exhibition might be made to stand out amongst these calls-for-attention. Yet, little consideration has been given to the notion of liveness within trailer studies literature.

Liveness has, however, been considered elsewhere in film and media research, and it is this literature which will be examined the second part of this chapter. In response to a renewed audience desire for “atmospheric, immersive and participatory cinematic experiences” (Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 140) within the so-called ‘live’ (Sweney 2018) and ‘experience’ (Pine & Gilmore 1999) economies, live and experiential cinema scholarship has emerged over the past decade as another productive site of academic investigation. Martin Barker’s (2013) work around what he variably terms ‘livecasting’ or ‘alternative content’ (which can be described as forms of ‘event cinema’) was influential in resurfacing the debate around cinema’s relationship with liveness.¹⁷ Since then, there has been

¹⁷ Barker defines ‘livecasting’/‘alternative content’ as the live-beaming into cinemas of live performance events such as theatre, opera, ballet, concerts, and sporting events (2013: 1). This is a form of ‘event cinema’, which is defined by the way ‘live(ness)’ represents a marker attributed

a concerted unfolding of this issue in different ways in relation to live and experiential (or 'event-led') cinema. The individual work of Sarah Atkinson (2016, 2018), along with her collaborative research with Helen W. Kennedy (2015a, 2016a, 2016c, 2018), has been central in furthering this area of research. Work in this area has predominantly focused on the exhibition, and exhibitory experience, of film. Similar to trailer studies, the debates emergent across this body of literature have become largely enmeshed around two key sets of issues: the spatiality and temporality of (live) film exhibition. The second part of this chapter will chart a spatial concern in how liveness has been predominantly mobilised during film exhibition in spaces beyond the cinema screen and auditorium. The same literature details how these spatial expansions have been temporally consolidated as time-restricted and ephemeral experiences, and have been publicised as such through a promotional discourse of liveness. Where this literature negates consideration of promotional materials themselves, the second section concludes by proposing trailer exhibition as a way of broadening the scope of live cinema research. On the one hand, then, where trailer studies has considered trailers (and, to an extent, their exhibition) but not in relation to liveness, live and experiential cinema research has considered liveness in relation to film exhibition, but not in relation to trailers. In bringing these discrete areas of scholarship into dialogue with one another, this chapter addresses lacunas in each and makes a number of key interventions and contributions.

Important to emphasise is that these spatio-temporal debates do not surface discretely. Space and time have emerged as intrinsically-meshed concerns

solely to the screening of a film (or other piece of filmic content) (Brook et al. 2016: 4). As we will see, this is a distinction from 'event-led cinema', where liveness underpins a performative or interactive expansion of the film beyond the cinema screen (ibid.)

across both sets of literature meaning that, as the epigraphs to this chapter attest to, scholars have commonly surfaced them in a single breath. Where this chapter will consider each body of literature independently across two parts, each part will be further structured as follows for the purpose of clarity: spatiality and temporality will be dealt with in individual sections in each part. Each section will then be structured thematically, with relevant scholars and their works considered chronologically.¹⁸ Structuring the chapter in this way serves not only to offer the clearest overview possible of the literature, but also to provide a sense of the way in which each body of research has evolved over the past two decades. That said, in drawing out these concerns and bringing these discrete bodies of research together, this chapter provides the conceptual framework within which my examination of live trailer exhibition strategies resides.

Trailers and their Exhibition

The first part of this chapter will examine how the subject of trailer exhibition and its related spatio-temporal debates have emerged in trailer studies literature.

Spatiality of Trailer Exhibition

Janet Staiger was among the first scholars to regard the trailer as a discrete media text (and viable site of academic enquiry) in its own right. Her largely economically-driven study proposed that the trailer could serve as a central site of negotiation between the film industry and its intended audiences. Her focus on advertising practices, particularly during cinema's early years into the 1920s, revealed the ways in which trailers emerged as a key piece of promotional

¹⁸ Important to note is that the very nature of their research means that scholars will appear across multiple sections.

material. In her article, Staiger defined the trailer as “a short film prepared as an advertisement for a forthcoming movie” (1990: 8), and contextualised this in relation to earlier definitions denoting it as a “brief film at the end of a short reel” (ibid.: 26n24). Underpinning Staiger’s examination is a consideration of the trailer in the context of its theatrical exhibition: on the cinema screen, coming after (and, eventually, its current resting place before) the screening of a feature film presentation.

Over a decade after Staiger’s article, Lisa Kernan’s seminal work, *Coming Attractions: Reading American Movie Trailers* (2004), represented the first sustained academic interrogation of the film trailer. In her examination, Kernan simultaneously offers a history of the trailer whilst foregrounding it as a vehicle through which to understand Hollywood’s changing conception of the cinema-going audience, alluding repeatedly to the potential the trailer offers in “indicating to audiences the assumptions studios and/or exhibitors have made about [them]” (2004: 16). To frame her work, Kernan breaks her study down into three distinct periods: the ‘classical era’ (around 1927 to 1950); the ‘transitional era’ (1950 to 1975); and the ‘contemporary era’ (1975 to around 2004).¹⁹ Across each era she maps the social, political, and technological motivators that have underscored observable changes in trailer production, construction, rhetoric, and address: from the encroachment of the television on cinema audiences during the transitional era and the need for film to differentiate itself from its smaller-screen counterpart (ibid.: 120), through to the contemporary era ‘heavily dictated’ by a “synergistic commercial marketplace shared by a number of other pervasively

¹⁹ In her original work, Kernan denotes the ‘contemporary era’ as spanning from “1975 to the present” (2004: 33). I use ‘2004’ here to denote *Coming Attractions*’ year of publication because, as we will see, significant changes have occurred in the intervening fifteen or so years.

commercialized media texts” (ibid.: 164). Throughout her study, Kernan’s focus remains exclusively on the theatrical trailer, having defined the trailer in her opening remarks as a “brief film text [...] created for the purpose of projecting in theaters” (ibid.: 1). In putting forward this definition, Kernan alludes to the spatial exhibitory conditions of the trailers she goes on to examine: on the cinema screen, within the cinema.

Evident here, both in the work of Staiger and Kernan, is an increased focus on the trailer text as a discrete and viable site of academic scrutiny in its own right. Kernan’s work in particular was influential in orientating debates around, and proposing a new way of approaching, the study of film trailers. What emerges in both authors’ work is a particular treatment of the trailer within the traditional confines of the cinema auditorium, with both considering the trailer within the defined spatial conditions of theatrical exhibition. Yet, in a number of passing comments she makes during her analysis, Kernan teases as to how these exhibitory conditions have changed through the twentieth century and into the new millennium. Early on in her work she alludes to the televised exhibition of trailers in outlining that, whilst important, television trailers do not constitute a focus of her investigation (ibid.: 15). Later, she recognises that trailers are “proliferating in new types of exhibition formats” (ibid.: 23) such as on DVDs and the internet. The internet surfaces again in her concluding remarks (which I quoted in the Introduction) where she comments on how trailer exhibition is “in the process of being reconfigured and renewed by the Internet and a general expansion of promotional venues” (ibid.: 209). Yet, precisely how these changes have specifically manifested themselves, or what impact they have had on the industrial practice of trailer exhibition, is given scarce attention. Apparent in this

final quote is a call for attention into precisely how trailer exhibition (and, particularly, its spatiality) has been, and continues to be, 'reconfigured and renewed'.

This call for attention into how trailer exhibition has been 'reconfigured with the expansion of promotional venues' has been taken up by a number of scholars. Across this literature, the theatrically-centred spatial debate traceable through the work of Staiger and Kernan is refocused to more acutely detail the exhibitory moves that trailers have made beyond the cinema screen. Finola Kerrigan offers a useful bridge here. In both editions of her book, *Film Marketing* (2010, 2017), she dedicates a brief section to the textual reading of film trailers, their production, and their relation to the broader film marketing campaigns of which they are constituent parts. Drawing parallels with the work of Staiger and Kernan, Kerrigan comments on how, in "the conventional sense, a trailer is viewed in the cinema" (2010: 142), and proposes this to be its 'ideal setting'. She goes on to list a number of advantages of the theatrical trailer. Shortly after this, however, she teases as to the kind of 'reconfiguration' that Kernan foresaw, making a passing and unexplored comment about how "trailers are now shown and shared on multiple social media platforms" (2017: 93). Whilst foregrounding a focus on the theatrical trailer (and, thus, its theatrical exhibition), Kerrigan affords an albeit brief glimpse of how the spatial conditions of trailer exhibition have been, and continue to be, reconfigured.

Keith Johnston has critiqued a 'purely theatrical conceptualisation' of the trailer for how it "limits our perception of what trailers are, what they can mean, who they target, and why we should be interested in them" (2008: 145). In his book-length study, *Coming Soon: Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood*

Technology (2009), Johnston adopts a historically contextualised close-textual approach to chart the ways in which trailer production, construction, and distribution have evolved in response to technological change, primarily since the 1950s. His analysis reveals how “the trailer has expanded beyond the cinema screen onto televisions, home video, DVD, computers, mobile videophones, media players and games consoles” (2009: 23). As he re-emphasises in a later co-written article, “trailers have moved beyond the cinema screen and are now avidly consumed across different media” (Johnston et al. 2016: 57). Traceable through Johnston’s body of work is a core consideration of how “the trailer has successfully moved from one media screen to the next, revising and changing its basic structural and aesthetic conventions to fit within [...] new technologically created frame[s]” (2008: 158). Johnston offers a detailed yet wide-ranging response to Kernan’s call into how trailer exhibition has been reconfigured. From the television, through portable home viewing formats, to the internet and connected mobile devices, his work provides an overview of the increased mobility that the trailer has attained in its moves beyond the cinema into different exhibitory spaces. His work serves as a useful stepping stone for considering how the spatiality of trailer exhibition has surfaced as a debate within film and media research, particularly in studies which more acutely consider the trailer in the context of the contemporary digital landscape.

In *Reinventing Cinema* (2009), Chuck Tryon interrogates the state of cinema in the face of its digital transformations in the early years of the new millennium. Offering a cross-sector account of the changing circumstances underpinning the distribution, exhibition, reception, and – importantly – advertising of films, Tryon seeks to “make sense of the ways in which new cinema

technologies are being used [by major media corporations and amateur media producers alike] as they seek to navigate this moment of transition” (2009: 4). A central component of this ‘moment of transition’ is the increasing availability and placement of trailers at sites beyond the cinema. In riposte to the perceived industrial concern at the time that new portable devices and increasingly high-fidelity technological infrastructures “would pull people away from the big screen” (ibid.: 3), Tryon suggests that those same factors “may be equally responsible for drawing people back into the theater through trailers and other promotional clips distributed digitally” (ibid.: 3). Alluded to here are the modes of digital exhibition, distribution, and circulation beyond the cinema screen which have become ubiquitous components of contemporary film marketing strategies. Indeed, in discussing Apple’s video iPod in particular, Tryon argues that such portable devices (and the sites and platforms available on, and accessible through, them) actually ‘supplement’ the moviegoing experience and serve as a means by which to further disseminate trailers and other promotional materials (ibid.: 83).²⁰ Within this work (and later around ‘on-demand culture’ (Tryon 2013)), trailers and their exhibition emerge as an understated concern within a broader debate to do with media and video mobility (2009: 82, 2013: 13). Tryon’s work nevertheless sheds light on the expansion of trailer exhibition beyond the defined spatial conditions of theatrical exhibition, particularly in its moves online.

This, too, is the case in the work of Jonathan Gray. In his influential study, *Show Sold Separately* (2010), Gray’s textual-led approach considers trailers

²⁰ Tryon’s discussion of trailers in relation to Apple’s video iPod echoes a similar discussion Johnston has about the same device in *Coming Soon* (2009: 143–49).

within the rubric of ‘paratexts’;²¹ as ‘meaning-making’ portals to a larger (filmic) text capable of creating and managing the text and filling it “with many of the meanings that we associate with [it]” (2010: 6). Like Kernan, Gray’s work here was influential in proposing a renewed paradigm through which to examine film trailers. These paratexts, Gray argues, can take different forms (from trailers to toys, videogames, and billboards) and present themselves in any number of on- and off-line locations (ibid.: 4). It is within this context that a concern around trailers and their exhibition emerges. Gray has outlined the moves that trailers have made beyond the cinema screen and the multitude of locations at which trailers can now be found within the contemporary media landscape:

where trailers were once limited to the space before movies (whether in a theater or on a VHS tape) or to television ad-breaks, they can now be found in various other locations, as Hollywood has used new media to circulate ads for its shows far and wide.

(ibid.: 71)

He goes on to propose that, “given their increasing presence in all forms of media” (ibid.), trailers’ meaning-making role as paratexts may be becoming even more pronounced.

This sentiment is shared by Paul Grainge and Catherine Johnson in *Promotional Screen Industries* (2015). Their industry-orientated study focuses on how the industrial cultures underpinning trailer production and circulation have

²¹ Gray borrows the term from Gérard Genette, who denotes the paratext as “a transitional zone between text and beyond-text” (Genette 1997: 407). He goes on to emphasise that the “paratext provides an airlock that helps the reader pass without too much respiratory difficulty from one world to the other, a sometimes delicate operation, especially when the second world is a fictional one” (ibid.: 408).

altered and adjusted in the “increased complexity of the digital media landscape” (2015: 62). Across their comprehensive, interview-led study, a concern around trailer exhibition surfaces within an overarching narrative of industrial, technological, and socio-cultural transformation. Within a broader discussion about screen advertising, they describe how the ‘thirty-second spot’ on television emerged “as the dominant form of audiovisual advertising in the 1960s” (ibid.: 28), before going on to caution that the recent “increase in competition from cable, satellite, gaming, the internet and mobile platforms [has given] rise to a media environment that [has] threatened the dominance of the traditional spot commercial” (ibid.). Later in their study, however, the authors emphasise that the film trailer’s successful moves across these platforms means that “the trailer retains its status as a primary promotional text for the film industry” (ibid.: 172). Interestingly, whilst Grainge and Johnson echo Gray’s sentiments as to the importance of trailers in the contemporary media landscape, both studies sit at odds with Kerrigan’s suggestion that the trailer has lost “some of its dominance as film is promoted through such a wide number of methods” (2017: 93). Nevertheless, what emerges in the respective works of Gray and Grainge and Johnson is a debate which builds on the earlier work of Johnston and Tryon: that trailer exhibition has extended beyond the cinema and across a diverse and complex range of exhibitory sites, both off-line and – increasingly – online.

This first section has examined a discrete body of literature dedicated to the study of film trailers. What emerges is a debate centred around the changing spatiality of trailer exhibition. Staiger and Kernan’s early works surface this debate in relation to the set spatial conditions of theatrical trailer exhibition, whilst those of Kerrigan and Johnston begin to reframe this debate in relation to

the trailer's moves to television, home video formats, and online. More recently, the respective works of Tryon, Gray, and Grainge and Johnson have continued to surface this debate more specifically in relation to the trailer's moves across and within the contemporary digital, and increasingly complex, media landscape. Traceable through this body of literature is a scholarly progression in the ways in which trailers and their exhibition have been considered. In particular, this evolving debate reveals the ways in which trailers and their exhibition have moved beyond the spatial confines of the cinema screen.

Temporality of Trailer Exhibition

Across this same body of literature, a parallel – often intrinsically-meshed – debate emerges around the temporality of trailer exhibition. Alongside the spatial debate that can be traced through *Coming Soon*, Keith Johnston emphasises how his study intends to ‘rehabilitate’ the trailer from its historical position as an “element of cinema, defined by particular temporal and spatial conditions” (2009: 2). An underlying theme of trailers’ freedom and liberation from the cinema – both spatially and temporally – underscores much of Johnston’s work. This is evident not only in his charting of the spatial expansions of trailer exhibition, but also in his consideration of the temporal reconfigurations that come with them: “freed from the confines of the cinema program” (ibid.: 143) and “release[d] from the set patterns and schedule of theatrical exhibition” (ibid.: 152), Johnston argues that the changing spatiality of trailer exhibition across new media formats has brought with it a changing in its temporal conditions. In his examination of home-media formats, for example, he argues that placing the remote control for the VHS or DVD player in the hand of the viewer has afforded them an agency within the practice

of trailer exhibition they had hitherto not possessed. Viewers could now watch but, more significantly, “pause, stop and re-watch” (ibid.: 137) the trailer whenever they wanted, or skip it altogether. In his subsequent discussion of online and mobile trailers (ibid.: 140), Johnston’s reference to how trailers are now modelled for multiple viewings, again, alludes to the way in which the temporality of watching trailers has changed dramatically in the face of recent technological, infrastructural, cultural, and viewing transformations.

Robert Marich’s *Marketing to Moviegoers* (2013) complements the work of Johnston in this respect. Presenting a study centred on the promotional film industry and its tactics, practices, and strategies, Marich’s investigation similarly highlights the changing temporality of trailer exhibition in the contemporary media landscape. Demonstrative of the way in which spatial and temporal debates interweave with one another throughout this literature, Marich firstly observes how the devices and platforms upon which promotional materials (such as trailers) can now be viewed are ‘mushrooming’ (2013: 115). Within this spatial context, Marich cites industry executive Jeffrey Godsick to argue how “the consumer is [now] in charge of when and where they view content” (in ibid.: 98).²² Echoing Johnston’s sentiments regarding the increased agency of the viewer within trailer exhibition, the words of Marich and Godsick are similarly illuminating as to the changing temporal status of contemporary trailer exhibition.

Temporality emerges as an interconnected debate within Jonathan Gray’s work as well. In the same breath as his spatial observations above, Gray remarks as to how trailers are no longer “limited to a few minutes before movies, or [to] a

²² Godsick is currently Executive Vice President, Worldwide Partnerships at Sony Pictures Entertainment Motion Picture Group, having been Senior Executive Vice President at Twentieth Century Fox at the time of Marich’s publication.

few television ads” (2010: 71). He proposes that paratexts – and, therefore, trailers – are not merely accessible before one has watched a film. Instead, he argues for, and distinguishes between, paratexts which are accessible before (‘entryway’) and during and after (‘in medias res’) (ibid.: 23). Indeed, Gérard Genette (from whom Gray borrows the term ‘paratext’) himself writes that “a paratextual element may appear at any time, [just as] it may also disappear, definitively or not, by authorial decision or outside intervention or by virtue of the eroding effect of time” (1997: 6). In this context, a debate around the changing temporality of trailer exhibition emerges in which viewers can not only pause, replay, or even ignore the trailer completely; they can also download, adapt, and re-circulate the trailer at any time (something that Keith Johnston (2009: 125) also recognises).²³

This second section has outlined a concern within trailer studies literature to do with the changing temporality of trailer exhibition. It emerges as a distinct yet interwoven debate alongside that around spatiality, and across the same body of literature discussed in the first section. Together, the changes that have been charted through these debates reveal an increasingly complex media ecosystem that trailer exhibition is situated within; one increasingly decentred – spatially and temporally – from the confines of the cinema screen and its schedule.

‘Loud’ and ‘Quiet’ Trailer Exhibition

This concern around the increasingly decentred nature of trailer exhibition can be mapped onto Gray’s recent collaborative work with Robert Brookey. In a co-

²³ Grainge and Johnson (2015: 162) have similarly reflected on the non-linear and decentralised nature of audience engagement with trailers (and promotional campaigns in general) in a predominantly online environment.

authored article which considers paratexts more broadly, Brookey and Gray discuss how the ‘proliferation of paratextuality’, through access to countless paratexts across various media, has facilitated a “heightened ubiquity and everydayness of all sorts of texts” (2017: 104). They postulate that this has complicated audiences’ ‘flow’ through paratexts; that media producers and advertisers can no longer assume an audience member’s journey into a text. For the authors, this means posing a question as to which “paratexts are loud and which paratexts are quiet” (ibid.: 105). This is an important question, but one the authors leave unanswered. In their discussion, Brookey and Gray do not expand on their use of ‘loud’ and ‘quiet’: they neither define whether “loud”/‘quiet’ are qualities which can be attributed to a paratext itself and/or its spatio-temporal placement; nor do they explore what loudness/quietness might mean in terms of the academic study of paratexts, particularly trailers. Trailer exhibition comes forth as a lens through which we might make sense of what Brookey and Gray mean here.

Building on his abovementioned remarks about trailers being limited to the minutes before cinema screenings, Gray has individually suggested that this theatrical exhibitory context means trailers’ “effect may have been more muted” (2010: 71). He goes on to argue that the proliferation of trailers across myriad platforms “means that most of us watch each one multiple times, often unable to escape them even if we wanted to” (ibid.). For Gray, trailers’ spatio-temporal moves beyond the cinema have made them easier to discover and more difficult to avoid. However, the inverse of this can also be argued. Peter Lunenfeld’s (2002) brief examination into the history of ‘interactive cinema’ offers a useful counterpoint to Gray in this respect. Writing before the rise of video-sharing

platforms such as YouTube and Facebook, Lunenfeld suggests that the internet has brought with it an “explosion of access [and a media environment where] anything can be obtained, but nothing is special” (2002: 151). Valentina Re builds on this more recently in her investigation into the temporality of transmedia narratives. She argues that the sheer volume of content, particularly online, has appeared to make content ‘more ephemeral’ and ‘more difficult to discover’ (2016: 68).²⁴ Elsewhere, Gray himself seems to align with what Lunenfeld and Re say by providing a similar intervention more specifically focused on promotional content. In describing a filmic property as an object which is ‘difficult to discover’, Gray conceptualises trailers as ‘indexical markers’ serving to ‘hail an audience’ within a crowded media environment which is ‘simply too large for any one of us to watch everything’ (2010: 52). Grainge and Johnson share this latter concern. They argue that, whilst the “internet [has made it] far easier for distributors to circulate promotional material [...], content online has to work far harder to find an audience” (2015: 163). This belief that content has to work harder in the contemporary media landscape is similarly reflected in remarks they make elsewhere in their study about televised advertisements. Grainge and Johnson argue that these concerns can be similarly observed in a broadcast television context where viewers are increasingly turning away from live TV (and its ad-breaks) in favour of time-shifted, video-on-demand (VOD) viewing, and over-the-top (OTT) services (ibid.: 128). This, they argue, has made it “easier for viewers to skip television adverts” (ibid.: 120), and echoes an observation that Marich makes

²⁴ If we consider Re’s suggestion as to an increased ephemerality of content in relation to trailers, her words sit in direct opposition to Johnston et al.’s (2016: 63) suggestion that the “original and ephemeral nature of trailer viewing [...] has, due to the expansion of media technologies, now largely been relegated to film history.”

in his industry study where he describes how ‘ad-skipping’ has emerged as a very real threat to advertisers and television broadcasters alike (2013: 98). Rather than viewing ‘loudness’ and ‘quietness’ as terms of value (where one is perhaps better than the other), we might consider them instead as different strategies of promotional address. Put another way, we might ask how trailer exhibition is being made louder and/or quieter, both in the context of its spatial and temporal reconfigurations beyond the cinema and in the context of an attention economy where an increasing amount of content is competing for audience attention. In trailers’ moves beyond the cinema screen, and their increased availability anywhere and when, how is their exhibition being made to stand out amongst similar forms of audio-visual content also vying for viewer attention?

Carter Moulton’s work around paratextual content and the inter-temporality of blockbuster culture offers a juncture here. In a 2015 article, Moulton examines the changing role of DVD special features, focusing specifically on making-of-documentaries (MODs). He argues that these bonus features have become “decentralized from the [digital versatile] disc and distributed across multiple media in multiple temporalities” (2015: 3). In such a multifarious media environment which is “overflowing” (ibid.) with similar content, Moulton proposes that, in “order to construct specialness and eventfulness, industry practices have begun to intensify and manipulate the temporality of today’s distributed cinema experience” (ibid.: 6).²⁵ Moulton argues that one way in which this is achieved is through the construction of “temporally-constricted window[s]

²⁵ Both Moulton and I regard trailers as constituent elements of this ‘distributed cinema experience’. Moulton aligns his understanding of this term with Richard Grusin’s concept of the ‘cinema of interactions’. For Moulton, the ‘distributed cinema experience’ denotes how the “textual meaning and experience [of cinema] is distributed across space, material, information, and time” (2015: 3).

of access” (ibid.: 8). By ‘centralising’ the spatial and temporal conditions of MOD exhibition in this way (“only one time to see it, in only one digital space to view it” (ibid.: 9), as he puts it), Moulton argues that such forms of liveness constitute an “event because of both its constructed, promoted nature and its distinction from everyday internet use” (ibid.). Indeed, in a later article in which he theorises and examines the construction of ‘speculative nostalgia’ (2019), Moulton articulates how liveness can distinguish a piece of content “as distinct from and more ‘eventful’ than other media” (2019: 437).²⁶ Liveness emerges through Moulton’s work as a way through which to eventise the exhibition of paratextual content and to make it stand out within complex, often saturated, media settings.

The notion of ‘eventfulness’ in relation to trailers has been surfaced only a limited number of times across the body of literature discussed thus far. In his discussion of traditional media advertising, Robert Marich foregrounds trailers and their exhibition as an important site of industrial negotiation. He describes how:

Trailers are in such demand that film distributors routinely negotiate exclusive premieres with online platforms in exchange for promotion of the trailer delivering large viewership [meaning] there’s plenty of opportunity to elevate the premiere of any trailer into an event.

(2013: 125)

²⁶ Moulton builds on Jonathan Gray’s concept of ‘speculative consumption’ (2010: 25) to define ‘speculative nostalgia’ as inviting audiences “to look forward to an upcoming film while also calling on them to look back to a previous cinematic encounter” (2019: 434). ‘Speculative nostalgia’ informs my analysis of live trailers in Chapter 3, where the concept will also be explored in more detail.

Elsewhere, Grainge and Johnson re-assert the potential strength and value that scheduled televised trailer exhibition can still hold in the contemporary digitalised landscape:

Unlike the internet, where it is harder to ensure that a mass audience receives promotional content when it is released, a spot in a highly rated television programme can potentially attract millions of viewers just before the release of a movie, constructing a sense of eventfulness designed to encourage cinema-going.

(2015: 167)

Indeed, at various points in their chapter on ‘trailers and blockbuster marketing’, Grainge and Johnson align with Marich by alluding to the potential for trailers to become “significant event[s] in their own right” (ibid.: 164/172). Whilst both Marich and Grainge and Johnson make explicit reference to the potential for trailers to attain event-status, these comments are fleeting and left underexplored. Furthermore, whilst implied in Grainge and Johnson’s comments about strategically-placed television spots, the notion of liveness is either implicit or entirely absent in relation to trailers and their (potentially) eventful exhibition.

This section has built on the previous two by exploring how trailers’ spatio-temporal moves beyond the cinema have complicated their exhibition within an increasingly complex media ecosystem. Having begun with Brookey and Gray’s contemplations about loud and quiet paratexts, this section went on to propose ‘loudness’/‘quietness’ as strategies of promotional address, suggesting that the eventising of paratextual content represents one way in which such content can be made ‘louder’. In drawing on the work of Moulton, this section then outlined how liveness represents one strategy through which paratextual content could be

eventised/made louder, before going on to highlight how only limited reference had been made to how trailers themselves could become eventful. Importantly, I observed that the notion of liveness is sometimes implicit, though largely absent, within this body of literature. Drawing these various debates together, liveness emerges as a strategy through which trailer exhibition can be eventised and made 'louder'. In the same way that Gray (2010: 52) suggested that trailers serve as 'indexical markers' to 'hail an audience' within a crowded media landscape, I propose that liveness can serve as an indexical marker for trailers and their exhibition. In arguing this, I make an original contribution to a body of film and media research which has considered trailers, their spatio-temporal moves beyond the cinema screen, and their potential to become events in their own right, but which has not considered these debates in relation to liveness.

The first part of this chapter has mapped how trailers and their exhibition have been considered by a body of research dedicated to the study of trailers and promotional content. The first section charted a spatial debate in relation to the moves that trailers and their exhibition have made beyond the cinema screen. The second section shifted focus to an intrinsically-linked debate to do with temporality. It examined how trailer exhibition has become increasingly decentralised – spatially and temporally – from the confines of the cinema screen and its schedule, resulting in the potential for trailers to be viewed multiple times, wherever and whenever a viewer chooses. The third section contextualised these spatio-temporal debates in relation to a media ecosystem saturated in content and calls-for-attention. It conceptualised paratextual loudness and quietness as strategies of promotional address, before proposing eventfulness and, in turn,

liveness as mechanisms through which to make paratexts louder. In highlighting a gap within this body of literature where trailers have been considered in relation to their potential event-status but not in relation to liveness, this section concluded by proposing liveness as a mechanism through which trailer exhibition can be eventised.

Whilst the concept of liveness is absent in the literature on trailers and promotional content, liveness has surfaced as a concern elsewhere in film studies research in the context of its wider relationship to cinema. It is this literature which the next part of this chapter will examine.

Cinema and its Liveness

Martin Barker's short study, *Live To Your Local Cinema: The Remarkable Rise of Livecasting* (2013), serves as a useful starting point when thinking about how film studies literature has broached cinema's relationship with liveness. In his examination of livecasting/alternative content (the names variably given to the practice of beaming live performance events into cinemas), Barker argues that this emergent form of 'event cinema' poses "a series of challenges to many traditional theories in [...] cinema studies, theatre and performance studies, and television studies" (2013: 2). One of these challenges is centred on how livecasting has complicated the concept of liveness. As he points out:

[Liveness] has been the topic of a series of quite disparate debates in a range of fields. But all the resulting very different theories are inevitably put at risk by Alternative Content, which unapologetically refuses demarcations.

(ibid.: 10)

Barker dedicates a substantial portion of his study to assessing the ways in which various academic fields – amongst them film studies, performance studies, and television studies – have conceptualised liveness. He goes on to describe how livecasting intersects, subverts, and borrows from all of them, arguing that to think about liveness in relation to livecasting “would entail a wholesale re-theorisation of what we mean and intend by the concept” (ibid.: 72). In his concluding remarks, Barker looked forward to seeing how “challenges to conceptualisations of ‘liveness’ play out within proximal academic fields” (ibid.: 89).

Barker’s work was central in re-igniting scholarly interest in cinema’s evolving relationship with liveness. Significantly, his study preceded an emergent body of scholarship which took up his call for attention into liveness and its relationship to emergent forms of live cinematic entertainment. Over the past decade, there has been a concerted unfolding of this issue in relation to what has been termed ‘live and experiential cinema’. The driving force behind this research has been the collaborative work of Sarah Atkinson and Helen Kennedy. Across a number of articles and reports (2015a, 2015b, 2016b, 2016c), a themed issue in the journal *Participations* (2016a), a collaborative industry report with Live Cinema UK (Brook et al. 2016), and an edited book entitled *Live Cinema: Cultures, Economies, Aesthetics* (2018), their work has been central in foregrounding live and experiential cinema as a lucrative area of enquiry within film and media studies debate. The outputs listed here, and the contributions to these by other authors to be examined in more detail below, have laid significant groundwork for the interrogation of cinema’s evolving relationship with liveness through the lens of the live and experiential cinema economy. This form of cinematic entertainment builds on “[r]ecent trends in cinematic expansion [signified by] the incorporation

of live events into cinematic schedules” (Atkinson 2016: 46), situating itself within:

[A] wider context of shifts towards an increasingly participatory cultural and creative economy [in which film exhibition is commonly] augmented by synchronous live performance, site-specific locations, technological intervention, social media engagement, and all manner of simultaneous interactive moments.

(Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 139)²⁷

Atkinson and Kennedy distinguish live and experiential cinema as a form of ‘event-led’ cinema as opposed to ‘event cinema’. Event cinema (such as livecasting) denotes “the coverage of live events in cinema auditoria” (ibid.: 140) where “the medium of film attributes the ‘live’ factor to the screening [rather than representing] an artistic expansion of the film being screened” (Brook et al. 2016: 4). In contrast, event-led cinema is underpinned by “the creation of live events around a particular film screening” (Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 140), often manifesting themselves through performative and/or interactive expansions of a film beyond the cinema screen (Brook et al. 2016: 4). Within the rubric of event-led cinema, Atkinson and Kennedy establish three categories of live and experiential cinema: ‘Enhanced’, ‘Augmented’, and ‘Participatory’. The first describes instances such as outdoor screenings, where the physical and social

²⁷ Sarah Atkinson (2016) has contextualised such phenomena within a clear historical precedent. She references Tom Gunning’s scholarly work in ‘The Cinema of Attractions’ (1986) which examined the expansions of film exhibition beyond the nickelodeon into vaudeville programmes in the early twentieth century. Scholars such as Raymond Fielding (1970) and Marta Braun et al. (2016) have examined in more detail the practices of early showmen such as George C. Hale, whose ‘Pleasure Railway’ demonstrated early exhibitors’ willingness to “rupture a self-enclosed world [and a] lack of concern with creating a self-sufficient narrative world *upon* the screen” (Gunning 1986: 64/5, emphasis added).

experience of film is enhanced but the filmic text itself is left alone (Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 141). Augmented live cinema denotes the addition of “a further dimension to the filmic text through: the site – situating the screening in a location relevant to the film itself [...]; through sensory enhancement [...]; and elements of non-interactive performance” (ibid), such as live-scored events. Participatory live cinema denotes “some element of audience direct engagement in elements of the originary text” (ibid.: 142), such as sing/quote-alongs or Secret Cinema productions.

These three categories are considered in different ways by different scholars across Atkinson and Kennedy’s edited collections referenced above. Traceable through each of them, and across the broader body of live cinema literature, are key debates which (like trailer studies) have become enmeshed around two sets of issues: spatiality and temporality.²⁸ Considering the abovementioned event-led categories in the face of liveness provokes a (re)consideration of film exhibition’s spatiality and temporality in the context of live and experiential cinema. Where the previous part traced how trailers studies research has shifted its attention towards other exhibition spaces beyond the cinema, the literature below similarly points to how exhibitory spaces around and beyond the cinema (screen) are underpinning live and experiential cinema practices within unique, temporally-bound moments.

²⁸ It should be noted that concerns to do with space and time can also be traced in Barker’s work. Underscoring his analysis is an acute awareness of how liveness is increasingly reconfiguring and reconceptualising cinematic exhibition (of live-beamed performances and events on the cinema screen). He suggests (2013: 57/8) that new senses of ‘locality’ and ‘temporality’ are at play during livecasts, arguing that a livecast’s exhibition will both ‘emphasise the difference’ between the spaces involved in the event and reify the event’s liveness and ‘simultaneity’ by foregrounding the ‘immediacy’ that livecasting affords an audience in being part of an event as it is unfolding.

The second part of this chapter will follow the structure of the first by independently teasing out these issues of space and time, structuring each section thematically with constituent scholars then considered chronologically. It will begin by considering how the spatiality of live film exhibition has emerged as a concern in studies centred on the three categories of event-led cinema.

Spatiality of Live Cinema

In her monograph, *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences* (2016), Sarah Atkinson echoes Barker's observations around livecasting by reaffirming how the "'space' of cinema is [...] being challenged by the inception of live 'alternative content'" (2016: 228). This observation comes in the concluding remarks to a wide-ranging study into 'emerging cinematic phenomena' in which "new modes of viewing [are changing] the nature of the spectatorial relationship with the cinema text" (ibid.: 3). From a number of methodological perspectives, Atkinson explores how:

There are now more ways to produce, view, explore and experience films than ever before. The expansion of cinematic and spectatorial spaces through the pervasion of portable networked screens means that the traditional auditorium is now just one of the many viewing and experiential conditions of a film.

(ibid.: 1)

Forms of 'enhanced' live cinema, and the scholars that have examined these, provide a useful starting point here for how they have explored these "alternative sites of spectatorship in non-auditorium external spaces" (Atkinson & Kennedy 2018: 17). Linda Levitt, for example, has examined how outdoor cinema

experiences in Hollywood have transformed “existing public spaces into moviegoing sites” (2016: 223). Within her audience-centred studies, Levitt examines these enhanced forms of live cinema in the context of how they seek to “recapture the pleasures of moviegoing as a communal activity” (ibid.: 219). With the filmic text largely left alone, Levitt describes how outdoor screenings tend to “privilege social space over the sanctity of the film” (ibid.: 221), arguing that motivations such as spending time with friends and family in ‘interesting settings’ are “factors that might lead moviegoing away from the theater” (ibid.). In her later contribution to Atkinson and Kennedy’s *Live Cinema*, Levitt furthers her own observations by responding to Robert C. Allen’s suggestion that cinema studies has “left largely unexplored [the meaning of moviegoing] in particular places” (2011: 53). She argues that the outdoor exhibition of films, “often in a historic or culturally significant setting, draws audiences to the shared experience of watching a film in the company of others” (2018: 21). Emma Pett has furthered this in her examination of rural and community cinemagoing which, she highlights, is also commonly located “in non-traditional exhibition spaces such as village halls, community centres, barns and other makeshift venues” (2018: 35). Pett argues that the enhanced exhibition of film in alternative screening spaces foregrounds senses of “accessibility and social inclusion” (ibid.: 40) that cannot be found in the participatory forms of live cinema that will be explored later in this section. Barbara Klinger, in her forward to Atkinson and Kennedy’s *Live Cinema*, summarises the concerns raised by Levitt and Pett by pointing to how enhanced forms of live cinema respond to a contemporary cinematic culture invested in experiences that “draw upon co-presence [and] forms of embodiment [...] in different spaces” (2018: xvii). The works of Levitt and Pett draw attention to the

spatiality of (live) film exhibition in spaces beyond the cinema auditorium. They do so through the lens of enhanced forms of live cinema, in which liveness emphasises the experience of co-presence, communality, and sociability that such forms provoke.

A concern with spatiality can similarly be traced in studies that have examined ‘augmented’ forms of live cinema. In their study of second screen applications for horror films, Alexander Svensson and Dan Hassoun examine the extent to which second screen apps play a central role in “expanding the diegetic world across simultaneous devices” (2016: 171). They explore this in their focus on how particular apps purportedly invoke a “4D experience through the addition of the mobile application’s visual, aural and physical components beyond the theatrical screen” (2016: 177). Whilst going on to question the apps’ scope to incite meaningful immersion in the diegetic narrative (ibid.: 184), their study is nevertheless useful for how it broaches the concern of spatiality, particularly in the context of films’ augmentations and diegetic-expansions beyond the cinema screen. Lavinia Brydon and Olu Jenzen’s empirical study of British seaside piers as screening spaces is similarly useful in this regard. Echoing the works of Levitt and Pett, Brydon and Jenzen foreground the way in which ‘deck top cinema’ re-purposes “seaside piers as community spaces [to resonate] with the sociability impetus of the community piers” (2018: 43/7). In re-purposing seaside piers for the exhibition of films, the authors point to deck top cinema’s standing as an augmented form of live cinema, where “the seascape and sounds of the natural surroundings blend with the film’s *mise-en-scène*” (ibid.: 43). Where ‘enhanced’ live cinema research has surfaced spatiality in relation to the exhibition of film in spaces beyond the auditorium, ‘augmented’ live cinema research has furthered

this by examining the ways in which the film's diegesis extends beyond the screen within such spaces. The respective works of Svensson and Hassoun, and Brydon and Jenzen, consider how cinema's evolving relationship with liveness is facilitating the expansion of a film's diegetic dimensions beyond the cinema screen, often in spaces beyond the cinema auditorium.

This is explored further in the context of 'participatory' live cinema, which introduces an element of interactivity to the dimensions outlined above. Studies centred on participatory live cinema have tended to focus on the "expansion and reimagining of a film's milieu in both virtual and real spaces [and how this] encourage[s] spectatorial performativity and ludic participation" (Atkinson & Kennedy 2015a: 49; Atkinson 2016: 47). As previously noted, the collaborative work of Sarah Atkinson and Helen Kennedy was, and continues to be, central in advancing this agenda, and their early examinations into the practices of Secret Cinema (SC) provide the foundations for this. Through an "expanded consideration of the permeation and manipulation of the filmic text beyond the screen" (2015a: 60), Atkinson and Kennedy (2015a, 2015b, 2016b) have examined SC productions for how they extend, and encourage participation and immersion with(in), the diegetic world of a film.²⁹ Employing elements of (auto/micro)ethnography, participant observation, and close textual and aesthetic analyses, Atkinson and Kennedy unpick the ways in which SC create "complex and multi-layered" (2016b: 253) cinematic experiences in which "audience members knowingly and complicitly" (2015a: 50) enter fictional spaces which extend across multiple online and physical sites. Online sites, they suggest,

²⁹ The SC productions primarily examined across their works are 2014's Secret Cinema Presents...*Back to the Future* and 2015's Secret Cinema Presents...*Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*.

invite participants to “access the fictional spaces of the experience via numerous ‘diegetic portals’ [where they can begin] to immerse themselves into the diegetic fabric of the [...] filmic universe well in advance of attending the [physical] event” (ibid.: 51).³⁰ The authors argue that this experience and interaction with the online/virtual incarnations of the diegesis in turn facilitates a more coherent occupation and navigation of its physical incarnations. In speaking about this in the context of Secret Cinema Presents...*Back to the Future*, the authors argue that:

These preparations enabled audience members to occupy the physical space of the narrative diegesis of the Hill Valley fair prior to the screening in what we refer to as an intra-diegetic play-space in which participants take on a role through their embodiment of in-world characters to navigate and explore, and immerse themselves in the extensive fabula initially established online.

(ibid.: 52)³¹

Across their studies, Atkinson and Kennedy are concerned with the ways in which SC create a participatory live cinema experience during which “the settings and the textual fabric of the [diegetic] space [are] expanded way beyond the boundary of the onscreen universe” (2016b: 258). In doing so, they offer a commentary on how participatory forms of live cinema encourage audience participation and

³⁰ Atkinson and Kennedy (2015b: 6) point to a dichotomy in the way SC uses these online spaces; using them on the one hand to “allow audience narrative engagement whilst also deploying these same sites to administer marketing, selling and instructions for the audience in key preparations required for the event.” As such, the authors have described how these spaces have at times become sites of “conflicts, tensions and re-negotiations of control” (ibid.: 2) between SC and its audience.

³¹ Atkinson and Kennedy offer a counterpoint to this in a later article examining the spatial design of live cinema events such as SC’s *Back to the Future* production. They suggest that: “as an audience member you are not actually immersed in the world of Hill Valley, you are immersed in the world of its making” (2016b: 274). Atkinson (2018: 192) herself builds on this in her examination of what she terms ‘simulacinema’, which will be explored in more detail below.

interaction with a film's diegesis in its various spatial, beyond-the-cinema, permutations. Participatory forms of live cinema offer a further perspective on cinema's increasingly interconnected relationship with liveness, highlighting how new means of engagement, immersion, and interaction with film in spaces beyond the cinema and its screen raise a core concern to do with the spatiality of (live) film exhibition.

The first section of this part has examined the ways in which spatiality has emerged as a concern within emergent film studies literature investigating cinema's evolving relationship with liveness. It considered the literature around live and experiential (or event-led) cinema, detailing three distinct categories of event-led cinema and tracing how key scholars in these areas have variably surfaced spatiality as a debate within each of them. Whilst individually tracing progressive changes in the spatiality of film exhibition, the literature around event-led cinema collectively offers a typography for examining "the growing trend towards the creation of a cinema that escapes beyond the boundaries of the auditorium" (Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 139) and the different ways in which liveness is impacting and reconfiguring the spatial conditions of film exhibition. In tracing these spatial expansions, the literature reveals that it is predominantly in spaces beyond the cinema (screen) that the mobilisation of liveness in relation to film exhibition is taking place.

Temporality of Live Cinema

Enmeshed with this concern to do with space is a concurrent concern to do with time. As Atkinson and Kennedy make clear in the introduction to their themed section on 'Temporalities' in *Live Cinema*: "The act of film viewing is inherently a

time-based, temporally specific occasion” (2018: 79). Yet, as this section charts, scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which liveness has a profound impact on the temporality of (live) film exhibition in its spatial moves beyond the cinema. Holly Willis’ chapter on live cinema in her book, *Fast Forward: The Future(s) of Cinematic Arts* (2016), offers a useful starting point here.³² Demonstrative of the interconnectedness of these spatio-temporal concerns, and building on her epigraph at the top of this chapter, Willis argues that live cinema:

calls attention to presence and liveness, as well as to the specificities of site, space and time [within] a world characterised not by concrete spatial boundaries and fixed temporal coordinates.

(2016: 68)

In her historically-contextualised, industry focused account of practitioners working in the field of live cinema, Willis investigates the “ways in which the [live] cinematic experience becomes a performative event unfolding in real time” (ibid.: 75). In doing so, she draws attention to the ways in which the mobilisation of liveness is redefining and reconfiguring cinema’s temporal parameters, particularly in terms of film exhibition’s temporal relation to other industrial practices (ibid.: 71). This sentiment can be traced through Svensson and Hassoun’s examination of second screen horror apps. In their concluding remarks, they point to how “[s]econd screen cinema has yet to move beyond long-standing practices of linearity and programmatic content flows” (2016: 189); indeed, they argue that live synchronisation is “key to the functionality of [...] second screen

³² Willis conceptualises ‘live cinema’ as a practice in which “artists dismantle and reconfigure the elements of the traditional cinematic apparatus in order to craft an event that straddles the boundary between mediated experience and live performance” (2016: 67).

technologies” (ibid.) in the cinema. Whilst appearing to suggest that second screen cinema has the potential to eventually move beyond the linearity of cinematic programmes, their comments nevertheless highlight how the current production of such forms of augmented live cinema is predicated on their liveness and temporally-bound nature. Atkinson, in her independent works, makes similar observations. In her 2017 article, she examines Woody Harrelson’s *Lost in London LIVE* (2017), which was shot live on location in London, in one take, and broadcast in real-time to cinemas (2017: 697). Atkinson teases out the way in which liveness provoked in the cinema audience a sense of ‘proximity’ to, amongst other things, the “the tools and people of production” (ibid.: 706).³³ Liveness in this instance consolidated the time of the film’s production, distribution, and exhibition into a single, temporally-bound event.³⁴ For Atkinson, this is also a defining feature of what she conceptualises in a later article as ‘synchronic simulacinema’. Atkinson conceptualises this as a live experience in which “an audience simultaneously experiences both the space of the filmic diegesis and/or the cinematic spectacle, and the attendant, but crucially, simulated space of its production” (2018: 192). Atkinson describes how, in synchronic simulacinema, the production of a filmic text is “designed to be appreciated in synchronicity” (ibid.: 195) with its output and reception. Similar to what she observed in the case of *Lost in London*, Atkinson highlights how, in synchronic simulacinema, “there is a simultaneous collapse of production, performance, capture, transmission and reception” (ibid.), going on to

³³ Atkinson also outlines how liveness provoked a sense of proximity to distanced others, citing Nick Couldry’s (2003: 96–97) suggestion that liveness “guarantees a potential connection to [...] shared social realities as they are happening.” Atkinson’s observations here interlink with the earlier-discussed spatial concerns around physical co-presence.

³⁴ A similar consolidation of these industrial practices will be broached in Chapter 3 in relation to live trailers.

re-affirm how “liveness is intrinsic” (ibid.: 198) to this form of live cinematic entertainment. Emergent in what Willis, Svensson and Hassoun, and Atkinson say is a temporal concern to do with how liveness consolidates various stages of industrial film practice into a single, temporally-bound moment.

Parallel to this is another concern which foregrounds this temporal consolidation and how it underpins discourses of liveness in relation to, and to promote, forms of event-led cinema. In *Beyond the Screen*, Atkinson herself argues that cinema’s ‘quest for liveness’ is provoking a “shift in the status of cinema in which deliberate ephemerality and time-based and temporal access are organizing principles” (2016: 51). She expands on this in her article on simulacinema. Building on her above observation that liveness is intrinsic to its synchronic form, Atkinson argues that “live[ness] is also a marketing and promotional tool, serving to historicize these instances as *one-off*, *unique*, and *ground-breaking*” (2018: 198, original emphasis). This sentiment is recurrent in her collaborative work with Kennedy: in one of their earlier articles they allude to how a ‘terminology of liveness’ is used in order to describe live and experiential cinema events (2015a: 53). They expand on what they mean by this in their opening remarks to *Live Cinema*, where they highlight:

[a] widespread tendency within live cinema marketing discourse to ignore all and any cinematic antecedents in hyperbolic proclamations of the instantaneity of the new. Marketing materials are peppered with statements such as ‘like never before’ and ‘first of a kind’ whilst also heavily underlining the novelty of the immersiveness of ‘live’ in the use of phrases such as ‘in the moment’ and ‘as it happens’.

(2018: 3)

Atkinson and Kennedy dedicate space to explore this in more detail later in their collection, in a thematic section exploring ‘Temporalities’ in the context of film festivals. The editors describe how the section’s constituent contributors foreground a temporal concern with how liveness imbues “a sense of ‘event’ – a buzz of excitement and that feeling of time marked out as distinct and separate from the routine” (ibid.: 79). María Vélez-Serna is one such contributor, offering an examination of the intersection between pop-up cinema and tourist performance. Exploring the ‘spatio-temporal compression’ that film festivals afford through their ephemerality and non-traditional cinema venues, Vélez-Serna points to how forms of live cinema in this exhibitory context produce ‘eventfulness’ and represent “a time limited appointment” (2018: 103). Leslie-Ann Dickson furthers this in her own contribution to the thematic section. In her examination of enhanced and participatory live cinema events at the Glasgow Film Festival, Dickson highlights how these practices are narrativised as “unique, one-off, temporal encounters by way of promotional motifs [such as] ‘rarity’, ‘first-timedness’, ‘seeing it first’, [and] ‘one-off moments’” (2018: 83). Foregrounded in Dickson’s work, as well as in that of Vélez-Serna, Atkinson and her collaborative work with Kennedy, is how a temporal aspect of cinema’s relationship with liveness is playing out not just in the production and exhibition of event-led cinema experiences, but also in the promotional discourse surrounding them. Prominent in what they say is how the temporality of liveness has contributed to a promotional discourse which instils forms of event-led cinema with a sense of ‘occasion’ and distinctiveness from other forms of cinema(tic exhibition).

This second section has traced a concern within live and experiential cinema research centred on the changing temporality of (live) film exhibition.

Emergent in this literature is a focus on how liveness roots different forms of event-led cinema within specific, temporally-bound moments, illuminating the different ways in which liveness has been industrially and promotionally mobilised. Enmeshed with a concurrent debate to do with spatiality, the previous two sections surface an academic concern to do with how liveness consolidates the exhibition of multi-spatial, beyond-the-cinema film experiences into unique and ephemeral live events.

Liveness as a 'new marketing strategy'?

In their Afterword to *Live Cinema*, Atkinson and Kennedy bring these debates together in their brief discussion of Harrelson's *Lost in London LIVE*. They highlight how:

[in] the liveness, immediacy and proximity unique to this experience [...], it is yet to be understood whether the [film's] format heralds a disruption to traditional exhibition and distribution practices, a new aesthetic form, a new marketing strategy or a new economic mode of production.

(2018: 267)

Embedded within this list of potential impacts on industrial film practice is a comment on how 'liveness, immediacy, and proximity' might serve as a promotional strategy. Atkinson and Kennedy frame this in a way that goes beyond simply the kind of discourse of liveness traced in the previous section. Instead, in framing this in relation to *Lost in London* (and its consolidation of multiple experiential and industrial sites into a live, temporally-bound moment), Atkinson and Kennedy appear to suggest a potential for promotional materials *themselves* to become live experiences. Coming at the end of their book, this fleeting reflection

– and how it might manifest itself in relation to promotional materials in practice
– goes unexplored. That said, promotional materials have generally been given scarce attention across the broader body of scholarship discussed here around event and event-led cinema. Beyond the ways highlighted above by Dickson, Vélez-Serna, and Atkinson and Kennedy (where marketing materials are commonly laden with a discourse of liveness), promotional materials such as trailers have barely been examined in the context of cinema’s evolving relationship with liveness.

I propose that trailers and their exhibition offer a key intervention here. Specifically, I propose that examining how liveness has been mobilised as a promotional strategy in film trailer exhibition enables us to understand the ways in which the US film industry is mobilising liveness in situations beyond the exhibition of filmic content. In doing so, I make an original contribution to a body of film research which has considered cinema’s relationship with liveness and the emergent spatio-temporal concerns related to this, but which has not considered these debates in relation to trailers. Indeed, the examination of live trailer exhibition responds directly to Atkinson and Kennedy’s call for “the continued mapping and critical study of [the] ever-evolving field” (ibid.) of live cinema.

The second part of the chapter has mapped how cinema’s evolving relationship with liveness has been examined by a body of research centred around the live and experiential cinema economy. It opened with a discussion of Martin Barker’s investigation into livecasting (a form of event cinema) and how it was central in re-surfacing this relationship as a pertinent area of academic scrutiny. Focus then shifted to literature which has examined the contrasting form of event-led cinema.

As with trailer studies, debates in this body of work have become enmeshed around key concerns to do with space and time. The first section charted a spatial debate which revealed a focus on the expansion of film, its exhibition, and its diegetic worlds in(to) a variety of spaces beyond the cinema screen. The second section turned to an intrinsically-linked debate to do with temporality, revealing a scholarly interest in the way liveness consolidated these spatial expansions within ephemeral, temporally-bound moments.³⁵ It highlighted how a promotional discourse of liveness, in turn, imbued these moments with a sense of 'occasion'. The third section expanded on this discourse by highlighting an unexplored suggestion that promotional materials could become live experiences in their own right, and proposing trailer exhibition as an intervention. In highlighting a lacuna in this literature where the industrial mobilisation of liveness in spaces beyond the cinema has been considered in relation to film but not in relation to trailers, this section concluded by proposing live trailer exhibition as a lens through which to understand how the US film industry is mobilising liveness beyond the exhibition of film; in turn arguing that live trailer exhibition is part of a wider concerted effort by the US film industry in the mobilisation of liveness as an industrial strategy.

Conclusion

Across this chapter I have charted the debates and concerns emergent in two distinct bodies of film and media studies scholarship. The first part of this chapter examined the still-emergent field of trailer studies, drawing to the surface a

³⁵ This interest can similarly be traced in Paul Grainge's (2011) work around 'ephemeral media', in which various forms of media entertainment are interrogated for their transience. This temporality in relation to television in particular will be explored further in Part Two.

constituent yet implicit and under-explored concern to do with trailer exhibition. From the early works of Staiger and Kernan, through those of Kerrigan, Johnston, and Tryon, and on to the more recent interventions of Gray, Marich, Grainge and Johnson, and Moulton, the first part traced two enmeshed debates to do with the space and time of trailers and their exhibition. Emergent through these debates was a scholarly awareness of how trailer exhibition has increasingly moved beyond the spatio-temporal conditions of the cinema, illuminating a media landscape in which the exhibition of trailers has become increasingly – spatially and temporally – decentred and unbound. The first part closed by contextualising these debates in relation to a media landscape which was saturated in content and calls-for-attention, proposing liveness as a promotional strategy through which trailer exhibition can be eventised and made to stand out. Despite the emergence of live trailer exhibition practices, the first part noted how liveness had barely been discussed within trailer studies literature.

The second part of this chapter examined a parallel but separate area of film studies research which has considered liveness and its relationship to cinema. Martin Barker foregrounded this as a pertinent area of academic enquiry in the context of event cinema, and preceded a growing body of work which has gone on to consider this relationship in the context of event-led cinema. In the latter, the works of Atkinson, her collaborative work with Kennedy (with contributions from Levitt, Pett, Svensson and Hassoun, Dickson, and Vélez-Serna), and the work of Willis have similarly surfaced two key debates which have become enmeshed around the space and time of film exhibition. Revealed in these debates is how an industrial shift towards liveness – in response to cultural shifts towards a more participatory and immersive cultural economy – has provoked both a spatial

expansion of film beyond the cinema screen and a temporal consolidation of the live cinema experience in these spaces into an ephemeral and time-bound event. Where the first part traced a debate revealing how trailers have become temporally *unbound* through their spatial moves beyond the cinema, the literature in the second part surfaces a temporal debate revealing how live film exhibition (in the context of similar spatial moves) has become increasingly bound *up* within live cinema's conditions of liveness. The second part closed by drawing these debates together in response to an unexplored suggestion in the literature that promotional materials themselves had the potential to become such multi-spatial, temporally-bound live experiences. It noted how promotional materials themselves had not been considered within this literature, and proposed live trailer exhibition as a lens through which to understand how the US film industry is mobilising liveness beyond the exhibition of film.

In the context of spatial expansions beyond the cinema, where trailer studies has considered trailers but not in relation to liveness, and live cinema literature has considered liveness but not in relation to trailers, the examination of live trailer exhibition emerges at an unexplored intersection of the two. In bringing these discrete areas of film and media scholarship into dialogue with one another, this thesis makes a number of key interventions and contributions. Doing so, in turn, helps formulate a conceptual framework through which to examine how liveness is being mobilised in trailer exhibition. This framework provides a foundation for understanding both the ways in which liveness is consolidating trailer exhibition into unique, temporally-bound events, and that it is in spaces beyond the cinema – particular on television and online – where this is taking place.

Having established the conceptual framework for this thesis, the following chapter will outline the methodological framework that I will use to interrogate moments of live trailer exhibition on television and online.

2 Locating the Trailer in its Live Moment

While Auslander strives to conceive of liveness in a mediated society, we [should] reverse the polarity to consider the status of mass media systems in the face of liveness.

(Klinger 2018: xv)

The previous chapter jointly examined the literature surrounding and informing current scholarly discussions of film trailers and of cinema's evolving relationship with liveness. It established that across both bodies of work there have been concerted moves beyond the cinema screen, both of trailers and of the filmic text. Yet, where liveness has been widely implicated in academic discussions of the latter, it has scarcely been implicated in discussions of trailers. Live trailer exhibition emerges at an as-yet-unexplored intersection between the two bodies of research.

With a central question of this thesis being to explore how liveness has been mobilised by the US film industry in the exhibition of film trailers, the purpose of this chapter is to outline the method by which I intend to examine the case studies which follow. To do this, this chapter draws on the recent work of Karin van Es (2017a, 2017b) into the changing conditions and understandings of liveness and the category of the 'live'. In particular, this chapter will scrutinise the methodological construction she develops. Termed by van Es as a '*constellation of liveness*', this framework is best understood as "a construction informed by technologies, institutions, and users" (van Es 2017a: 5). Unpacking her constellation will, simultaneously, draw out the critical gains that her framework can offer whilst also interrogating its applicability when the object of study is

different to the online, social-based platforms at the heart of her investigation. This chapter will go on to refine and re-articulate van Es' constellation, proposing an iteration of the framework which is capable of examining the live moment surrounding the exhibition of trailers on television and online, and how that moment has been concurrently informed by the trailer, technologies, media institutions, and on- and off-line viewers.

Prior to this, however, it is pertinent to first reflect on the concept of liveness itself. As was noted in Barker's work in the previous chapter, the concept of liveness in relation to media is neither new nor simply articulated. Indeed, Andrew Crisell's assertion that the "phenomenon of liveness is unexpectedly complicated" (2012: 3) understatedly speaks to the daunting and often confusing task of unpacking the term's various meanings. Important to re-instate at this point is that it is not the purpose of this chapter – nor of this thesis – to develop a new conceptualisation of 'liveness'. However, by reflecting briefly on the body of literature which has contemplated it, a number of distinct but interrelated concerns can be traced which underscore the term's definition and use in the context of this thesis.

The first of these concerns relates the instantaneous, real-time transmission of audio-visual content. Television studies research in particular has observed how television's affordance of instantaneity – the real-time transmission and reception of images,³⁶ as well as its potential to interrupt and guarantee a connection to real events as they are happening³⁷ – has always been one of the medium's defining and distinguishing features.³⁸ This sentiment can be similarly

³⁶ See, for example, Marriott (2007).

³⁷ See, for example, Meyrowitz (1985), Couldry (2004), and Auslander (2008).

³⁸ See, for example, Heath & Skirrow (1977), Doane (1990), and Caldwell (1995).

observed in relation to liveness online, where technological developments such as live-streaming are said to “have intensified the experience of liveness and instantaneity” (Ytreberg 2017: 314).³⁹ This notion of online liveness draws out a second concern related to a mediated co-presence with others, known and unknown, close and distant. Nick Couldry has conceptualised online liveness as the “simultaneous co-presence of an audience [...] on a variety of scales [...], all made possible by the Internet as an underlying infrastructure” (2004: 356–57).⁴⁰ Indeed, Andrew Crisell has expanded on this by arguing that:

we value liveness not just for the instantaneous nature of its messages but for the sense it gives us of being part of a larger community – all listening, or viewing and listening, at the same time [...]. [All] are either co-present in time and space [...] or merely in time [...]: that is to say, in different places but all conscious of doing the same thing at that instant.

(2012: 16)

A third concern relates to rhetorical uses of liveness, in which the term is deployed by media institutions as an ideological and indexical mechanism in relation to their content and services.⁴¹ These concerns constitute just a few of the perspectives through which liveness has been conceptualised, and together provide the basis for this investigation’s use and understanding of the term: as a multi-dimensional construct underpinned by the “instantaneous or near-instantaneous transmission of an event in the moment of its unfolding” (Marriott

³⁹ See also White (2006), Ytreberg (2009), and Stewart & Littau (2016).

⁴⁰ See also Auslander (2012), Frei (2013), Reason & Lindelof (2016), Sørensen (2016), and Haimson & Tang (2017).

⁴¹ See, for example, Feuer (1983), McPherson (2002), White (2006), and Ytreberg (2009).

2007: 57) resulting in a “technologically mediated temporal co-presence with others known and unknown” (Auslander 2012: 6).⁴²

Even in this understanding, it is clear that liveness cannot be defined nor understood in a single way. Rather, its meanings are in a constant state of flux as “new, altered forms of liveness continue to be driven by significant technological change” (Grandinetti 2017: 18). Liveness can be understood in multifarious ways and approached through a variety of perspectives, and it is this complexity that Karin van Es seeks to tackle in her work.

The Future of Live(ness)

In her book, *The Future of Live* (2017a), and in a subsequent journal article (2017b), Karin van Es attempts to disentangle the multifarious nature of the ‘live’ in the current climate. Homing in on three key areas, she decides to re-articulate how liveness has been considered, employing the terms ‘ontology’, ‘rhetoric’, and ‘phenomenology’ to underscore how technologies, institutions, and users respectively, have been implicated in understandings of liveness, all with a specific focus on social media platforms.⁴³ Yet, her key contribution to media discourse around liveness is inherent in her assertion that, independently, these perspectives and scholarly assumptions behind liveness fail to capture its complexity and multiplicity in the contemporary socio-digital landscape (2017a: 5). She questions the assumption that “there is a simple and rather obvious

⁴² Beyond television studies, liveness has also been conceptualised through broader disciplinary perspectives such as theatre and performance (Morris 2008; Auslander 2008; Georgi 2014), and radio (Chignell 2009; Crisell 2012).

⁴³ Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof (2016) have previously attempted to map the use of liveness across and within different contexts. From its use by industry, to its use to describe audience experience, and transmission technologies, Reason and Lindelof outline the perspectives advanced by van Es without explicitly doing so in their own work.

definition of liveness [whereby it] concerns the simultaneity that links the production, transmission and reception of an event” (2017b: 4). She suggests that such a stance ‘overlooks a bigger picture’ (ibid.).

In order to more acutely examine this ‘bigger picture’, van Es suggests consolidating ontological, rhetorical, and phenomenological perspectives within a single methodological approach she coins a ‘constellation of liveness’. Influenced by Mirko Tobias Schäfer’s notion of media ‘dispositifs’,⁴⁴ van Es posits liveness as a construction mutually informed by three interdependent domains: ‘Metatext’; ‘Space of Participation’; and ‘User Responses’. These three domains, each of which addresses to some degree one of the analytical perspectives she points to above, interrelate in what van Es describes as a “construction of the live” (2017a: 26) (Fig. 2.1). Whilst herself not explicitly expanding on her use of the term ‘constellation’, if we understand it to denote an assemblage or group of (usually-related) things, we can ascertain that van Es’ constellation of liveness represents a concept informed by an assemblage of interrelated factors. Whilst the Metatext, Space of Participation, and User Responses all influence the construction of liveness, each may be applied to varying degrees depending on what the object of focus is that the constellation is applied to. Much like a constellation of stars is rarely a cluster of cosmic bodies in equal proximity to each other, a constellation of liveness is not necessarily a conceptual construction informed equally by each of its three domains.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Schäfer (2011) uses ‘dispositif’ in a ‘participatory culture’ context to describe the “formations of various participants” (2011: 16). A three-way interdependent construction of ‘Discourses’, ‘Social Use’, and ‘Technology’, he posits that these three domains interrelate “and transform the meaning of participation itself, as well as the meaning of related technologies, their socio-political framing and their legal regulation” (ibid.: 17).

⁴⁵ The metaphorical use ‘constellation’, particularly within a socio-technological context, has become increasingly regular in recent years (see, for example, Sørensen (2016: 397), Uricchio

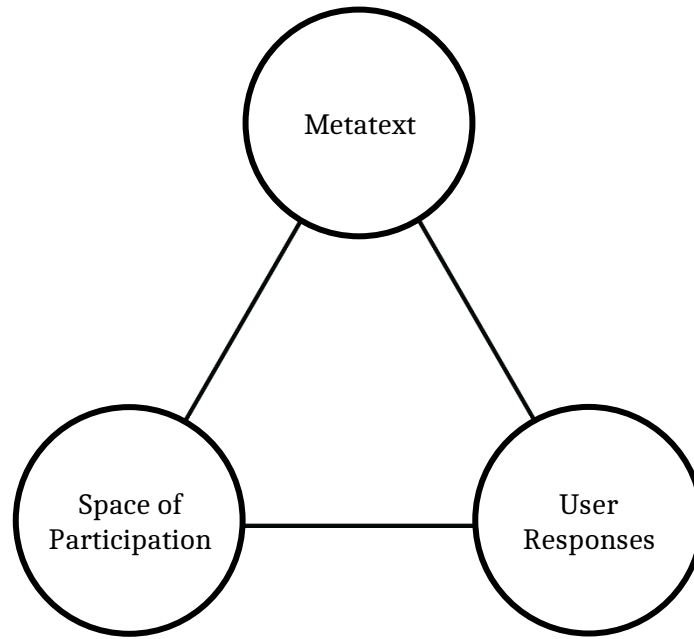


Fig. 2.1 Karin van Es' 'constellation of liveness'. *Figure by Asher Boersma* (in van Es 2017a: 27).

Metatext

The domain of Metatext is used by van Es to account for the impact that institutions and media establishments have on the construction of liveness. It is a development of the term 'paratext' – originally coined by Gérard Genette (1991)⁴⁶ and later adapted and developed by Jonathan Gray (2010).⁴⁷ Whilst the conceptual nuances of each scholar's classification of 'paratexts' differ slightly, both employments understand paratexts as key meaning-making agents in our reading and understanding of a text (or media property/franchise). They further consider how elements which are potentially external to the property – such as third-party-

(2016: 155), Greenfield (2018: 221), and Moulton (2019: 438)). Its usage is emblematic of the multifarious, networked, and interconnected platform society and new screen ecology in which we currently exist.

⁴⁶ Genette's use of 'paratext' describes the surrounding textual elements of a literary text, such as the author's name and visual illustrations. He emphasises a distinction between the literary text and its surrounding influencing paratexts.

⁴⁷ Gray adapts the term to denote the discrete units which make up and inform our reading of an overall 'text'. He distinguishes how the 'work' (i.e. a film) and its 'paratexts' (i.e. posters; trailers) together inform the 'text', "where the text is the entity in society and culture" (in Brookey & Gray 2017: 102).

generated content and reviews – can also still be regarded as influential forces in our reading of a text.

Yet, van Es alters the prefix in her work to ‘meta’ in response to this final point. She establishes her focus on the self-created and self-referential materials belonging to certain social media platforms. Metatextual materials such as press releases, website information, and promotional materials, she suggests:

[...] are discursive sites that can be analyzed to disclose how the makers/owners of the platform conceive of its liveness [and for what they can] collectively communicate about the platform’s liveness.

(2017a: 29)

Her intention is to understand how social media platforms themselves understand, develop, utilise, and deploy liveness within and via their own online environments and tools. In doing so, she argues that her focus on platform-specific, self-produced, metatexts offers a “consistency of ideas about what is ‘live’ about a particular platform” (ibid.).

Space of Participation

For van Es, the ‘Space of Participation’ – as a domain underpinning her construction of liveness – discloses “the participatory practices that specific media platforms offer their users, and the politics through which this space solidifies” (2017a: 29). She borrows the term, and its composition, from Eggo Müller, who dissects an online participatory space into four determining factors:

Instead of simply praising the ‘blurring of boundaries’ between spheres of production and consumption, the concept of ‘formatted spaces of

participation' allows for a more differentiated and adequate analysis of the technological, economic, social and cultural powers and conventions that structure the diverse participatory spaces which these spaces allow for and also provoke.

(2009: 60)

Müller's framework is pertinent for van Es in her construction of liveness for how it helps "shed light on how ways of relating to and around content change the form of liveness" (2017a: 29). In van Es' constellation of liveness, the Space of Participation domain accommodates examination of how technological affordances and forces mediate spatio-temporal relations (2017b: 4), and how economic and legal considerations affect the functionality of, and mobility on, a specific platform. For van Es, the Space of Participation is solely online, comprehending only on the fundamental appearance, responsiveness, and operation of a social platform's interface and tools within which end-users interact with content and each other.

User Responses

The third and final domain comprising van Es' 'constellation of liveness' is 'User Responses'. She borrows the term from José van Dijck's use of it, who argues that such evidence of users' online activities are valuable pieces of source material which disclose a social media user's changing relationship with a platform (2013: 34–41). Beyond revealing what van Dijck calls the 'norms and values' relating to social media platforms, van Es suggests that user responses can more critically offer a 'reflection and commentary' on how "users understand a platform's liveness" (2017a: 33). She continues:

When users become critical of the understanding of liveness put forth by the metatext, they respond either by appropriating the platform itself, changing its scripted use, or by publicly articulating their dissatisfaction.

(ibid.)

Such user responses are at the core of van Es' analysis. Often taking the form of comments or 'posts', such evidence enables van Es to examine the practices of online social media platform users. Furthermore, it enables her to understand how liveness is understood by users in relation to their interaction with a platform's Metatexts and Space of Participation.

In proposing the unification of these three domains/areas of focus, van Es presents an interesting framework with which to think about and examine liveness as it currently exists in both academic discourse and popular culture. Her consolidation of previous analytical perspectives on liveness within a single methodological framework helps, as she suggests, "to account for its diversity – a key task at a time when forms of liveness proliferate on new media platforms" (2017b: 4). In a media environment in which innovation and development is constantly provoking re-assessment of social, cultural, technological, and industrial codes and practices, van Es' framework provides a useful tool with which to unpack and critique these changes. Yet, in considering how to most fruitfully apply this framework to the study of the live trailer exhibition, it forces us to ask certain questions about the construction that van Es puts forward. The most significant of these questions relates to what lies at the centre of the constellation, which, in turn, prompts subsequent questions about the composition of the constellation when a certain kind of question is asked.

No explicit consideration is given by van Es to the position that her object of study takes within the constellation she puts forth. Whilst highlighting that her examination of social media platforms offers a “reflection on the interesting dynamic between broadcast media and social media in our present moment” (2017a: 14), she does not explicitly locate these online platforms in relation to their position within her construction. Rather, the object of study appears merely as something that the constellation (as a framework) is applied to, playing an absent and implicit role in how the framework is applied.

However, I find this problematic. If we are to consider van Es’ own words, the constellation – comprised of the three abovementioned domains – “enables approaching the live as a construction, one that is *reconfigured in different articulations*” (2017a: 26, emphasis added). Therefore, if the social media platforms she examines present one articulation of the ‘live’, it seems reasonable to suggest that positioning something else as the object of focus – such as a trailer and its live exhibition – would change the manner in which the constellation is applied. Consequently, I would suggest that the object of study – whatever it may be – should hold the same critical and influential weighting that each of the surrounding three domains do; that all *four* components should play an interrelating role in the construction of liveness.

Reconsidering, and explicitly emphasising, the object of study at the heart of the constellation has consequent implications for how we view the other domains van Es puts forward. Her use of ‘Metatext’, for example, becomes problematic due to the insular nature of its analytical perspective. As highlighted above, whilst it is beneficial in understanding how a platform itself conceives of its liveness, it does not allow for consideration of how external third-party

institutions and bodies see the platform. Again, if we are to locate an instance of live trailer exhibition at the heart of the constellation, it seems relevant that how external commentators view and report on it provide a certain degree of insight into how that particular live moment exists in the multifarious, multi-platform landscape that van Es, and I, are dealing with.

The terms ‘Space of Participation’ and ‘User Responses’ also require reconsideration when establishing a heart to the constellation. van Es’ use of the former, as highlighted, is centred on examining the technological space – the platforms, their interfaces and tools – through which users interact with each other, and with content; examining a “platform’s material assemblage” (ibid.: 30) as well as the cultural, economic and legal forces which inform it. Yet, this notion presupposes that the live moment being examined exists solely within a specific online platform’s environment. What if the live moment being examined were to transcend multiple spaces? As the previous chapter detailed, trailer exhibition has moved extensively beyond the cinema, and now takes place across myriad exhibitory sites. As will be inherent in each of the ensuing case study chapters, what do we mean by ‘space of participation’ when the participation occurs across *multiple spaces*: virtual *and* physical spaces; close *and* distant spaces?

Similarly, ‘User responses’ as a domain is centred on what users operating within van Es’ examined online platforms “*explicitly* say and do” (2017a: 34, original emphasis). But what if viewers – of trailers during their live exhibition, for example – are denied the ability to evidence their participation because the affordances of a particular space do not allow them to do so, or because the institution does not encourage them to do so? Particularly evident in Chapters 3 and 5, what if there is no requirement or ability for any kind of evidential response

on the part of the viewer – typographical or otherwise – such as those van Es considers?

Explicitly recognising a heart to a constellation of liveness raises a number of questions regarding not just the structure of the constellation, but also the meaning and understanding of the domains which comprise it. Whilst van Es' version of the construction is beneficial in providing a base from which to explore the complexity of liveness in a largely online, digital environment, her analyses appear centred solely on online social media platforms. Therefore, when the live moment under scrutiny becomes something which may not necessarily solely unfold on a single online platform, the applicability of van Es' version of the constellation becomes problematic. Foregrounding live moments – on television and online – of live trailer exhibition as the focal points of this thesis, it is important to refine the grounding van Es provides to build a construction of liveness which more wholly implicates and considers not just the trailer and its exhibition, but also the multiple spaces, agents, and viewers who are an influential part of it.

Reconsidering the constellation

Trailer Exhibition

As I have begun to argue above, it is important to explicitly implicate a central object of focus within the heart of any constellation of liveness. Doing this will not only clarify for both the reader and applicator of the framework what the object of the study is, but it can also have critical benefits in that it foregrounds the object of study as a key determining factor in any construction of a live moment. For this thesis I propose explicitly locating the live moment of trailer exhibition at the

heart of my revised version of van Es' framework. It is appropriate here to recall the first of this investigation's overarching research questions, which asks how liveness is being mobilised in trailer exhibition. It is therefore apt to locate the trailer and its live moment of exhibition at the heart of enquiry not only for clarity, but to re-emphasise the moment of exhibition as being the core element of analysis. Furthermore, with the live moment of exhibition at the heart of the constellation, it becomes clearer not only how the surrounding domains of the constellation inform the central focus, but more importantly how the central pillar informs the application of these adjoining domains; it becomes a core, fourth, domain informing the construction of a specific live moment.

Paratext

Having established the central domain at the heart of the constellation, it is important now to re-consider the co-domains which both inform and are informed by the focus at their centre. To fully consider the live moment surrounding a moment of live trailer exhibition, for example, I argue that it is not necessarily beneficial to solely home in on the dialogue produced and distributed by the studio or film property themselves – its metatext. To be able to fully consider how the exhibitory live moment exists in the new screen ecology in which the trailer is deployed requires both an inward and outward-facing analytical perspective. That is to say, it is important to consider not only how the centralised institution (such as the studio) positions the exhibition within its intended media environment, but also how external institutions and commentators perceive the trailer's existence in the contemporary media landscape. Metatext is therefore not an adequate term to use when my investigative focus exceeds van Es' self-referential scope. I wish

to understand not just how the institution(s) underpinning the trailer's exhibition conceive of its liveness, but just as importantly how third-parties commentate on it. It is pertinent therefore to return to Jonathan Gray's concept of 'paratext' to denote the objective of this domain.

Bearing in mind the currently accepted understanding of paratexts,⁴⁸ I suggest that instances of live trailer exhibition may be informed by any number of the possible paratexts which may surround it. These may include – but would by no means be limited to – information from the studio, the creative agency, and/or collaborative partner exhibiting the trailer, as well as by any of the abundance of commentaries offered by industry, trade, and journalistic press. In the same way that trailers, posters, spoilers, toys, and reviews (amongst others) are seen by Gray as paratexts to film and television properties, I suggest that the commentaries surrounding instances of live trailer exhibition – not just by the distributing studio, but just as significantly by third-party institutions and organisations, as well as by public viewers/users themselves – serve a similar purpose. In operating as vital parts in the reading of the moment of exhibition as a “social and cultural unit” (Gray & Brookey 2017: 102), consideration of these internal and external commentaries offers us new ways to make sense of, and interact with, the live moment surrounding the live exhibition of a trailer on television and online.

⁴⁸ As aptly summarised elsewhere by Grainge and Johnson (2015: 4), paratexts are not “peripheral, ancillary or tertiary texts that are purely commercial in purpose, [but rather] bear on the way that audiences anticipate, interpret and engage with [the overarching text].”

Space of Participation

Influenced by Eggo Müller's work on the construction of a 'Space of Participation', van Es outlines what she means by the term by focusing on how the participatory space of social platforms is informed and constructed by various social, technological, economic, and legal factors. Yet the notion of 'space' is complex when thinking about the multimedial, cross-platform, digital and physical, platform society in which content is accessed and consumed today. This is particularly relevant when one considers that live, off-line events remain as prominent a part of movie promotion campaigns as online practices do.⁴⁹ It is necessary therefore to clarify what I mean by 'space' in my use of the term.

Influenced by the works of Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) and Paddy Scannell (1996),⁵⁰ Shaun Moores has developed the notion of a 'pluralised space' – a social landscape of interconnecting spaces afforded through electronic media's capacity for liveness, instantaneity and "sense of temporal immediacy" (2012: 16). Moores goes on to argue that "analyses of social interactions and experiences in contemporary living need to be sensitive to such doublings and intersections [of, and between,] physical and media environments" (ibid.: 21). Therefore, whilst van Es' focus remains solely on online platforms, it is important for this thesis – and

⁴⁹ Robert Marich has highlighted how, in response to the shift by audiences to online consumption, marketing departments are now "spreading their publicity budget over more and smaller events and publicity stunts because more events offer a better payoff. Film marketers find that crafting multiple events, each with a different thrust tailored to appeal to different audience segments, better addresses the interests of audiences" (2013: 214) across various exhibitory outlets.

⁵⁰ Meyrowitz argues that "[e]volution in media [...] has changed the logic of the social order by restructuring the relationship between physical place and social place and by altering the ways in which we transmit and receive social communication" (1985: 308). He goes on to say that "because the interlocking components of 'place' have been split apart by electronic media [the] world [...] for the first time in modern history [...] is relatively placeless" (ibid.). This is furthered in Scannell's work in which Scannell argues that broadcast media – such as television and radio – mediate between two distinct and spatially different places (1996: 76), causing a 'doubling of space' whereby a viewer is able to simultaneously be in two places at once (ibid.: 172).

any future investigation which examines content at a physical/virtual intersection – to consider the ‘Space of Participation’ as a pluralised landscape, comprised of digital and physical spaces which interconnect, interact, and exist simultaneously in relation with each other.

Audience Configuration

Finally, it is important to distinguish how the examination of the audience in my thesis differs from van Es’ investigation. As highlighted, van Es enquires as to the role of the user in the construction of liveness by referencing only the digital footprint they leave when participating or interacting within an online platform. This, she argues, provides an insight specifically into how the user understands the liveness of a given platform (2017a: 34). Whilst such insight is valuable (indeed, such responses will inform my own analyses), the scope of, and analytical perspective afforded by, van Es and her term ‘User Responses’ is both limiting and misleading in the context of this thesis. Where van Es’ study unpacks the liveness of online platforms, this thesis is driven by the question of how liveness is mobilised by the US film industry as a promotional strategy in film trailer exhibition. The focus here, therefore, is on how liveness is constructed, rather than unpacking the liveness of a given exhibitory media. Whilst recognising that those who watch trailers play an integral role in underpinning the live moment of trailer exhibition, this thesis seeks to examine not just how/what these people say and do during the live moment, but – more importantly – how they are configured and positioned by the industry in the first place during the live moment of exhibition.

In this context, the notion of ‘user’ is also problematic. Dan Harries has rightly critiqued the word for its “connotations of computational doings” (2002:

172). In comprehending a pluralised space, where those watching trailers during their live exhibition can be implicated in/across multiple (on- and off-line) locations and not necessarily afforded the opportunity – or encouraged – to leave an evidential footprint of ‘doings’, the notion of ‘user’ seems inappropriate. Harries’ hybrid suggestion of ‘viewer’ (ibid.) is likewise inappropriate as it retains the computational connotations of ‘user’ and, similar to van Es, has a dependence on the tangible footprint(s) such as comments and interactions left by the individual. The term ‘audience’ seems more appropriate as it jettisons both the linguistic computational-baggage associated with ‘user/viewer’, and the reliance on tangible viewer contributions such as comments. Whilst Chuck Tryon has suggested that “classic terms such as [...] audience may not offer the most precise terminology” (2009: 7) in the twenty-first century, Holly Willis has, more recently, re-emphasised how the ‘audience’ has become an increasingly-central component of a ‘generative and dynamic’ cinematic environment (in all that the term embodies) which is often ‘unfolding in real time’ (2016: 8). I use the term ‘audience’ here for how it aptly describes the individual(s) implicated in the viewing of trailers on television and online during their live exhibition. In not presupposing – but remaining open to – forms of ‘computational doing’, the configuration of the audience by the industry – or ‘Audience Configuration’, as I term it – seeks to address how the audience of a trailer is implicated in the live moment of its exhibition: how are they watching; what are they asked to do (if anything); and in what ways are they stakeholders in the live moment and agents in determining how it unfolds? These are some of the issues that the domain of ‘Audience Configuration’ can explore.

Ultimately, what I have proposed here is a re-consideration and re-configuration of van Es' constellation of liveness as a methodological tool. Her founding version of the construction returned interesting insights into how liveness is considered in relation to online platforms and how liveness is constructed concurrently by a multitude of factors. Her framework offers a strong basis for being able to more acutely and accurately examine the complex and evolving structures of liveness which continue to be borne out of the platform society's new screen ecology. However, examination of the multi-spatial nature of live film trailer exhibition would be inhibited not just by the scope of van Es' purely-online focus, but also by the lack of an established central focal pillar which both informs and is informed by its surrounding domains.

Therefore, I have proposed locating the object of focus – in the case of this thesis, the moment of trailer exhibition – as a discrete domain at the heart of the constellation (Fig. 2.2). Doing so provides not just clarity, but also a critical foundation for the overall methodological construction. The interchangeability of the central domain – particularly within promotional screen industries research – means that other promotional elements (other audio-visual materials; Q&As with creatives, for example) can be located as the central domain and examined for the live moment surrounding them. Consequently, the heart of the constellation becomes informed by the coverage, and technological and audience-related factors surrounding it, as well as informing the application of each of these surrounding domains within an analysis. The domain of 'Paratexts' now enables scope to consider not just materials produced by the studio and its creative partners, but also the commentary of third-party establishments, both of which concurrently and to the same degree inform my own – and audiences' –

understanding of the live moment of trailer exhibition. Similarly, an understanding of 'Space of Participation' as a pluralised arena which can be variably comprised of multiple (on- and off-line) environments enables a consideration not just of the multitude of spaces in which promotional materials must now exist, but also how each of the spaces informs one another and how, together, they inform the participatory environment in which the meeting between content and viewer occurs. Finally, shifting perspective to understand the 'Audience Configuration' allows us to unrestrictedly examine the way(s) in which the US film industry is implicating and configuring audiences of televised and online trailers during the live moment of their exhibition. This shift goes some way to not only facilitating an understanding of the ways in which the industry is mobilising liveness as a promotional strategy, but also maintains the scope to include audiences' participatory footprint as part of such an examination.

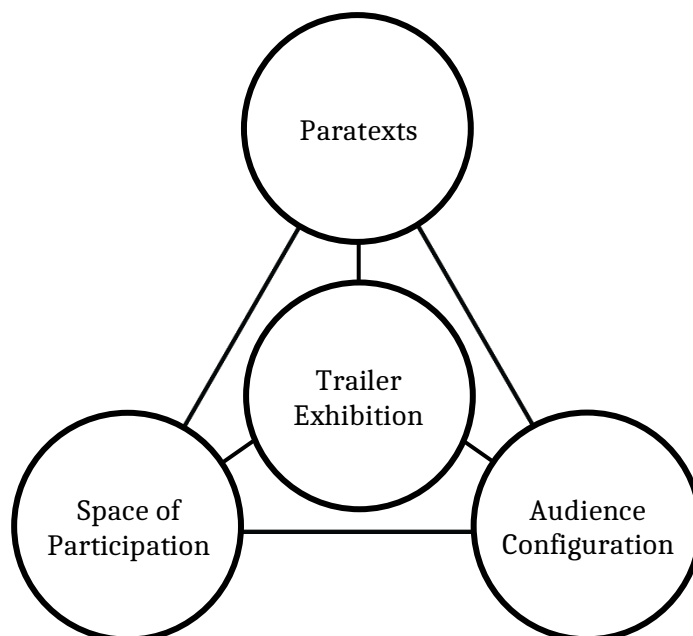


Fig. 2.2 Reconfigured constellation of liveness.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter I have examined how Karin van Es has attempted to consolidate various perspectives and approaches to the study of liveness within a single construction, mutually-informed by technological, institutional, and user-related factors. Yet, in her application of her constellation of liveness framework solely to the study of online media platforms, I have argued that aspects of her construction have required refinement when considering the live exhibition of trailers. As a result, in locating a specific element as a central grounding domain at the heart of the constellation, I have refined the construction of liveness around it to more suitably account for the fluid, multi-spatial landscape in which the exhibition of trailers during contemporary promotional campaigns now occurs.

Overall, Part One of this thesis has outlined the conceptual and methodological frameworks for this thesis. It outlined the interventions that the following analysis makes in two distinct areas of scholarship, arguing on the one hand that liveness provides a lens for understanding how trailers and their exhibition are being eventised, and on the other, how trailers provide a lens for understanding how liveness is being mobilised more broadly by the US film industry as an industrial strategy. It then proposed a ‘constellation of liveness’ as a mechanism by which to examine live moments of trailer exhibition on television and online.

Focus now shifts to the first of this thesis’ case study parts. Part Two examines the ways in which liveness has been mobilised during the television ad-break for the exhibition of trailers on broadcast television.

PART TWO
‘TUNE IN’: LIVE TRAILER EXHIBITION ON
TELEVISION

3 Live Trailers on Broadcast Television

Now stay tuned for a coming attraction!

The *liveness* of broadcast coverage is the key to its impact, since it offers the real sense of access to an event in its moment-by-moment unfolding. This presencing, this re-présenting of a present occasion to an absent audience, can powerfully produce the effect of being-there, of being involved (caught up) in the here-and-now of the occasion.

(Scannell 1996: 84)

Seeing as movie trailers have become events in themselves, it doesn't seem like all that outrageous of a leap to try out a live trailer.

(MacRae 2017)

We tried to write something about this picture and gave it up, believing that it speaks for itself, and speaks louder than all the adjectives P. T. Barnum could conjure up.

Advertisement for Mamma's Affair (1921)

(First National Pictures 1921: 154)

At 8.10pm on 29th May 2008, nineteen skydivers leapt from an aircraft 14,000 feet above Spain in what was publicised as the “first ever live advert on British television” (Gibson 2008). A partnership between Channel 4 and car-maker Honda, the 200-second live stunt took over the entirety of what Channel 4's continuity announcer described as a “very special live break”.⁵¹ The advertisement opened with a shot of a small aircraft gliding above the clouds at sunset (Fig. 3.1). A caption in the top right of the screen – reading “Live ad from Spain” – confirmed

⁵¹ This was coupled with a visual disclaimer on the channel's ident that the break was “Not live on Channel 4+1”.

not just the aircraft's location, but also the real-time nature of the broadcast.⁵² To further affirm this liveness, the broadcast cut to a hand-held shot from within the aircraft and to a device showing the time, date, day, and temperature (Fig. 3.2). Careful not to break the continuity of the shot, the hand-held camera zoomed out to reveal skydivers dressed in red overalls preparing to jump from the open hatch at the rear of the aircraft. Underscored by indistinct radio chatter and intermittent fractures in the broadcast signal, various camera angles from within and outside the aircraft showed the skydivers as they took up their positions to jump. Another skydiver, jumping seconds before the main group, served as camera operator and narrator, describing the spectacle of the jump as the main group leapt, fell, and organised themselves into their starting free-fall formation: "Okay, this is live, at 14,000 feet. [Inaudible] falling about 125 miles-per-hour." By this point, the narrating camera operator had taken up position above the formation, providing viewers a birds-eye view as the other skydivers proceeded to sequentially form the letters 'H', 'O', 'N', 'D', 'A' as they free-fell towards the ground. Having completed the routine and deployed their parachutes, and amongst congratulatory screaming and cheering, the narrator could be heard reminding viewers about the unique nature of the ad: "This has never been done before."

⁵² Stephanie Marriott (2007: 43), in her study of live television, has put forth that visual and interfacial markers, such as a 'LIVE' icon, can serve as key markers of liveness.



Figs. 3.1–3.2 Online screengrabs from uploaded footage of the live Honda ad: **Fig. 3.1 (left)** The aircraft over Spain with the ‘LIVE’ graphic; **Fig. 3.2 (right)** Device showing real-time information at the drop-zone.

Publicised by five, unbranded, teaser ads in the two weeks preceding the jump, the live Channel 4 advert was itself part of a broader Honda advertising campaign under the strapline “Difficult is worth doing” (Honda 2008).⁵³ Speaking about the campaign, Neil Christie (Managing Director of ad agency Wielden & Kennedy) reflected appreciatively on Honda’s willingness to “break advertising conventions by redefining the role of TV” (in Sweney 2008) in the context of a coordinated and integrated advertising campaign.⁵⁴ Discussing the live Channel 4 ad in particular, Honda’s Harry Cooklin pointed to how the car manufacturer’s desire “to move boundaries [meant that] being involved in the UK’s first truly live TV ad [was] perfect for us” (in Sandison 2008). For Andy Barnes (Channel 4’s Sales Director), the live ad similarly represented a means by which to break “the boundaries of the perceived confines of TV advertising” (in Thinkbox 2008). As Barnes continued:

We wanted to create something unmissable and what better way to produce something ‘must see’ than to stage the first live ad event on TV. It’s

⁵³ The ‘Difficult is worth doing’ campaign culminated two days after the live Channel 4 ad with a second, pre-recorded, televised advert shot over the Mojave Desert, US. In this ninety-second ad, forty-five skydivers created a series of shapes depicting features of Honda’s new Accord model.

⁵⁴ Wielden & Kennedy created and oversaw the overall ‘Difficult is worth doing’ campaign, and provided support to 4creative, Channel 4’s in-house creative agency, who took charge of the live Channel 4 ad itself (Thinkbox 2008).

about creating talkability on a big scale, managing the risk and being seen as pioneers for it.

(ibid.)

The joint desire of Honda, Channel 4, and Wielden & Kennedy to produce something ‘must see’ was grounded in a broader desire to reconfigure the old, and pioneer the new, boundaries of broadcast television advertising. More importantly, this desire came in the context of a “wider drive by broadcasters to maintain the relevance of TV advertising” (Gibson 2008).

Honda’s live ad came at a time of significant industrial change, with the role and value of the television commercial being called into question. As Paul Grainge observed at the time about the industrial conditions for commercial broadcasters and advertisers: “the erosion of network audiences and the uncertain impact of digital video technologies [have] begun to raise questions about the traditional thirty second commercial” (2008: 39). Indeed, over a decade later, the role of the traditional television ad(-break) continues to be complicated and challenged within a new screen ecology where time-shifted viewing, internet-connected devices, and online platforms and services are challenging both the practices of the television industry and the dominance of the television set in the living room. As a result, ‘ad-skipping’ has become an urgent issue for the television industry and its advertisers (Grainge 2008: 39; Marich 2013: 98). In press reports about Honda’s live ad, industry commentators remarked on the pressing need for advertisers, broadcasters, and advertising agencies to proactively respond to an increasingly complex media landscape in which “[all parties] have been forced to raise their game [...] to get viewers’ attention” (Gibson 2008). Honda’s Ian

Armstrong (Manager of Customer Communications) pointed to this need to ‘win attention’ as reasoning for staging the live ad in the first place:

More people are watching television than ever before. But things are becoming more complicated. People have to want to watch something, you can't force them. People will navigate towards the good stuff and ignore the bad stuff.

(in Thinkbox 2008)

In view of these concerns, liveness represents the promotional strategy chosen by Honda, Channel 4, and Wielden & Kennedy with which to prevent the kind of ad-skipping that Grainge and Marich speak of. Put differently, liveness – as a specific promotional strategy – can be seen as one example of what William Boddy has described as “new technological and advertising countermeasures” (2002: 249) which have materialised in response to television audiences’ increased ability to ‘evade’ commercials. In mobilising liveness in this way, Honda’s live ad is illustrative of the way liveness has underpinned experimentation with the boundaries of television advertising and, particularly, with the form of the television advert and its encompassing advertising break. As Justin Wyatt (2018) has argued, it is this kind of experimentation with the form and structure of television advertising that is needed if it is to remain effective in the contemporary media landscape. That said, the effectiveness and success of Honda’s live ad in attracting viewer attention is seemingly bolstered by statistics suggesting that Channel 4’s audience, during the live three-minute ad-break alone, increased by a reported 8% (Conlan 2008). Indeed, the success of their partnership with Honda

marked the first in a series of live ad-break takeovers that Channel 4 has experimented with since.⁵⁵

The live Honda advert on Channel 4 provides a useful starting point for Part Two of this thesis for the way it illustrates how traditional media industries are attempting to navigate an emergent new screen ecology. As was noted in the Introduction, Cunningham and Craig (2019: 20) have argued that the dominance of legacy media institutions is being threatened by new and influential online entertainment platforms. In this new screen ecology, the television audience has become increasingly fragmented as the services through which they can consume content, and the devices upon which these services can be accessed, have mushroomed. The television set (and its advertising breaks) is no longer the only device in the living room vying for the attention of the viewer. As such, Inge Sørensen has observed how “TV networks are using live media events to win eyeballs over from the online audiovisual content providers” (2016: 396). The Honda advert offers a demonstration of how television’s propensity for liveness has been mobilised during the television ad-break as a way of navigating these challenges that the new screen ecology is presenting. It exemplifies one of the ways in which the television ad-break has been turned into a “hyped event” (Braithwaite, in Hobbs 2016)⁵⁶ as a way of preventing the television audience from focusing its attention elsewhere during these moments. It represents an attempt

⁵⁵ In 2014, for example, the broadcaster partnered with Google Play, MediaCom, The Outfit, and Universal Music to broadcast a live performance from singer songwriter Sam Smith in promotion of his new album (McCabe 2014). In 2017, they partnered with Cancer Research UK to broadcast a live colonoscopy to raise awareness around Bowel Cancer – becoming “the first TV advert to show an operation in progress” (Forster 2017).

⁵⁶ Chris Braithwaite is Agency and Client Sales Leader at Channel 4.

to return viewers to what Jenkins et al. have called an “appointment-based model of television viewing” (2013: 116). In this model, “[c]ontent is created and distributed primarily to attract [viewer] attention at a certain time” (ibid.), reorienting fragmented viewer attention to a central point of focus: the television set and its advertising break. This compliments Scannell’s remarks in the epigraph to this chapter, where television’s liveness plays a key role in inciting a sense of real-time access to (and, sometimes, participation in) the here-and-now, moment-by-moment unfolding of a televisual ‘occasion’. The following two chapters chart some of the ways in which television’s propensity for liveness has been strategically mobilised in the televised exhibition of film trailers. Chapter 4 examines the ways in which the promotional screen industries have navigated the increasingly multi-screened living-room by marrying broadcast ad-breaks with live, second-screen interactivity.⁵⁷

First, however, the current chapter builds on the introductory example of Honda’s live ad by examining how televised film trailers have also undergone the ‘live ad’ treatment. It examines two manoeuvres undertaken respectively by the UK and US promotional screen industries which experiment with ‘live trailers’ during broadcast television ad-breaks, where the trailers’ exhibition occurs at the same time with their production and distribution. Lisa Kernan has argued that trailers, as ‘coming attractions’, “combine and/or alternate [...] two temporal modes, offering an intensified present tense into which is woven the anticipatory dimension of the ‘announcing gesture’” (2004: 17). Drawing similarities between

⁵⁷ I borrow the term ‘promotional screen industries’ from Grainge and Johnson’s study of the same name. I use it throughout this thesis, but prominently in Part Two, to collectively denote the “[hybrid] space between the worlds of marketing and media [which often encompasses] the work [...] of film and television marketing departments, broadcast promotion specialists, [and] ‘content’ divisions within advertising and media agencies” (2015: 3).

trailers' announcing gestures and those present in early forms of entertainment such as vaudeville and the circus, Kernan argues that trailers 'speak' to audiences in different ways. As such, she proposes two distinct modes of trailer address: a 'circus mode' and a 'vaudeville mode' (2004: 18). In examining live trailers on broadcast television, this chapter is concerned with exploring the ways in which liveness impacts these modes of address, and how this is encompassed within a broader experimentation with the structural form of the film trailer as part of ad-break takeovers.

The first part of this chapter returns focus to Channel 4 by examining a live trailer for the film adaptation of the video game, *Assassin's Creed* (2016). Titled 'Leap of Faith', the live ad interspersed pre-recorded trailer footage for the film with a live stunt recreating the film's iconic 'leap of faith' jump (Fig. 3.3). The ad was performed and edited live in a way which sought to integrate the live stunt with the pre-recorded footage, creating in effect a single, fluid live trailer. Drawing on Kernan's debate around trailer address, as well as on debates around live television replays (Marriott 2007; Crisell 2012), this first part of this chapter posits the 'Leap of Faith' trailer as a demonstration of Kernan's (2004: 18) 'circus mode' of trailer address in its use of 'hyperbolic rhetoric' and 'singling out of the film's attractions'.



Fig. 3.3 The iconic 'leap of faith' from the *Assassin's Creed* franchise. Screenshot from the game, *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (left), and from the film, *Assassin's Creed* (right), which the live trailer was promoting.

The second part of this chapter examines a live trailer for the film musical, *The Greatest Showman* (2017). Performed and broadcast live on the US network, FOX, the live trailer saw the film's cast perform a song-and-dance number from the film during an ad-break for one of the network's annually-televised live musical events. Drawing additionally on debates around address in musicals (Feuer 1993; Fowler 2000; Cohan 2002) and 'speculative nostalgia' in trailers (Moulton 2019), the second part of this chapter posits that the live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* demonstrates Kernan's vaudeville mode of trailer address; promoting a "something for everyone" (2004: 19) rhetoric which, at times, blurred the distinction between the two modes.⁵⁸ In examining the live moment's constellatory domains, the live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* reveals an amalgamation of modes of address; employing the circus mode's hyperbolic rhetoric to promote the spectacularity of the live event on the one hand, whilst going on to subsume this within the vaudeville mode's 'something for everyone' approach to appeal to as wide an audience as possible on the other.

Both case studies, during their televised exhibition, were simultaneously streamed online via Facebook's live-streaming tool, Facebook Live. Whilst it is the former means of exhibition that this chapter is concerned with examining, it is pertinent to recognise how Facebook (a central pillar of the platform society that van Dijck et al. theorised in the Introduction) and its 'Live' feature are becoming an ever-present tool within promotional film practices.⁵⁹ That said, reflecting on the overarching research questions to this thesis, this chapter examines firstly

⁵⁸ Kernan has suggested that individual modes of trailer address often "become less distinguishable within actual trailer promotional practices" (2004: 18).

⁵⁹ The promotional use of Facebook Live in the online exhibition of film trailers is the focus of Chapter 6.

how liveness has been mobilised by interrogating the constellation of liveness underpinning each of these live moments of televised trailer exhibition. In each example, it jointly considers the trailer moment of exhibition itself, its surrounding paratexts (such as studio press releases and trade/industry commentary), the construction of the audience (through technical mechanisms such as sound effects and camera positioning), and the space of participation (for its technical as well as ‘nostalgic’ qualities). In doing so, this chapter reveals secondly why liveness has been mobilised in these ways. At a micro-level, it argues that these mobilisations of liveness have impacted these trailers’ modes of audience address and facilitated experimentation with their structural form. This experimentation serves as a way through which the promotional screen industries are attempting to eventise the televised exhibition of film trailers. At a macro-level, it argues that these mobilisations of liveness in televised film trailer exhibition are part of a broader experimentation with the television ad-break in a new screen ecology in which the role and effectiveness of televised (film) advertising is being called into question in the face of internet-connected devices, platforms, and services.

“No Harness. No CGI. No Going Back.”

In what was widely-publicised as a “world first broadcast stunt never before attempted live in a TV ad-break [...] Hollywood stuntman Dave Grant [free-fell] from almost 100 feet at a speed of over 50mph live on air” (Channel 4 2016). The stunt occurred as part of a televised advertisement for the film adaptation of *Assassin’s Creed*, and was enveloped between two segments of recorded trailer footage and introduced with a special voiceover announcement and visual

Channel 4 ident (Fig. 3.5).⁶⁰ Together, these elements were presented as a single, live trailer titled ‘Leap of Faith’ (‘LoF’) which aired live in December 2016 during an ad-break for Channel 4’s Sunday evening drama, *Humans* (2015—2018). As with both case studies in this chapter, the live ‘LoF’ trailer experimented with the form of the television ad-break – and its content – through the use of live production, distribution, and exhibition strategies. As we will see, mobilising liveness in these ways not only impacted the trailer’s mode of audience address, but also served to build eventfulness around the live trailer and construct it as a “cultural event in its own right” (Grainge 2008: 39). It is this latter point which this part of the chapter will explore first, and will do so by considering the paratexts surrounding this live moment of trailer exhibition.

“The World’s Most Dangerous Ad-break”

Announcing its partnership with Twentieth Century Fox (TCF), Channel 4’s own press release emphasised the “TV history [that this] daring live ad stunt” (2016) was going to make, detailing later how the ‘highly ambitious feat’ posed a number of ‘variables’ that stuntman Grant would need to ‘navigate and overcome’ across the ‘dramatic 100 second ad-break’. Elsewhere, a 4Sales report about the stunt outlined the partnership’s “terrifying ambition of creating ‘The World’s Most Dangerous Ad-break’” (2019), pressing home the distinction that this was “literally, one of the UK’s most dangerous & ambitious adverts of all time – and as it was live on TV [...] the team had no margin for error” (ibid.). This kind of buzz-inciting language can similarly be traced through the words of Cameron Saunders

⁶⁰ The structure of the live *Assassin’s Creed* trailer will be examined in more detail later in this part of the chapter.

(TCF's then-Managing Director of UK Theatrical Releases) when he rhetorically asked: "What better way to bring a taster of this adrenaline to audiences throughout the UK than this daring live Leap of Faith?" (in Channel 4 2016). Trade and journalistic coverage of the ad likewise drew attention to the 'never-before-attempted' nature of the stunt (Campaign 2016; Hiorns 2016; Holman 2016), whilst elements of the (albeit mixed) reaction on social media platforms like Twitter made reference to the 'heart-in-the-mouth' feeling experienced whilst watching the ad play out.

A recurring theme traceable across this paratextual commentary is one to do with the risk involved in executing this ad-break; a risk inherently linked to its liveness. This speaks to a broader academic debate where scholars such as Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof have put forth how the "*possibility* of [...] risk, of mistakes, even in the absence of them actually occurring" (2016: 7, original emphasis) represents one aspect of liveness in which audiences find value and/or meaning. Later in the aforementioned authors' edited collection, Martin Barker attests to this by situating "*risk* ([where] the outcome is not guaranteed[...])" (2016: 22, original emphasis) as a core element of liveness. The kind of hyperbolic and provocative rhetoric foregrounded here in the live trailer's surrounding paratexts is firstly reminiscent of the promotional discourse of liveness discussed by Atkinson and Kennedy in Chapter 1. In the same way that they pointed to live cinema's use of such rhetoric in promotional materials to construct a sense of 'occasion' around live and experiential cinema events, the rhetoric here similarly served to construct a sense of occasion around the promotional material itself. Clear here is how a hyperbolic, promotional discourse of liveness was used to eventise the live 'LoF' trailer itself. This hyperbolic rhetoric secondly echoes the

'loud adjectives' alluded to in the epigraph to this chapter in relation to circus showman, P. T. Barnum, who was well known for his hyperbolic promotional gambits.⁶¹ Where liveness underscored the promotional rhetoric that sought to eventise the live 'LoF' trailer, Barnum offers an apt juncture for considering how this rhetoric was further emblematic of, and impactful on, the trailer's specific mode of audience address.

'Step Right Up! The Circus Mode is here!'

In *Coming Attractions* (2004), Lisa Kernan proposes two historically traceable modes of trailer address: a 'vaudeville mode' and a 'circus mode'. The former, Kernan suggests, emerges from vaudeville's 'variety show' tradition, and can be read in trailers which present:

[a] cornucopia of generic and narrative features as well as attractions, announcing a range of different kinds of pleasures [a] film will offer, implying that whatever 'you' want, the film will provide it.

(2004: 19)

In anticipating and drawing attention to the variety of genre-specific and/or spectacular elements of a film (usually in the context of an individual genre like the film musical, for example), the vaudeville mode evokes a 'something for everyone' rhetoric. This rhetoric, Kernan argues, seeks to appeal to as broad an audience as possible, emphasising the film's variety through an equal foregrounding of the "dazzling visual effects [as well as the] range of star types,

⁶¹ Academic studies from a spectrum of disciplines have regarded Barnum as an "impresario with a knack for publicity" (Wilson 2020: 2); as a "master of publicity and advertising, who resorted to every marketing device then available [...] for stimulating the endless curiosity of the public" (Springhall 2008: 99) – using "hype, exaggeration, and deception to attract attention and draw crowds to his shows" (Kaye & Medoff 1999: 216).

story situations, and/or genre signifiers” (ibid.) the film will offer up. Trailers which align with the vaudeville mode of address focus less on the spectacularity of individual attractions within a film as they do on the relation of these attractions to broader narrative and genre elements. And whilst this amalgamation of different appeals and tastes in contemporary trailers is most commonly achieved through the technical use of montage structures, the next part’s example of *The Greatest Showman* will reveal that montage structures are not the only way in which this ‘something for everyone’ register of tastes can be achieved.

Conversely, trailers that align with Kernan’s second mode of trailer address – the ‘circus mode’ – foreground almost exclusively the ‘spectacle’ of a film, drawing parallels with “P. T. Barnum’s brand of showmanship and the rhetoric or ‘hyperbolic discourse’ of the circus” (ibid.: 20). Kernan distinguishes the circus mode from the vaudeville mode through its singular orientation towards a ‘hyperbolic pole’ as opposed to the latter’s more generalised scope. As she elaborates:

Where the vaudeville mode chatted with or lectured to an implied audience who was assumed to desire a range of choices among a variety of spectacular features, evoking individual genres, stars and stories as vehicles for expressing the full and generalized variety of consumer choice, the circus mode exhorts an undifferentiated audience that the spectacles it offers, regardless of their particularities, will provide unqualified pleasure and undisputed excitement to all.

(ibid.: 20–21)

A trailer exhibiting the circus mode of audience address makes no attempt to cater for a variety of cinematic or genre-related tastes. Instead, in singling out just one

attraction from a film and positioning this as the “phenomenon or event” (ibid.: 18) that will entice audiences to the cinema, circus mode trailers effectively put their eggs in a single basket by assuming that the central attraction will have widespread audience appeal. Conjuring comparisons to the ‘step right up!’ invitations of the circus barker and the ‘See! Hear! Feel!’ proclamations of the circus’ promotional materials, Kernan suggests that circus mode trailers foreground their main attractions in similar ways: a circus mode trailer’s “‘see/hear/feel’ imperative hyperbolically touts the sensory appeal of [a] film’s spectacular elements” (ibid.: 21). This kind of sensorial rhetoric is enmeshed with the hyperbolic rhetoric of liveness traced above in the paratexts surrounding the live ‘LoF’ trailer. Among the variables that stuntman Grant needed to navigate, for example, were the “dark, winter weather conditions” (Channel 4 2016) at the derelict flour mill in Newham, London which served as backdrop to the jump (Fig. 3.4). The use of superlatives such as ‘daring’, ‘ambitious’, ‘terrifying’, and ‘most dangerous’ by these paratexts similarly worked to heighten the sense of ‘unqualified pleasure and excitement’ that is a prevalent feature of the circus-mode of trailer address, and which together focused attention on the spectacularity of the event.

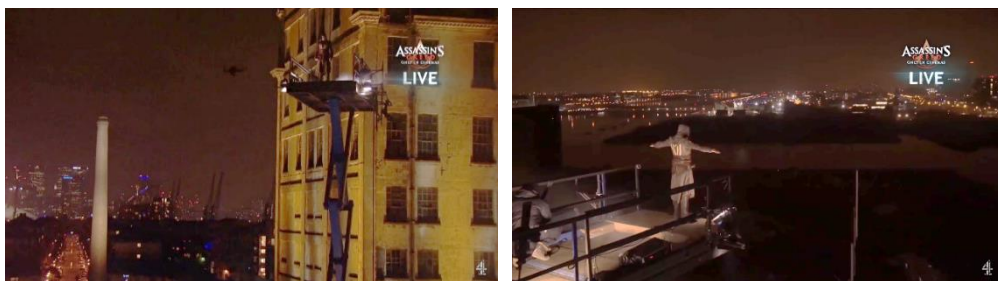


Fig. 3.4 Stuntman Dave Grant atop an elevated platform at the derelict flour mill in Newham, London.

'See! Hear! Feel!'

This sensorial imperative of Kernan's circus mode of trailer address can also be traced beyond these paratexts. The 'See! Hear! Feel!' of the circus mode emerges by considering both the textual features of the live trailer itself and the ways in which the audience and participatory space were configured.

For Kernan, the 'See!' in the circus mode of address draws attention to the 'visual pleasures' of the film, "announcing the movies' spectacular sights in titles or narration" (2004: 21). During the live 'LoF' trailer, the manifestation of the 'See!' was most explicitly demonstrated in two Channel 4 idents which appeared prior to, and served to introduce, the live trailer (Fig. 3.5). The first read: 'Channel 4 presents A Live Advertising Event'; with the second presenting a disclaimer: 'WARNING: The stunt you are about to see is performed by a trained professional. Do not attempt to recreate it.'⁶² The disclaimer announcement in particular evoked the visually spectacular nature of what was about to occur, and was emblematic of the 'risk' (inherent to the trailer's liveness) that was so prominent in Andy Barnes' paratextual commentary above. Visually, the message was emphasised by the lack of any other visual imagery accompanying the warning, appearing on its own on a black background in red and white lettering.

⁶² Idents are "short graphical sequences used to depict television channels" (Grainge & Johnson 2015: 16n3) and are commonly used as a way of moving and distinguishing between promotional and editorial content.

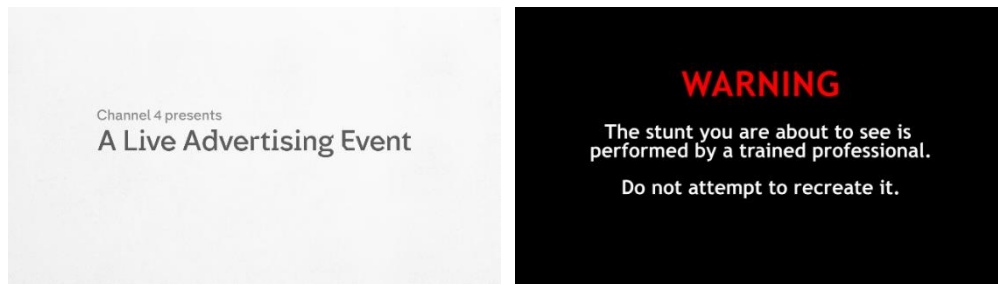


Fig. 3.5 The ‘See!’ of the circus-mode trailer exemplified during Channel 4’s ‘Leap of Faith’ trailer in the introductory ident (left) and the accompanying disclaimer (right).

Where the ‘See!’ of the circus mode foregrounds visual spectacularity, the circus mode’s ‘hyperbolic Hear!’ highlights auditory appeals. In her outlining of this aspect of the circus mode, Kernan draws parallels with trailers for film musicals, which would sample songs from a film in the hope that audiences would consequently want to pay to hear them in full (ibid.: 21). In the context of the live ‘LoF’ trailer, the ‘hyperbolic Hear!’ manifested itself in a number of ways. The sound of a calling eagle, for example, was repeatedly used throughout. Whilst the eagle has symbolic significance within the *Assassin’s Creed* franchise overall,⁶³ the live trailer’s specific use of the bird call inferred a sense of physical elevation and danger – connotations which have also been teased out above in relation to the sensorial rhetoric used in the paratexts by the live trailer’s stakeholders to promote and eventise the trailer. Alongside this, the natural sound of swirling wind was also a prominent auditory feature, and could be heard for vast portions of the trailer, including during the live stunt itself. The sound of the wind aided in constructing one of the spaces of participation underpinning this live moment: the jump-site. Establishing shots of the jump-site at the derelict flour mill in London

⁶³ The eagle is a recurring motif across the *Assassin’s Creed* franchise (Assassin’s Creed Wiki 2020). Indeed, the action of performing the ‘leap of faith’ within the games (as illustrated in Fig. 3.3) is accompanied by a sound effect of an eagle’s call.

presented stuntman Grant atop an elevated platform against the backdrop of the mill and the surrounding London areas (Fig. 3.4). Seemingly picked up live by microphones on-site, the resulting audio/visual synchronisation served to offer a more visceral representation of the site being broadcast whilst simultaneously exemplifying the wintry weather conditions that Channel 4's sensorially-provoking press release sought to draw attention to in the build-up to the live ad-break.

This marriage between sound and imagery was similarly manifested in the musical soundtrack used during the trailer. The field of music studies has widely considered the ways in which audio/visual 'synch-points' are commonly used in films to 'punctuate' moments of dialogue or action.⁶⁴ Trailer studies too has drawn similar conclusions as to the use of musical/orchestral cues to punctuate key moments during trailers.⁶⁵ Kernan herself has expanded on this in relation to contemporary trailers for action films, outlining how graphics and flashing titles are commonly interwoven with punctuating sound effects and percussive sounds to hyperbolically signal genre (2004: 48). Applied to the 'LoF' trailer, punctuative musical moments tended to occur at specific synch-points where the spectacular technical features of the trailer itself were being foregrounded over those of the advertised film.⁶⁶ Here, it was the technical and logistical challenges intrinsically linked to the trailer's/ad-break's liveness, rather than the narrative significance of the leap itself, which came forth as the central attractions being emphasised

⁶⁴ See, for example, Kalinak (1992: 95), Audissino (2014: 277n9), Goldmark (2014: 230), and Saltzman (2015: 35).

⁶⁵ See, for example, Johnston (2009: 151).

⁶⁶ This aligns with Kernan's suggestion that, as part of the 'See! Hear! Feel!' imperative of the circus-mode, a trailer's focus on the sensory appeals of a film can be simultaneously accompanied by "an announcement of [the] special technical features enabling this appeal" (2004: 21).

through the trailer's hyperbolic 'Hear!'. Following the introductory Channel 4 ident and disclaimer (Fig. 3.5), the trailer opened with a montage of 'exclusive', recorded trailer footage interspersed with intertitles hyperbolically announcing the practical technicalities of the live stunt (Fig. 3.6). Accompanied by punctuative moments of percussive score, this montage represented one of the trailer's most explicit audio/visual synch-points. Where, for Kernan, the 'special technical features' being touted by circus-mode trailers tend to relate to the film being advertised, the technical features being touted here by the 'LoF' trailer instead relate exclusively to those underpinning the trailer and its live stunt. In this example of a circus-mode of trailer address, the 'Hear!' imperative strategically mobilised punctuative and supplementary audio cues and effects not to hyperbolically signal genre or even spectacular features of *Assassin's Creed* (the film). Rather, the 'Hear!' within the 'LoF' trailer hyperbolically signalled the spectacular spatial and technical features of the live trailer itself; features which were intrinsically linked to its liveness and which, in turn, reconfigured the circus-mode's focus from promoting filmic "attractions as cinematic events" (Kernan 2004: 23) to more acutely promote the trailer itself as the event.

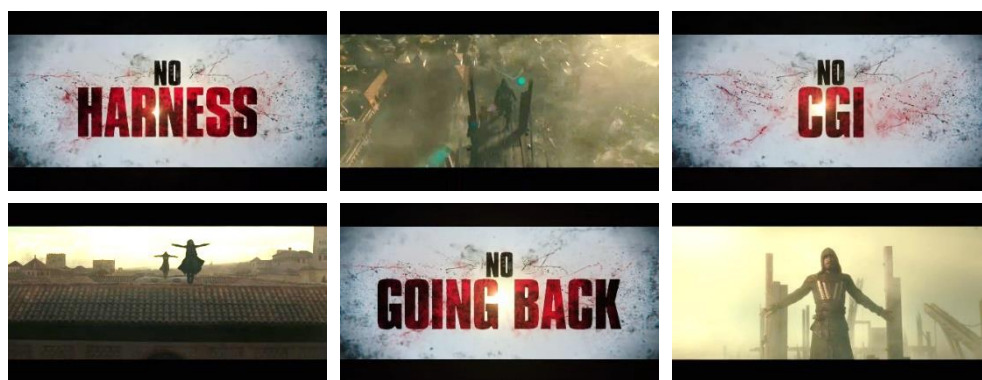


Fig. 3.6 Trailer/Intertitle montage (running left to right) promoting the practical technicalities of the live 'Leap of Faith' trailer.

Finally, the 'Feel!' in Kernan's circus-mode of address conveys the "physical effects of spectacle and attraction" (2004: 22). These, Kernan argues, can be manifested in this form of trailer through the rhetorical implication "that the boundary between the screen and the audience might be crossed through spectatorship" (ibid.). If we consider again the suggestion earlier in this chapter by TCF's Cameron Saunders that the live trailer was '*bringing* a taster of the film's adrenaline *to* audiences', his words appear emblematic of the boundary-crossing that Kernan suggests. Indeed, the circus-mode's 'Feel!' imperative that can be read in Saunders' words is revealing as to the way in which the audience for the live trailer was configured; for the way in which his contribution to Channel 4's press release "alerts audiences that the [...] spectacle [...] will in some way come to them" (ibid.: 21).

In a similar vein, Kernan suggests that this 'Feel!' boundary "is also crossed via the circus mode's 'step right up' motif" (ibid.: 22). In the context of the 'LoF' trailer, the 'step right up!' of the circus barker translates to the 'stay tuned!' of Channel 4's continuity announcer. A teaser trailer aired during the ad-break preceding that of the live trailer was accompanied by the following message from the broadcaster's continuity announcer: "Stay tuned, to celebrate the cinema release of *Assassin's Creed*, we're about to recreate the jaw-dropping leap of faith jump, live, in the next ad-break." Containing instances of the 'jaw-dropping' hyperbole inherent to the circus mode of address, this announcement alongside Saunders' earlier words are illustrative of the ways in which the 'Feel!' of circus-mode trailers seeks to bring the spectacularity of the film to the audience. In the case of the 'LoF', the spectacularity of the live trailer (specifically both the live stunt and the accompanying exclusive footage), was constructed in a way so as it

was ‘leaping’ at viewers from behind the television screen, providing an insight into the manner in which the audience of the live ‘LoF’ trailer was configured during the trailer’s live moment. In all, considering how the ‘See! Hear! Feel!’ of Kernan’s circus mode of trailer address maps on to the constellatory domains underpinning the live trailer for *Assassin’s Creed* reveals a concerted effort on the part of the trailer’s various stakeholders to foreground liveness and its intrinsic role in underscoring the spectacularity of the live trailer itself over any specific appeals from the broader film.

Experimenting with Form

In the same way that liveness impacted the ‘LoF’ trailer’s mode of address, it also underpinned experimentation with the trailer’s structural form. Where Paul Grainge (2011: 3) has suggested that much can be garnered from teasing out the different forms that promotional materials such as trailers can take, Ed Vollans has more acutely pointed to the “varied aesthetic structure” (2015: 114) that can underpin how a trailer is constructed as a piece of short-form promotional content. With this in mind, the different types of audio-visual material utilised during the live ‘LoF’ trailer demonstrate one way in which this aesthetic structure was played with.

As was highlighted above during discussion of the ‘LoF’ trailer’s ‘Hear!’ imperative, the live trailer was composed of both recorded material and live footage which had been edited together in a way that sought to blend the two forms into a single, coherent trailer. The trailer opened with the introductory idents discussed earlier (Fig. 3.5) before moving into the montage of exclusive, recorded trailer footage and hyperbolic titles announcing the live trailer’s

technical features (Fig. 3.6). The trailer then cut from the final shot of this montage (of actor Michael Fassbender standing on a rooftop preparing to perform a ‘leap of faith’) to the live shot of stuntman Grant stood atop an elevated platform at the London flour mill (Fig. 3.4). The stance and positioning of Grant clearly sought to recreate the preceding image of Fassbender, in the process attempting to present a consistent image with which to facilitate a fluid transition between recorded and live material. This same editing strategy was used for the transition back to recorded film material after the live stunt had been performed. After having witnessed Grant leap from the elevated platform, the camera tracked him as he free-fell towards the ground. As he neared the ground, the trailer cut back to recorded footage of Fassbender’s character executing a landing (Fig. 3.7). As before, the fluid shifting between live and recorded material experimented with what might be seen as the traditional form of a trailer to construct an aesthetic structure which sought to create a single, coherent piece of promotional content out of different types of audio-visual material; a single live trailer.



Fig. 3.7 Transition from live footage of stuntman Dave Grant falling from platform (left), through freefall (centre), to recorded material of Fassbender’s character landing (right).

Also included in the live ‘LoF’ trailer were replays of the live jump – representing another aesthetic and structural variation alongside the live and recorded material discussed above. Missing between the second and third images in Fig. 3.7, for example, are the three slow-motioned replays of the jump that

allowed viewers to re-watch the stunt which, in real-time, lasted just 2.5 seconds.⁶⁷

The inclusion of these replays is significant when thinking about the live trailer and its televised exhibition. Stephanie Marriott has outlined how instant replays create:

the conditions for the recapitulation of stuff which 'really happened' some moments or minutes before, dislocated from its 'real' location in time and re-manifesting itself in the emergent now of the television event.

(2007: 81)

Echoing these sentiments, Andrew Crisell has argued that instant replays during live television broadcasts simultaneously:

freeze a moment in order to help us understand it more clearly [and affirm] that there has been no interruption in the temporal flow of the broadcast.

(2012: 48)

Adding a further temporal dimension to the already-aesthetically-variable live trailer, two key points emerge from what Marriott and Crisell put forward here: the first is to do with the re-running of a past moment; and the second is to do with the configuration of the television viewer in relation to the temporal 'now' of the live broadcast.

With regard to the first of these points, Marriott has outlined the way in which slow-motioned replays involve a "dilation of the time of the event, and expansion and stretching of the interval in which stuff originally transpired"

⁶⁷ These three replays were comprised of four individual shots from different angles, with each shot lasting an average of 4.7 seconds (as opposed to the 2.5 seconds that the jump took in real-time).

(2007: 79). Through this, Crisell suggests, viewers are consequently able to "observe and understand an event that would otherwise be too quick and complex [...] to capture" (2012: 47). On the one hand, Crisell (ibid.: 48) continues, it is in this slowing-down – in this obvious technological mediation – that the replay's non-liveness becomes most visible; it is clear that the images being shown are not live. In the same breath, however, he argues that it is precisely in this slowing-down that characteristics of liveness actually emerge most vividly. The instant replay, he posits, is:

'larger than life' in enabling us to see more of an event, or at least to see it more meaningfully, than we ever could either as spectators who are physically present or by watching continuous live television.

(ibid.)

This is significant when thinking about the 'LoF' trailer's live jump which, as detailed above, lasted just 2.5 seconds.⁶⁸ With so much of the paratextual commentary surrounding the ad-break focusing on the liveness of it and of the (very brief) live stunt, assessing how the audience was configured reveals that instant replays were a mechanism with which this liveness was both elongated and magnified.

At the same time, it was important to re-affirm to viewers that, during these replays, nothing was being missed of the rest of the ad(-break). Crisell again provides useful context here in highlighting that replays do not "involve a suspension of the present but the use of the past to accompany the present" (ibid.).

⁶⁸ Indeed, actual live footage from the jump-site constituted not even one third of the 100-second-long trailer, amounting to just twenty-eight seconds of broadcast time.

The 'Hear!' of the swirling wind discussed earlier offers one example of how this affirmation manifested itself within the live trailer. Marriot (2007: 79–82) has suggested that the continual transmission of ambient sound can reaffirm the temporal 'now' of a television event, even whilst replays of a temporal 'then' are being shown and remarked upon. As described earlier, the ambient sound of wind could be heard throughout key moments, including during the live jump itself and – significantly – during its replays. Thus, the 'Hear!' of the swirling wind not only served as a hyperbolic demonstration of the trailer's circus mode of address, but also as a mechanism by which the liveness of the ad-break overall was reified, particularly during the slow-motion replays of the jump for which the 'LIVE' icon in the top-right corner of the screen had been removed.⁶⁹ Through considering the way in which the trailer's audience was configured, the use of replays (in coordination with certain sound effects) had the effect of re-affirming the liveness of the live stunt, but also emphasising its liveness and that of the ad-break more broadly. The mobilisation of liveness in the case of the live 'LoF' trailer provoked experimentation with the trailer's form through the fluid combination of live and recorded material.

The first part of this chapter has examined the televised exhibition of a live trailer for *Assassin's Creed*. In examining the live 'Leap of Faith' trailer through its various constellatory domains, liveness comes forth as having directly impacted the trailer's mode of address by reframing the focus of its hyperbolic rhetoric. Rather than foregrounding a particular attraction from the film, the 'See! Hear! Feel!' of

⁶⁹ Crisell has furthered this by suggesting that when the "'past' of the replay is [so] embedded within the continuing present of the broadcast [we] might describe the effect of the instant replay as one of hyper-liveness" (2012: 48–49).

the 'Leap of Faith' trailer's mode of address drew attention instead to the spectacularity of the live trailer itself. Co-opting Kernan's earlier words, this reframed circus mode of address exhorted an undifferentiated television audience that the spectacle on offer in the live trailer *itself* would provide 'unqualified pleasure and undisputed excitement to all'. This in turn sought to position the trailer and its encompassing ad-break into spectacularised events in their own right, playing with the form of both in order to set them apart from surrounding content and advertisements.

Pertinently (and in seeming contrast to what has been argued so far), 4Sales – in their post-ad write-up of the live trailer – emphasised how the teaser trailers promoting the live ad "were optimised for a broad audience, playing out across C4 and E4 for 5 days prior to the jump" (2019). This suggests that, despite the undifferentiated nature of the live ad's circus-mode rhetoric, differentiated audience tastes were considered in other aspects of the campaign. This notion of catering to different tastes aligns with Kernan's second mode of trailer address: the 'vaudeville mode'. As we will see in the next case study, the vaudeville mode adopts a different type of audience address which can similarly be reshaped by liveness.

The Greatest Live Trailer!

Almost a year to the date after Twentieth Century Fox partnered with Channel 4 for the live 'Leap of Faith' trailer, the studio partnered with its sister US television network, FOX, for another live trailer; this time for the film musical, *The Greatest Showman*. In what was publicised as the "the first-ever live television commercial for a feature film" (FoxFlash 2017), the live trailer took over an entire ad-break

during the network's televised version of the Broadway musical, *A Christmas Story Live!* (2017). Lasting two-and-a-half minutes and with its live capture, distribution, and exhibition facilitated by a 360-degree, multi-camera shoot, the live trailer saw 150 dancers perform one of the film's original songs alongside principal cast members Hugh Jackman, Zac Efron, Zandaya, and Keala Settle (FoxFlash 2017). Like that for *Assassin's Creed*, the live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* provides another example of how liveness was mobilised by the promotional screen industries for the exhibition of a film trailer on broadcast television.

Something for Everyone!

By examining the constellatory paratexts surrounding the live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* (*TGS*), a similar kind of circus-mode rhetoric emerges to that outlined above for the live 'Leap of Faith' trailer; one that hyperbolically touted the spectacular attraction of seeing (and hearing) established stars performing a song-and-dance number, live. Suzanne Sullivan (Fox Network Group's Executive VP of Entertainment Ad Sales) encapsulated this in her anticipation of the live trailer: "We can't wait to watch as Hugh, Zac, Zendaya and Keala make history and unwrap the first-ever live theatrical commercial on FOX's air" (in FoxFlash 2017). Elsewhere, trade commentators similarly foregrounded the spectacular nature of the live trailer, variably describing it as a "special feat of daring" (MacRae 2017) and a "two-minute musical extravaganza" (Dupre 2017). Indeed, with the film's narrative chronicling the life of P. T. Barnum, and with said showman providing a key influence for Kernan in her discussion of circus-mode trailer rhetoric, the words of TCF's Michelle Marks (Executive VP of Worldwide Marketing) are

pertinent: “This first-ever live commercial for a feature film is one that P.T. Barnum would be proud of and one that I hope paves the way for future titles” (in Pedersen 2017). On the surface, the paratextual commentary surrounding the live trailer for *TGS* presents similarities to the circus-mode rhetoric of the live ‘LoF’ trailer. Liveness, again, underscores a promotional discourse in which the spectacular appeal of the trailer’s live performance and uniqueness/first-timedness were being hyperbolically touted.

However, in interrogating these paratexts further and, beyond those, the trailer itself and the ways in which audiences and spaces were configured during the trailer’s live moment, liveness becomes just one of a number of appeals being touted by and through the live trailer. This is emblematic of Kernan’s second mode of trailer address: the ‘vaudeville mode’.

For Kernan, the vaudeville mode centres on offering an audience “a range of reasons to choose the film, assuring them that no matter who they are, the movie’s ‘variety show’ is for them” (2004: 19). This stands in contrast to the circus mode’s “hyperbolic assumptions that spectacle is universally appealing” (ibid.). Trailers exemplifying the vaudeville mode therefore attempt to cater to a diverse range of demographics and tastes, adopting a ‘something for everyone’ rhetoric in the hope of appealing to as wide an audience as possible. Expanding on this, Kernan highlights how:

The rhetoric of ‘something for everyone’ is usually posited within the generalized framework of an individual genre. By quantifying or encapsulating aspects of the films’ generic appeals in this way, such trailers construct genre at the same time as they construct genre-transcending commodity-units of spectacle (or attractions), aiming to land as broad an

audience as possible to see a genre film by emphasizing the range of different aspects that might appeal to audiences within the specific genre. Thus, the vaudeville mode of trailer address emphasizes the role of attractions along with narrative and generic elements, all considered as equally desirable aspects of commodified spectacle.

(ibid.)

Suggested by Kernan here is that trailers which adopt a vaudeville mode of address simultaneously bring to the fore a range of spectacular filmic aspects – genre-related and otherwise – which together showcase the varying appeals a film might have for a recognisably diverse audience. Kernan goes on to summarise that “[i]f spectacle is emphasized in this type of trailer, it is presented as one element among many” (ibid.). In view of this, the spectacular ‘musical extravaganza’ being touted by the paratexts’ circus-mode-type hyperbole instead emerges as just one of the live trailer’s variety of appeals as part of its vaudeville, ‘variety show’, mode of address.⁷⁰

Star Appeal and Direct Address

On further interrogation, the vaudeville mode’s ‘variety show’ imperative can be traced across the live *TGS* trailer’s surrounding paratexts. Suzanne Sullivan’s earlier anticipation at watching “as Hugh, Zac, Zendaya and Keala make history

⁷⁰ Beyond the scope of this chapter, but pertinent to reflect on, is one of the film’s wider promotional campaigns, titled *#TheGreatestWeek*. It was executed in the week leading up to, but independently of, the live trailer, but was similarly reflective of this ‘variety show’ principle. It saw a number of live promotional events take place around New York City, ranging from individual to ensemble live performances by cast members, to collaborations with other NYC-based entertainment groups/individuals. The individual events (titled, amongst others: ‘The Greatest Singing and Shopping Experience’; ‘The Greatest Piano Bar Takeover’; ‘The Greatest Kids Day’) offered numerous, co-ordinated, and thematically-varied ‘entry-points’ into the world of *The Greatest Showman*. Each of these events sought to appeal to different age- or taste-based demographics, offering a broader manifestation of the vaudeville mode’s ‘variety show’ imperative.

and unwrap the first-ever live theatrical commercial on FOX's air" (in FoxFlash 2017) is illuminating in this regard. Whilst foregrounding the liveness of the trailer as a core appeal, Sullivan's comments are also illuminating for how they point to another of the live trailer's appeals. As quoted in the introduction to this chapter, Kernan has argued that the vaudeville mode of address might emphasise a "range of star types" (2004: 19) as one of the various appeals on offer. With this in mind, the film's (and trailer's) principle cast members – in film stars Hugh Jackman and Zac Efron, children's TV star and singer Zendaya, and Broadway star Keala Settle – emerge through the paratexts as another of the appeals being offered up in the live *TGS* trailer.

The emergence of the trailer's stars as one of the live trailer's appeals speaks to Catherine Haworth's suggestion that:

the presence of the star-who-sings might [provide] additional layers of pleasure and personal authenticity, especially in their moments of musical performance [and that] the presence of big stars [may] result in an intensification of some of the musical's appeal.

(2017: 110/112)

To the same end, James Walters (2018) has suggested that star performances in musicals can represent 'spectacles' in their own right. These suggestions bring Kernan's vaudeville mode into conversation with a debate in scholarly literature on Hollywood musicals which posits that production and performance techniques such as direct address can serve to highlight the performance of the star. In examining the live trailer, this debate helps reveal one of the practical ways in which the star appeal of the trailer's vaudeville mode manifested itself in practice. Steven Cohan has argued that the shifting registers of address in musicals can

facilitate a focus on the “authenticity, charisma, and talent” (2002: 13) of a star rather than on their performance as a character. We can trace this in practice throughout the live *TGS* trailer where, even within the opening minute, we see definite shifts in address by Jackman, Efron and Zendaya, and Settle; shifts which move from indirect, narrative-grounded character performances, to directly-addressed performances to camera (Fig. 3.8). With this in mind, it was not the characters of P. T. Barnum, Phillip Carlyle, Anne Wheeler or Lettie Lutz that viewers were necessarily witnessing in these moments of live direct address, but the performances of Jackman, Efron, Zendaya, and Settle themselves. Liveness served a key role in magnifying these moments, particularly for how it challenged longstanding “ideas about authenticity, specificity and virtuosity in the musical genre” (Haworth 2017: 110). Whilst some have argued that a star’s inability to adequately sing a live solo is of little significance to the film musical (Kniffel 2013: xiii), others have outlined the impact that poor live performance can have (Haworth 2017: 111; Walters 2018), particularly in view of an audience culture which is constantly seeking ‘authenticity’ (Schultze 2017: 251). The mobilisation of liveness during the live *TGS* trailer became a way with which the performances of the principle cast were ‘authenticated’, which in turn foregrounded the role that these cast members played as one of the appeals being touted by the trailer’s vaudeville mode of address.



Fig. 3.8 Direct-address to camera by stars (left to right) Settle, Zendaya, Jackman, and Efron.

The stars' direct address is also relevant when considering how the audience of the live *TGS* trailer was configured. In her sustained study of the Hollywood musical genre, Jane Feuer has pointed to how musicals concentrate "on breaking down any perceived distance between performer and audience" (1993: 35). Direct address is one of the ways in which this is achieved in film musicals, with Feuer arguing that it "may just as well signify the intimacy of live entertainment" (ibid.: 39). Building on this, Cathy Fowler has argued that it is in these moments of direct address that "the spectator is invited to partake in the spectacle [and where] his/her position is played with" (2000: 113). For Jim Collins (1981: 139), the recognition and inclusion of the viewer within the 'world of the film' is an essential part of the film musical for the potential it affords the viewer to share in the success of the performances. Fowler (2000: 113) has suggested that this inclusion of the audience within the world of the film musical can be achieved

through certain editing and shot-composition techniques.⁷¹ The live *TGS* trailer utilised this at its outset by immediately identifying three diegetic ‘audience members’ whose journey the non-diegetic television audience would follow through the trailer (Figs. 3.9–3.12). Opening with a slow tracking-shot of diegetic onlookers (Fig. 3.9), the camera focused on three children who proceeded to follow Hugh Jackman as he entered the shot (Fig. 3.10). After a few seconds, Jackman turned, at which point the camera cut to a reaction shot from the point of view of the children (Fig. 3.11). From this shot, Jackman appeared to be directly addressing ‘us’, the non-diegetic television audience. This shot signified the point at which the non-diegetic viewers were recognised and included within the diegetic world of the trailer. In identifying with these three children at the outset, a later shot of them performing amongst the ensemble of dancers (Fig. 3.12) exemplified the way in which the non-diegetic audience was represented as ‘partaking’ in the spectacle of the performance in the way Fowler alludes to above. Outlined here is how a focus on the paratexts, the trailer itself, and the audience configuration revealed the ways in which direct address and associated production techniques firstly aided in configuring the audience as made to feel part of the trailer’s live moment. Alongside Sullivan’s comments in the paratexts discussed earlier, direct address simultaneously served to foreground the stars of the trailer; these different star types emerging alongside the trailer’s liveness as another of the appeals within the trailer’s vaudeville mode of address.

⁷¹ For example, a direct address shot might often be followed by a shot of a diegetic audience with whom the non-diegetic audience is encouraged to identify (Fowler 2000: 113).



Figs. 3.9–3.12 How the live trailer used production techniques to configure the audiences during its exhibition: **Fig. 3.9 (top left)** Recognising diegetic ‘audience members’; **Fig. 3.10 (top right)** Situating them in relation to Jackman; **Fig. 3.11 (bottom left)** Reaction shot; **Fig. 3.12 (bottom right)** Final performance.

Musical Nostalgia

In further examining the constellatory domains surrounding the live *TGS* trailer, another appeal emerges alongside liveness and star types to do with the film musical genre itself. Indeed, as was noted earlier, Kernan (2004: 19) has signalled how the vaudeville mode of address encapsulates genre-specific appeals alongside those of a more spectacular nature. These genre-specific appeals manifest themselves in the live *TGS* trailer through its borrowing of famous film musical iconography and signifiers, the deployment of which provokes a nostalgia for the musical form. Carter Moulton’s conceptualisation of ‘speculative nostalgia’ offers a useful way for thinking about this.

In his examination of ‘announcement trailers’ for Hollywood blockbusters,⁷² Moulton posits ‘speculative nostalgia’ as a strategy through which audiences are invited to:

⁷² Moulton describes ‘announcement trailers’ as “teasers-for-the-teaser [trailer], [often serving] as a film’s first audiovisual contact with culture” (2019: 436).

look forward to an upcoming film while also calling on them to look back to a previous cinematic encounter [– in turn encouraging] fans to scan [a] text for clues [...] while making connections to previous texts.

(2019: 434)

This builds on previous studies which have argued that nostalgia and ‘pastness’ have become expedient, marketable, and strategically valuable modes in the contemporary cultural landscape (Grainge 2000: 33; Hills 2015: 7), and that trailers specifically can often be most effective when they successfully evoke, amongst other things, the styles of old trailers (Marich 2013: 31). Moulton posits that this mobilisation of nostalgia can be achieved “through the deployment of *iconic images* [but that it] can only be fully understood when juxtaposed with its aesthetics of *speculation*.” (2019: 436–39, original emphases) The live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* did this in a number of ways in relation to the film musical genre.

One way was through the borrowing of key iconography from past film musicals. Building on his suggestion above with regards to the effectiveness of evoking past trailer styles, Robert Marich (2013: 31) has additionally argued that borrowing images and iconography from films themselves can be similarly effective. Three pertinent examples of this presented themselves during the live trailer for *TGS*. The first was a transitory moment in which Hugh Jackman jumped on, and clung to, a lamppost to deliver a sung line (Fig. 3.13). Though brief, the

choreography in this instance was reminiscent of the iconic moment in the film musical, *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), where Gene Kelly performed the same action.⁷³



Fig. 3.13 Comparison between choreography performed by Jackman in the live *TGS* trailer (left), and that performed by Gene Kelly in *Singin' in the Rain* (right).

The second example came shortly after this moment, with Jackman, Zendaya, and Efron stood in a line facing the camera and holding newspapers (Fig. 3.14). The intention of this choreography, on closer inspection, appears to have been to foreground the newspapers themselves, on which the release details for the film were written. However, the choreography here was also reminiscent of a moment during the film musical, *Bugsy Malone* (1976), in which members of Fat Sam's gang opened the song 'Bad Guys' in the same formation.



Fig. 3.14 Comparison between choreography performed by Jackman, Zendaya, and Efron in the live *TGS* trailer (left), and that performed in *Bugsy Malone* (right).

⁷³ The iconicity of this *Singin' in the Rain* sequence is seemingly affirmed in it having been regarded as the 'greatest' film musical number of all time (MTV 2013; Selzer 2018).

The third example came at the end of the live trailer in the form of its title-card (Fig. 3.15). The design of the title-card was reminiscent of those belonging to past musical films and, in particular, their trailers. The trailer for *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) provides an apt comparison here. Evident in this comparison are the aesthetic similarities between both, particularly in the use of large, elaborate font to denote the film's title and its precedence on the screen. In borrowing iconographic references from past musicals, particularly those of Hollywood's 'Golden Age', the live trailer for *TGS* configured its audience in a way where they were asked to make these historical connections whilst simultaneously speculate as to how the iconography – and the nostalgic themes they convey – might be manifested in the forthcoming film.



Fig. 3.15 Comparison between the trailer title-cards for *TGS* (left) and *The Wizard of Oz* (right).

The location on which the live trailer was filmed also served a role in provoking this kind of speculative nostalgia. As mentioned in the introduction to this part, the FOX press release drew attention to the production-related aspects underpinning the live trailer. Alongside detailing the 360-degree shoot involving more than 150 dancers, the release drew attention to the fact that filming would take place “at the historic Warner Bros. Studios in Burbank” (FoxFlash 2017). Warner Bros. was one of “three major musical-producing studios of the 1930s”

(Feuer 1993: 24) alongside MGM and RKO, and was key in ‘reviving’ the musical genre under the guidance of Darryl F. Zanuck with Busby Berkeley-choreographed ‘backstage musicals’ such as *42nd Street* (1933) (Cohan 2002: 7). In emphasising the detail about the ‘historic’ Warner Bros. backlot, the paratextual commentary drew attention to the historical, musical-related context and precedent within which the live trailer existed, and to the significance of the space in which the live trailer was being made. This, in turn stirred speculation as to how this ‘backstage musical’ precedent might manifest itself in the film itself, and demonstrates how speculative nostalgia can transcend the visual iconography to also manifest itself in written, paratextual content.

Moulton has described speculative nostalgia as a self-promoting discourse through which a text’s cultural lineage, heritage, impact, and legacy are simultaneously paid homage to and commodified (2019: 439). When thinking about the live *TGS* trailer’s vaudeville mode of address, speculative nostalgia comes forth as another of the live trailer’s various appeals. The deployment of various iconographic and paratextual references sought to speak to a different potential audience demographic.⁷⁴ The explicit self-referential nature of these deployments of speculative nostalgia can therefore be seen as concerted and intentional mobilisations of the past with the intention of selling a related future commodity. Where Moulton has argued that the ephemerality of announcement trailers “articulate movie blockbusters as distinct from and more ‘eventful’ than other media” (ibid.: 437), liveness – as a promotional strategy – can demonstrably serve a similar purpose. In the case of the live *TGS* trailer, liveness becomes a

⁷⁴ Included amongst these might be, for example: fans of Warner Bros. musicals; fans of the musical genre in general, particularly classical ‘Golden Age’ musicals; or even fans of Gene Kelly.

mechanism by which the various temporalities implicated by the trailer's speculative nostalgia (the 'look back' at the musical genre and 'look forward' to how its thematic and iconographic references might be configured in the forthcoming film) were compressed into an ephemeral 'now'; a 'now' which sought to articulate the live trailer and its ad-break as being distinct from and more eventful than traditional ad-breaks.

Experimenting with Form

Film studies scholarship has examined instances where experimentation with the ad-break has occurred. One of the most documented of these is Baz Luhrmann's *Chanel No. 5: The Film* – an 'ad movie' starring Nicole Kidman which premiered (and took over an entire ad-break) during a Channel 4 broadcast of *Moulin Rouge* (2001) in November 2004. Echoing the latter aesthetically and thematically, the three-minute advertisement drew upon "the popular language of film and its aura of celebrity" (Grainge 2008: 39) to experiment with the form of the television commercial. Paul Grainge, in his examination of the ad movie as a form of 'branded entertainment', points to how the ad:

took the form of a short film, focusing less on the product than on possibilities of living, feeling and behaviour [whilst being] staged and sold as a quasi-cinematic event. [...] Consuming a full block of television advertising, the commercial made strenuous efforts to confuse its status as text and event, the premiere including a minute-long credit sequence [through which] *Chanel No. 5: The Film* assumed the formal conventions of a major studio movie.

(ibid.: 40–41)

Evident through this is how the ad movie's placement during a televised broadcast of *Moulin Rouge* was not inconsequential. Indeed, Grainge argues that "it enabled the ad movie to 'play' as a parenthetical sequence of the film itself" (ibid.: 41). For Grainge, the close alignment (thematically and aesthetically) between the Chanel advertisement and the surrounding broadcast/editorial content sought to prevent the 'literal and figurative ad-skipping' that the live strategies examined in Part Two of this thesis seek to mitigate against.

Where the live 'LoF' trailer experimented with form through the editing together of different types of audio-visual material, the live trailer for *TGS* experimented with form through its resemblance to another form of entertainment entirely: a musical song-and-dance number. Beyond borrowing the iconography from past musicals, the live trailer for *TGS* also aligned thematically and aesthetically with the editorial content surrounding its ad-break. Indeed, the paratexts surrounding it drew attention to this, pointing to how, from "the costumes and the sets to the choreography and the vocals, the advertisement had all the components of a mini musical" (Dupre 2017). The live trailer for *TGS* thus shared a number of aesthetic and thematic similarities to the broadcast of *A Christmas Story Live!*: both were produced, distributed, and exhibited live, and both were examples of – or drew significantly on conventions from – the musical genre.

This kind of alignment between editorial and advertising content is not uncommon in the broader context of the US television landscape, particularly around the increasingly popular televised live musical events (Otterson 2017; Stanhope 2017). As has been observed in the paratextual trade press surrounding *TGS* live trailer, televised live musical events have become creatively lucrative

“venues for ad innovation” (Poggi 2017).⁷⁵ Jeanine Poggi, in her write-up of *A Christmas Story Live!*, contextualises this by highlighting how:

As TV networks grapple with a continued decline in scripted programming, these live musicals have served as a bright spot for networks desperate to deliver mass audiences to advertisers.

(2017)

As has been aptly summarised elsewhere in the live moment’s paratextual commentary, “the 2 ½-minute live *Greatest Showman* trailer [represents] a new twist on efforts to get viewers to watch commercials” (Pedersen 2017). Alongside the formal experimentations detailed above, the foregrounding of the ad’s liveness – as epitomised in TCF’s press release labelling of it as a “live trailer” (FoxFlash 2017) and Suzanne Sullivan’s description of the live trailer as an “exciting live holiday event” (in *ibid.*) – becomes a way with which the ad-break (and its content) was eventised and made to stand out within the temporal flow of the television broadcast.⁷⁶ The comparisons drawn between it and the musical form point to the ways in which, together with liveness, the language and aesthetic conventions of the film musical genre were drawn on to play with the form both of this particular trailer and its encompassing ad-break, whilst all-the-while maintaining its promotional status as a trailer.

The second part of this chapter has examined the televised exhibition of a live trailer for *The Greatest Showman*. In examining the live trailer through its

⁷⁵ *A Christmas Story Live!* represented a particularly high uptake in this ad-innovation in their partnership with retail outlet, Old Navy (Lynch 2017).

⁷⁶ Indeed, John Caldwell has argued that attributing televised content with an “event-status [can] bestow on viewers an air of textual and conceptual distinction” (1995: 191).

constellation of liveness, liveness initially came forth as underpinning a hyperbolic promotional discourse similar to that of the circus mode of trailer address. However, interrogation of the live moment's constellatory domains further revealed that liveness constituted just one of a number of appeals being touted by the trailer's vaudeville mode of address. In drawing out other appeals such as stars and nostalgia for the musical form, the live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* demonstrated a 'something for everyone' rhetoric; one which foregrounded different appeals in order to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. In turn, these appeals – particularly that to do with the film musical genre – underpinned experimentation with the form of the trailer and its ad-break; aligning the trailer to its surrounding editorial content and positioning it as an event in its own right. It contextualised this in relation to other such promotional activities occurring around televised live musical events.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the televised exhibition of two live trailers. The first part examined a live trailer for *Assassin's Creed* and its exhibition during a Channel 4 ad-break. Interrogation of its constellatory domains revealed how liveness underpinned the 'Leap of Faith' trailer's circus mode of address through its hyperbolic touting of the live trailer's main spectacular feature: the live 'leap of faith' stunt itself. It also revealed how liveness provoked experimentation with the structural form of the trailer, fluidly blending live and recorded trailer footage in an attempt to create a single, coherent piece of promotional content. The second part of this chapter examined a live trailer for *The Greatest Showman* and its exhibition during a FOX ad-break. Through the same process of interrogation, the

second part revealed how, in this instance, the circus-mode-type of hyperbolic promotional discourse emerged as just one of the appeals being touted by the trailer's vaudeville, 'something-for-everyone', mode of address. This part went on to draw out other appeals, such as star types and film musical nostalgia, and how these again informed experimentation with the structural form of the trailer and its ad-break.

The mobilisation of liveness in these instances consolidated the trailers' production, distribution, and exhibition into a single, time-bound event – something the paratextual commentary surrounding the trailers seized upon as a way of positioning the live trailers as discrete events in their own right. Liveness in both cases played a central role in eventising these live trailers, both through the paratextual promotional discourse and through the practical experimentations with structural form that the trailers' liveness facilitated. In turn, these mobilisations demonstrate the way in which the various stakeholders involved in these live trailers (movie studios, television broadcasters, and advertising agencies) sought to use liveness as a way of preventing the kind of ad-skipping that Grainge and Marich argue is such a threat to them. Both trailers sought to present themselves as unmissable events, either by emphasising the risk inherent to its liveness, or by emphasising its alignment with the editorial content surrounding the trailer's ad-break. Finally, evident in both examples is how these mobilisations of liveness represent experimental manoeuvres on the part of the promotional screen industries. Both emphasised their 'world first' status, and both remain the only examples to date in which the production, distribution, and exhibition of a film trailer has been consolidated into a single, time-bound moment of televised exhibition.

Having examined the way in which liveness facilitated experimentation with live trailers during their televised exhibition, the next chapter will examine the way in which liveness has been mobilised by the US film industry as a way of navigating an increasingly multi-screened living room.

4 Televised Trailers in the Multi-Screen Living Room

Tune in and choose your side

In the digital era, the proliferation of channels and fragmentation of audiences appear to pose a threat to the [...] dailiness of broadcast television, the rhythm of scheduling sutured into the lives of the audience. Conversely, the rise in second screen usage could be seen to counter this threat as audiences are invited to sign up, join in, and share responses to TV content.

(Wilson 2016: 176)

At 8.20pm on 6th October 2012, ITV's continuity announcer introduced the first ad-break during a Saturday evening broadcast of *The X Factor* (2004—): "Coming up if you're mobile savvy, some exclusive interactive ads are on the way." These ads were part of an advertising campaign for carmaker Mercedes-Benz, who had tasked ITV and creative agency Abbott Mead Vickers BBDO with introducing their then-new Mercedes A-Class to a younger audience. Titled '#YouDrive', and described as an "innovative dual-screen event" (WARC 2014), the campaign played out over three prime-time advertising breaks, with viewers deciding via Twitter which advert would be shown in the second and third ad-breaks. Following the introductory remarks of the announcer, the first sixty-second spot set the scene for the campaign's narrative: a musician (played by rapper Kane 'Kano' Robinson) must get, undetected, to a secret gig that the police have threatened to close down. To do so, he enlists the help of a professional driver who, driving the new Mercedes A-Class, weaves through the cobbled streets of Lisbon in their bid to avoid detection by the authorities. With the police following

close behind, the chase cut to a split screen showing two alternative scenarios: to #hide or #evade (Fig. 4.1). Viewers were encouraged to tweet one of the two by 8.50pm that evening, with a closing caption explaining that the story ‘continues later’ (Fig. 4.2).



Figs. 4.1–4.2 #YouDrive campaign: **Fig 4.1 (left)** First spot’s #hide/#evade options; **Fig 4.2 (right)** First spot’s closing caption.

Twitter engagements with the two hashtags were monitored in real-time and, three ad-breaks later, the second spot aired, opening with a visual announcement that ‘60% tweeted #evade’ (Fig. 4.3). The chosen #evade scenario was edited to the end of the first spot. With the musician and his driver now being followed by a helicopter, the now-lengthened ad cut again to a split screen with a further two scenarios: to #switch or #lift (Fig. 4.4). Viewers were again encouraged to tweet by 8pm the following evening when the narrative would continue once more (Fig. 4.5).



Figs. 4.3–4.5 #YouDrive campaign: **Fig 4.3 (left)** Second spot’s audience decision; **Fig 4.4 (centre)** Second spot’s #switch/#lift options; **Fig 4.5 (right)** Second spot’s closing caption.

The following evening, during the second ad-break for *The X Factor*'s live results show, the third and concluding spot aired. Opening again with a visual announcement that '51% tweeted #switch' (Fig. 4.6), the musician's entire journey was edited together with the winning #switch scenario closing out the ad – seeing the musician switch to another A-Class to make it to the secret gig (Fig. 4.7).



Figs. 4.6–4.7 #YouDrive campaign: **Fig 4.6 (left)** Third spot's audience decision; **Fig. 4.7 (right)** Third spot's/campaign ending.

The #YouDrive campaign was described as a 'world-first' in the way it encouraged viewers to "drive the action" (Edwards 2018) through real-time social media participation. In urging viewers to use their internet-connected portable devices (such as smartphones and tablets) to tweet the ad they wanted to see in the next ad-break, the #YouDrive campaign represented the first time on UK broadcast television that an ad's storyline had been driven by viewer Twitter engagement (Shearman 2012).⁷⁷ As this chapter will demonstrate, it would not be the last time. Indeed, the #YouDrive campaign's use of Twitter to direct the on-screen action can be viewed in the context of what has been more broadly conceived as 'social TV' (Proulx & Shepatin 2012; van Es 2017a).

⁷⁷ Twitter engagements in the #YouDrive campaign reportedly totalled 17,000 tweets and sixteen million impressions across its weekend lifecycle (ITV Media 2012). In context, viewing figures for *The X Factor*'s live and results shows, according to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB), totalled 8.6 and 9.1 million viewers respectively.

At its simplest, social TV denotes “convergence between television and social media [and how this is] affecting the way in which we experience [television] programming” (Proulx & Shepatin 2012: ix). Located within this phenomenon is the practice of second-screening, which denotes the use of a secondary device or screen by a television viewer that ‘complements’ what they are watching on television (Nee & Dozier 2015: 215). The continued uptake of portable connected devices alongside an expanding array of time-shifted/online viewing have together resulted in an increasingly fragmented television audience.⁷⁸ The challenge for advertisers, broadcasters, and creative agencies alike is how best to traverse a viewing environment where the television set is no longer the only device in the living room vying for eyeballs.

Almost a decade ago, William Boddy observed how the biggest task facing the broadcast television industry was finding its place “in this new world of mobilized screens and fragmented audiences” (2011: 96). For Karis van Es, social TV represents one “strategic response to [this] audience fragmentation” (2017a: 87). In harnessing the reach of live broadcast television in conjunction with the real-time engagement of Twitter, David George (Marketing Director for Mercedes-Benz UK) described how the #YouDrive campaign was “led by the way consumers now interact with advertising” (in Shayon 2012), outlining elsewhere how the campaign sought to “really cut through, and create a positive, lasting impression”

⁷⁸ Ofcom’s Online Nation (2020b: 6) report has detailed how the uptake of smartphone devices continues to increase in the UK. The same report notes how 60% of the UK’s online consumer market now consider the smartphone as “the most important device for internet access” (ibid.) Viewership of subscription video-on-demand services (SVoDs) (such as Netflix and Disney+) has also continued to increase, while the viewership of advertising/broadcaster video-on-demand services (A/BVoDs) (such as iPlayer and All4) is lower but continues to remain steady (Ofcom 2019: 64).

(in Shearman 2012).⁷⁹ The #YouDrive campaign offers a practical manifestation of Sherryl Wilson's words in the epigraph to this chapter, where the potential 'threat' of a fragmented, device-enabled television audience was reconfigured as an active component within a televised advertising strategy. With televised promotional practices still playing a significant role in the marketing schedule for Hollywood feature films,⁸⁰ this chapter is concerned with examining the ways in which the US film industry has navigated the fragmented, multi-screen living room for the exhibition of film trailers on live broadcast television.

This chapter continues the agenda for Part Two of this thesis by examining how liveness has been mobilised in trailer exhibition on broadcast television. Where the previous chapter charted how liveness has underpinned experimentation with the structural form of live trailers and its impact on their modes of audience address, this chapter shifts focus to exploring the mobilisation of liveness in the form of live viewer participation in televised trailer exhibition. Indeed, Inge Sørensen has observed how "TV networks [today] are using live media events to win eyeballs over from the online audiovisual content providers by creating [an] enhanced experience" (2016: 396). This chapter examines two instances in which the promotional screen industries have sought to (re-)orientate viewer attention towards the television set; exploring how live viewer participation was encouraged in each case by asking viewers to choose which trailer they wanted to

⁷⁹ In a white paper titled, 'Tune in with Twitter' (2013), Twitter UK asserted how a deeper integration of Twitter in broadcast television advertising "not only drives discovery and engagement but also drives increases in brand recall scores and other marketing goals."

⁸⁰ Despite witnessing a decline, television advertising continues to consistently account for the greatest advertising spend by film studios (BFI 2019: 78).

see in the next ad-break. Yet, as the two parts of this chapter will reveal, this was done in two very different ways.

The first part of this chapter examines the televised exhibition on Channel 4 of trailers for Twentieth Century Fox's (TCF) *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014). This example shares many similarities to the #YouDrive campaign, and lends itself to further exploring the concepts of social TV and second-screening. Pitting the humans' story versus the apes' story, viewers were asked to 'choose a side' by tweeting which story's trailer would be shown in the following ad-break. Drawing on a broader debate around the 'procrastination economy' in the 'connected' living room (Tussey 2018), as well as on related concerns around second-screening (Blake 2017; Evans et al. 2017), the first part of this chapter traces how the live participation potential of the multi-screen living room was harnessed as a central component of this particular trailer exhibition strategy.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the same franchise but three years later. It examines the televised exhibition of trailers for TCF's sequel, *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017). As with its predecessor, this campaign sought to mobilise live viewer participation in again asking viewers to choose which story's trailer (humans or apes) they wanted to see in the ad-break. However, this time, the participation was not facilitated by mobile devices. Instead, TCF partnered with both Channel 4 and ITV, with each commercial broadcaster carrying one of the trailers. This time, the participatory element was centred on a single screen: that of the television. Viewers had to choose which trailer they wanted to watch not with their mobile devices, but with their remote control. Drawing additionally on discussions around single-screening (Iuppa & Borst 2007; Miller 2014, 2020) and the remote control (Thomas 2011; Lotz 2014), the second part of this chapter

argues for a notable shift in how the multi-screen living room was conceptualised and engaged with at an industry level.

Together, these case studies were part of a wider portfolio of collaborations between TCF and Channel 4, dating back to 2012. 4Sales, in a write-up of this collaborative partnership, described the circumstances leading to its formation:

The formula of success for film marketing was changing in an increasingly digital landscape. [I]n a social media driven world where news spreads fast, standing out and getting the film talked about was increasingly important. Talkability couldn't be bought [...], it needed to be earned by behaving differently.

(4Sales 2018)

This chapter foregrounds the mobilisation of liveness as one of the ways in which viewer attention and behaviour was guided during the televised exhibition of film trailers. Reflecting on the research questions driving this thesis, this chapter interrogates the constellation of liveness underpinning each of these case studies to reveal how this liveness was mobilised. Each part will jointly consider the live moment of exhibition itself, the paratexts surrounding it (such as studio/broadcaster press releases and industry reports), how the audience was configured (through the way(s) they were encouraged to participate), and which participatory spaces (such as mobile device-based social media platforms and television channels) were implicated. In doing so, this chapter reveals why liveness was mobilised in these ways. At a micro-level, it argues that the liveness of real-time viewer participation was harnessed as a way of reorienting the “wandering eye of the living room television audience” (Tussey 2018: 142) back

to the television and its linear scheduling; in doing so highlighting the continued value that the US film industry places on television advertising for the mass audience reach that it can deliver, particularly during the promotion of big-budget films. At a macro-level, it argues that these mobilisations – these collaborations between the film industry and television broadcasters – were part of a wider concerted effort to reify live broadcast television as an “anchor medium” (Heyer, in Jenkins 2006: 72) for film advertising within a new screen ecology in which portable devices, and the services available on them, are increasingly drawing attention away from the television set.

Dawn of the Second-Screen

On Saturday 21st June 2014, TCF “strategically hijacked” (Francis, in iProspect 2016) the first ad-break during Channel 4’s terrestrial premiere of *The Hunger Games* (2012).⁸¹ The purpose of this was to debut an exclusive trailer for the new *Planet of the Apes* sequel, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (*Dawn*).⁸² The ad-break opened with a Channel 4 ident designed with imagery from the film (Fig. 4.8) and was introduced by the broadcaster’s continuity announcer:

And now, Channel 4 presents a look at the new movie, *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*. Stay tuned until the end to vote for which exclusive clip from the film we show in the next ad-break.

At the end of the three-minute trailer, the continuity announcer returned with a call-to-action:

⁸¹ Sarah Francis was TCF’s then-Senior Partnerships Manager.

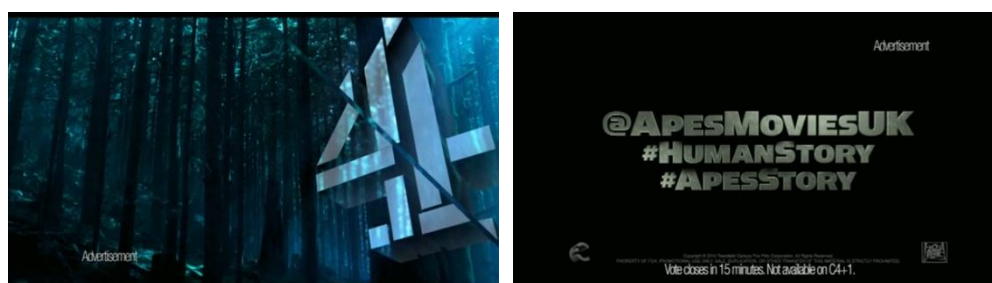
⁸² *Dawn*’s first official full-length trailer had been released online three days earlier. The exclusive trailer exhibited on Channel 4 was a recut version of this with additional unseen material, created specifically for the Channel 4 promotion.

That looks amazing. Now let us know whether you'd like to see more of the humans' story or more of the apes' story in the next ad-break. To vote, tweet @ApesMoviesUK using either #HumanStory or #ApesStory. The clip with the most amount [sic] of votes will be seen in the next ad-break.

A black screen with Twitter information visually reiterated these details (Fig. 4.9). Over the next fifteen minutes, Twitter engagements in both hashtags were "counted in real time" (Cineworld 2014) and, at the beginning of the next ad-break, Channel 4's continuity announcer returned to reveal and introduce the winning trailer:

Now the moment you've been waiting for: we asked you to vote for what you wanted to see next from *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and 73% voted for the apes' story – and here it is.

The exclusive sixty-second spot depicting the apes' story was then shown, marking the end of the exhibition strategy. The focus of this section is the live moment surrounding this exhibition strategy, particularly the calls-to-attention/action around the initial three-minute trailer for *Dawn*.



Figs. 4.8–4.9 *Dawn*'s takeover ad-break on Channel 4: **Fig. 4.8 (left)** *Dawn*-themed Channel 4 ident; **Fig. 4.9 (right)** Voting information for choosing which trailer to show in the next ad-break.

The televised exhibition of the initial three-minute *Dawn* trailer on Channel 4 shared many similarities to the #YouDrive campaign on ITV. Both sought to harness the liveness of linear television programming and integrate it with the real-time responsiveness of social media participation as a way of navigating the multi-screen living room and an increasingly fragmented television audience. Indeed, in his study of interactive television and social participation, James Blake (2017) has suggested the most effective advertising campaigns are those which successfully combine “the interactive and social potential of online advertising with the reach and impact of TV” (2017: 168). This points to a new relationship being formulated between televised advertising content and the viewer. Advertisers need to make viewers want to watch – and engage with – advertising content on the television set. For Justin Wyatt, “[e]ven more persuasive are those moments when advertising can break free of the formal qualities, TV or digital” (2018). The ‘strategic hijacking’ of Channel 4’s ad-break for the exhibition of the first three-minute *Dawn* trailer points to one of the ways in which this example attempted to ‘break free’ from the formulaic nature of the ad-break.

The Ad-Break Takeover

As television viewers are “turning away from the traditional interruptive 30-second TV spot” (Blake 2017: 153), it has become imperative for commercial broadcasters to effectively harness viewers’ attention during these moments. Bob Greenblatt, in his former capacity as NBC’s Chairman of Entertainment, reinforced this in his suggestion that the television industry needs to find ways “to make those [advertising] interruptions a lot more palatable, a lot more entertaining [and] a lot more relational” (in Wyatt 2018). Commercial broadcasters need to

demonstrate to advertisers – such as film studios – that they can guarantee a return-on-investment by being able to effectively target, reach, and engage intended audiences.⁸³ For Channel 4 in particular, this has meant turning the ad-break into an appointment-based advertising “destination” (Clark, in Whiteman 2009). Danny Peace (Agency Principal at Channel 4 between 2012–19) has described Channel 4’s track record of:

delivering innovative ad breaks for our commercial partners that go beyond the traditional ad execution to create an exclusive must-see event that our viewers will want to make an appointment to watch.

(in Channel 4 2014a)

One of the most prominent of these innovations has been what Channel 4 refers to as the ‘ad-break takeover’. These takeovers usually see a single paid advertisement fill most, if not all, of an entire ad-break. They have been deployed by Channel 4 and its advertising partners a number of times over the past decade.⁸⁴ These takeovers exemplify a “wider shift [towards] long-form TV advertising” (Hobbs 2016), where ad-break takeovers are being increasingly employed as a way of turning the ad-break into a “hyped event [in order to] make sure people don’t fast forward” (Braithwaite, in *ibid.*).⁸⁵ Takeovers have been deployed as part of collaborations with Hollywood studios as well. A notable forerunner to the kind examined here was Channel 4’s ‘Orange Movie Zone’ (OMZ), which launched in 2009 in partnership with telecommunications company,

⁸³ Television advertising continues to be one of the most expensive forms of film advertisement (Marich 2013: 83; Blake 2017: 162; Ofcom 2020a: 92).

⁸⁴ For examples, see Footnote 55.

⁸⁵ Chris Braithwaite is Agency and Client Sales Leader at Channel 4.

Orange (now EE), and was a weekly ad-break dedicated solely to film trailers. As Peter Clark (Channel 4's then-Manager of Strategic Sales) observed at the time:

Conventional wisdom suggests you shouldn't have clashing adverts in the same break but we wanted to do something completely different and create a destination break that would become a genuine appointment to view [...]. We know that cinemagoers love watching film trailers and by creating an ad break that's all about film, we believe we have created something innovative that viewers will genuinely enjoy watching.

(in Whiteman 2009)

The language that Clark uses ('destination'; 'appointment to view'; 'innovative') is useful for understanding the concept of the ad-break takeover, and for understanding how and why it was used to underpin the exhibition of the *Dawn* trailer.⁸⁶ At three minutes in length, the trailer took up the entirety of the ad-break; no other paid advertisements aired alongside it.⁸⁷ Indeed, the paratexts surrounding the trailer's moment of exhibition reveal the term 'ad break takeover' being used repeatedly to describe the event (Channel 4 2014b; Francis, in iProspect 2016; Mathé 2014). Designating *Dawn*'s trailer exhibition as an ad-break takeover had the effect of imbuing it with a sense of eventfulness; something special and unique that viewers needed to schedule into their television viewing. In this, it is emblematic of Jenkins et al.'s "appointment-based" (2013: 116) model of watching television, and illustrates how TCF/Channel 4 sought to position the

⁸⁶ Grainge and Johnson have discussed 'appointment-to-view' (ATV) trailers, which they define as "short films promoting forthcoming episodes that conclude with an end board giving the date and time of the next episode" (2015: 143n11). In this case, however, it is the episode that is the appointment-to-view event, rather than the ad-break (or the trailer) itself.

⁸⁷ This was not the case for the tailored sixty-second trailer chosen by viewers, which was aired in the second ad-break as one of a number of paid advertisements.

trailer's exhibition in the context of the multi-screen living room as something that viewers would want to turn away from their other devices to watch.

That said, the multiple screens in the living room also played a role in making *Dawn's* takeover an appointment-based television event. Whilst Jane Rumble (Ofcom's Director of Consumer Policy) has suggested that the increasing number of mobile and connected screens appearing alongside the television can on the one hand "take attention away from the television, [they] can also draw you back in again [and help] facilitate moving people back to TV" (in Blake 2017: 3). Elsewhere, in her examination of liveness in the multi-platform living room, Inge Sørensen points to one of the ways in which broadcasters are doing this with mobile devices. Speaking about Channel 4 in particular, Sørensen observes how:

Channel 4 are using two of their core strengths, reach and live TV, to enhance the experience of watching live TV across screens and devices. They do so in order to become the cultural lynch-pins for high-profile media events that are then viewed on and interacted with across platforms and devices, but that always revolve around the original TV broadcasters and are orchestrated as TV viewing experiences.

(2016: 396)

Central to what Sørensen is saying here is the increasing integration between television content and mobile devices in the construction of high-profile television events whereby the television and its content are the 'lynch-pin'. The ad-break takeover for *Dawn* exemplifies this in how the televised trailer instigated an integration with real-time, device-based participation with the purpose of dictating what would happen back on the television screen. Whilst this exhibition strategy encouraged viewers to turn away from the television to another device,

its ultimate purpose in doing this was to drive attention back to the trailer(s) on the television screen.

This is emblematic of what Ethan Tussey describes as the “procrastination economy of the ‘connected’ living room” (2018: 142). For Tussey, this economy is dedicated to harnessing and monetising “the in-between moments that traditional media industries struggle to reach” (ibid.). In the context of this *Dawn* example, these in-between moments represented the television ad-break, where the risk of viewers switching their attention from the television screen’s advertisements to content on their portable connected devices was ever present.⁸⁸ Tussey’s procrastination economy offers a grounding for understanding how and why these other screens were used in the way they were for the exhibition of *Dawn*’s trailers, and their role in the eventised, appointment-based ad-break takeover.

The In-Between Moments

Tussey conceptualises the ‘procrastination economy’ as a concerted effort by media companies to “create content and services for a mobile day part made up of people’s in-between moments” (ibid.: 172). For Tussey, these in-between moments denote “[t]argeting a specific audience at a specific time” (ibid.: 6), whether on the commute, in the waiting room, at the workplace, or in the ‘connected’ living room. He describes how people (pro)actively use mobile devices during these moments to “navigate their surroundings” (ibid.) and uses this to distinguish the procrastination economy from a ‘distraction economy’. For Tussey, the procrastination economy is not about distracting people from what they are

⁸⁸ An Ofcom-commissioned report by consultancy firm Technologia assessing the impact of second-screens on the UK television industry was compiled around the time of the *Dawn* campaign. It observed how two-thirds of UK television viewers were likely to have had a smartphone or tablet in hand when sitting down to watch TV (2014: 21).

doing in these moments, but about harnessing what they are already doing in order to commercialise them.

Tussey dedicates a chapter in his study to examining the procrastination economy of the ‘connected’ living room. As noted above, the procrastination economy in this context is focused on the in-between moments that the traditional television industry struggles to reach. Tussey elaborates on this in clarifying how:

In this case, the procrastination economy’s target is the wandering eye of the living room television audience. The television network and advertisers want mobile devices to help focus attention and conversation on programs and advertisements [...]. The desire to corral wandering attention motivates the development of products and services for the ‘connected’ living room and privileges viewers who want to sync their interactive technologies with the programming flow.

(ibid.: 142)

This desire to ‘corral attention’ back to the television set can be traced through the paratexts surrounding the *Dawn* trailers. In a subsequent write-up about the campaign, Sarah Francis (TCF’s then-Senior Partnerships Manager) described how the @ApesMoviesUK Twitter page had sent out a tweet “telling audiences to look out for a #DawnofApes exclusive during an ad-break” (in iProspect 2016). Later in the same report, Francis pointed to how Twitter was used to “target the right audiences, at the right time, in real time, creating a [...] live interactive experience” (ibid.). As analysis of *Dawn*’s live moment reveals, Twitter was used a number of times during this exhibition strategy. In this instance, the use of Twitter extended beyond the live moment of the trailers’ televised exhibition, occurring

hours before it was due to take place, though nevertheless serving in directing attention to the television set 'at the right time'.

This corralling of attention manifested itself similarly when examining the trailer's other constellatory domains. Interrogating the moment of exhibition itself and the way the audience was configured reveals that these industrial stakeholders did not stop at simply directing viewer attention to the television set; once focused on the television set, viewers' attention continued to be guided in a number of ways to ensure it stayed there. This manifested itself most prominently in the continuity announcer's dialogue detailed above. His opening dialogue in particular was loaded with a number of signposts, first directing viewers to 'now' watch the new footage from *Dawn*, and then prompting them to 'stay tuned' to find out how they could choose what appeared in the next ad-break. The effect of this was a foregrounding of the television and its ad-break as the focus of viewer attention over the subsequent three minutes. Short of explicitly asking viewers not to change channel, the announcer's directions sought to pre-empt the threat of viewers' wandering attention by teasing the active role they would play at the conclusion of the first three-minute trailer.

Even once the trailer had played, the continuity announcer's attention-guiding role continued. He confirmed that it was 'now' time to vote on which additional trailer would be shown in the following ad-break. To do this, viewers needed to use the connected mobile devices already likely in their hands to 'tweet' – using a platform likely already on, or at least accessible through, that device – the story they wanted to see. Fine-print at the bottom of the voting information screen described above offered further guidance that the vote would close in fifteen minutes. Having directed viewer attention to mobile devices, the

announcer's final words ('the clip with the most votes will be seen in the next ad-break') provided a final signpost, confirming to viewers when their attention needed to be back on the television set. Observed here is how the attention of the viewer, even when focused on the television screen and its advertising content, continued to be guided by a variety of audio-visual signposts, each of which directed viewers as to where their attention should be, when, and in what capacity.

Beyond exemplifying the procrastination economy of the living room, it is pertinent to reflect on how these attention-guiding gestures reveal something further about how the television viewing audience was conceptualised and configured by the various industrial stakeholders, particularly in terms of ownership and use of mobile devices. In a living room environment where two-thirds of UK television viewers would likely have had a smartphone or tablet in hand when sitting down to watch TV (Technologia 2014: 21), it is clear that an assumption has been made that a significant enough portion of viewers would, at the very least, have a mobile device to-hand at the time of *Dawn's* trailer exhibition. It was then further assumed that viewers therefore had at least the potential to take up this device and to navigate to a specific service – in this case Twitter – in the moment they were called to. However, the suggestion by Ofcom (2014: 84) in their UK Communications Market Report of that year that only 21% of time engaged in the television set was spent on simultaneous media activity suggests that, even if viewers had access to a device, they might not necessarily be willing to take it up in response to the call-to-action. Guiding attention to the television screen and harnessing it in the synchronised use of mobile devices is arguably only effective when viewers actually engage and respond to the call-to-attention.

Nevertheless, for Tussey, it is this integration between “mobile devices and other interactive technologies with television programs” (2018: 143) that is the core purpose of the procrastination economy of the living room. As he continues:

Instead of regarding mobile devices as competition for audience attention, the entertainment industry, advertisers, and social media platforms have collaborated to create a procrastination economy meant to redirect the living room audience’s wandering attention back onto television programming.

(ibid.)

This was true for the tweet described earlier, where the attention of the television audience was directed in advance (via Twitter), to a specific television moment (on Channel 4), to a specific piece promotional content (TCF’s *Dawn* trailer). Yet, within the live moment itself, the integration of real-time social media participation represents a specific strategy within the procrastination economy of the living room through which viewer attention was (re-)directed back to the television screen. This strategy has gone by a number of terms, the most prominent of which is ‘second-screening’.

The World’s Biggest Living Room

Already in 2004, Jane Roscoe discussed how the proliferation of, and advances in, technologies were affecting television practices and consumption habits:

Multiplatform media events both respond to and emerge from the changed media landscape, utilizing the latest technological developments and creating new spaces for audiences to interact and participate directly in the production of the event.

The ‘new spaces’ she discussed related to the use of secondary services such as e-mail and SMS in conjunction with television programmes to facilitate new means of interaction and participation with televised content. Since then, this notion of participating in and interacting with television content via portable devices and services has gone by a number of names: “simultaneous media use” (Hassoun 2014); “connected viewing” (Sørensen 2016); and “multiscreening” (Evans et al. 2017), to name a few. However, it is ‘second-screening’ which has emerged as “the most common term in both academic and industry discourse” (ibid.: 192).⁸⁹ Second-screening broadly denotes “the use of handheld devices such as smartphones and tablets in close connection with TV watching” (Technologia 2014: 7). Some scholarship has focused on second-screening in the form of dedicated ‘companion apps’ (Tussey 2014; Grainge & Johnson 2015). These apps were designed around major entertainment properties to provide a “focal point of group interaction” (Blake 2017: 33) and represented one “of the most exciting new developments” (Washenko 2014) for harnessing the second-screen tendencies of viewers. Often integrating social feeds within the structure of the app, companion apps not only offered users access to additional exclusive content, but allowed viewers to interact with distanced others whilst watching televised content (Grainge & Johnson 2015: 138). However, as Sherryl Wilson (2016: 186) highlights, viewer-demand for bespoke second-screen apps with show-specific

⁸⁹ Indeed, Lee and Andrejevic (2014: 41) described ‘second-screening’ as a “credible candidate for 2012 buzzword of the year.”

curated social feeds did not match the level of excitement with which the industry embraced these technological possibilities.

Established social media platforms have, however, become a core component of second-screen practices. It is the ability to corral attention and buzz around a particular piece of television content via these established platforms that has rendered packaged companion apps redundant (ibid.: 179). Twitter in particular has emerged as a “go-to company for a wide section of the TV industry” (Moulding 2014).⁹⁰ Indeed, Twitter has described itself as the “world’s biggest living room” (in Tussey 2018: 150). Tussey has pointed to Twitter’s strength in offering “a snapshot of viewer reaction” (ibid.), rather than fostering back-and-forth conversation between viewers, as one of its core appeals. The platform’s use of hashtags is one way in which this snapshot is provided. In their examination of Twitter’s role in television fandom, Highfield et al. (2013: 316) describe hashtags as “unifying textual markers [often] relating to a certain topic or television programme”. Hashtags offer a live means by which dispersed viewers of a television programme (or advertisement) can congregate virtually around a common interest, resulting in what Harrington et al. (in ibid.: 317) have described as a “virtual loungeroom.” The *Dawn* takeover sought to take advantage of this virtual living room, with its use of hashtags serving a dual-purpose. Its use of the #HumanStory and #ApesStory hashtags sought firstly to home the attention of device-enabled viewers by providing a focal-point for potential online buzz around the film.⁹¹ The takeover, secondly, sought to marry these hashtags with the

⁹⁰ Indeed, Tussey has gone as far as suggesting that Twitter “has staked its financial future on its relationship with the television industry” (2018: 149).

⁹¹ A further hashtag – #DawnofApes – was included at the end of each tailored spot. This served in providing a more generalised marker around which Twitter discussion about the trailers and, importantly, the film more broadly, could take place.

viewer participation element of the exhibition strategy. They served as a means of further harnessing attention in this in-between moment by actively encouraging real-time participation with televised content. This ability for social media platforms such as Twitter to offer real-time feedback and engagement with live television invites what Espen Ytreberg has described as a “sense of presence, heightened immediacy and involvement in the live event” (2009: 467) for the viewer.

For *Dawn*’s ad-break takeover, Twitter became part of the live moment’s constellatory space of participation and a means by which to instigate the kind of ‘involvement in the live event’ that Ytreberg speaks of. In placing live second-screening at the heart of the promotional strategy, the *Dawn* ad-break takeover positioned Twitter not just as the central catalyst for participation, but also as another means by which to guide viewer attention. As detailed above, the call-to-action delivered by Channel 4’s continuity announcer at the end of the initial trailer directed viewer attention to Twitter, and to engage with the prescribed social media handle/hashtags in order to have a say in what they would see in the next ad-break. Directing viewer attention to a secondary device, on the surface, appears problematic. It has been argued that asking viewers to be ‘busy’ on their second-screen may distract them from content (promotional and/or editorial) on the primary screen (Technologia 2014: 65; Fossen & Schweidel 2017: 31). Whilst no other paid advertisements were broadcast during the initial ad-break takeover, it would not be a stretch to assume that the second-screen activity incited by the takeover ate into Channel 4’s broadcast of *The Hunger Games*. Indeed, with only a few seconds between the call-to-action and the resumption of the film, it seems

inevitable that viewers (who chose to take up the call-to-action) may well have still been looking at their devices well after the film had resumed playing.

This point is pertinent in view of the Technologia report's later suggestion that encouraging second-screen activity "also reduces the likelihood of consumers changing channel" (2014: 65). What becomes clear in the case of *Dawn*'s ad-break takeover is an acute awareness on the part of the takeover's industrial stakeholders of what the consequences of second-screening might be and how they might be beneficial in "redirect[ing] attention back to the television screen" (Tussey 2018: 144). In sending viewers to a secondary device, the use of second-screening to incite real-time participation not only provoked online engagement with television-based promotional content, but it also served on a broader level in reducing the risk of viewers changing channel. This in turn increased the likelihood of viewers remaining tuned-in to Channel 4 until the next ad-break, during which the second sixty-second spot aired, in effect all but guaranteeing itself promotional exposure across two consecutive ad-breaks.

Interrogating the way in which the audience was configured to participate in the live moment similarly reveals something about how and why Twitter specifically was used. The live moment's paratexts offer a useful insight here. In her write-up of the takeover, Sarah Francis wrote: "the #DawnofApes Twitter activation allowed us to harness the huge reach and impact of our broadcast campaign with real-time responses from the movie-going public" (in iProspect 2016). Elsewhere, Angus Mitchell (Agency Principal at Channel 4 at the time) furthered this by outlining how:

Fox were looking for an innovative way to launch *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and by utilising the immediacy of Twitter in terms of feedback, we are letting the viewer take control and decide what they see.

(in Mathé 2014)

Dawn's campaign stands out for the agency it gave viewers in having a say about how the television ad-break unfolded. This might be viewed as one way in which this interruptive ad-break was made more 'palatable' (to borrow NBC Greenblatt's term). In this, *Dawn's* use of Twitter demonstrates a "new kind of reciprocity between producers and viewers" (Highfield et al. 2013: 316) that goes beyond what might be understood as a 'para-social' relationship. Para-sociability has been discussed by John Thompson as an 'implied co-presence' in which a "non-reciprocal relation of intimacy" (1995: 222) exists between a viewer and media producer. Often in these circumstances, there is a suggestion that the viewer is intimately involved in the live television moment but, in reality, is merely operating within the defined parameters of a pre-planned strategy. Whilst the overall parameters of this trailer exhibition strategy (of having one trailer play after another in consecutive ad-breaks) were evidently defined by TCF/Channel 4 likely many months in advance, the way in which the strategy was executed, and the decision about the actual content of the second ad-break (the sixty-second spot), was left to the viewers. The *Dawn* exhibition strategy illustrates a fine balancing act between what Getz and Page (2016: 284–85) have discussed as the constraint and liberation of the viewer. Whilst the strategy afforded a degree of liberation on the one hand through enabling viewers to determine on-screen content, complete liberation was taken with the other in that this participation

was required to take place within defined parameters determined by the industry players.

Nevertheless, observed here is how the practice of second-screening served in harnessing viewer attention during the ad-break's in-between moment. Through its strategic use of second-screening, specifically the use of Twitter, the *Dawn* takeover sought to mobilise the real-time responsiveness of Twitter's hashtags not only as a way of encouraging participation, but also as a means by which to ensure viewer attention stayed on the television screen.

The first part of this chapter has examined the way in which viewer behaviour in the multi-screen living room was guided and harnessed during the televised exhibition of trailers for *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*. It first contextualised this exhibition strategy as an exemplar of the ad-break takeover, where the broadcast television ad-break is constructed as an appointment-to-view destination. It then went on to examine how the ad-break takeover for *Dawn* sought to mobilise the liveness of Twitter participation to drive the televised exhibition of its film trailers. It examined this integration between real-time social media participation and televised content in relation to broader debates around the procrastination economy of the 'connected' living room and, within that, the phenomenon of social TV and the practice of second-screening. Whilst it has been argued that terms such as 'second-screen' impose a hierarchy in which digital technologies are 'second' to the television set (Evans et al. 2017: 192), the *Dawn* takeover suggests that to be precisely, and intentionally, the case. Through the ways in which viewer attention was guided and harnessed during this in-between moment, the first part of this chapter has outlined how secondary devices and the services accessible through

them played an integral role in underpinning the strategy whilst ultimately serving to elevate the television and its ad-break as the primary point of viewer attention. It demonstrates a strategy which attempts to manage a fragmented audience within the multi-screen living room by returning them to the scheduling rhythm defined by the liveness of television's linear programming.

Much like *Dawn*, its sequel, *War for the Planet of the Apes*, also sought to mobilise live viewer participation to (re-)direct attention back to the television. Yet, as the following part will explore, it approached the multi-screen living room in a very different way.

***War* for the Single-Screen**

Three years after the ad-break takeover for *Dawn*, TCF executed a similar strategy, this time for the televised exhibition of trailers for *Dawn*'s sequel, *War for the Planet of the Apes* (*War*). The strategic premise in the case of *War* was the same as with *Dawn*: guide and harness viewer attention towards the television screen by encouraging viewers to choose which story (humans' or apes') they wanted to see during the live broadcast television ad-break. Whilst the premise was the same, the execution was different. The first major change came in the form of rival British commercial broadcaster, ITV, joining the collaborative pairing of TCF and Channel 4. The second major change centred on the way in which viewers were asked to participate. Two exclusive and tailored three-minute trailers had been created for *War*, one from the humans' perspective and one from the apes'. Each broadcaster carried one of these trailers, with ITV carrying the former and Channel 4 the latter. Rather than taking up a mobile device and using Twitter to

vote for which trailer they wanted to see, viewers were instead encouraged to switch to the channel carrying their desired trailer.

At just before 9pm on Saturday 8th July 2017, a twenty-second spot aired simultaneously prior broadcasts of *Skyfall* (2012) on ITV and *Bridesmaids* (2011) on Channel 4. The spot previewed footage from *War*, with intertitles setting up the humans versus apes rivalry interspersing this footage (Figs. 4.10–4.11). The spot closed with a call-to-attention, delivered through both visual directions (Fig. 4.12) and voiceover: “War for the Planet of the Apes – whose side of the story do you want to hear? Tune in to [ITV/Channel 4] Saturday from 9.15pm to find out more.”



Figs. 4.10–4.12 Intertitles from *War*’s call-to-attention spot: **Figs. 4.10–4.11** (left/centre) Setting up the humans versus apes rivalry; **Fig. 4.12** (right) The visual call-to-attention (Channel 4 variation).

At 9.15pm, broadcasts on both channels simultaneously went to their first ad-break. On both channels, at the same time, a fourteen-second call-to-action spot previewed the tailored trailers. In split screen, the spot switched rapidly between contrasting themed footage depicting the ‘two sides’ (Figs. 4.13 & 4.15) and shared, screen-spanning establishing shots (Fig. 4.14). On top of this visual montage, the voiceover announcer returned with a call-to-action:

In every war there are two sides. Whose side do you want to hear? Stay tuned for the apes' story on Channel 4 or witness the human story on ITV now.⁹²



Figs. 4.13–4.15 Visual montage from *War's* call-to-action spot: **Fig. 4.13 (left)** Humans versus apes footage; **Fig. 4.14 (centre)** Screen-spanning establishing shots; **Fig. 4.15 (right)** Humans versus apes footage.

Inherent to the liveness and real-time ‘flow’ of television, viewers had to decide there and then which trailer they wanted to watch, and navigate accordingly to their desired channel. As the paratextual commentary surrounding the live moment highlighted, this represented the first time that the commercial broadcasters had intentionally “direct[ed] viewers to the other channel” (Deighton 2017). Indeed, Craig Stead (Strategy Director at creative agency Mindshare) noted how they were “delighted that Channel 4 and ITV bought into the idea because both are fantastic mass-reach platforms and will generate a real buzz” (in Tan 2017).

As with the exhibition strategy for *Dawn*, the underlying intention was to foreground the content on the television screen. The calls to attention and action described above all served in directing viewer attention to the television screen and its advertising break. Paul Dunn-Baker (ITV’s Sales Manager) emphasised how the dual-channel exhibition of *War's* trailers was “a great example of how powerful and creative TV advertising can be” (in Linden 2017). Unlike *Dawn*,

⁹² The corresponding voiceover on ITV rearranged the wording of the second sentence: “Stay tuned for the humans’ story on ITV or witness the apes’ story on Channel 4 now.”

however, this trailer exhibition strategy was not designated as a takeover event (other paid advertisements were aired alongside the trailers). Nevertheless, it did share the qualities of a takeover: both trailers took up the majority of their respective ad-breaks and both were constructed as appointment-to-view events. In considering the live moment's constellatory space of participation, examining the role that Twitter served in scheduling these events reveals the changing way in which TCF, Channel 4, and ITV approached the multi-screen living room for the televised exhibition of *War's* trailers.

'Tune-in to Choose Your Side'

As detailed in the previous part to this chapter, the trailer exhibition strategy for *Dawn* used a number of hashtags, both to facilitate the participatory element of the strategy (#HumanStory/#ApesStory) and to more broadly provide a unifying marker (#DawnofApes) around which Twitter discussion about the trailers and film in general could amass. These markers were included within the trailers themselves – a standard industry practice which now sees audio-visual promotional content routinely laden with socio-digital tags intent on driving online discussion and buzz. However, no such markers were used within the televised trailers for *War*. Neither were they used within online audio-visual clips used to promote the dual-channel strategy. Where they were used was in the text of posts posted by the official @ApesMoviesUK and @Channel4 Twitter handles in the period leading up to the trailers' televised exhibition. The hashtag #WarForThePlanet was used in the text of Twitter posts promoting the Saturday-evening event (Fig. 4.16). However, use of this hashtag was inconsistent. Use of a conflicting hashtag, #WarForThePlanetOfTheApes, both by Twitter users and by

the @ApesMoviesUK handle itself, during and after the trailers' live moment of exhibition complicated the notion of the hashtag as a central unifying marker (Fig. 4.17).⁹³ It not only impacted the ability for viewers/users to congregate around a central point of discussion, but also arguably impacted the ability for the stakeholders to gauge the quality of viewer engagement in the campaign.⁹⁴ The purpose in highlighting this inconsistency is not to make an evaluation as to the success or failure of the campaign. Rather, highlighting this inconsistent use of hashtags reveals a key difference in the way *War's* campaign sought to guide audience behaviour, and thus is revealing for the way in which the audience was configured during this live moment.



Figs. 4.16–4.17 Inconsistent hashtag use on Twitter during *War's* strategy: **Fig. 4.16** (left) Use of #WarForThePlanet by stakeholders and public Twitter accounts before and during the live moment; **Fig. 4.17** (right) The simultaneous use of #WarForThePlanetOfTheApes.

⁹³ Highfield et al. have observed how “rival hashtags may exist for major events” (2013: 317).

⁹⁴ Jenkins has highlighted how broadcasters and advertisers alike have recognised the importance of focusing “more on the quality of audience engagement [than] on the quantity of viewers” (2006: 63).

Examining these Twitter posts also reveals the capacity in which Twitter was part of the live moment's participatory space. In seventeen-second clips, lead actor Andy Serkis informed Twitter users in direct address to tune in to either ITV or Channel 4 (Fig. 4.18). Twitter, despite its affordance for live responsiveness of the kind utilised in the strategy for *Dawn*, was only used by *War* as an appointment-making tool, playing no role in the live moment of the Channel 4/ITV televised strategy. This is revealing as to the way the industrial stakeholders approached the multi-screen living room. It reveals a change in approach to how and where viewer attention was directed, and in what capacity. It signifies a rebuttal of the concept of social TV and the practice of second-screening; the core to both being the "communication and social interaction [facilitated by and on] mobile devices while simultaneously watching a show on the main [television] screen" (Miller 2014: 370). In this instance, the threat of second-screen usage was not repurposed into a core element of the promotional strategy. Instead, it was used solely in advance as an appointment-making tool and seemingly ignored completely during the trailers' live moment. The trailer exhibition strategy for *War* illustrates a concerted move away from second-screen participation to a form of live viewer participation more akin to what has been variably described as 'one/single-screen interactive TV (iTV)'.



Fig. 4.18 *War's* appointment-making use of Twitter (screengrabs taken on mobile device).

From Second-Screen to Single-Screen

In her examination of digital storytelling and interactive entertainment practices, Carolyn Handler Miller (2014, 2020) has described single-screen iTV as a form of “interactive programming [that] is furnished via a digital set top box provided by a satellite or cable company and is viewed on one’s television set” (2020: 734). The interactive element takes place live and wholly on the television screen itself, with potential uses ranging from casting votes in game or reality shows, to taking polls or quizzes (Iuppa & Borst 2007: 178; Ross 2008: 225). Miller traces a historical trajectory to single-screen iTV whilst simultaneously highlighting the difficulties that have prevented it from becoming an established form of live television-based interactivity.⁹⁵ She points to limited functionality and infrastructure, as well as a lack of “financial incentives [...] among cable and satellite services, broadcasters, or advertisers” (2014: 373), as being stumbling

⁹⁵ Miller points to an “upsurge of iTV experimentation in the 1990s with Time Warner’s Full Service Network and other cable companies, who were trying to deliver interactive apps through enhanced set-top boxes” (2014: 370).

blocks in its development. Indeed, throughout her chapter dedicated to interactive television, single-screen iTV is overwhelmingly portrayed as a ‘failed’ and ‘largely outdated’ technology.

Yet, in the most recent edition of her study, she makes reference to recent developments which have revitalised interest in single-screen iTV – focusing on SVoD provider Netflix and its investments in interactive content. The most high-profile of these was Charlie Brooker’s *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch* (2018), part of the *Black Mirror* (2011—) anthology series, in which viewers could determine their own path through the feature-length episode by choosing between two storyline options at certain points (Fig. 4.19). Indeed, Iuppa and Borst have pointed to a core element of single-screening being to facilitate viewers in “determining branching story direction” (2007: 178). With this in mind, the trailer exhibition strategy for *War* demonstrates the hallmarks of single-screening. Much like *Bandersnatch*, the potential for viewers to choose between two branching storylines was manifested in the choice between seeing a full-length trailer depicting the human story or one depicting that of the apes. Similarly, like *Bandersnatch*, the interactive element of *War*’s strategy occurred wholly on the single television screen, setting it apart from second-screening’s function of undertaking this interactivity on a separate device such as a smartphone or tablet. Furthermore, whilst Iuppa and Borst have suggested that interactive content might appear “as a separate window on the screen” (ibid.), *War*’s exhibition strategy reconfigured this to have the live participation appear on separate broadcast channels on the same screen. As such, the trailer exhibition strategy for *War* is representative of a shift away from the second-screening of *Dawn* and towards a single-screen for viewer participation. In the context of the

procrastination economy of the living room, it reveals a change in how the audience was configured and how their attention during the in-between moments of the ad-break was guided and harnessed.⁹⁶ Rather than encouraging participation on a connected smartphone or tablet, then, it was instead located on the television screen itself and facilitated by another device in the living room: the remote control.

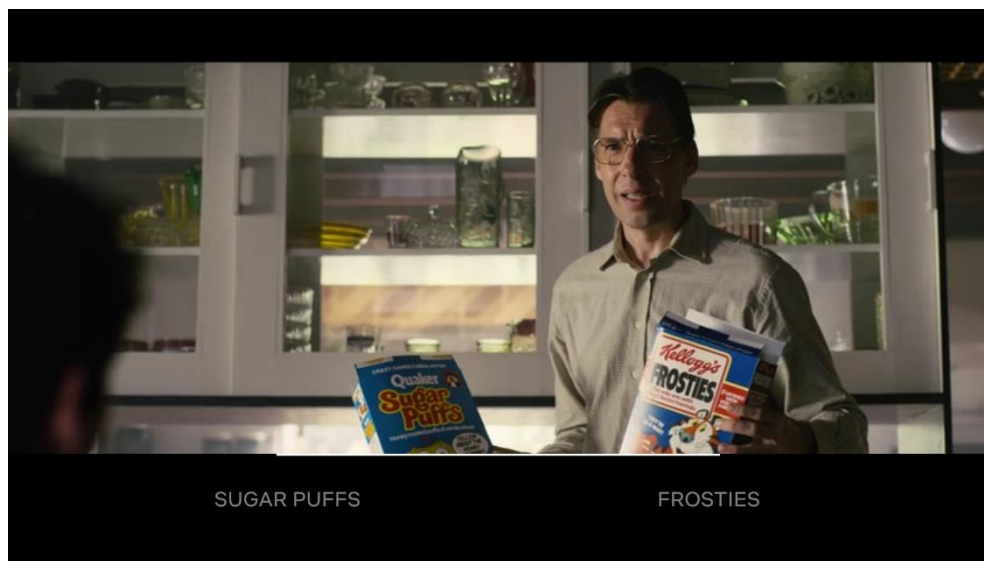


Fig. 4.19 Single-screen interactivity during *Black Mirror: Bandersnatch*. This simple choice between cereals was the first branching moment in the film and provided a way for viewers to get accustomed to the interactivity element.

Harnessing the Remote Control

Contrary to her dejected perspective on single-screen iTV described above, Carolyn Miller – in the most recent, 2020 edition of her interactive entertainment book – speaks with much enthusiasm about Netflix’s experimentations with single-screen iTV:

⁹⁶ Indeed, it is pertinent that *War’s* strategy occurred in the year that a report from the UK’s TV Licensing authority (2017: 9) observed that only 21% of young people would be comfortable watching content which allowed or encouraged them to provide direct audience feedback in the form of mobile and/or web voting.

We are now at an exciting new point in iTV. Thanks to Netflix, we have true single screen TV, where all the interactivity is offered on the TV screen, and you control the interactivity with the remote control.

(2020: 498)

At the heart of these ‘exciting’ new developments is an ability to control interactive content on the television screen with the remote control. The ability to control televised content with the remote is no new phenomenon. It has been widely observed how the remote has expanded viewers’ power, choice, and control over television content since the 1980s.⁹⁷ Indeed, in his examination of television technologies, Julian Thomas has asserted that the remote control “has an important place in the continuing attempts of [viewers] to organise and control television” (2011: 53). Yet, the inability of the remote control to afford real-time participation with broadcast television content has represented one of the biggest obstacles in the development of single-screen iTV (Miller 2020: 261). With the interactivity of Netflix’s relatively straightforward interface came the ability to interact with content such as *Bandersnatch* using buttons ubiquitous to most remote controls (namely the directional keys and central ‘confirm’ button). This remains a hurdle for live broadcast television, which lacks the interactive interface inherent to online-based services like Netflix. The dual-channel exhibition strategy for *War* represents one of the ways in which broadcasters (and advertisers) might navigate this obstacle. With the absence of an interactive interface, *War* exploited the reach of multiple television channels and harnessed the functions of the television remote to afford viewers the ability to participate, in real-time, with broadcast television content, all on a single-screen. In the same

⁹⁷ See, for example, Medoff & Kaye (2013: 97), Seiter et al. (2013: 2), and Lotz (2014: 25).

way that internet-connected devices were made a central component of *Dawn's* trailer exhibition strategy, it was the remote control in the case of *War's* that facilitated the television-based participation.

In doing so, the remote control – as a participatory device – played a central role in guiding viewers' attention during the in-between moments of the television ad-break.⁹⁸ Whilst Amanda Lotz has argued that the remote has expanded viewers' control, she has also argued that this same “increased consumer control [has] also facilitated viewers' break from the network-era television experience” (2014: 26). Julian Thomas argues a similar point by suggesting that the remote control has contributed to the “divergence of television from broadcasting” (2011: 71–72). The harnessing of the remote control during the televised exhibition of *War's* trailers argues to the contrary. The role it played in facilitating single-screen participation means that the remote control in this instance was central in returning viewers' attention to the programming flow of broadcast television and its advertising breaks.

The second part of this chapter has examined the changes in the way viewers' behaviour and attention was guided and harnessed for the televised exhibition of trailers for *War for the Planet of the Apes*. It first outlined the appointment-making role that Twitter played, revealing how the second-screen, Twitter-based participation employed three years earlier for *Dawn* had been completely disregarded. It highlighted how the strategy for *War* instead encouraged viewers

⁹⁸ Indeed, Thomas has argued for the remote control to be “[c]onsidered not as an attachment to another machine but as a machine in itself” (2011: 54), sitting in opposition to Catherine Johnson (2019: 9), for example, who regards the remote control as an ‘add-on device’ that emerged with the expansion of channels in the cable/satellite era.

to choose which storyline they wanted to see by navigating to either ITV or Channel 4, having the effect of centring the participatory element of the strategy on the television itself. It went on to contextualise this shift in relation to single-screen interactive television, arguing that the strategy for *War* demonstrated similarities in the way it facilitated viewer choice between branching storylines and in the way it presented these on-screen. Focusing then on how this participation was facilitated by the remote control, the final section of this part argued for the remote as a core device, both within this strategy and the living room more broadly. It closed by arguing that the remote control was fundamental in directing viewer attention back to the television for this single-screen strategy.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how liveness was mobilised in the form of live viewer participation for the televised exhibition of trailers. The first part examined this in relation to the multi-screen exhibition strategy for *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* on Channel 4. Interrogating its constellation of liveness revealed how real-time social media participation on secondary mobile screens was integrated with televised content as a way of harnessing the second-screen tendencies of an increasingly fragmented television audience. Internet-connected mobile devices, and the services available on them, served in (re-)directing viewer attention to the television screen during the eventised ‘ad-break takeover’. The second part of this chapter examined a change in the way live viewer participation was encouraged for the exhibition of trailers for *War for the Planet of the Apes*. Examining the live moment’s constellatory domains revealed a rejection of the second-screen activity used three years earlier. Instead, Twentieth Century Fox, Channel 4, and ITV

foregrounded a form of single-screen participation, which sought to combine the reach of television with the participatory elements of second-screening without the need to harness, or even recognise, these other screens.

These case studies mobilised the liveness of real-time viewer participation as a way of guiding viewer attention back to the television ad-break. They did this by targeting these in-between moments, harnessing and re-focusing the wandering attention of viewers in the multi-device living room by constructing the television ad-break as a participatory takeover event. The televised exhibition of these trailers was thus positioned as an eventised, appointment-to-view live moment in its own right, within the daily flow of television's schedule. Particularly illustrative in these two case studies are the varying ways, even in the context of the same film franchise, in how the multi-device living room was approached. The shift from second-screening to single-screening suggests a continued experimentation with the television ad-break in lieu of any established procedure or practice as to how the film and television industries can most effectively navigate the increasingly complex living room, and engage an increasingly fragmented television audience.

Overall, Part Two of this thesis has charted the ways in which liveness has been mobilised during the exhibition of film trailers on broadcast television. It has outlined the different ways in which television's propensity for liveness has been harnessed to experiment with the form of the trailer and live participation in trailer exhibition strategies, and how the ad-break itself has been constructed as an eventised, television appointment in its own right. It has argued that liveness has been mobilised in these ways in response a new screen ecology where long-

standing industrial practices are being questioned and the traditional television ad-break has come increasingly under threat. This focus on the televised exhibition of film trailers has revealed how cinema's relationship with liveness extends beyond the exhibition of film, transcending the silver screen onto its smaller-screen cousin and manifesting itself in the promotional practices for feature films.

The next part of this thesis shifts its focus to another arena beyond the cinema in which cinema's relationship with liveness is unfolding. Part Three examines the ways in which liveness has been mobilised for the exhibition of trailers online.

PART THREE
‘JOIN US’: LIVE TRAILER EXHIBITION ONLINE

5 Live-Streaming of Convention Trailers

Join us, in a convention hall far, far away....

Every trailer shown at Comic Con will leak. Bank on it. Fans are too hungry for this content, and the best thing you can do is to make sure you control the message, and that includes the tone in which all this happens.

(Kuchera 2015)

On Saturday 11th July 2015, Warner Bros. used their 'Hall H panel' at San Diego's 'Comic-Con International' (SDCC) to preview a first-look trailer for their DC Comics anti-hero movie, *Suicide Squad* (2016). Shortly after director David Ayer had shown the trailer to the fans gathered in Hall H, a shaky, blurred, low-quality version of it had appeared online. Warner Bros., not ready to release the trailer beyond the convention hall, moved quickly to limit its online spread. In a statement, Sue Kroll (Warner Bros.' then-President of Worldwide Marketing and International Distribution), re-affirmed the studio's stance that the trailer was exclusively reserved for those physically present in Hall H:

We have no plans currently to release the *Suicide Squad* footage that leaked from Hall H on Saturday. It's unfortunate and ultimately damaging that one individual broke a long-standing trust we have enjoyed with our fans at the convention by posting early material, which, at this point, was not intended for a wider audience. We are still in production on *Suicide Squad*, and will have a big campaign launch in the future. Our presentation yesterday was designed to be experienced in that room, on those big screens!

(in Fleming Jr 2015)

After concerted efforts to take down pirated versions of the footage, and going as far as to limit the ad-revenue on YouTube accounts discussing the trailer (Thier 2015), Warner Bros. relented. Two days later, on Monday 13th July, the studio officially released the SDCC footage in high-definition across its online media platforms. In a second statement, Sue Kroll conceded:

Warner Bros. Pictures and our anti-piracy team have worked tirelessly over the last 48 hours to contain the *Suicide Squad* footage that was pirated from Hall H on Saturday [...]. We have been unable to achieve that goal. Today we will release the same footage that has been illegally circulating on the web, in the form it was created and high quality with which it was intended to be enjoyed. We regret this decision as it was our intention to keep the footage as a unique experience for the Comic Con crowd, but we cannot continue to allow the film to be represented by the poor quality of the pirated footage stolen from our presentation.

(in Goldberg 2015)

Conventions can be an important component of promotional campaigns for films. As Robert Marich has suggested, the exhibition of promotional content such as trailers at major events like SDCC has the potential to generate significant amounts of coverage, enthusiasm, and interest around a property (2013: 229). As an element of a pre-planned promotional campaign, the exclusive exhibition of a trailer at a fan convention can often precede the trailer's wider online release by a number of days; that is to say, fans not at the convention can often be made to wait before seeing it. The leaking of promotional content from such conventions thus represents a problem for the promotional film industry. Whilst some have suggested that Warner Bros.' statements demonstrate a complete misunderstanding of the "reality of social media, the Internet, and the fundamental

realities of the entertainment industry” (Thier 2015), the statements do serve as a vivid reflection of a film industry which is constantly attempting to navigate the challenges posed by emergent means of content distribution and exhibition. As Ben Kuchera’s epigraph captures, the leaking of promotional content from entertainment conventions is not uncommon. Indeed, in contrast to how Warner Bros. handled the *Suicide Squad* situation, Kuchera’s words suggest that one way in which to navigate these challenges is to pro-actively incorporate them into the promotional strategy itself. This begs the question: how has the US film industry attempted to do this?

The case of the leaked *Suicide Squad* trailer provides a useful starting point for Part Three of this thesis for the way it illustrates some of the issues facing the US film industry in the emergent platform society. As was noted in the Introduction, van Dijck et al. (2018: 2) have argued that a core group of infrastructural platforms are reconfiguring the practices of legacy institutions and companies. These platforms, through their black-boxed algorithms, are increasingly determining the way in which content, content producers, and audiences/users operate within and across this changing media ecosystem.⁹⁹ Concerns arise in this to do with both the control of content by “online gatekeepers” (ibid.: 13), and the movement and visibility of content within a “media-rich ecosystem” (boyd, in Jenkins et al. 2016: 98) saturated in immeasurable calls for attention. The *Suicide Squad* leak offers an acute demonstration of how these platforms are impacting the US film industry and its promotional practices. It is illustrative of how the industry must

⁹⁹ The term ‘black box’ denotes a “system whose workings are mysterious; we can observe its inputs and outputs, but we cannot tell how one becomes the other” (Pasquale 2015: 3).

increasingly navigate the affordances of online platforms over whose workings they have little control or understanding, but which have become increasingly important in the lifecycle of promotional film materials. As the following two chapters reveal, liveness emerges as one strategy with which the US film industry is attempting to assert control over the online exhibition of its trailers. Simultaneously to this, liveness comes forth as a promotional strategy through which trailers and their online exhibition are being made to stand out in a media ecosystem in which “content online has to work far harder to find an audience” (Grainge & Johnson 2015: 163). Building on van Dijck et al.’s observations about the algorithmically-driven platform society, Chapter 6 examines how Facebook’s live-streaming tool, Facebook Live, has been used for online trailer exhibition as a way of strategically positioning the trailer within the algorithmically-determined News Feed.

First, this chapter builds on the introductory example of *Suicide Squad* to examine the exhibition of trailers at fan conventions, focusing specifically on two iterations of Star Wars Celebration (SWC) (a bi-annual *Star Wars* fan event co-produced by Lucasfilm and event-production company, ReedPOP). It charts the ways in which trailers being debuted at these conventions were, for the first time, live-streamed online via YouTube’s live-streaming tool, YouTube Live. These instances represented the first time that this had been done with trailers at SWC, and generally goes against standard industry practice when it comes to releasing new trailers at fan conventions. The above case of *Suicide Squad* is testament to this. Drawing on concerns around film piracy (Ponte 2008; Lobato & Thomas 2015) and the leaking of promotional content (Davis et al. 2015; Hanna 2019), this chapter argues that the mobilisation of liveness, in the form of live-streaming the

moments of trailer exhibition, served as a response to the increasing influence of the platform society, and as a mechanism with which Lucasfilm sought to exert control over the exhibition and circulation of its trailers.

The first part of this chapter examines the live exhibition of the teaser trailer for *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017) at Star Wars Celebration Orlando (SWCO) in 2017. SWCO represented the first time that the debut of a major trailer at the convention was included in the online live-streamed footage of the event. Drawing on broader debates to do with subcultural capital (Thornton 1995; Gelder 2007; Hills 2010) and fan(dom) culture (MacDonald 1998; Duffett 2013; Graves 2014), the first part of this chapter goes on to trace how the convention's bid to respond to the threats posed by the platform society resulted in the configuration and construction of two distinct and hierarchised audiences: those at the convention who appeared more 'involved' and important, and those watching online who were constructed to feel 'part of', but were ultimately detached from, the event.

The second part of the chapter examines the same kind of live online trailer exhibition, this time for *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019) at 2019's Star Wars Celebration Chicago (SWCC). Drawing further on the abovementioned debates, the second part of this chapter traces a shift in the way the audience was configured. Where SWCO firmly established two separate(d) audiences, some aspects of SWCC's strategy worked to break down these boundaries whilst at the same time emphasising the difference in technical quality between official and unofficial versions of the trailer.

In response to the overarching research questions of this thesis, the chapter examines how liveness has been mobilised by interrogating the

constellation of liveness underpinning each of these moments of live-streamed trailer exhibition. In each case, it jointly considers the trailer and its moment of exhibition (as part of the wider live moment of its encompassing SWC panel), the surrounding paratexts (such as studio statements and trade press commentary), the space of participation (comprised of the convention halls in Orlando and Chicago, YouTube Live's interface, and tertiary social media platforms), and the configuration of the audience (through the technological construction and presentation of this space coupled with the way cast, creatives, and fans operated within it).

Exploring these moments of live online trailer exhibition through their respective constellations of liveness reveals why liveness was mobilised in this way. At a micro-level, it argues that liveness represents a mechanism with which studios can mitigate against the risks that illegally-uploaded content can pose to their promotional strategies. Building on Kuchera's opening words, it argues that liveness can become a way with which studios can control the method, message, and tone with which trailers are exhibited within the context of fan conventions. As a consequence of this, it also argues that these strategies have a subsequent impact on the way in which audiences of fan conventions are configured. At a macro-level, it argues that these mobilisations are part of a broader response to the emergent platform society in which online platforms are threatening the longstanding practices of the US film industry.

SWCO: *The Last Jedi*

In the year that marked the 40th Anniversary of the release of *Star Wars* (1977), fans from around the world were able to enjoy Star Wars Celebration Orlando

2017, in real time, without needing to leave the comfort of their home. Delivering “30-plus hours of live streamed content” (Star Wars 2017), SWCO continued the precedent set two years earlier at Star Wars Celebration Anaheim (SWCA) in offering live online access to those unable to attend the event.

The 2015 iteration of SWC in Anaheim represented the first time that the fan convention was live-streamed online to the property’s “worldwide community of fans” (Star Wars 2015). It was done so using YouTube’s live-streaming tool, YouTube Live.¹⁰⁰ The decision to use YouTube Live is important for how it had the potential to elevate these live-streams (and, in turn, their trailers) to stand out. It has been recognised how YouTube Live affords “a way to stand out from the crowd” (Sehl 2020). Indeed, in being a Google-owned company, YouTube Live videos also “tend to rank relatively high [...] in search results” (Wilbert 2020).¹⁰¹ Illustrative in this is an awareness as to the algorithmically-driven nature of the platform society and, in particular, the way in which core platforms’ increasingly-ubiquitous tools (such as Google’s search-ranking algorithm) are controlling the visibility of content online. Lucasfilm’s decision to use YouTube Live to live-stream SWCA can be seen as an attempt to navigate these concerns and eventise its live-streams within a saturated online media ecosystem.

At the time, multiple trade commentators appeared to confirm that, as part of this new means of online access, the live stream of the panel for J.J. Abrams’ long-awaited *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) would not cut out when the expected new trailer for the film was to be shown (Lussier 2015; McCarthy 2015).

¹⁰⁰ YouTube Live was rolled out in a phased approach, starting in April 2011 to select commercial partners (Siegel & Hamilton 2011) and ending in December 2013 with its rollout to all users (Salgar 2013).

¹⁰¹ This sets it apart from other, non-Google-owned, live-streaming services such as Facebook Live, which do not show in search results (Wilbert 2020).

Yet, when it came to the actual live-streaming of *The Force Awakens* panel, the online stream did cut: from a shot of the cast/creatives leaving the stage to a placeholder image thanking online viewers for watching. This resulted in online viewers of the live-stream being unable to watch the exhibition of the new trailer in real-time.¹⁰² With this in mind, when SWC announced in 2017 that SWCO too would be live-streamed (Star Wars 2017), it was expected that the anticipated trailer for *The Last Jedi* would again be exclusively reserved for those gathered in the convention hall in Orlando: “If the trailer for *The Last Jedi* does drop this weekend – and there’s no reason it shouldn’t – we may not actually see it on stream” (Alexander 2017). However, this was not the case, and SWCO became the first SWC convention where the debut of a new film trailer was included as part of the live online stream of the event. These shifts in strategies by Lucasfilm across SWCA and SWCO are significant when viewed in relation to broader concerns around content piracy and gatekeeping.

Plugging the Leaks

In their study into the informal media economy, Ramon Lobato and Julian Thomas describe the media industries’ ‘war on digital piracy’ as “the most spectacular, and arguably the most ill-fated, private media regulation effort in recent memory” (2015: 261). Indeed, years earlier, in her examination of the challenges facing the US film industry in tackling film piracy, Lucille Ponte foregrounded an argument which positioned film piracy as a ‘competitor’ rather than an adversary. Piracy, she suggested, serves “customer interests in ways [such as price and availability] that the industry has long ignored” (2008: 58). Referencing Haber et al.’s (2003)

¹⁰² That said, it was uploaded to *Star Wars*’ official social channels shortly afterwards.

study into Digital Rights Management (DRM), Ponte went on to argue that pirates' continued efforts to "defeat technological efforts to protect copyrighted materials suggests that the time has come to try to compete, rather than defeat, piracy's business model" (2008: 58). Trailers have lacked any great attention in this body of work around film piracy. Yet, the philosophy that Ponte foregrounds here can be traced in the decision by Lucasfilm to start live-streaming their SWCs.

Erin Hanna (2019: 114), in her examination of SDCC, has observed how antipiracy concerns are a significant cause of anxiety, both for conventions and for the studios exhibiting promotional content at them. It has been recognised how the leaking of trailers and other promotional content significantly impacts the marketing strategies for the film industry (Swafford 2014; Davis et al. 2015). Yet, in echoes to Ponte's remarks above, efforts to control these leaks continue to be overwhelmingly ineffective. Indeed, as Hanna goes on to highlight about content debuted within SDCC's Hall H: "[d]espite heavy policing in the space, pirated trailers and footage from the panels make their way online every year" (2019: 114). The paratextual commentary surrounding Lucasfilm's announcement in 2015 that it would be live-streaming the panel for *The Force Awakens* at SWCA made light of this concern:

Over lunch, Ross Miller [Managing Editor of *The Verge*] and I speculated about which citizen of the internet would leak exclusive footage from this week's Star Wars Celebration. Now we know the rebellious force will be none other than Disney itself.

(Plante 2015)

Plante's comments point to the perceived inevitability that content exclusively previewed at the convention would make it online shortly thereafter. As Brian

Swafford (2014: 83) has recognised in his ethnographic study of SDCC, conventions tread is a fine line whereby the desire to 'get the word out as quickly as possible' about new content is constantly at odds with needing to ensure the exclusivity of said content for those in attendance at the convention. What can be extrapolated from Lucasfilm's decision to live-stream SWCA is their use of live-streaming as a way of navigating an ever-demanding fan culture and, significantly, the problems posed by the platform society in how it continues to facilitate the distribution and circulation of pirated promotional content. The mobilisation of liveness in this instance served as a way with which Lucasfilm sought to exert control over its content within the platform society. As Hanna has argued: "controlling the context in which this content circulates – controlling the experience – is one way that studios exercise their power inside and outside the convention centre" (2019: 113).

Yet, their decision to withhold the *Force Awakens* trailer itself from the online audience during its live exhibition at SWCA appears to undermine their strategy. On the one hand, their decision to live-stream the convention in general represents a strategy through which it sought to compete with the threat posed by the platform society by controlling the exhibition of content at the convention and online. On the other hand, their decision to cut the live-stream prior to the exhibition of the trailer established the boundaries of this strategy; boundaries which were drawn at the trailer and at Lucasfilm's pursuit of the exclusivity that Swafford speaks of above. This inevitably resulted in the outcome they were

seemingly attempting to prevent: unofficial versions of the trailer being uploaded to YouTube.¹⁰³

Lucasfilm's decision two years later, then, to include the trailer for *The Last Jedi* within the live-stream of SWCO represents a significant shift in strategy. Hanna has argued that at stake for the industry "is not so much the circulation of exclusive footage [as] it is how their marketing strategies are implemented and who, ultimately, retains control" (ibid.: 116) over their execution. Indeed, this chapter is not proposing live-streaming as a means by which the re-distribution and circulation of illegally-uploaded trailers can be stopped altogether.¹⁰⁴ Rather, it is suggesting that, in live-streaming convention trailer launches, the promotional film industry has the potential to demonstrate and enact some form of agency as cultural gatekeeper in relation to its own content. In the case of *The Last Jedi*, and of *The Rise of Skywalker* in the next part, Lucasfilm's decision to live-stream their respective trailers online demonstrates the studio's attempt to exert greater control over their respective moments of trailer exhibition, both in the convention hall and, importantly, online.

With this in mind, trailers and their exhibition provide a new perspective on how the US film industry is attempting to control its content, particularly promotional content, in the context of fan conventions. Lucasfilm's decision to live-stream SWCA, and then to include the trailer for *The Last Jedi* in its SWCO live-stream (and that for *The Rise of Skywalker* in its SWCC live-stream), signifies a

¹⁰³ A YouTube search for 'Force Awakens trailer Star Wars Celebration' returns a multitude of results, all of blurred and shaking footage taken on portable devices in the hall. At the time of writing, the official version of the trailer, hosted on *Star Wars'* own YouTube channel, was not in the top ten results.

¹⁰⁴ Another YouTube search for 'The Last Jedi trailer Star Wars Celebration' will also return results showing that this was not the case.

shift in the way the company sought to control the exhibition and circulation of its 'exclusive' promotional footage in the face of the emergent platform society through the mobilisation of liveness. This, in turn, had consequences on the way the audience was regarded.

You Can Watch, But You Can't Comment

The live exhibition of the teaser trailer for *The Last Jedi (TLJ)* at SWCO occurred as part of an hour-long live panel for the film. In both of this chapter's case studies, the live moment at the heart of their respective constellations of liveness encompasses the overall panel, as the trailers' exhibition fell within this. It is pertinent to step back and examine the live moment underpinning the panel more broadly for how it aids in understanding the moments of trailer exhibition themselves. With this in mind, the panel for *TLJ* at SWCO saw key creatives and cast members interviewed by actor Josh Gad. Interrogating the paratexts, space of participation, and audience configuration underpinning the panel offers further context for understanding why Lucasfilm turned to liveness for the trailer's moment of exhibition. In doing so, it intersects with a number of debates around fandom, and subcultural capital.

The live stream for SWCO's *TLJ* panel was again hosted on the official *Star Wars* YouTube channel through the platform's YouTube Live feature. The same YouTube stream was embedded on a dedicated page at starwars.com. The stream opened with a branded placeholder title-card detailing the event and the time at which the stream was due to 'go live'. When the stream went live, it joined mid-way through a video of Gad (and other actors) trying to tease answers about the

film from actress Daisy Ridley.¹⁰⁵ The online audience could hear laughter from what was presumed to be the convention audience, suggesting that both audiences were watching the same content. When the video of Gad ended, the stream faded to a wide-angle shot introducing the online audience to the stage at SWCO. At this point, a number of visual features appeared in the stream's interface, helping to delineate it as 'live'. Chief among these was a 'LIVE' icon in the top right corner, a widely-used mechanism to denote the liveness of audio-visual content (Fig. 5.1). In the bottom left corner of the screen was the SWC logo, along with social media hashtags #TheLastJedi and #SWCO. Barring the moment of the trailer's actual exhibition, this spatial and technological set-up remained constant for the entirety of the stream.



Fig. 5.1 Screenshot of the YouTube Live desktop interface for the live-stream of the SWCO panel for *The Last Jedi* showing the 'LIVE' icon (top right corner).

Multiple elements made up the space of participation during these introductory minutes. First were the two online sites (YouTube Live and

¹⁰⁵ This video was taken from Gad's own social media accounts and was filmed whilst working with Ridley on *Murder on the Orient Express* (2017).

starwars.com) facilitating the live stream, then were the convention hall itself in Orlando, and the tertiary social media platforms referenced by the hashtags within the interface. This pluralised space in effect created a 'global event' out of the local (Orlando) event, a desire made explicit by *Star Wars* (2015) two years earlier in their announcement regarding the live-streaming of SWCA. In this way, the 'worldwide community' of *Star Wars* fans unable to make it to Orlando was afforded the opportunity not only to watch various elements of SWCO, but directed to the online space(s) with the potential to connect and participate with likeminded fans. Ken Gelder, in his study of virtual and media subcultures, has highlighted how, despite what we might think about going online as being a 'disembodied and detached affair', the internet actually "offers up a realm where one's yearnings for community can at least find their realisation" (2007: 147). Likewise, Jo Mackellar, in her various studies on fan behaviour, points to how online chatrooms, forums, and other sites of computer-mediated communication are fundamental components of contemporary fan culture (2009: 17–18), with convention attendance comprising just one aspect of a fan's life which "extends to being part of [...] an internet community" (2014: 53). Michael Graves has similarly addressed the use of online videos in tandem with convention panels and presentations in the context of participatory fandom. He details how:

[the] confluence of technological and industrial shifts involving [...] online video technologies [...] has created a terrain on which media producers and fans regularly evaluate the value of participatory fandom. Although engineered by new media technologies, these engagement strategies represent a culturally significant shift that simultaneously empowers fans while reinforcing producers' role as cultural gatekeepers.

(2014: 187)

This context is significant when approaching the space of participation underpinning the live stream for this SWCO panel. The usual page configuration on YouTube Live is for the video to be accompanied by a 'chat stream' to the right of the page. This is a scrolling feed of comments, contributed in real time. Yet, during the live stream of *TLJ*'s panel, the chat feature had been disabled by the page administrator (Fig. 5.2). Furthermore, the embedded YouTube stream on *starwars.com* was merely accompanied by a breakdown of the convention's schedule. The online platforms directly broadcasting the live feed thus offered no in-platform means of communication. As Mackellar highlighted above, online communities form just one component of a fan's experience, so the fact that comments were disabled is not necessarily a bad thing. However, what it does explicitly reveal is that Lucasfilm were not asking for, or encouraging, any means of participatory fandom within these spaces in particular. Whilst it has been argued that the specificities of YouTube's interface can limit interaction and creativity within the platform (Juhasz, in Stein 2015: 74), the specific act of disabling the chat stream in YouTube (and offering no similar feature on *starwars.com*) demonstrates Lucasfilm enacting their role as 'cultural gatekeeper' by dictating the spaces in which discussion about their content occurred. The hashtags (most commonly associated with platforms such as Twitter) thus served a dual purpose: not only as an anchor – a 'unifying textual marker' (Highfield et al. 2013: 316) – around which online communities could congregate, interact, and discuss (akin to their use by Channel 4 in Chapter 4), but also as strategic promotional signposts employed by Lucasfilm to direct online fans to specific tertiary spaces of participation; spaces not fundamental to the execution of this

particular live moment. With this in mind, despite the opportunities that Gelder, Mackellar, and Graves speak of above regarding online fan interaction, the two principal online sites comprising this constellation's space of participation offered little in the way of this. Rather, 'participation' on YouTube and the *Star Wars* website can be read as merely denoting the act of watching the live stream.

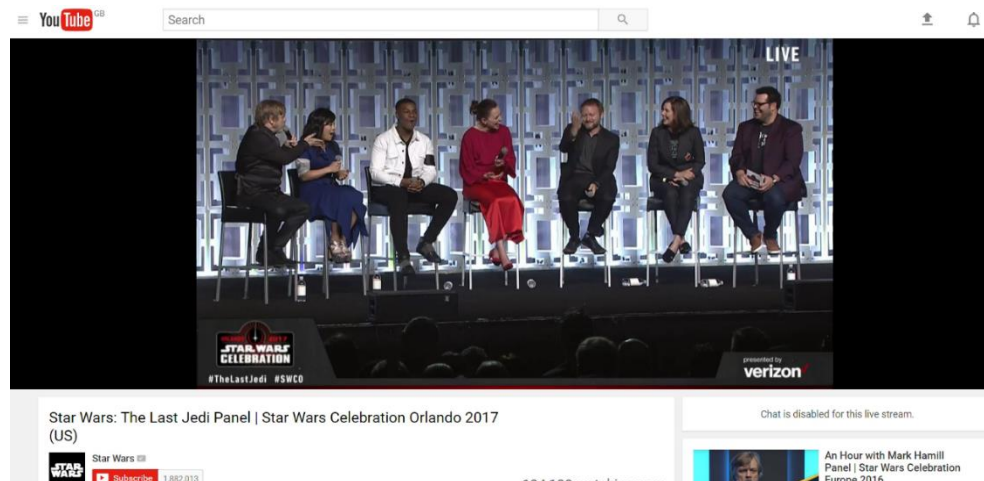


Fig. 5.2 YouTube Live desktop interface during the live-stream of the SWCO panel for *The Last Jedi*. Where the chat stream would ordinarily be (bottom right corner) is instead a box indicating that 'Chat is disabled for this live stream.'

Disabling the chat feature within YouTube Live speaks to another concern to do with the moderation of online content. Tarleton Gillespie (2018: 21), in his study of content moderation by and on social media platforms, has argued that content moderation is an essential component of what platforms do. Elsewhere, Sarah Myers West has outlined how such practices are “designed to place bounded limits on undesirable forms of expression while maximally encouraging users to produce and post content” (2018: 4367). Lucasfilm's apparent lack of encouragement for participation directly in the live-streaming interface might therefore also be grounded in a desire not to have to moderate the chat feed and remove inappropriate content. Indeed, Gillespie references Sarah Roberts' (2016)

work on content moderation in suggesting that social media channel managers “want to keep moderation opaque, hiding the process by which content which could cause brand damage is selected and removed” (2018: 124). He goes on to argue that content removal represents the “harshest” (ibid.: 176) form of moderation. There emerges a double-edged sword here: on the one hand, not wanting to risk reputational damage by facilitating inappropriate content, but on the other, not wanting to risk similar damage by censoring fan discourse. Ultimately, Lucasfilm’s decision to disable the chat stream (whether for ideological or logistical reasons) limited the extent to which online viewers could meaningfully participate in the live moment. With this in mind, understanding the affordances that convention attendees had in terms of participating and interacting with other fans, subtle differences begin to emerge between *Star Wars* fans physically present at SWCO and those watching online. This is made clearer when examining how the audience was configured through the ways in which cast and crew operated in relation to this space.

Convention Audience vs. Online Audience

Presenter Josh Gad, and the guests that he introduced, carried a significant amount of agency when it came to constructing the audience(s) during the live trailer exhibition for *TLJ* at SWCO. This was evident immediately in Gad’s introductory words: “Welcome to the thousands of *Star Wars* fans here at Celebration [...], and the millions of *Star Wars* fans watching around the world this live stream right now.” At the outset Gad constructed two distinct groups of fans: those in the conventional hall in Orlando, and those watching online. This distinction was reinforced in the way he conducted himself as host. Gad would fluidly switch

between scanning and addressing the fans in the convention hall, and looking down-camera and appearing to address the online audience directly (Fig. 5.3). Not only did this reaffirm the presence of a distinct, online audience, but his direct address at camera also served as a means by which the liveness of the stream was validated for the distanced viewers watching via the online stream.¹⁰⁶ From the outset, then, through the ways in which Gad conducted himself as host, two distinct sets of fans were constructed: those in the room and those online. Yet the level to which he, and his guests, regarded each audience differed greatly.

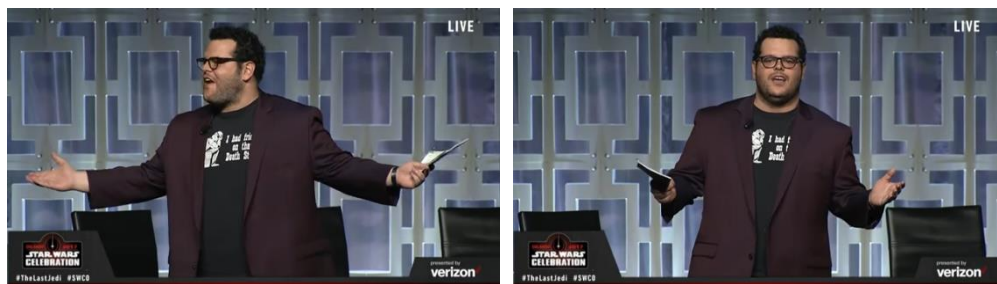


Fig. 5.3 Different modes of address used by host, Josh Gad: addressing the audience in the convention hall (left) and appearing to address the online audience in dialogue to camera (right).

Beyond Gad's introductory words, and his occasional looks to camera, very little attention appeared to be given to the online audience. Rather, in their address, attention, and consideration, the cast and creatives along with Gad prioritised almost exclusively those fans gathered in the convention hall in Orlando. This continued through the entirety of the panel. Speaking about his personal experience of watching a *Star Wars* marathon at a local cinema, Gad stated that there was “nothing like that feeling of anticipation”, continuing to say that “you can feel that anticipation right now in this room.” Barring his infrequent

¹⁰⁶ Stephanie Marriott (2007: 43), in her study of live television, has recognised that direct address, when considered alongside other visual or interfacial components (such as a ‘LIVE’ icon), is a key marker of liveness.

looks down-camera, Gad offered little in the way of recognition of the ‘other’ fans watching online.¹⁰⁷ This trend was continued by the guests that Gad invited on to stage as the panel progressed. Director Rian Johnson and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy, for example, also made few references to fans watching from afar, directing their attention and interaction almost exclusively to those in the convention hall. Kennedy, on a number of occasions, echoed Gad’s earlier observation by making reference to the ‘energy’ in the room.¹⁰⁸ Whilst two distinct audience configurations can be ascertained, they were not regarded in the same way or to the same extent.¹⁰⁹

Delving deeper into the ways in which the cast and creatives conducted themselves in relation to these audiences, a clear hierarchy emerges between these two sets of audiences and fans. In her work on computer-mediated fandom, Andrea MacDonald (1998: 136) has suggested that hierarchies can be identified in fandom. Focusing on how media, technologies, and interfaces have altered the mechanics of fandom, MacDonald delineates multiple hierarchical dimensions of fandom which can be broken down into the following: by knowledge, by level of fandom, by access, by leaders, and by venue (*ibid.*). She posits that fans “may occupy multiple positions simultaneously” (*ibid.*: 138), the combination of which has the potential to dictate a fan’s overall hierarchical positioning within a fandom.

¹⁰⁷ One of the few references Gad did make to the online audience came when trying to press Director Rian Johnson and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy for information: “It’s not about my questions any more, it’s about their questions now. You don’t owe me anything, but you might want to think twice because they seem like a very aggressive crowd, and the millions of people at home watching I’m sure would like some of these questions answered as well.”

¹⁰⁸ Kennedy did make a rare reference to the online audience in a passing comment about people watching in Ireland, where parts of the film were shot.

¹⁰⁹ This is akin to event cinema, where Martin Barker has pointed to how the cinema audience might be “observing actors performing – but never especially for [them]” (2013: 16). There is a clear distinction between the live theatre audience and the audience watching the live stream in the cinema.

Two dimensions are of particular interest here: 'Hierarchy of Fandom Level', and 'Hierarchy of Access'. The former distinguishes fans based on their level of fan-related participation, and can be exemplified by the distinction between fans "who attend conventions and other organized events versus those who do not" (ibid.: 137). The latter defines the level of 'direct access' that a fan might have to, for example, cast, creatives, and other production personnel. These map pertinently onto the live-streaming of SWCO's *The Last Jedi* panel, where fans in the convention hall in Orlando could be perceived as having greater levels of both fandom and access compared to those watching the stream online. In turn, it can be argued that fans physically present at the SWCO panel for *The Last Jedi* therefore had an elevated hierarchical positioning. This notion is supported by the differing ways in which the convention and online audiences were regarded and communicated with by cast and creatives during the live panel; actions which intersect with a number of other discussions in fan-related academic study, most notably around the 'value' of convention attendance and subcultural capital.¹¹⁰

Gad's introductory words, again, provide a useful demonstration here: "I'm so excited. And I got to be honest, if weren't up here, I would be down there with you guys – that's how much of a *Star Wars* aficionado I am." Significant about this statement was, firstly, that Gad gestured at and addressed the audience in the convention hall on the words 'with you guys'. With this in mind, his second suggestion that to be a *Star Wars* 'aficionado' meant being there and physically present at SWCO further contributed to the hierarchical divide being constructed between online and convention audiences.

¹¹⁰ The notion of 'subcultural capital' stems from Sarah Thornton's use of it in her study of club cultures, in which she defines it as a 'status' which is conferred "on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder" (1995: 11).

The notion of ‘being there’ intersects with discussions, particularly in fan studies literature, which foreground the physical attendance at conventions as being a key part of fandom. Referencing Obst et al.’s (2002) study into the psychological sense of community (PSOC) within sci-fi fandom, Jo Mackellar has discussed how fans’ PSOC can be ‘enhanced’ by attending sci-fi conventions which afford a “rare opportunity to [...] enjoy the company of like-minded strangers” (2014: 53). Similarly, for Matt Hills (writing in the context of horror genre gatherings), conventions signify “a powerful source, and display, of subcultural capital [– a concept understood as] a social status in the eyes of other fans” (2010: 87–89).¹¹¹ Extending beyond fan-related studies, Getz and Page, in their theorisation of ‘event studies’, point to how contemporary demand for all manner of conventions is not subsiding:

Clearly the rise of social media has not dampened the enthusiasm for meeting face-to-face: it may have even expanded the appetite for such meetings. There really is no ‘virtual event’ that can simulate [the] symbolic interaction, socializing or having fun [that can be had at face-to-face events].

(2016: 245)

In foregrounding the convention hall as the place that he (as a *Star Wars* ‘aficionado’) would be were he not presenting, Gad (perhaps inadvertently) reaffirmed the higher hierarchical fan positioning that those gathered in the

¹¹¹ In his study, Hill proposes that “subcultural capital appears to be powerfully linked to embodiment, whether through embodied appearances or through forms of knowledge” (2010: 89). He goes on to argue that the subcultural capital inherent to convention attendance can be indebted to its ‘place-bound nature’ (a specific convention hall) “along with all the physical restrictions of ‘liveness’ connected to this” (ibid.: 99). These might include the ‘inaccessibility of materials’ (such as trailers) as well as the time-specific ‘flesh-and blood’ co-presence and ‘communitas’ that comes with being at a convention.

Orlando convention hall hold over those watching the panel online. Similarly, towards the conclusion of the panel, Gad asked Director Rian Johnson: "I would say that this crowd has been unbelievably generous and patient – so I'm going to ask, Rian, do you have anything that you brought today for the fans?" This is significant because of the way in which Gad presented the question to Johnson. On the words 'this crowd', Gad explicitly gestured to the fans in the hall, suggesting that – for Gad at least – it is the fans in the convention hall who are deserving of any new content the director might have as a 'reward'. This, again, had the effect of positioning the convention audience higher hierarchically than those watching online. As Hills has observed:

By virtue of being physically present [at a convention], fans often gain access to [...] preview trailers or exclusive 'rough cut' clips in advance [...]. Such events are, precisely, restricted by their fans' and industry professionals' spatial and temporal co-presence [and] by their 'liveness' [...].

(2010: 89/96)

By live-streaming SWCO as a strategic response to the threat of the platform society, it becomes evident that this had knock-on effects on the configuration of the audience, both online and off. The perceived exclusivity constructed in relation to the SWCO convention audience through Gad's words was affirmed when, upon revealing the first poster for *TLJ*, Kathleen Kennedy announced that everyone there would receive a physical copy of it to take home.

In interrogating the space and audiences implicated and constructed during the live moment underpinning the SWCO panel for *TLJ*, the online streaming platforms (YouTube and starwars.com) come forth as offering merely

a means of distanced access for an online audience constructed as being largely distinct and separated from the audience physically at the convention. Whilst the convention audience was imbued (by presenter, cast, creatives, and Lucasfilm) with a sense of priority, importance, and higher standing within the *Star Wars* fandom, the online audience was constructed to feel part of the SWCO event only to an extent, being spoken to and regarded at infrequent, specific moments yet kept as an intentionally separate entity. This calls into question the paratextual commentary surrounding the live panel which heralded the ability to ‘be part’ of the event (Liptak 2017; McCluskey 2017). This context is significant when considering the actual moment of trailer exhibition at the end of the panel for *TLJ*.

Interrupting the Live-Stream

As established, SWCO represented the first time a trailer release was included as part of a live-streamed panel at SWC. After revealing a first-look (for both convention and online audiences) at the new poster for *TLJ*, Rian Johnson revealed that “of course there’s a trailer!” At this point, the cast and creatives left the stage at SWCO, the convention hall lights dimmed and the online stream faded to black. The cheering of the anticipating convention audience, audible in the stream, also faded out. The overlaid graphics hitherto present in the online stream – the ‘LIVE’ icon along with the signposting hashtags – also disappeared at this point. After a few moments of black silence, the trailer started playing. However, it became clear at this point that the online audience was no longer watching a live-stream of the hall in Orlando and, thus, not watching the trailer’s exhibition on the hall’s big screen. Instead, the online audience was presented with a recorded, high-quality audio-visual rendering of the trailer without any visual or aural interference

(from, say, a cheering convention hall audience or blurred, shaky camera movement) (Fig. 5.4). In effect, the moment of the trailer's online exhibition appeared to interrupt the live-stream of the exhibition hall at SWCO.¹¹²

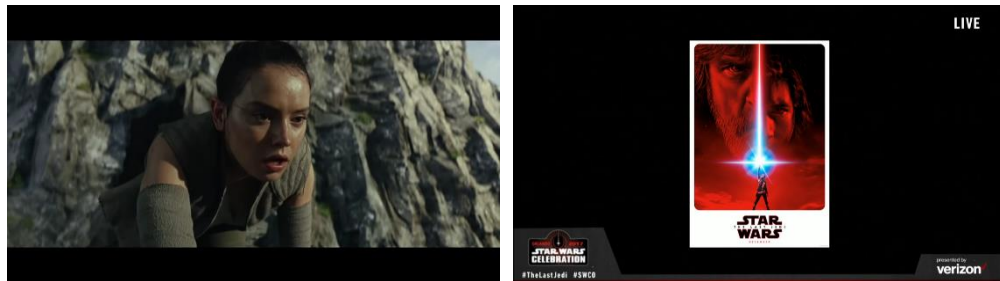


Fig. 5.4 The full-screen, high-quality online exhibition of the trailer for *The Last Jedi* at SWCO (left), where the interfacial markers had been removed. (Right) The similar presentation of the film's poster, albeit with interfacial markers in place.

On the one hand, including the trailer as part of the live-stream can be seen as Lucasfilm attempting to exert some control over the exhibition of its trailer. If one reason for leaked promotional material lies in an increased audience desire for such content (as per Ben Kuchera's epigraph), then it can be argued that including those materials as part of an online live-stream reduces the need for such leaks to occur in the first place. A question is raised as to why a fan would seek out a low-quality, illegally-uploaded version of a trailer when a high-quality, officially-released version of it was being made readily available via the company itself? And, while it doesn't rule out altogether unofficially-recorded versions finding their way online, the inclusion of a trailer within a live-stream of a convention panel does away with the perceived temporal disadvantage that online fans face; namely the often-undisclosed wait for content such as trailers to be made (officially) available at sites beyond the four walls of the convention hall.

¹¹² This was also the case for the aforementioned poster for *TLJ*, which was also shown full-screen for the online viewers (Fig. 5.4).

On the other hand, the interruptive nature of the trailer's online exhibition raises a concern as to whether the trailer's online exhibition was live at all, and whether the online audience was still 'part' of the panel for *TLJ* in this moment. In her study of live television, Stephanie Marriott offers a useful way of understanding this. In her examination of immediacy and co-presence in electronically mediated communication, Marriott argues that:

An important distinction needs to be drawn between the instantaneity of electronic communication – its ability to send information instantly so that it arrives in the same moment (more or less) as it was transmitted – and its potential for *immediacy*, for delivering an elsewhere which is unfolding in the intersubjective *now* of [one's] encounter with the world.

(2007: 36, original emphasis)

In view of this distinction, the online exhibition of the trailer for *TLJ* was live, in one respect, in that its transmission and reception occurred instantaneously in the same moment. On the other hand, the recorded nature of the footage and the interruption that it represented in the live-stream rendered the trailer not live in the sense that it did not afford an immediacy with an unfolding elsewhere (i.e. an immediacy with the trailer's exhibition *in* the convention hall in Orlando). This, in turn, suggests a shift in the way the online audience was made to feel 'part of' the *TLJ* panel at SWCA.

In his study into livecasting, Martin Barker outlines how "feeling close" (2013: 66) to the action (unfolding on a distanced stage elsewhere) is a core component of the liveness of livecasting, describing this as a sense of 'intimacy'

with the live production.¹¹³ Elsewhere, Mark Duffett has argued that “the internet has made the idea of intimacy at a distance more normal and acceptable” (2013: 237). This notion can be applied to the overall live-stream of the panel at SWCO. Whilst this chapter has argued that the online audience was regarded to a lesser extent than the audience in the convention hall, they were nevertheless part of the unfolding event as it was occurring in Orlando. The mobilisation of liveness afforded a sense of intimacy with the panel despite it being in a distanced manner. However, once the exhibition of the trailer interrupted this live-stream, the online audience was no longer immediately and intimately part of the convention event. This was reinforced again when the trailer was exhibited for a second time in the same way,¹¹⁴ and reinforces the distinction that has been observed across this part between the two audiences.

The first part of this chapter has examined the online exhibition of a teaser trailer for *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* at Star Wars Celebration Orlando. Evident in this analysis is a strategy in which Lucasfilm broke with widely-established convention protocol by opening access to its SWC panels to a worldwide online audience. It has argued that it did so in response to the threat of the platform society; as a way of regaining control over the exhibition (and subsequent online distribution) of its promotional content. In doing so, however, the liveness of this

¹¹³ This aligns with Michele White’s assertion that the real-time broadcast facilities being increasingly afforded by the internet provide “access to social events and enable entrances into places that would otherwise be unavailable” (2006: 350).

¹¹⁴ Between these exhibitions of the trailer, the online audience was returned to the live-stream of the convention hall, where Rian Johnson appeared on stage to thank the (convention) audience for being there. He finished by saying: “Right now, though, all I want to do is watch the trailer, in this room, with you guys, one more time.” This, again, helps illustrate how the interruption of the trailer’s online exhibition rendered the online audience not privy to the experience.

strategy called into question the subcultural capital often attributed to embodied convention attendance, thus calling into question the value in convention attendance. To maintain this perceived capital, the studio enacted a number of strategies which sought to establish agency with regard to the where, when, and how of discussion around, and exhibition of, the promotional content being exhibited. This agency manifested itself in the form of directing fans to specific sites of participation, as well as controlling the way in which content was technologically exhibited. The effect of this was the construction of a hierarchised audience structure, whereby the convention audience was deemed more important and 'involved' in the embodied Orlando event than the distanced online audience. Reaffirmed by the manners in which cast and creatives regarded both audiences, and the way in which the trailer was exhibited online, the strategy for the live exhibition of the trailer for *The Last Jedi* at SWCO was simultaneously expanding in its access whilst intentionally limiting in its inclusivity for online fans.

SWCC: *The Rise of Skywalker*

Two years later, at Star Wars Celebration Chicago in 2019, Lucasfilm again chose to live-stream many of the convention's panels online via YouTube Live and a dedicated page on *Star Wars*' official website. Included as part of this was the panel for the then-untitled third film in the *Star Wars* 'sequel trilogy' and, significantly for fans, the concluding part of the nine-film 'Skywalker saga'. Anticipation for details of the film was thus high, and much of the paratextual commentary surrounding the live panel was concerned with what information would be revealed:

We'll discover the film's official title, see the trailer, and probably get a bunch of new images and details as well from *Star Wars* chief Kathleen Kennedy and writer/director JJ Abrams. We don't know exactly what the *Star Wars: Episode IX* panel will include, but it's likely we'll see the trailer at the top of the hour.

(Kain 2019)

The *Rise of Skywalker* (*TROs*) panel at SWCC shared a number of similarities to that for *The Last Jedi* at SWCO. It was highly expected that the first trailer for *TROs* would be launched during the panel. Also similar were the components comprising the live moment's space of participation: the convention hall; the online YouTube Live/*Star Wars* website streams; and tertiary social media platforms. On first glance, Lucasfilm's use of these components was the same, too. For example, hashtags were again used to direct fan discussion about #EpisodeIX to specific online sites, particularly Twitter. Twitter was also used as a means by which the official @StarWars Twitter account actively and directly engaged with fans by encouraging them to 'tune in' to the live online stream. The choice of the phrase 'tune in' is revealing in how it appears to set a precedent for Lucasfilm's use of live-streaming for SWCC.

'Tune in' is traditionally associated with live broadcast television: "[t]elevision audiences tend to tune in at specific times" (McDowell & Betten 2005: 36). Even in the emergent new screen ecology, 'tuning in' has "remained part of the industrial and cultural vernacular" (Lotz 2014: 94).¹¹⁵ Yet, in this television context, Catherine Johnson references Kim and Sawhney (2002) in observing how

¹¹⁵ Indeed, YouTube creators often post tweets and comments encouraging "their community to tune in to their monetized content on YouTube channels" (Cunningham & Craig 2019: 92).

tuning in to live “[...] broadcast television has lacked interactivity, functioning primarily as a one-to-many communication technology with relatively limited feedback routes from viewer to producer” (2019: 118). Whilst the previous chapter contested this notion in the context of live viewer participation, it is nevertheless useful in the current examination for understanding Lucasfilm’s use of live-streaming. Where the previous part argued that YouTube Live merely offered a means of distanced access to the online audience of SWCO, the notion of ‘tuning in’ to SWCC suggests a similar lack of meaningful participation or interactivity for the online audience. This is reaffirmed when examining the constellatory domains of the live moment for how the space of participation was constructed and presented, and the audience configured.

You Can Watch, But You Still Can’t Comment

During the live-stream of SWCC, the chat stream within the YouTube interface was again disabled, and no similar feature was provided on the *Star Wars* webpage. This, again, hindered the extent to which the online audience could actively and meaningfully participate in, and demonstrate their fandom in relation to, the live event; spaces in which this was possible were again limited to the tertiary social media platforms signposted by the hashtags in the bottom left corner of the stream’s interface.¹¹⁶ As with its disabling during the panel for *TLJ*, the consequence of not affording online viewers the opportunity to share their thoughts directly with those in the hall was that these fans were unable to validate their subcultural capital, something which – as has been outlined – needed to be

¹¹⁶ The use of US ‘CT – Central Time’ too has a broader significance when thinking about how the live-stream sought to create a global event out of the local. Both the national and international audience are contextualised through the use of ‘CT – Central Time’ to denote the starting time of the panel.

validated in the eyes of other fans. At conventions, this can often be achieved, accrued, and exhibited through conversation with other convention attendees. This could not be the case for online fans/viewers of the live-stream. Live-streaming commonly has the potential to facilitate a two-way dialogue in which broadcasters and viewers can directly communicate, influence, and participate in live-streams (Sjöblom & Hamari 2017: 985; Hilvert-Bruce et al. 2018: 58). Live-streaming in the cases examined here would thus have offered the potential for online fans to exhibit their knowledge and capital of the *Star Wars* franchise in the eyes of convention-attending fans, and even the panellists. However, the possibility of this was negated by the disabling of chat during both SWC events, re-emphasising again the hierarchical disconnect between the two audiences.

Similarly, in the same way that the live stream for *TLJ* opened by cutting mid-way through a video of Josh Gad berating Daisy Ridley, the live-stream of the *TROSP* panel cut to the Chicago convention hall at a point where the audience there was already cheering something unheard and unseen by the online audience. Both points re-emphasise not just the clear distinction between convention and online audiences, but also the suggestion of the live stream serving merely as a means of access for online viewers: a means of access controlled by an external force beyond their control.

The actions of panel-host Stephen Colbert, like Gad before him, were similarly illuminating for the ways in which they contributed to the construction of these distinct audiences and spaces during the live event. Most prominent and influential of all was the change in position of Colbert's autocue. Where the device for Gad had been positioned at eye-line height directly front-on to him, the autocue for Colbert had been moved to a downstage position on the stage (Fig. 5.5). This

had a dramatic effect on the delivery and direction of Colbert's address. Where Gad's address when reading the autocue had been directed down-camera, resulting, as outlined earlier, in the validation of both the online audience's presence and of the broadcast's liveness, the move of Colbert's autocue resulted in his address returning 'in-house'. The consequence of this was that, for the entirety of the panel, Colbert's address and focus was solely and without exception homed on the audience in the convention hall. This trend manifested itself not only in where and to whom Colbert spoke, but also in what he said. At multiple points during the panel Colbert made explicit reference to the atmosphere in the room with comments such as: "This room is electric. It's soaked with gasoline right now." His comments during the exhibition of still images taken on the set of *TRoS* further emphasised his lack of recognition and awareness of an audience beyond the walls of the convention hall. Gesturing to and looking out at the fans gathered in the hall, he exclaimed: "I'm not sure I could enjoy this movie more than I'm enjoying watching you enjoy these photographs right now!" This was similarly mirrored in an exchange Colbert had with director J.J. Abrams. Gesturing again at the fans seated below and overlooking them in the Chicago convention hall, the exchange went as follows:

[Colbert:] Well you say they're [characters] going on this adventure together. Does that include everyone we're seeing?

[Abrams:] I will say... how dare you?

[Colbert:] I am not your agent right now; I am their agent right now. I work for them, J.J.!

As with Josh Gad during the panel for *The Last Jedi*, Stephen Colbert carried significant agency with regard to the construction of the audience and of the spaces of participation underpinning the live moment of the panel for *TROs*. However, whilst Gad recognised the presence of an audience beyond those fans gathered in the convention hall in Orlando (albeit limitedly), Colbert made no reference or gesture to such an audience; Colbert's actions and dialogue were solely reserved for, and directed at, the audience in the convention hall itself.



Fig. 5.5 Host Stephen Colbert looking at his autocue positioned downstage rather than at direct-address.

The same can be said for director J.J. Abrams and Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy, the latter heralding her return to the SWC main-hall stage with a “Hello, Chicago!” directed at the fans in the convention hall. Abrams’ opening words are also pertinent in this respect: “To come here and to have this kind of warm reception and to be physically, viscerally reminded of what it means is the most amazing and exciting shot in the arm.” His use of ‘physically’ and ‘viscerally’ acutely illustrates the difference between attending a convention such as SWC in person versus experiencing it from afar. As Philip Auslander has argued in his

study into mediated liveness, a reason why people continue to attend live events lies in the value in being able to say that “you were physically present at a particular event” (1999: 57). The emphasis that Abrams put on the importance of the physicality of the event had the potential to further distance himself (and the event) from the audience watching online from around the world. Whether intentionally or not, the walls that cast and creatives on a convention panel can put up through what they say and how they act raises a question as to where (and at whom) their address should be directed when being live-streamed online. Yet Abrams’ words do affirm one reason why conventions such as SWC continue to operate commercially and successfully. Whilst Robert Marich (2013: 229) has suggested that film promoters have become more selective in the events/conventions they promote films at (citing costs, rejection of content by fans, and the media clutter at mushrooming events such as SDCC as concerns), SWC represents the only official live convention dedicated to the *Star Wars* franchise. As such, SWC remains a core component for Lucasfilm (and for fans) when it comes to promoting the various contributions to the *Star Wars* film franchise.

Returning to how the words and actions of those on the panel for *TROs* contributed to the configuration of the audience, Kathleen Kennedy and (C-3PO actor) Anthony Daniels refer at various points to a short film which had played at the ‘front-end’ of the panel. Possibly similar to the video of Josh Gad questioning Daisy Ridley at the opening of *TLJ*/panel, this video at the top of the panel for *TROs* was not included as part of the live-stream, and thus remained unseen by the online audience (it was possibly the convention audience’s cheering and applause in response to this video that the live stream cut to when it first joined the

convention hall). Echoing Auslander's words, not only were those physically attending SWCC able to say 'we were there', but – with specific regard to this video – they were also able to say that 'we saw that'. The more prominent hierarchical positioning of the convention audience here came in the form of the cultural, social, and symbolic value associated with attendance at such events and the 'exclusivity' that it brings. Overall, the second part of this chapter has thus far outlined how, in many respects, the live-stream for SWCC mirrored that of SWCO in the way it constructed and used the space of participation, and in the way it configured the audience during its live moment: in a way that they had access to, but never fully a part of, the live event in Chicago.

That said, Anthony Daniels' first words after having been introduced by Colbert point to a divergence in this approach:

On Tweets today, people were – all over the world – saying 'wish I could be here'. And I know we're on camera so – I don't know where the camera is but – whoever is in Australia or all the other countries around the planet, I want to give you a big wave and you're here in spirit, OK?!

Daniels' explicit reference to the online audience can be viewed as an attempt by Daniels to make that audience feel more inclusive in the live event. It stands in stark contrast to the approach taken during SWCC by other cast/creatives who – through their words and actions – maintained the barrier between convention and online audience. That said, Daniels' reference emerges as just one of a number of examples during the panel for *TROs* whereby the strategy underpinning the SWCC panel sought to present a more inclusive live-stream.

‘PLEASE JOIN US at 11am CT’

At the start of the live-stream for the SWCC panel for *TROS*, the placeholder title-card called on the online audience to ‘PLEASE JOIN US at 11am CT’ (Fig. 5.6). The use of ‘join us’ is striking in how it complicates the encouragement to ‘tune in’ that was simultaneously being urged by the @StarWars Twitter account. Where this chapter has outlined how ‘tune in’ represents a ‘one-to-many’ form of communication with a lack of opportunity for interaction, ‘join us’ suggests the inverse of this. Jenkins et al. have pointed to the encouragement to ‘join in’ as one of the ‘tenets of Web 2.0’, outlining how “marketers have increasingly emphasized [...] interactive experiences and participatory platforms encouraging [forms of] co-creation” (2013: 49). The title-card’s use of ‘join us’, then, is significant in how it appears to foreground a more participatory and ‘involved’ form of distanced access for the online audience.



Fig. 5.6 Opening title-card encouraging online viewers to ‘join’ the convention at 11am CT.

The same can be said about the way in which audio-visual content was exhibited at SWCC. Unlike the live-stream for SWCO, which cut away to show full-

screen, high-quality versions of content such as set-pictures and posters, the live-stream for SWCC instead cut to a wide-angle shot of the convention hall which encompassed the convention screen (on which the content was being exhibited), the guests on-stage, and sections of the convention audience (Fig. 5.7). This is akin to one of the presentational characteristics of livecasting, where Barker has argued that “wide stage-shots [...] are a core component of livecasting’s presentation structure” (2013: 19). Indeed, Barker elaborates by pin-pointing wide shots in which the audience can be seen as among the most important in this form of event cinema:

[...] the audience shots [are] important for the ‘guarantee’ they provide of the event’s simultaneity. Here are people finding their seats, talking, then hushing as the lights go down. Their responses (laughter, clapping) are overheard. Occasional shots will register at least the front rows. Here, surely, is proof of liveness.

(ibid.: 13)

By this sentiment, the presentation of audio-visual content within wide-angle shots of the convention hall at SDCC is significant, on one level, for how it reaffirms the liveness of the event. On another level, these exhibitory decisions on the part of Lucasfilm complement Daniels’ words above in serving to break down the boundaries between audiences. Lucasfilm’s explicit encouragement for online fans to ‘join us’ at the convention, and their opting for wide-angle shots over cutting away from the convention hall completely, served in constructing a more inclusive space in which the online audience was similarly configured as having a greater sense of co-presence in the live event. All of this worked towards subverting the instantaneity/immediacy divide that the end of the previous part

established in the online exhibition of the *TLJ* trailer at SWCO. Considering the moment of exhibition for the *TROS*'s trailer at SWCC is similarly revealing in how this divide was broken down.

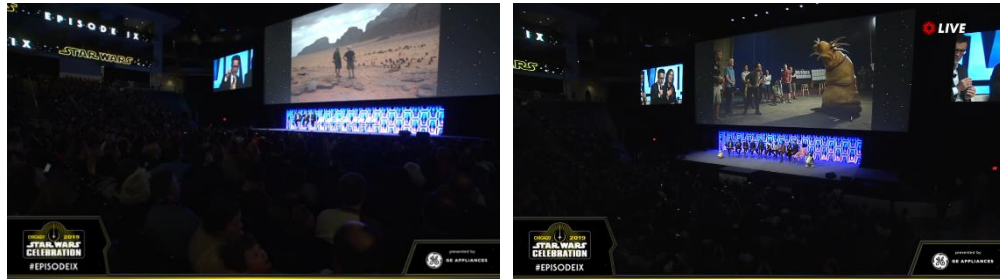


Fig. 5.7 Screenshot from the online live stream of the SWCC panel for *The Rise of Skywalker* demonstrating how audio-visual content was exhibited online via wide-angle shots.

“Roll It, Again.”

Continuing the precedent set two years earlier at SWCO during the exhibition of the first trailer for *TLJ*, the exhibition of the trailer for *TROS* at SWCC was, too, simultaneously streamed live online. Echoing his mode of address throughout the panel, the trailer was introduced with J.J. Abrams standing and asking the convention audience, “Who here wants to see a teaser trailer?”, to which those in the hall responded with an overwhelming, yet expectant, chorus of cheering and applause. As at SWCO, the trailer for *TROS* was exhibited twice, with its first exhibition aligning characteristically with that of *TLJ* trailer.

After the panellists had exited the stage, the lights in the hall dimmed to blackout (as did the online stream) and the cheering of the audience was also faded out. It is of note that the fade-out of the convention audience noise in the SWCC online stream appeared to be slower and smoother compared to the faster and more abrupt cut-out that occurred leading in to the trailer for *TLJ* at SWCO. The effect of this was a more integrated and fluid transition between the live relay

of the hall and the full-screen online exhibition of the trailer. It also provided the online audience with an extended insight into the emotions in the hall. Once the sound had faded, the overlaid interfacial graphics (the SWC logo; the 'LIVE' icon; the hashtags) disappeared and a high-quality, full-screen version of the teaser trailer was shown for the online audience. As with the exhibition of *TLJ* trailer at SWCO, this mode of online exhibition of the trailer for *TROS* interrupted the live-stream, having a similar effect as before in negating the online audience any immediate or intimate connection with the convention hall in Chicago.

At the end of the online exhibition of the trailer, the live-stream cut back to the convention hall in Chicago where the trailer was still in the process of ending. The online audience could clearly hear character Darth Sidious' menacing laugh again and see the main *Star Wars* title-card reveal the title of the film on the convention hall screen. Whilst a similar delay occurred at the end of the SWCO reveal of *TLJ* trailer, it was much shorter than the delay experienced at the end of the online exhibition of the trailer for *TROS*. The gap between the ending of the online exhibition of the trailer and that of its convention exhibition was significant enough in length that it raises concerns regarding the perceived 'exclusivity' that convention attendance entails. Where Sue Kroll, in this chapter's opening paragraphs, fought to uphold Warner Bros.' promotional strategy of ensuring that the first look at the new *Suicide Squad* trailer be exclusively reserved for SDCC attendees, in the case of *TROS* it was Lucasfilm's own strategic and technological construction of the trailer's live moment of exhibition which actually afforded online, distanced fans the first glimpse of the film's title over those physically in attendance at SWC. For a few seconds, the hierarchical levels of fandom outlined by MacDonald swung – for the first time – in favour of the online audience. Whilst

this knowledge would ordinarily constitute significant subcultural capital in the eyes of *Star Wars* fans, due to the configuration of the space and audiences during the live moment, the online audience were unable to demonstrate or validate this knowledge within the interface of the live stream. Despite these subtle but significant differences, the strategy underpinning the first moment of exhibition of the new teaser trailer for *TROS* largely aligned with that employed two years earlier for the exhibition of the trailer for *TLJ* at SWCO: an interruption in the live-stream during which the online audience was cut-off from the convention.

It was in the second screening of the trailer for *TROS*, however, where the greatest difference in exhibition lay. At the trailer's first conclusion, after a mixture of sweeping and close-up shots of the cheering convention audience (serving to reaffirm the stream's liveness, as per Barker), a front-on, tightly-framed shot of the convention stage revealed (Darth Sidious-actor) Ian McDiarmid standing before the audience. By this point, the interfacial features of the online stream had re-appeared to resemble the live stream interface as it had been throughout the panel. After a long pause on account of the convention hall cheering, and adopting his character's distinct tone, McDiarmid uttered the words, "Roll it, again." At this point, rather than the interfacial features disappearing and the screen fading to black and silence – as they had done previously – the live-stream remained fixed on the convention hall and its screen. It captured the abrupt dimming of the convention hall lights and the continued cheering of its audience and then the faint glister of the 'Lucasfilm' logo on the convention hall screen and the cut to Daisy Ridley's character breathing heavily in a desert landscape (Fig. 5.8). It became clear at this point that the hitherto two simultaneous modes of exhibition had now become one: the online audience were watching the trailer being exhibited on the

screen in the convention hall, live, with the fans gathered there. This was evident not only in the continued audience noise that could be heard emanating from the convention hall during these opening moments of the trailer (and, indeed, throughout), but also in the difference in audio-visual quality of the trailer's exhibition via the live-stream. This demonstrates a significant shift away from the interruptive form of exhibition used for the first showing of the trailer, and for the exhibition of the *TLJ* trailer at SWCO. In recalling Marriott's distinction between instantaneity and immediacy, this second exhibition of the trailer for *TROs* illustrates a conjoining of the two. Indeed, as Marriott has summarised, only in some cases does "instantaneous transmission offer [an] immediate encounter with an elsewhere which is unfolding in [the] present moment" (2007: 36). A different kind of live exhibition was therefore at play here: one which sought to incite a 'closeness' and 'intimacy', that Barker argues is so intrinsic to the liveness of livecasting, within the live event unfolding in a distanced elsewhere.



Fig. 5.8 The second online exhibition of the trailer for *The Rise of Skywalker* integrated into the live-stream itself.

Clearly observable here, and in the steps detailed above, was a desire on the part of Lucasfilm to facilitate a more inclusive experience for the online audience. In relaying a live-stream of the convention hall's exhibition of the trailer rather than interrupting it, the barrier of exclusivity around live trailer exhibition at SWC events which had been so rigidly maintained during SWCA, SWCO, and this trailer's first showing at SWCC, had been broken down. It afforded, for the first time, the opportunity for online fans to witness and experience – live – the sights and sounds of the SWC convention hall during the exhibition of a new *Star Wars* trailer. Being able to hear the convention audience's reactions to certain moments of the trailer and see the reactions of the cast as they watched it (Fig. 5.9) offered a new level of participation and intimacy which had, until this point, been exclusively reserved for those physically in attendance. It is these moments, as Barker argues, that are fundamental in authenticating the liveness of the encounter. The 'authentic marker of insider status' which Matt Hills (2010: 90/99) argues is exemplified in convention attendance through the liveness of the event, the external inaccessibility to materials (such as trailers), and proximity to symbolic figures within a fandom, was in this case extended beyond the confines of the convention hall to those watching online. Returning full-circle to the opening of this section, the opening title-card's encouragement to 'join us' becomes all-the-more significant for the way in which it teased what would be a more intimate form of live trailer exhibition.

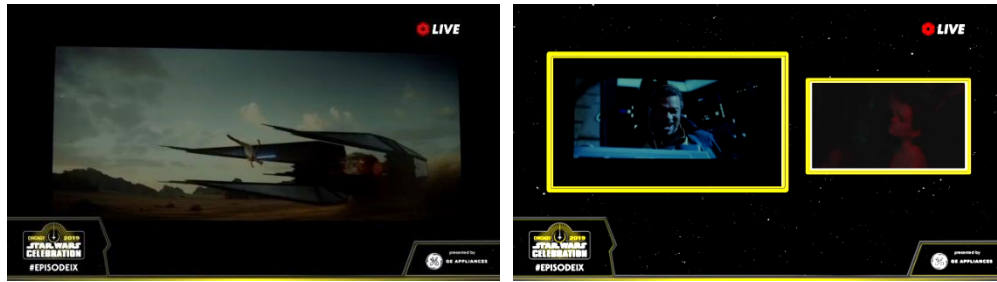


Fig. 5.9 Screenshot from the online live stream of the SWCC panel for *The Rise of Skywalker* depicting moments of significant audience reaction: Rey's (Daisy Ridley) acrobatic leap over a low-flying TIE fighter (left); and Lando Calrissian's (Billy Dee Williams) first appearance in the trailer (right, large window) with reaction shot of Daisy Ridley (right, small window).

With that in mind, the difference in audio-visual quality also points to a further reason why Lucasfilm might have chosen to live-stream the convention exhibition of the trailer in this way. The previous part argued that exhibiting a high-quality rendering of the trailer live online (even in an interruptive manner) might negate the perceived need of fans to seek out a leaked, low-quality version of it. In doing so, it suggested this as a way with which studios might exert some control over the exhibition of its promotional content. With this in mind, the strategy outlined above for the live exhibition of the trailer for *TRoS* is also illuminating for how it very practically demonstrated the difference in quality commonly discernible between legally and illegally-uploaded promotional content. Where both online exhibitions of the trailer for *TLJ* at SWCO, and the first online exhibition of the trailer for *TRoS* at SWCC, presented the online audience with a high-quality, full-screen rendering of the trailer, the quality of the latter's second moment of exhibition was demonstrably lower (Fig. 5.10). The audio-visual quality of the trailer's second exhibition was of such a low quality that it was often difficult, sometimes impossible, to discern both what was happening and what was being said. A consequence of this kind of strategy, particularly in this example, was thus to highlight the difference in technical quality of the trailer's

exhibition. An industrial benefit of this could be to re-emphasise to fans and audiences the value in waiting (when required) for the studio to release official versions of any promotional content. Liveness in this particular configuration of trailer exhibition served not just as a mechanism with which to control the moment of live trailer exhibition, but also to facilitate a clear demonstration of the difference in quality between official and unofficial versions of trailers, seeking to act as a deterrent for watching the latter.



Fig. 5.10 Screenshots from the online live stream of the SWCC panel for *The Rise of Skywalker* showing the difference between the interruptive, high-quality version of the trailer's first online exhibition (left) and its second exhibition (right).

The second part of this chapter has examined the online exhibition of a trailer for *The Rise of Skywalker* as part of a live-stream of Star Wars Celebration Chicago. Evident in this analysis is a strategy which shared many of the characteristics of its SWCO predecessor. The key components of the space of participation remained the same, with the convention hall and the online stream interface being supplemented by tertiary social media platforms to which hashtags signposted online discourse during the panel. The construction of the audience similarly set

up two distinct groups of fans: those in the convention hall and those online. The hierarchical positioning of each audience was again largely determined not only by technological constraints (such as the lack of interfacial comment stream for online viewers), but also by the performances of host Stephen Colbert and of cast and creatives in relation to these audiences. For much of the panel, and for part of the trailer's eventual exhibition, it was the convention audience which was afforded the most attention, address, and access to audio-visual content, solidifying their claim as the dominant audience hierarchically. At the same time, however, the second part of this chapter has traced efforts on the part of Lucasfilm to break down this hierarchical distinction whilst simultaneously retaining an element of control over the exhibition of its exclusive promotional content online. Whilst editorial and technological decisions, such as opting to exhibit audio-visual content via wide-angle shot of the convention screen, sought to minimise the distancing-effect that cutting away from the hall might have on an online audience, verbal gestures such as those of Anthony Daniels served to re-emphasise the global scale of the event. The decision to exhibit the trailer live online for a second time by remaining focused on the convention hall, firstly, further served in combining the instantaneity of the live-stream with the immediacy of feeling closer to the unfolding elsewhere of the convention hall. Liveness was mobilised in a different manner here in a way which enhanced the means of distanced-access afforded by the live-stream. It secondly served to highlight the difference in audio-visual quality between official and unofficially-obtained versions of promotional content, demonstrating another way in which Lucasfilm looked to exert some control over how its trailer was viewed.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how liveness was mobilised for the online exhibition of convention trailers. It argued that mobilising liveness in the form of live-streaming represented a strategy through which Lucasfilm could exert control over the exhibition of exclusive promotional content being debuted at their conventions, particularly trailers. It contextualised this in relation to concerns around the piracy of both film and promotional materials. The first part of this chapter went on to examine this in relation to the exhibition of a trailer for *The Last Jedi* at Star Wars Celebration Orlando. Interrogating its constellatory domains revealed that Lucasfilm's pursuit of control through the use of YouTube Live simultaneously afforded online fans a means of distanced access, and impacted the way in which they were configured, resulting in a hierarchical divide between convention audience and those online. The first part closed by drawing out the interruptive nature of the trailer's online exhibition, suggesting that, whilst live in its instantaneous transmission, it lacked an immediate and intimate connection with an unfolding elsewhere. The second part of this chapter examined the online exhibition of a trailer for *The Rise of Skywalker* at Star Wars Celebration Chicago. It highlighted a number of similarities to SWCO in the way the space and audience was configured, attributing this again to the technical construction of the space of participation and the words and actions of the host, cast, and creatives. The second part then went on to trace a divergence in Lucasfilm's strategy: one which sought to offer both a more inclusive, immediate incorporation of the online audience in the live event, and a reification of the value of officially-released content.

The case studies in this chapter have revealed how liveness has been mobilised for the online exhibition of trailers. The live-streaming of trailers online

emerges as one strategy through which the US film industry has attempted to control the way in which its promotional content is exhibited, both online and off, in response to an ever-demanding fan culture and the threat posed by leaked promotional content to its promotional strategies. The case studies reveal more broadly how the US film industry is using liveness as a means by which to respond to the increasingly influential platform society in which core platforms, such as Google-owned YouTube, are controlling the way in which content and audiences operate.

The next chapter will examine the way in which liveness has been mobilised as a way of specifically navigating the algorithmically-driven News Feed of another of such core platforms.

6 Online Trailers on News Feed

Go Live!

Platforms use algorithms to automatically filter enormous amounts of content and connect users to content, services, and advertisements.

(van Dijck et al. 2018: 10)

Facebook offers promotional agencies the promise of a renewal, a reframed set of relations, interfaces, and engagements [...] key in ongoing efforts to enchant consumers.

(MacRury, in Sciortino & Wright 2017: 83)

[W]e see that video as a medium is not only, in the future, going to be about people producing content that looks like traditional content and then consuming it in a static rectangle video screen. [Facebook Live is] not the kind of traditional video experience. It's actually a more social experience.

(Mark Zuckerberg, in Facebook 2016b: 12)

On Tuesday 13th December 2016, at around 3.40pm, I logged in to my Facebook account. As I scrolled down, past the first few posts on my News Feed, I stopped at a video. It was a live video shared by the UK Facebook page belonging to the Warner Bros./Christopher Nolan film, *Dunkirk* (2017).¹¹⁷ It depicted a gentle sea mist settling over the calm waters along a stretch of coast. In the foreground sat a pier, jutting out into the black and blue waters upon a combination of rock seawall and timber framing. At the end of the pier, upon their own wooden island, stood a

¹¹⁷ The live video was hosted by the film's US Facebook page. At the time, the UK page did not offer the option to 'switch region', meaning I was geo-blocked into only being able to access the film's UK Facebook page.

lighting tower and pulsating warning beacon, the vivid green light of which stood in stark contrast to the dullness of the overcast sky and fading daylight. Barely-discernible in the distance lay a vast expanse of beachfront, beyond which could be made out a quiet, shadowy, unlit town. The tide lapped gently against the wooden struts of the pier as a small boat silently appeared from the bottom left corner of the video, passing slowly from left to right on its way to the darkening harbour just out of sight. At that moment, a 'thumbs up' icon in a tiny blue circle appeared from the opposite, bottom right, corner. It drifted, weightlessly, from right to left along the bottom of the video's frame and was followed in quick succession by another thumbs-up, a number of cartoon faces resembling a 'wow' expression, and an even greater number of white heart icons in tiny red circles. One by one, these colourful flying icons disappeared to where the small boat had just emerged from; itself having chugged silently away and out of sight. The tide continued to lap gently against the wooden struts of the pier as the scene became still once again.

In their collection of interviews with film and television professionals about the impact of digital technologies on the entertainment industries, Michael Curtin et al. (2014) included a discussion with Thomas Gewecke (Warner Bros.' then-Chief Digital Officer and Executive Vice President of Strategy and Business Development). They asked him about the studio's relationship with Facebook in the evolving digital media landscape. Gewecke teased as to the "very interesting ways" (in Curtin et al. 2014: 66) in which Warner Bros. continued to partner with Facebook to promote its films. The coastal scene described above signifies one of those 'interesting ways', representing Warner Bros.' first employment of Facebook's contribution – 'Facebook Live' – to an expanding array of online live-

streaming tools and services. Launched to select public figures in August 2015, and to Facebook's wider userbase eight months later, Facebook Live converged high-fidelity audio-visual content with text and graphic-led communication techniques within a single, consolidated interface.¹¹⁸ Described above was the tool's use for the launch of a trailer for *Dunkirk* – one of this chapter's two case studies.

Returning to Curtin et al.'s discussion with Gewecke, the latter highlighted how Warner Bros. routinely engaged Facebook as a "marketing partner" (in 2014: 67), regarding it as a "very important platform for connecting directly with [their] consumers" (ibid.).¹¹⁹ This disclosure is by no means ground-breaking. Facebook and its counterparts are widely used and discussed for their ability to "capture and exploit participatory culture" (Jenkins et al. 2013: 48), and for their "infinite [opportunity] for interaction, [and] commercial and social engagement" (Kerrigan 2017: 64). As such, social media platforms such as Facebook play major roles in the promotional strategies for feature films (Mingant et al. 2015: 9).

Yet, in these roles, social media platforms have also accrued an increasing amount of agency in how these promotional strategies are executed. As alluded to by van Dijck et al. in their epigraph to this chapter, the algorithms underpinning these platforms are increasingly determining the conditions under which users/audiences and content operate within and across the emergent platform society. In the case of Facebook, it is its 'Ranking' algorithm (formerly 'EdgeRank') that organises how, where, and when content appears on the platform's main

¹¹⁸ Facebook Live was described at its launch, by Vadim Lavrusik (Live's then-Product Manager), as "an immersive and authentic way to connect with the public figures you care about, in real-time" (2015).

¹¹⁹ This sits in opposition to Derek Johnson's view that "Facebook is not a partner of the entertainment industry in the generation of hype" (2017: 149).

News Feed.¹²⁰ The effect of this, according to Facebook, is that users see the “most relevant content [to them] at the top, every time [they] open Facebook” (Mosseri 2018).¹²¹ Indeed, van Dijck et al. elaborate on this ‘algorithmic personalisation’, describing how News Feed’s algorithm “distinguishes between different levels of affinity, measuring how close each user is to friends, to people they follow, as well as to pages and groups” (2018: 41–42). However, Derek Johnson has highlighted how News Feed’s algorithmic structures “impose order on media promotion and thereby enable and limit [content] experiences” (2017: 149). With this in mind, a question is raised as to how this imposed ordering has manifested itself in film promotional strategies on Facebook, particularly in relation to the online exhibition of trailers on the platform. As the following chapter will show, it was no coincidence that *Dunkirk*’s Facebook Live video appeared near the top of my own News Feed.

This chapter continues the agenda for Part Three of this thesis by examining how liveness has been mobilised in the online exhibition of film trailers. Maintaining a focus on the use of live-streaming tools, this chapter explores the role that Facebook Live played – as a tool and through its interfacial features – within trailers’ exhibitory live moments online. In particular, it will examine two of the first instances in which Facebook Live was used for trailers’ online exhibition: the launch of the first trailer for Universal’s *The Fate of the Furious* (2017), and this

¹²⁰ It organises this content based on thousands of data-points. According to Adam Mosseri (Facebook’s Head of News Feed, 2012–2018), these points can be grouped under four overarching steps: “the available *inventory* of stories; the *signals*, or data points that can inform ranking decisions; the *predictions* we make, including how likely we think you are to comment on a story, share with a friend, etc; and a *relevancy score* for each story” (2018, original emphasis).

¹²¹ Indeed, Tarleton Gillespie has noted how such algorithms “play an increasingly important role in selecting what information is considered most relevant to us” (2014: 167).

chapter's opening example of the trailer debut for Warner Bros.' *Dunkirk*. Drawing on concerns around the organisational power of algorithms (Carah & Louw 2015; Derek Johnson 2017; van Dijck et al. 2018), and those of Facebook in particular (Bucher 2012; Birkbak & Carlsen 2016), the first part of this chapter opens by arguing that both case studies' employment of Facebook Live represented concerted efforts by the US film industry to effectively navigate and position trailers within a complex and algorithmically-determined online environment.

This focus on Facebook's algorithmic structures raises further questions about the platform's agency in determining, directing, and facilitating user engagement with online audio-visual content, particularly through the design of its interface. Daniel Chamberlain has highlighted the importance of interfaces in their function as "discrete visual spaces [and] as the locus of technological interactivity" (2011: 230) with media content. More recently, Jonathan Gray has argued that not enough attention has been paid to interfaces – as "gateways we enter through to get [to] things" (in Brookey & Gray 2017: 104) – and their increasing influence on how paratextual content such as trailers are positioned, accessed, consumed, and engaged with. Mindful of Jenkins et al.'s (2013: 49) suggestion that marketers have increasingly emphasised participation and interactive experiences, and of Kerrigan's (2010: 201) assertion that online promotional strategies only succeed if audiences actively engage with them, the rest of the chapter draws on broader concerns to do with digital/media interfaces (Chamberlain 2011; Gillespie 2018; van Dijck et al. 2018) and participatory culture/online interactivity (van Dijck 2009; Jenkins et al. 2016; Skjuve & Brandtzaeg 2019) to explore the ways in which participation and interaction with

the online-exhibited trailers was guided, encouraged, and presented by Facebook Live's interface.

The first part of this chapter closes by examining the live online launch of a trailer for *The Fate of the Furious*. Occurring a day before *Dunkirk*'s stream went live, it represented the first time that Facebook Live had been used to underpin the online launch and exhibition of a film trailer. Drawing on broader debates around platform temporality (boyd & Crawford 2012; Pearson 2016), the first part of this chapter explores the consequences for participation/interaction when Facebook Live videos are archived by the platform, focusing in particular on the chat stream embedded within Facebook Live's interface.

The second part of this chapter expands on the opening example of the Facebook Live trailer launch for Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk*. Drawing further on the debates of the previous part, focus shifts to other elements of Facebook Live's interface, specifically the tool's live-viewer counter and its pictographic Reactions. The second part of this chapter goes on to make a number of methodological observations about the difficulty in examining live-streamed material that is not subsequently archived (unlike the Live video for *The Fate of the Furious*, the Live video for *Dunkirk* was deleted upon its conclusion, along with all Reactions and comments).¹²²

In response to the overarching research questions of this thesis, the chapter examines how liveness has been mobilised by interrogating each case study's constellation of liveness. In each case, it jointly scrutinises the trailer and its moment of live exhibition, the space of participation (Facebook Live's interface,

¹²² I use 'Live video' in its capitalised form throughout this chapter as an abbreviation for 'Facebook Live video'.

and external locations), audience configuration (through the features of Facebook (Live)'s technologically/algorithmically-constructed interface), and surrounding paratexts (such as trade reporting and viewer comments).

Exploring each of these employments of Facebook Live reveals why liveness was mobilised in these ways. At a micro-level it argues that Facebook Live served as a mechanism with which the US film industry sought to navigate and position trailers within Facebook's algorithmically-driven News Feed. With this in mind, it goes on to argue that these same algorithmically-driven processes impacted upon the participation and interaction encouraged by Facebook Live's interface. Where the previous chapter made reference to some of YouTube Live's interfacial features, this chapter undertakes a more acute interrogation of Facebook Live's interface. As such, this chapter is insightful not only for what Facebook Live can reveal about trailer exhibition practices, but also for what these practices can reveal about the design, role, and influence of platforms in the contemporary media landscape. At a macro-level, this chapter compliments the previous chapter in arguing that the mobilisation of liveness in the form of Facebook Live is part of a broader response to the increasing influence that core infrastructural platforms have on the visibility of, and engagement with, promotional audio-visual content within the emergent platform society.

'The Fate of the Furious was live'

At just gone midnight on the morning of 12th December 2016, the UK Facebook page belonging to the *Fast and the Furious* film franchise began streaming a Facebook Live video. This live-stream culminated in the debut of the first trailer for the eighth film in the franchise, *The Fate of the Furious* (*TFotF*). In the days

leading up to the trailer's launch, trade commentary described it as a 'special live event' (Dornbush 2016; Eisenberg 2016; Hipes 2016). Examining the constellation of liveness underpinning the trailer's live moment reveals various components to this special event's space of participation.

The first was Facebook Live itself, with trade reports emphasising the tool's role in serving as the launch platform for the trailer (Alexander 2016; Bakkila 2016). The second was New York's Times Square, which served as a backdrop to a physically-embodied Q&A session with cast and creatives (Fig. 6.1), which was also part of the live-stream and which preceded the exhibition of the trailer. Indeed, the live-stream opened with a visual placeholder title-card announcing it as a 'Times Square Takeover' (Fig. 6.2). It is pertinent to note the similarity in 'takeover' rhetoric here to that used around the ad-break takeovers examined in Chapter 4. Indeed, the paratextual commentary surrounding this live moment drew attention to the eventful nature of the trailer launch (Couch 2016; Thompson 2016), focusing in particular on how Universal had taken over Times Square's multitude of digital billboards (D'Alessandro 2016) (Fig. 6.3).¹²³ The final component of the live moment's space of participation was an NBC television broadcast of *Football Night in America* (2006—), a Sunday evening pregame show for the broadcaster's primetime National Football League (NFL) coverage.¹²⁴ Upon concluding her interviews with the cast and creatives, the Q&A host linked live to the NBC broadcast, where the same members of the film's production had gathered alongside *Football Night's* own presenter for a brief discussion before

¹²³ A claim was made multiple times throughout the live-stream that this was the first time that Times Square and its screens had been completely requisitioned for the exhibition of a single trailer.

¹²⁴ This is illustrative of a synergistic relationship between film studio Universal and broadcaster NBC; both subsidiaries of NBCUniversal and parent company, Comcast.

introducing the trailer (Fig. 6.4). Evident here is that Facebook Live, whilst serving as a platform for the online exhibition of the trailer for *TFotF*, was one of a number of sites simultaneously exhibiting the trailer live (the others being Times Square's digital billboards and NBC).

Significantly, the midnight online launch of the trailer in the UK represented a 7pm EST launch in the US, timed to target the primetime television audience of the NFL's flagship Sunday evening game.¹²⁵ This reveals something about the way in which Facebook Live was used for the online exhibition of the *TFotF* trailer. Whilst Facebook Live has been touted for the way users can simply "pick up [their] phone to share a moment instantly with the people [they] care about" (Simo 2016), its employment here suggests an integral alignment with the linear flow of broadcast television.¹²⁶ Specifically, whilst Facebook Live provided a global means of access for distanced fans, this access was contingent upon a temporal schedule geared towards a US primetime television audience. In view of both this and the 'takeover' rhetoric surrounding this trailer launch, these aspects together raise a number of similarities with Chapter 4, where viewers' attention was scheduled through the construction of the ad-break as a takeover advertising destination.

¹²⁵ The value in this is evidenced in the ratings that NBC's coverage of the Dallas Cowboys vs. New York Giants received that evening, reportedly being the most-watched primetime NFL game of the 2016 season (D'Alessandro 2016; Patten 2016; Stites 2016).

¹²⁶ Supporting this notion is Facebook's own guidance for media producers, which recommends "scheduling live broadcasts ahead of time to make your audience aware of upcoming broadcasts and to more easily connect when your stream begins" (Facebook 2016a).



Figs. 6.1—6.4 *The Fate of the Furious* trailer launch: **Fig 6.1 (top left)** Q&A host, Sasha Perl-Raver, interviewing cast member, Michelle Rodriguez; **Fig 6.2 (top right)** Facebook Live's opening title-card; **Fig. 6.3 (bottom left)** The film's branding on each of Times Square's digital billboards as part of the 'takeover'; **Fig. 6.4 (bottom right)** Cast interview on NBC's *Football Night in America*.

That said, the Times Square Q&A, the NBC interview, and the trailer itself were all included as part of the Facebook Live video for *TFotF*. The focus of this chapter is therefore on the trailer's online exhibition specifically within Facebook's live-streaming tool. To examine this, and to understand the significance of this employment of Facebook Live, it is pertinent to reflect on the tool's relation to the broader socio-technological structures of the Facebook platform and, in particular, Facebook Live's standing on the platform's News Feed.

Ranking Live videos in News Feed

Nicholas Carah and Eric Louw have described Facebook as a major cog in a “larger and messier network of organizations competing and collaborating with each other to innovate and create value” (2015: 94). This chimes with van Dijck et al.'s recognition of Facebook as one of the ‘Big Five’ infrastructural platforms of the platform society, serving an influential role in “automating connections between

users, content, data, and advertising” (2018: 10).¹²⁷ This sentiment builds on Inge Sørensen’s observation that Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook continue to (re)shape the ways in which people “access, consume and interact with audiovisual content” (2016: 381). As such, Facebook carries significant agency in determining the way in which people and content operate online. Indeed, echoing the previous chapter’s discussion of online gatekeepers, Derek Johnson uses the metaphor of ‘doorman’ to describe Facebook for the way it imposes “order upon paratextuality, determining what paratextual experiences users might likely have” (2017: 149). As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, one of the ways in which Facebook imposes and enacts this order and control is through its algorithmic structures and processes, most notably the ‘Ranking’ algorithm underpinning News Feed.

News Feed is the first page that appears when a user logs in to Facebook. It is a continually-refreshing stream of the “latest headlines generated by the activity of [users’] friends and social groups” (Sanghvi, in van Es 2017a: 132) and aims to “show people the stories that are most relevant to them” (Mosseri 2016).¹²⁸ In their conceptualisation of the platform society, van Dijck et al. expand on this by outlining how Facebook’s News Feed algorithm determines what users see, automatically filtering “enormous amounts of content [to] connect users to content, services, and advertisements” (2018: 10). These observations contribute to those made in a growing body of research around platform algorithms and the

¹²⁷ Facebook is also part of the so-called ‘FAANG’ power-group of technology stocks alongside Amazon, Apple, Netflix, and Google-Alphabet; these companies representing the “five most popular and best-performing American technology companies” (Fernando 2020). A variation of this includes ‘FANGAM’, which adds Microsoft to this group (Damodaran 2020).

¹²⁸ Ruchi Sanghvi was News Feed’s product manager when it launched in September 2006. Adam Mosseri was Facebook’s head of News Feed between 2012-2016.

social and organisational power they possess in contemporary society.¹²⁹ Indeed, speaking about Ranking's predecessor, 'Edgerank', Andreas Birkbak and Hjalmar Bang Carlsen highlight how the Edgerank algorithm:

composes the sequence of posts on a Facebook user's News Feed, [ranking] relationships ('edges') between content and users, in order to decide which posts should show up on the news feeds of individual users. [...] Edgerank gets to make decisions about how Facebook users are informed about their social networks.

(2016: 2)

These observations compliment those of Tania Bucher, whose examination of Edgerank explored the "new conditions through which visibility is constructed by algorithms online" (2012: 1165). In practice, Edgerank and Ranking operate to the same end: to determine what appears, where and when, on a user's News Feed, based on a variety of data-points.¹³⁰ The use of Facebook Live for the online exhibition of the trailers for *TFotF* and *Dunkirk* is significant with this in mind.

Since the algorithmic shift from Edgerank to Ranking in 2011, Facebook has sought "to put video first" (Zuckerberg, in Facebook 2016b: 2) across its range of apps and within its News Feed.¹³¹ In 2014, the platform made a change to Ranking in what they described as an "improvement to how [they] rank videos [...] so that relevant videos appear more prominently in News Feed" (Welch & Zhang

¹²⁹ See, for example, Beer (2009, 2017), Bucher (2012, 2017), Gillespie (2014), and Kitchin (2017).

¹³⁰ The key difference between the two being an evolution to the latter's "more complex ranking algorithm based on machine learning" (McGee 2013) which, Lars Backstrom (then-Engineering Manager for News Feed) explains, takes into account as many as 100,000 data-points (in *ibid.*). This as opposed to the three factors ('affinity', 'weight', and 'time decay') which had underpinned Edgerank's algorithm.

¹³¹ Indeed, in the same quarterly earnings conference call in November 2016, Mark Zuckerberg prophesised that, whilst in "most social apps today, a text box is still the default way we share [...], we believe a camera will [soon] be the main way that we share" (in Facebook 2016b: 2).

2014). Underpinning this change was an increase in the number of factors that Ranking takes into account when deciding where and when to position video content; factors such as when and how often a user has watched videos, and for how long, in addition to a variety of other metrics. As Facebook affirms: “many factors influence how, when and where videos [...] appear, and the signals we use to determine distribution are always evolving as we learn more about what people want to watch” (Facebook 2019). Another such evolution came in March 2016, and centred on how Facebook Live videos were positioned in News Feed:

Now that more and more people are watching Live videos, we are considering Live Videos as a new content type – different from normal videos – and learning how to rank them for people in News Feed. As a first step, we are making a small update to News Feed so that Facebook Live videos are more likely to appear higher in News Feed.

(Kant & Xu 2016)¹³²

Pertinent in relation to these changes is Bucher’s abovementioned examination of Edgerank in which she describes how “[v]isibility online is increasingly subject to various ranking, sorting and classification algorithms” (2012: 1176). In the case of Facebook Live, Facebook made Live videos more visible by altering Ranking so that it automatically elevated Live videos up News Feed. This change was made seven months after the tool had been launched to public figures and one month before its general release to Facebook’s wider userbase. More significantly, however, it was implemented during a period when the marketing strategies for

¹³² This echoes a similar change made by live-streaming service Mogulus in 2008 (later rebranded as Livestream). Karin van Es has observed how the layout of Mogulus’ homepage created a hierarchy “wherein ‘Live Now’ content was privileged over all other kinds” (2017a: 41).

TFotF and *Dunkirk* were likely to have been in their planning stages.¹³³ As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, it was no coincidence that the Live video for *Dunkirk* appeared toward the top of my own News Feed. The employment of Facebook Live for the online exhibition of the trailers for *TFotF* and *Dunkirk* emerges as an apparent response to this Ranking change. Indeed, Carah and Louw have suggested that:

As [algorithms] become more important to how content is sorted and displayed to audiences, professional communicators devise ways to tune their activities to the decision-making logic of algorithms.

(2015: 239)¹³⁴

The announcement by Facebook that Live videos would be placed higher in News Feed provided a rare insight into the workings of Facebook's algorithms, and provided an opportunity for the US film industry to respond and 're-tune' its promotional activities in order to most effectively navigate the algorithmically-driven News Feed. Indeed, when viewed alongside assertions by Facebook (Kant & Xu 2016) that users spend three times longer watching Live videos than non-live content, the mobilisation of liveness through the use of Facebook Live comes forth as a strategy which seemed to guarantee an increased level of visibility for trailers alongside the plethora of other audio-visual content within the continually-refreshed, algorithmically-determined News Feed.

¹³³ Robert Marich has suggested that "serious planning for [promotional] campaigns ideally begins six to ten months before a movie premieres" (2013: 118). This would suggest that Facebook's announcement overlapped with the preliminary stages of promotional planning for both *TFotF* (released April 2017) and *Dunkirk* (released July 2017).

¹³⁴ Adam Greenfield makes a similar observation, noting how every time Facebook 'tweaks' its News Feed algorithm, "certain business propositions suddenly become viable, and others immediately cease to be" (2018: 212).

With this in mind, trailers and their online exhibition provide a new perspective on how the US film industry has attempted to navigate an evolving platform society and new screen ecology in which the actions of media producers, audiences, and content are being increasingly guided by black-boxed algorithms. Much like the previous chapter, the decision to use Facebook Live for the online exhibition of trailers for *TFotF* and *Dunkirk* on the one hand signifies an effort to control the exhibition of promotional content on digital platforms over which studios have little authority or control. On the other, through the exploitation of News Feed's algorithmic processes, it demonstrates an attempt to make these trailers stand out amongst the plethora of other audio-visual content calling for viewers'/users' attention.

That said, the employment of Facebook Live in this way raises further questions about the other ways in which the actions of the trailers' audiences were guided by Facebook, particularly through the Live tool's interfacial features. In his critical study promoting algorithms as important sites of academic scrutiny, Rob Kitchin has noted how algorithms "do not work in isolation, but form part of a technological stack that includes infrastructure/hardware, code platforms, data and interfaces" (2017: 25). Kitchin's recognition of interfaces compliments the work of Daniel Chamberlain, in which the latter describes interfaces as the "visible tip of a software layer that increasingly structures our engagements with text, audio, and video" (2011: 231). Indeed, Johanna Drucker (2013) has argued that:

[The interface] is a space of affordances and possibilities structured into organization for use. An interface is a set of conditions, structured relations, that allow certain behaviors, actions, readings, events to occur.

(Drucker 2013)

More recently, van Dijck et al. (2018: 11) have similarly argued that interfaces play a central role in staging user participation and interaction, building on this later in their *Platform Society* study by highlighting how platforms “curate content and user activity through a wide range of interface features” (ibid.: 41). It is pertinent here to reflect briefly on the meanings of participation and interaction in relation to their use in this chapter.

It has been widely observed how terms such as ‘participation’ and ‘interaction’ are often broad, vague, and easily confused.¹³⁵ With regard to the former, Lewis et al. (2010: 356) have highlighted how, in relation to social media use, there is often confusion as to what the term participation means. Elsewhere, Carah and Louw have cautioned the use of the term:

There is no doubt that the [online] audience is active, and we live in a media culture that calls on us to participate every day. What matters though is that we make careful distinctions between being ‘active’ and being ‘powerful’.

(2015: 231)

It is at this intersection, between active and powerful, that I determine the differentiation between participation and interaction. Henry Jenkins (in Jenkins et al. 2016: 12) has posited participation as a cultural phenomenon that can refer to the way individuals make decisions which determine and impact their experience of something. Implicit within this is Carah and Louw’s notion of being ‘active’; individuals actively and consciously decide to act in a certain way that will

¹³⁵ See, for example, van Dijck (2009: 45), Lewis et al. (2010: 356), Fish et al. (2011: 157), and Jenkins et al. (2016: 12).

influence how they experience something. There is a connection here to Tara McPherson's (2002: 462) notion of 'volitional mobility', which denotes an agency possessed by individuals in determining how they navigate and engage with media content. In relation to the online exhibition of the trailers for *TFotF* and *Dunkirk*, simply seeing their respective Live videos on News Feed would not indicate participation on the part of the viewer. Rather, it would take the conscious act of clicking/tapping the Live video to expand it into its own window, for example, to demonstrate a viewer's active decision to take part – to participate – in the live-stream in some capacity. Conversely, being 'powerful' in the way Carah and Louw propose suggests a more enhanced engagement with content, other viewers, and media producers. Jeffrey Hall's definition of interaction – as "an exchange or conversation with another person in which both people [have] attended to one another and adjusted their behaviour in response to one another" (2016: 11) – is useful in clarifying this distinction.¹³⁶ In relation to live-streams, Oliver Haimson and John Tang (2017: 55) use 'interact' and its derivatives to describe the relationship between viewers, between viewers and live-stream broadcasters, and between viewers and content. Where viewers might choose to become participants, those participants might then choose to interact with other people and elements.

With these distinctions in mind, Facebook Live's interface thus emerges as a fruitful site of investigation when considering not just the space of participation underpinning each of this chapter's live moments of trailer exhibition, but also the

¹³⁶ This sentiment has the hallmarks of what McMillan and Chavis (1986: 9) describe as a 'sense of community', whereby influence, fulfilment of needs, and emotional connection are among the key factors inherent to any kind of meaningful interaction with others, known and unknown, and with content, online or otherwise.

way in which the audience and its actions were configured in each instance.¹³⁷ In their examination of live-streamed events, Haimson and Tang argue that live-streams have “become popular in part because of the opportunity for viewers to interact with and participate in streams” (2017: 50). This mirrors Hamilton et al.’s findings in their examination of gaming platform Twitch, which found that one of the main reasons why people engage with the live-streams of Twitch gamers was the potential of “being interacted with and participating in that stream’s community” (2014: 1315). Facebook Live’s interface thus comes forth as a valuable site of enquiry for ascertaining how participation and interaction was guided, encouraged, and presented during the tool’s employment for the online exhibition of film trailers. Before investigating this, it is useful to first identify the different features of Facebook Live’s interface, and how they specifically appeared during the Facebook Live video for *TFotF*.

“This live video has ended. It’ll be available to watch shortly.”

Facebook Live’s interface merges live audio-visual content with real-time text and graphic-led communication techniques within a single, consolidated window (Fig. 6.5). Central in the interface is the live video itself, on top of which is layered a small red ‘LIVE’ icon and a viewer counter denoting the number of viewers watching the video live. In the desktop version of the interface, the video is typically accompanied by a short description outlining the nature of the broadcast. Next to the video (or below it in the mobile app) is a chat stream to which viewers can post comments in real-time, as well as directly respond to others’ comments

¹³⁷ Indeed, Drucker (2013) has argued that interrogation of interfaces can be particularly useful in understanding how content is organised and structured based on the navigational functions inherent to the interface.

by ‘liking’ them. Finally, at the bottom of the interface is Facebook’s set of six standardised pictograms called ‘Reactions’. Once clicked (or tapped), the chosen Reaction appears on top of the video, floating from right to left across the screen. In its construction and functionality, Facebook Live shares a number similarities to other online live-streaming tools.¹³⁸

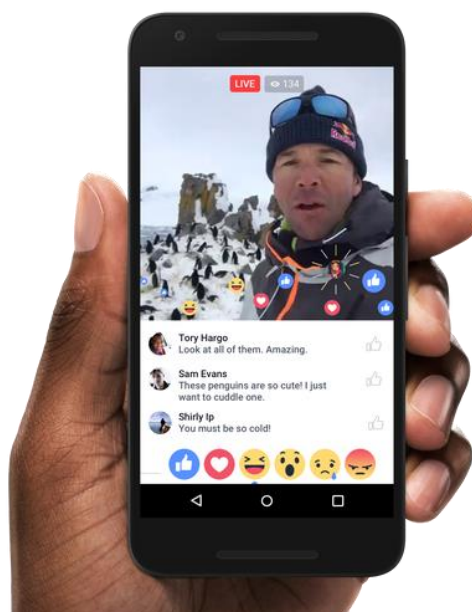


Fig. 6.5 Facebook Live’s interface as it appeared in Facebook’s mobile app at its public launch in 2016. *Image courtesy of Facebook* (Simo 2016).

Yet, the Facebook Live video for *TFotF* was missing a number of these interfacial features (Fig. 6.6). For example, there were no Reactions at the bottom of the video for the viewer to click or tap. Neither was there a live-viewer counter or a red ‘LIVE’ icon at the top of the video. Only the video description and the chat stream were visible alongside the video. The reason for these absences raises a key methodological point in that I did not examine this moment of trailer

¹³⁸ Gaming platform Twitch “enables public broadcast of live audio and video streams alongside a shared chat channel” (Hamilton et al. 2014: 1315), whilst Twitter-owned Periscope superimposes this chat stream on top of the video itself. Indeed, the previous chapter noted YouTube Live’s inclusion of a real-time chat feature that can be enabled and disabled by the moderator.

exhibition in its live moment. Instead, my examination of *TFotF*'s use of Facebook Live for the online exhibition of its trailer is based on a retrospective analysis. This was made possible by the fact that Facebook Live videos are automatically and indefinitely uploaded to the broadcasting page's profile upon completion (Facebook 2018b).¹³⁹ As such, the 'LIVE' designation would not have been applicable at the moment I accessed the Live video for *TFotF*. The need for a live-viewer counter was also negated for this reason. Whilst the 'view' count on the video (at the time of access) stood at 4.4 million, this figure denoted the total number of views that the video had received, both live and not live. It was therefore not representative of the number of live viewers that watched the trailer during its initial moment of exhibition.¹⁴⁰ Reactions, too, were unavailable after the live-stream had ended. Whilst various trade reports at the time had suggested that Facebook would enable the synchronous replaying of Reactions within the Live interface (Constine 2016a; Steele 2016), this ability did not manifest itself in the retrospective viewing of the Live video for *TFotF*. It is also for this reason that the Live video for *TFotF* did not appear toward the top of my News Feed in the way *Dunkirk*'s did. Whilst the previous section outlined how Ranking placed Facebook Live videos higher in News Feed, this is only the case when they are actually live. Live videos which are no longer live are not subject to these same algorithmic protocols because, according to Facebook (Kant & Xu 2016), non-live videos are neither viewed for as long, nor as 'interesting', when viewed after the fact. Facebook's archiving of Live videos stands it apart from other social live-

¹³⁹ The broadcasting page retains the ability to "remove the video post at any time, just like any other post" (Facebook 2016a).

¹⁴⁰ Indeed, it has been reported that "two-thirds of Live video views are replays after a broadcast has ended" (Steele 2016).

streaming services, such as Twitch and Twitter-owned Periscope, where videos are deleted by default upon completion.¹⁴¹ Facebook’s reasoning for making Live videos available indefinitely is “so that fans and friends who missed it can watch at a later time” (2016a). For researchers, this archiving presents a unique opportunity to capture and examine the ephemerality of Facebook content.¹⁴²

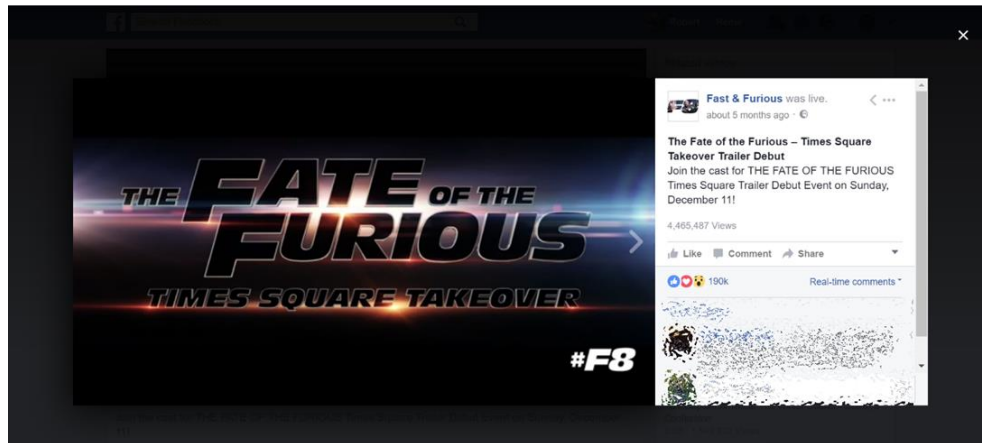


Fig. 6.6 Facebook Live interface for live online exhibition of the trailer for *TFotF*, depicting the missing ‘LIVE’ icon, live viewer counter, and Reactions, but the included description and chat stream. Image taken on Facebook’s desktop website.

Karin van Es (2017a: 123) has described Facebook as an example of what has been termed the ‘real-time web’, a notion which refers to how content on the platform – particularly its News Feed – is in a constant state of being updated. Roberta Pearson has also examined Facebook’s ephemeral nature in relation to fan content, noting how, no matter how often one might visit and return to a single page or to the News Feed, content on that “page will have flowed on” (2016: 85).

¹⁴¹ To save streams on these services, streamers must first ‘enable’ this function in their settings; an opt-in function that, even then, only makes videos available for a limited period of time (Twitch 2020; Twitter 2020).

¹⁴² boyd and Crawford have observed how Facebook’s poor archiving functions have resulted in researchers tending to “focus on something in the present or immediate past [...] because of the sheer difficulty or impossibility of accessing older data” (2012: 666).

Elsewhere, Kaun and Stiernstedt have offered a more acute summary of Facebook's temporality:

In general, Facebook users' temporal experience is one of immediacy, ephemerality, 'liveness,' and flow: to be immersed in an atmosphere and an interface of rapid change and forgetfulness, rather than of remembrance and preservation. Every single post, status update, link, and like in a Facebook feed is visible only for a short period of time: for the user, the experience and feel of Facebook is one of rapid change, new stories are continually appearing, pushing old stories out of sight, downwards in the stream.

(2014: 1161)

In one way, the algorithmic prioritisation of Live videos on News Feed can be seen to counter this continual flow of content, elevating the presence of a Live video to prevent it from being engulfed by an endlessly-refreshing stream of posts. In another way, the subsequent archiving of Facebook Live videos reinstates the 'remembrance and preservation' that Kaun and Stiernstedt observe is absent.

When thinking about the interfacial features present in the archived Facebook Live video for *TFotF*, the comments stream comes forth as one element in which this remembrance and preservation is manifested. When Live videos are archived, the comments stream is archived with it, along with the ability to replay comments in real-time (namely, in the order – and at the moments – they were contributed whilst the video was live). Whilst van Es has argued that the fleeting, real-time nature of chat modules within live-streaming tools reinforces the notion that “the content is important and must be seen now rather than later” (2017a: 44), the ability to replay comments as they were posted, after the fact, contests this perspective. Indeed, where Paddy Scannell (2014: 97) has argued that replays

can ‘redeem’ and ‘resurrect’ a live moment, the real-time replaying of comments within archived Facebook Live videos similarly serves to resurrect the feeling of watching the video as if it were live; it provides an opportunity to not “miss out on all the interaction that took place” (Kennemer 2016). Where the previous section argued that Facebook Live’s interface comes forth as a lucrative site for understanding how participation and interaction were guided, encouraged, and presented during trailers’ online exhibition, the archived (but real-time-replayed) comments stream represents a specific component of Facebook Live’s interface through which this can be examined.

“Join the cast!”

The description accompanying the Facebook Live video for *TFotF* offers a useful starting point here. Located above the comments stream in the desktop version of the interface, the description read: “Join the cast for THE FATE OF THE FURIOUS Times Square Trailer Debut Event on Sunday, December 11!” As was noted in the previous chapter, encouragement to ‘join’ a live-stream foregrounds a more participatory and ‘involved’ form of distanced access for an online audience. The call for online users and viewers to actively join the live exhibition of the trailer for *TFotF* thus resonates with the suggestion earlier that participation requires some form of agency on the part of the viewer, and signifies one of the ways in which participation was encouraged by the page administrators through the interface. Furthermore, with the live-viewer counter unavailable retrospectively, the comments in the stream emerge as one of the ways in which participation was

also presented within the interface.¹⁴³ The posting of a comment signifies a decision on the part of the viewer to be active by acting in a way (in this case, by commenting) that would influence their experience of the live-stream.

With comments being indicators of participation, it has also been suggested that they can be revealing for how interaction was manifested during the trailer's live launch. In their examination of what makes Facebook Live events engaging, Haimson and Tang (2017: 49) recognise comments as one of two key types of interaction within Facebook Live.¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, in a study similarly dedicated to Facebook's live-streaming tool, Marita Skjuve and Petter Brandtzaeg also observe how Facebook Live, through its real-time commenting function, affords the "opportunity to connect with people on another level, beyond what was possible with pre-recorded videos" (2019: 597), providing "an unedited and spontaneous environment that facilitates immediate and intimate interaction" (ibid.: 598). Indeed, Wilson et al. (2012: 209–10) have suggested more generally that Facebook users can present an authentic virtual image of themselves by contributing comments or messages, whilst doing so simultaneously cultivates social capital amongst peers. On the surface, then, the real-time comments contributed during the thirty-five minute live-stream for *TFotF* emerge as a site where interaction between viewers had the potential to be guided and manifested.

However, when one replays the Live video with real-time comments enabled, and considers the paratextual comments on an individual basis, the kind of 'intimate interaction' foretold by Skjuve and Brandtzaeg appears to be largely absent. Rather than the "directness of engagement" (Kaun & Stiernstedt 2014:

¹⁴³ The next part will argue that the live-viewer counter is also one of the interfacial features that offers a visual representation of participation.

¹⁴⁴ The other – Facebook's set of pictographic Reactions – will be examined in the next part.

1162) that Facebook has been observed as fostering, the majority of comments constituted more generally-addressed expressions of presence or knowledge. In particular, a substantial portion of the comments posted during the launch of the trailer for *TFotF* related to actor Paul Walker, a key figure in the franchise who died in a car accident whilst on a break during the making of the previous, seventh, film in the *Fast and Furious* franchise. Using the comments thread almost in a shrine-like manner, the live comments stream offered a virtual space in which fans could express their grief of his passing, celebrate his contributions to the franchise, and more broadly reminisce on his impact on their personal lives. These comments were rarely in direct response to another comment, nor or to a specific moment in the audio-visual live-stream. As such, the comments stream comes forth instead as an indicator of what Haimson and Tang describe as ‘sociality’. This, they suggest, denotes “the ways that live streams can be social even *without* the viewer interacting in any way” (2017: 55, original emphasis). On initial interrogation, then, the paratextual viewer comments posted during the live exhibition of the *TFotF* trailer did not appear to demonstrate the real-time interaction between viewers that Haimson and Tang, and Skjuve and Brandtzaeg, suggest.

That said, on very rare occasions it appeared that comments had been posted in direct response to other comments in the stream. One such instance occurred towards the beginning of the live-stream (Fig. 6.7). At one minute and fifty-six seconds in to the stream, one viewer asked: “Am I the only one having problems with the live video its not working”. A number of unrelated comments followed in the moments immediately after this. Then, at two minutes and twelve seconds, almost twenty seconds after the initial comment, a different viewer

responded with: “If you see a black screen leave then join back it will be fixed”. With none of the intervening comments warranting a response of this manner, it becomes clear that the second comment was a direct response to the first. Despite being an interaction predicated merely on technical difficulties rather than related to *TFotF* and its trailer, it is nevertheless representative of the way in which Facebook Live’s interfacial comments stream had the potential to present and encourage viewer-to-viewer interaction. This example was one of only a handful of instances where direct interaction occurred between viewers. As such, these moments of interaction between co-present but (seemingly) unknown participants were arresting in how they stood out within the continuously-rolling stream of otherwise non-interactive posts.

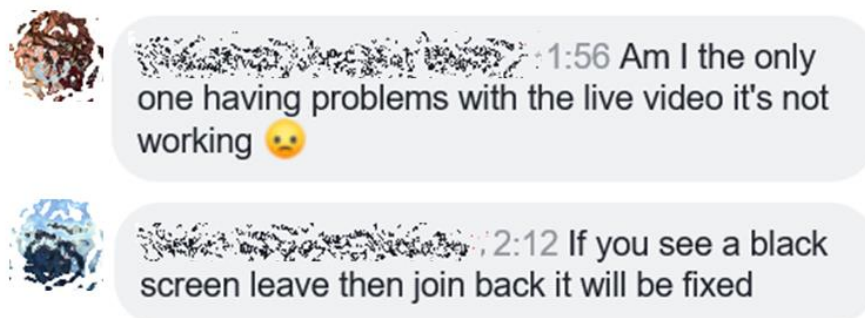


Fig. 6.7 Interactive comments within the live comments stream for the online exhibition of *TFotF* trailer. Comments were posted almost twenty-seconds apart and separated by a series of other unrelated, non-interactive comments which have been omitted in this image.

In their study of live-streaming tools, Haimson and Tang suggest that, in “addition to nuances around comments, the nature of a viewer’s relationship to the broadcaster also affects a live stream’s interactivity” (2017: 56). As was outlined at the start of this part, the live moment of trailer exhibition for *TFotF* was part of a longer live-stream to which there were multiple components. The first of these was the live Q&A session with cast and creatives which overlooked

Times Square and its array of digital billboards that had been taken over for the launch of *TFotF*'s trailer.¹⁴⁵ Recalling the video's description encouraging viewers to 'join the cast', the live comments stream represented a potential portal for the two-way communication between online, distanced viewers and those (cast and creatives) on the other side of the camera.¹⁴⁶ Facebook itself has suggested that Live broadcasters can 'boost' their Facebook Live videos by "answering questions in real time" (Facebook 2018a). To the same end, Skjuve and Brandtzaeg (2019: 594) have revealed how answering questions is a prominent part of Facebook Live streams, whilst Haimson and Tang have proposed that Live broadcasters "appreciate interactivity, and often let viewers' comments influence their streams' content" (2017: 50). This appeared not to be the case in the online exhibition of *TFotF*'s trailer. Asking what appeared to be pre-planned questions to specific members of the cast and creative team, the opening Q&A session presented little opportunity for fans – neither for those virtually present, nor those physically present – to interact, engage, and 'join in' with the film's creatives in a question and answer capacity. This lack of interaction was also clear once the Facebook Live stream switched from the Q&A session to the NBC television broadcast and on to the exhibition of the trailer. Haimson and Tang have warned that "[t]wo-way interaction between viewers and broadcasters can be powerful, but that [it] brings challenges" (2017: 50), and that live-streamed "event experiences suffer when remote audiences do not feel acknowledged by streamers" (ibid.). This appeared

¹⁴⁵ As the second part of this chapter will go on to illustrate, the interview-led nature of this particular mobilisation of liveness represents the most significant difference between the Facebook Live trailer launches of *TFotF* and *Dunkirk*.

¹⁴⁶ This builds on observations made in the previous chapter which noted how the chat feature in YouTube Live had been disabled by *Star Wars*; a decision which negated the potential two-way communication that the live chat stream could have afforded.

very much the case in the online exhibition of the trailer for *TFotF*, where the live-stream appeared to serve more as merely a distanced means of access than a meaningful opportunity to 'join in'. The intention in making these observations is not to make a value judgement on how effective or ineffective *TFotF*'s employment of Facebook Live was. Rather, reading Haimson and Tang's words in view of the lack of interaction during *TFotF*'s Facebook Live stream is useful for understanding the limitations of the interactive elements that were foregrounded by the tool's interface during this particular moment of live online trailer exhibition. Together with the viewer comments discussed above, the interface's guidance and encouragement to join in and interact – an aspect that this chapter has noted as being central to promotional film practices – did not appear to manifest itself to any great extent in the online exhibition of *TFotF*'s trailer.

The first part of this chapter has examined the online exhibition of the first trailer for Universal's *The Fate of the Furious*; a live moment of exhibition that represented the first time Facebook Live had been used for the launch of a new film trailer. This first part opened by arguing that Facebook Live was used by the US film industry as a response to an emergent platform society in which algorithms are increasingly guiding the way in which content, audiences, and media producers operate online. It furthered this by pointing to the priority given to Facebook Live videos on the platform's News Feed, arguing that the use of Facebook Live for the online exhibition of film trailers was a way of both navigating the algorithmically-driven homepage of one of the platform society's core infrastructural platforms, and as a way of making trailers stand out amongst other forms of audio-visual content on the continually-refreshing News Feed. This

raised further questions about the agency that online platforms hold in guiding online actions and activities, with Facebook Live's interface and its features being identified as loci for understanding this in terms of participation and interaction with online-exhibited trailers. The first part closed by focusing on the comments stream accompanying the Facebook Live video for *The Fate of the Furious*. It observed how, despite being touted as a guiding feature for viewer/broadcaster interaction, not much interaction appeared to manifest itself during the trailer's live moment of exhibition. Beyond its service in elevating the trailer for *The Fate of the Furious* higher up on News Feed, the mobilisation of liveness during this particular moment of live exhibition appeared to serve little more than as a means of access for distanced audiences.

'Dunkirk is live now'

At 3pm on 13th December 2016 – around thirty-eight hours after *TFotF*'s launch had ended – the US Facebook page belonging to *Dunkirk* went live with an image of the coastal scene described in the opening words to this chapter (Fig. 6.8).¹⁴⁷ Immediately apparent in the opening moments of the live-stream was a lack of contextual information. Unlike the Facebook Live video for *TFotF*, which included a description alluding to the promotional nature of the 'takeover' event in Times Square and the ensuing launch of the trailer, the Live video for *Dunkirk* included no such information. Instead, the Live video proceeded to unfold, in real-time, over twenty-four hours, switching between two different static camera shots whilst providing no context either to where these shots were being broadcast from, nor

¹⁴⁷ As was noted in Footnote 117, the US Facebook page served as host of the live-stream, with the film's UK page sharing this post to make it available to UK audiences.

to what the length – nor purpose – of this live-stream was. The live-stream ended, a day later, with the exhibition of the first official trailer for *Dunkirk*.

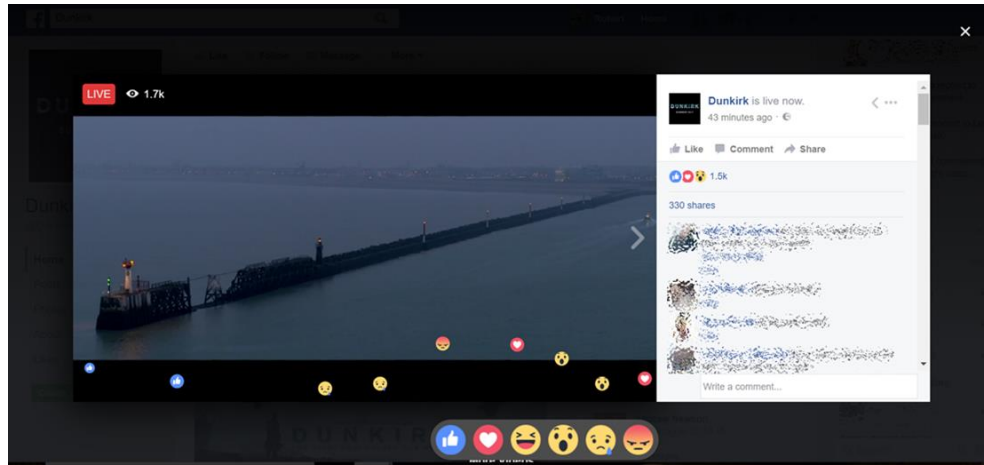


Fig. 6.8 Opening image of the Facebook Live stream for *Dunkirk*, depicting the pier and the interfacial elements described in the opening words of this chapter.

Where the Facebook Live interface was not forthcoming about the location that viewers were watching, the trailer's paratexts provided a little more information. In particular, it was local French journalistic press (Europe1 2016; Libert 2016) that revealed the location to be Dunkirk; the site of Operation Dynamo (the mass evacuation of Allied troops from Western Europe during the Second World War), and the setting of Christopher Nolan's film. With this in mind, the significance of the two locations being shown in the live-stream thus lies in the roles they played during these evacuations. The pier described earlier – jutting out into the black and blue waters upon a combination of rock seawall and timber framing – was 'La jetée de Malo'; otherwise known as the 'East Mole' located on the eastern side of Dunkirk harbour.¹⁴⁸ The Mole played a pivotal role in the operation, enabling the embarkation onto ships of over two thirds of the 338,226

¹⁴⁸ The 'East Mole' at Dunkirk is actually described as "a breakwater [and is made] of latticed concrete piles and topped by a narrow wooden walkway" (HistoryExtra 2020).

evacuating Allied personnel (Smalley 2015: 33). The second shot – with which the aforementioned shot alternated on the hour, every hour, for the duration of the live-stream – depicted ‘La Plage de Malo-les-Bains’ (or ‘the beach at Malo-les-Bains’) (Fig. 6.9). This beach lies immediately to the east of the Mole, and it is this beachfront that was barely discernible in the distance in this chapter’s opening words and in Figure 6.8. It was also the primary beach from which the remaining Allied personnel were picked up by the flotilla of civilian boats sent to aid in the evacuation (ibid.: 33-34).¹⁴⁹ With the film *Dunkirk* having been shot on location, it seems no surprise that these sites also played a central role in the film’s early marketing strategies.

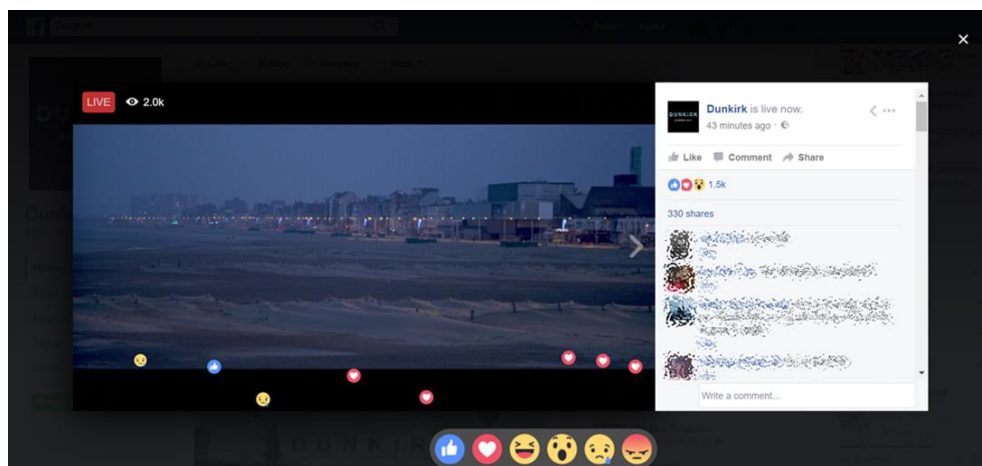


Fig. 6.9 Second static shot of ‘La Plage de Malo-les-Bains’, from which 100,000 Allied personnel were evacuated during Operation Dynamo.

Accompanying these hourly-alternating shots of *Dunkirk* was a non-diegetic soundtrack initially consisting of a dull beat, reminiscent of bomb shells exploding in the distance. This soundtrack was gradually layered every four hours with additional war-related audio cues, reaching a crescendo – a cacophony of

¹⁴⁹ Due to congestion on the Mole, Malo beach – as well as others east of the Mole – became essential embarkation points for Allied personnel, particularly those of the rearguard who would be among the last to be evacuated (Gardner 2000: 103).

indistinguishable noise – during the live-stream’s final two hours. At 14:57 on 14th December – twenty-three hours and fifty-seven minutes after the Live video had first gone live – and without warning, the exhibition of *Dunkirk*’s trailer started. Already clear is how the live online exhibition of the trailer for *Dunkirk* differed to that of *TFotF* in their use of Facebook Live. In common with the case studies examined across this thesis, these initial differences between *TFotF* and *Dunkirk* are illustrative of an experimentation with how liveness has been mobilised in trailer exhibition, particularly with both case studies in this chapter representing the first uses of Facebook Live for the online exhibition of film trailers.

One similarity between them, however, was the use of Facebook Live as a way of navigating the platform’s algorithmically-determined News Feed. As I noted at the start of this chapter, the Live video for *Dunkirk* appeared as one of the top posts on my own News Feed on the afternoon of 13th December. Whilst I had ‘liked’ *Dunkirk*’s UK Facebook page a number of days prior to the trailer’s launch (meaning any content that it posted would ultimately appear on my News Feed), the positioning and visibility of this content was not guaranteed. It was only in it being a Live video – and one that had only just gone live – that meant it was one of the first posts I saw. This observation points to a methodological difference between these two case studies. Whilst I returned to the Live video for *TFotF* retrospectively, I participated in *Dunkirk*’s Facebook Live stream as it was unfolding in real-time. In documenting this experience at various points across the stream’s twenty-four-hour duration, the second part of this chapter is able to interrogate aspects of Facebook Live’s interface which were unavailable retrospectively, but which are similarly revealing about how participation in, and

interaction with, *Dunkirk*'s trailer launch was guided, presented, and encouraged within the interface. The first of these features is the live-viewer counter.

“They made 1.7k people watch this”

View counts have been conceptualised by Franklin et al. (2015: 147) as one of a number of ‘Digital Engagement Metrics’ (DEMs) which have come to play a central role in shaping the marketing practices of the film industry. They are typically understood as an indicator of ‘exposure’ relating to “the successful dissemination and placement of [online] video ads or content” (Mayar & Ramsey 2011: 236), and are widely regarded by content publishers as a primary means by which to gauge the extent to which online audio-visual content has been engaged with. As such, they can be seen as “valorising and valuation mechanisms [for how] they produce and assess value” (Franklin et al. 2015: 152). The online view counts of trailers receive significant amounts of coverage in trade and journalistic press. Indeed, it was widely reported how the above-examined trailer for *TFotF* broke the record for the most number of views in twenty-four hours for a trailer upon its release (ComingSoon 2016; D’Alessandro 2016; Stolworthy 2016). It has also been observed how “studios have started using [...] online trailer views to mold [sic] advertising and even films” (Barnes 2013), highlighting the degree to which the film industry takes seriously how promotional materials are engaged with online. However, to what extent are view counts reliable indicators of participation and interaction within the Facebook Live interface, particularly in relation to its use for the online exhibition of trailers?

Recalling the distinction outlined earlier between ‘active’ participation and ‘powerful’ interaction, Facebook’s definition of what constitutes a view on its platform provides a useful starting point for ascertaining this:

A ‘video view’ is defined as a view of three seconds or more and will appear for all videos, including those that come to life as people scroll through News Feed. We’ve also renamed the ‘video plays’ metric ‘clicks to play video.’ These register after a person has clicked to play a video and it has started.

(Facebook 2014)

Even within this description, Facebook appears to differentiate between passive and active engagement. Whilst individuals must be viewing a video for more than three seconds in order for a view to count, the number of such views cannot be stated as belonging solely to Facebook users who have intentionally sought out and viewed that piece of audio-visual content. Views also count for those who have not turned off the ‘auto-play’ feature for content on News Feed (which, fittingly, requires another demonstration of agency) and for whom the video thus comes-to-life as they scroll down News Feed. Views therefore give no plausibly reliable indication as to participation with the live video as a view does not necessarily indicate agency on the part of all those who have watched it. Seeing a video come to life for three seconds whilst scrolling through News Feed – thus registering a view in the process – does not suggest active participation with that piece of content. In signalling that view counts do not necessarily offer a reliable indication of participation, a question is raised as to the accuracy of trade and journalistic reporting of trailer-view numbers. It also gives pause for thought to Facebook’s

assertion earlier in this chapter that Live videos are reportedly viewed three times longer than non-live video content.

That said, the live-viewer counter thus emerges as an alternative indicator of participation. As was detailed in the first part of this chapter, overlaid on Facebook Live videos (being broadcast live) is a small red 'LIVE' icon located next to the live-viewer counter at the top of the interface. Upon accessing a Live video for the first time, the duration for which the video has been streaming will temporarily flash up within the red box (Fig. 6.10). As can be seen in the image below, taken at different points during *Dunkirk's* live-stream, 947 people were watching *Dunkirk's* Facebook Live video after five and a half hours (at around 7.30pm GMT, 13th December), with 254 people watching after eighteen and a half hours (at 9.30am GMT, 14th December). These numbers are not indicative of the total views the Live video had accumulated by those points, but of the number of viewers who were watching at those moments. More specifically, the 947/254 people denoted by the live-viewer counters related to those who, like me, had exercised their volition by actively tapping or clicking on this Live video; viewers who, like me, had decided to actively take part in this live-streaming event. The live-viewer counter located at the top of *Dunkirk's* Facebook Live interface comes forth in place of the view count as a more reliable indicator of participation; it offers a visual, numerical representation of the cluster of viewers who had decided to be temporally co-present with each other, and with the content, in that moment within that interface. That said, further interrogation of this aspect of *Dunkirk's* space of participation suggests that it also served as a means by which Facebook's interface guided and encouraged participation.

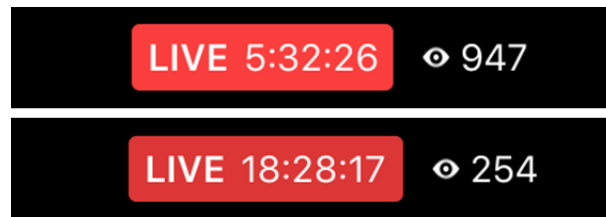


Fig. 6.10 The red ‘LIVE’ icon with temporary time-stamp, alongside the live-viewer counter, at two different moments during the live-stream for *Dunkirk*.

One of the unique aspects of *Dunkirk*’s Facebook Live exhibition was its length. In December 2016, standard users could only stream via Facebook Live for up to ninety minutes, with this duration rising to four hours for the majority of professional and public figures (Yeung 2016).¹⁵⁰ Certain partners, however, were granted access to Facebook’s then-new ‘Continuous Live Video API [Application Programming Interface]’, which enabled “24-hour windows [of] non-stop, long-form broadcasting” (Constine 2016b). *Dunkirk*’s twenty-four-hour duration thus suggests such a partnership; the kind of ‘interesting partnership’ between Warner Bros. and Facebook alluded to by Thomas Gewecke in the introduction to this chapter. Considering this in relation to the participatory affordances of the tool’s live-viewer counter, however, illuminates a number of pertinent observations with regard to viewer participation in the online exhibition of *Dunkirk*’s trailer.

In addition to lacking any contextual information about the depicted locations or purpose of the live-stream, unclear to viewers throughout its duration was when and how it would end. What subsequently became noticeable at the top of every hour was a trend whereby the live-viewing figure would reach a peak and hold there in the minutes before and after the hour mark. It would then subside again for the intervening fifty-or-so minutes. Though not reaching the peak

¹⁵⁰ For standard users, this has since increased to eight hours if streaming from a computer and four hours if streaming from a mobile device (Facebook 2020). This highlights the rapidly-changing nature of online platforms, as well as the difficulty in researching and examining them.

viewership of 2,600 that would occur during the eventual exhibition of the trailer (Fig. 6.11), this fluctuation of live-viewers, alongside the longevity of the live-stream, posed two assumptions. The first was that viewers were not willing to engage with audio-visual content for an elongated period of time, leaving and returning to the broadcast at the top of the hour in the belief that this temporal milestone would provide a development in the live-stream of some kind.¹⁵¹ For the first twenty-three hours of *Dunkirk*'s Live video, these developments took the form of the hourly-alternating shots of Dunkirk, and the incremental additions to the audio soundtrack.

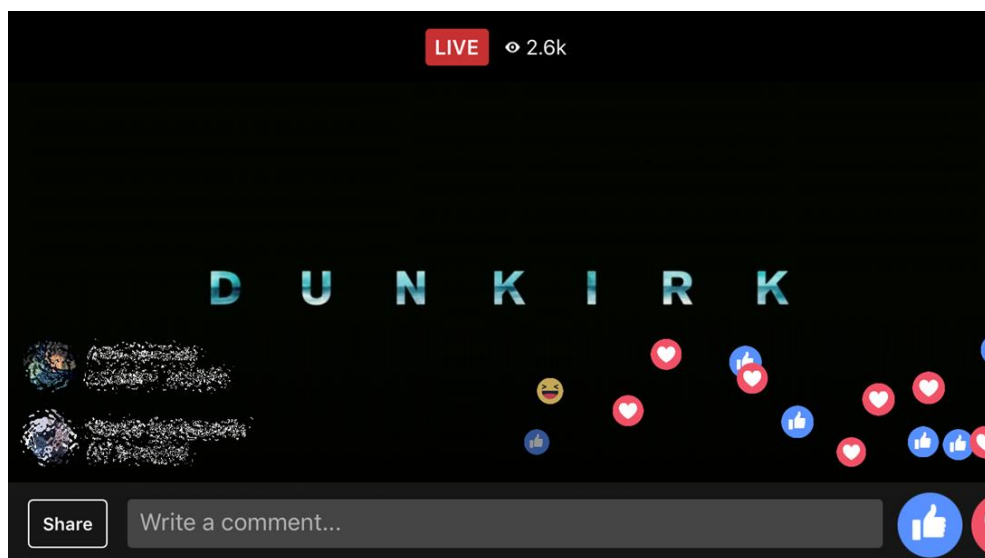


Fig. 6.11 Final moments of the live online exhibition of *Dunkirk*'s trailer, with the live-viewer counter showing the live-stream's peak audience. Image taken in Facebook's iOS mobile app.

Secondly, the fluctuating viewership was suggestive of people frequently leaving and returning to the live-stream to ensure they did not miss anything. Despite fluctuating, the live-viewer count rarely dropped below two hundred live viewers, suggesting that there was a sustained engagement with the live-stream.

¹⁵¹ This contrasts Facebook's assertion earlier in this chapter that people were watching Facebook Live videos for longer (Kant & Xu 2016).

This “reluctance to miss out on important information” (Dempsey et al. 2019: 1) has been conceptualised as a psychological ‘fear’ (Przybylski et al. 2013) or ‘feeling’ (Hayran et al. 2017) of missing out (FoMO). FoMO can be understood as a “pervasive apprehension that others might be having rewarding experiences from which one is absent” (Przybylski et al. 2013: 1841). This understanding has since been furthered by Hayran et al. to encompass:

a sense of felt deprivation that individuals encounter due to becoming aware of fleeting favorable and self-relevant experiences taking place in their environment, from which they are absent.

(2017: 661)

The fluctuating live-viewership observed above could be attributed to this feeling – for fans of the film or of the director, for example – of missing out on the ‘rewarding’ experience of being part of something relevant and accessible to them. Indeed, as both Hamilton et al. (2014: 1315) and Haimson and Tang (2017: 50) recognise in their respective examinations of live-streaming tools, one of the core appeals for viewers of engaging with audio-visual content in this way is the potential to participate in it with a likeminded community of known and unknown individuals. It could be argued, therefore, that seeing via the live-viewer counter that 947 other people were watching *Dunkirk*’s live-stream at that given moment might have instilled the FoMO enough to have encouraged someone to participate in the video themselves so that they, too, were not missing anything and could be part of that community. Indeed, Hamilton et al. have proposed that, as “more people start to watch, a stream stands out more” (2014: 1323), whilst Franklin et al. have argued that metrics such as the live-viewer counter “are not passive, but

constitutive of the world, influencing the organisation of actors within the domain they create” (2015: 148). Again, the intention here is not to make a value judgement on the extent to which people participated in *Dunkirk*’s live-stream. Rather, by drawing attention to the live-viewer counter and what it can tell us about how the Live video for *Dunkirk* was engaged with, this section has highlighted a certain aspect of Facebook Live’s interface for how it served not only as an indicator of participation, but also as a driver of it. In turn, this is revealing for how Facebook, as a core player of the platform society, continues to exercise control over the ways in which online viewers and users operate in relation to audio-visual content.

Whilst the live-viewer counter present during the online exhibition of *Dunkirk*’s trailer was useful when considering participation during the live moment, it is less useful for understanding interaction. As a superficial numerical visual marker within the interface, the live-viewer counter did not indicate – nor incite – interaction between viewers. One final aspect of Facebook Live’s interface is useful for understanding this, particularly for the way in which it enables viewers to react directly to the content, to the broadcasters, and to each other.

Like. Love. Haha. Wow. Sad. Angry

The earlier examination of *TFotF*’s chat stream noted how moments of interaction between viewers stood out within the continuously-rolling stream of otherwise non-interactive comments. Whilst revealing something about how interaction was presented during that particular moment of live trailer exhibition, the statement is also revealing for what it says about the operational characteristics of the chat stream during a Live video. In replaying *TFotF*’s Facebook Live video with real-

time comments enabled, and in experiencing *Dunkirk*'s moment of exhibition as it was unfolding in real-time, what stood out was the rate at which comments were appearing and disappearing as part of the continually-unfurling thread of text contributions. The chat stream offered little respite, making it difficult to fully take in – and, as highlighted earlier, respond to – other comments being posted. This may go some way to explaining why interaction between participants was rare during *TFotF*'s trailer exhibition. Indeed, the same conclusion can be drawn about the chat stream for *Dunkirk*.

This sentiment can be read in Haimson and Tang's work, in which the authors conducted interviews to ascertain what makes Facebook Live streams engaging. Reflecting on these interviews, they highlight how:

As much as interactivity overall makes live streams engaging, certain interactive aspects can cause challenges. In particular, the volume [...] of comments can make interactivity exciting or frustrating [...]. Many interview participants reported disliking streams with overwhelming amounts of text, which participants described as distracting [...]. Others remarked on the overwhelming and unruly nature of comments on live streams, often expressing frustration that broadcasters would not get the chance to see or respond to their comment in the sea of text. [...] Finding the right balance between a stream that is interactive enough vs. overwhelming text [...] is a challenge for live stream platform designers and moderators.

(2017: 56)

It becomes clear that the live-streams for *TFotF* and *Dunkirk* did not strike this balance. Indeed, Haimson and Tang (ibid.) propose that more needs to be done by

platform designers to recognise the nuances of real-time engagement within live-streams.

Facebook's set of six standardised pictograms, called Reactions, appear suited to this task (Fig. 6.12). Reactions represent Facebook's contribution to the expanding array of graphic-led communication techniques being developed by platforms in their attempts to make their services as easy to use as possible.^{152,153} They offer instantaneous potential for expression which, according to Facebook, enables users to "easily and quickly express how something you see in News Feed makes you feel" (Krug 2016). Offering a means of expression which requires simply a tap or a click, rather than the typing of a comment, appears to counteract the overwhelming nature of the chat stream, and gives individuals a "quick and efficient way to bring some color and personality into otherwise monochrome networked spaces of text" (Stark & Crawford 2015: 1).

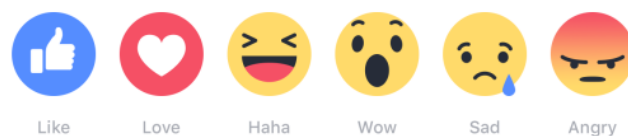


Fig. 6.12 Facebook's six Reaction pictographs which are superficially clickable/tappable within the Facebook Live interface. *Image courtesy of Facebook* (Krug 2016).

Within the non-monochrome live-stream of Facebook Live, Reactions represent another visual indicator of participation, and join a range of

¹⁵² This array of platform-specific, graphic-led features includes YouTube Live's palette of emoticons within its own chat area, and the 'heart' feature in Twitter-owned Periscope, which Twitter promotes as an opportunity to "show support for the broadcaster" (Haider 2016). This variety in features illustrates the competition between platforms as they attempt to position themselves as alluringly as possible within the evolving live-streaming marketplace.

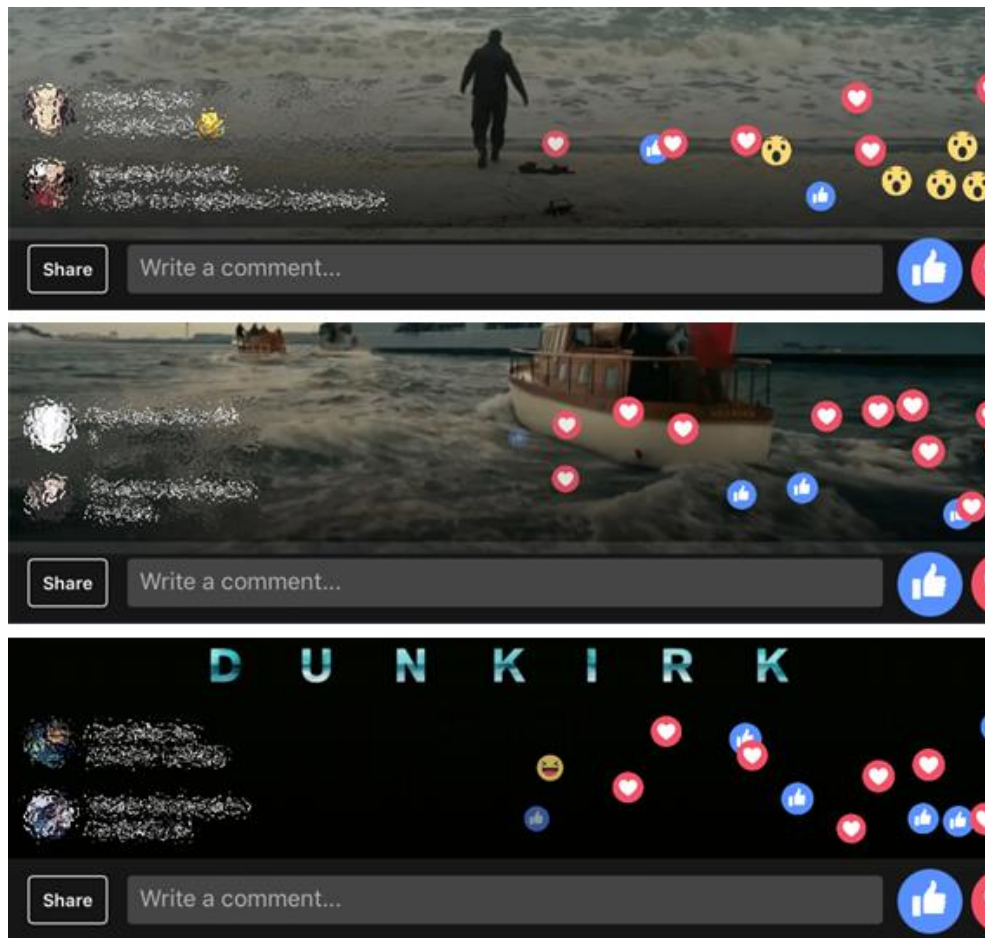
¹⁵³ With regard to making services as easy to use as possible, Tarleton Gillespie has cautioned that "an unwieldy and multclick interface will discourage participation" (2018: 134).

tappable/clickable communication techniques (such as ‘Like’, ‘Retweet’, and ‘Heart’ buttons) which have been increasingly integrated into the fabric of platform use. For Warner Bros. (and Universal in the previous part), Reactions provide a useful metric to gauge the levels of participation at various points in *Dunkirk*’s Live video, allowing them to understand the parts of the live-stream that viewers found most interesting and to use this data to influence future promotional strategies.¹⁵⁴ For the viewers, these features largely promote positive participation with online content and “showcase the possibilities for affective expression in new forms of digital living and communal cultural production” (Stark & Crawford 2015: 9). Indeed, watching a tiny icon containing my profile picture emerge from the bottom of Facebook Live’s interface during *Dunkirk*’s stream in instantaneous response to my own click – then seeing it pop, bubble-like, into a ‘Like’, ‘Love’ or a ‘Wow’ icon before floating across the screen alongside a host of other such icons – contributed to the sense of participation and communality which appears key to the appeal of live-streaming.

This final point – watching my own Reaction contribution alongside everyone else’s – also points to the potential for Reactions to be indicators and encouragers of interaction. Indeed, they have been considered as such since before their implementation; they represent the response to Mark Zuckerberg’s call for a “more nuanced way for users to interact with posts” (in Stinson 2016). Since then, Haimson and Tang have conceptualised Reactions as the second type of interaction (alongside the chat stream) offered within Facebook Live, describing Reactions as “lightweight ways to show appreciation to broadcasters,

¹⁵⁴ In Summer 2016, Facebook began offering select pages access to ‘engagement graphs’; features on Facebook Live’s back-end which rendered Reaction contributions into a “visualized timeline [displaying] when a Live video receive[d] the most engagement” (Constine 2016a).

particularly after an exciting moment in the stream” (2017: 55). They furthered this by observing how such Reaction-based interactions “encouraged other viewers to interact with the live stream” (ibid), citing one of their interviewees to highlight how interaction via Reactions tended to be encouraged more when lots of other viewers were Reacting at the same time. At various points after the trailer had started, a wave of a particular Reaction would appear based on a particular prompt within the trailer. For example, the visceral imagery and soundtrack during a German Luftwaffe attack on waiting British troops provoked a number of ‘Wow’ faces to emanate from the right of the screen in the moments following it (Fig. 6.13). Similarly, after Harry Styles’ first appearance in the trailer, a number of ‘Love’ icons swarmed across the screen (Fig. 6.14). At the trailer’s conclusion (Fig. 6.15), a mixture of ‘Like’ and ‘Love’ icons filled the bottom of the interface, less in response to a particular moment as a general response to the trailer overall. These instances appear to clearly illustrate Haimson and Tang’s observation as to the collective interactivity that Reactions represent and encourage; individuals interacting with the *Dunkirk* trailer based both on what they see in the trailer itself, and on what they see in terms of other peoples’ interactions.



Figs. 6.13–6.15 Interaction through Reaction during the online exhibition of *Dunkirk*'s trailer: **Fig 6.13 (top)** Response in moments after visceral Luftwaffe attack; **Fig 6.14 (middle)** Response to Harry Styles' appearance; **Fig 6.15 (bottom)** Response upon the trailer's conclusion.

It is important to note that Facebook has always been explicit in its assertion that Reactions are not a completely new feature, but an extension of its well-established 'Like' button (Krug 2016; Stinson 2016; Teehan 2016). The original 'Like' button – itself the simplest and most common form of reaction on Facebook – has been conceptualised as a 'paralinguistic digital affordance' that 'facilitates communication and interaction' without the need for any specific associated language (Hayes et al. 2016: 172–73). It has been recognised as a "crucial part of [...] online interaction" (Eranti & Lonkila 2015). Thus, in this discussion of Reactions, it is pertinent to return to the live chat stream, in which

viewers were afforded the ability to react to individual comments by ‘Liking’ them. This form of reaction – of interacting via another user’s comment – manifests itself not as a floating icon, but as a numerical figure beneath the ‘Liked’ comment. In the case of *Dunkirk*’s live-stream, a viewer had the ability to contribute a comment to the rolling thread, which others then had the potential to respond to and interact with. This interaction could have taken the form of another comment – which, as has been noted, was rare – or the form of a ‘Like’. In their examination of the Facebook Like button, Veikko Eranti and Markku Lonkila have posited the Like button as a form of ‘nano-level interaction’, using it to describe ‘Liking’ as one of “most minute and fleeting forms of interaction online” (ibid.). Almost paradoxically to this, the authors go on to suggest that ‘Liking’ can also be very asynchronous in nature:

more consideration and planning [can be afforded] than the immediate nature of a physical social situation. [One] can take as much time as [is] need[ed] to evaluate all the situations, [and] there is always time to reconsider every action.

(2015)

The twenty-four-hour-long live moment underpinning the exhibition of *Dunkirk*’s trailer via Facebook Live complicates this latter notion. Whilst the example of *The Fate of the Furious* illustrated the standard practice of Facebook Live videos being uploaded in their entirety to Facebook upon their completion, the example of *Dunkirk* represents an instance in which this was not the case. Whilst the three-minute trailer for *Dunkirk* was uploaded to Facebook after its exhibition, the twenty-three hours and fifty-seven minutes of live footage which preceded it, along with its accompanying Reactions and comments, were deleted. There is no

way to replay the moment the small boat described in the introduction to this chapter passed across the screen as it entered Dunkirk harbour. Neither is there a way to respond to, or ‘Like’, the comment posted two-and-a-half hours in to the live-stream remarking on how ‘they’ had “made 1.7k people watch this” (Fig. 6.16). There was no time to consider and evaluate whether to ‘Like’ this comment as it made its way up the continually-flowing chat stream. If a viewer didn’t ‘Like’ it, there and then in that instant, they couldn’t ‘Like’ it ever.

The set of Reactions within Facebook Live’s interface, along with the ‘Like’ reaction within the comments stream, emerge here as indicators and encouragers of interaction. However, whilst they enabled viewers to easily and quickly interact with the trailer and with other viewers, the ultimate impermanence of this live-stream rendered these interactions fleeting and ephemeral, accessible now only in the memories (and in the screenshots) of those who participated in and interacted with this live moment of trailer exhibition as it was unfolding.

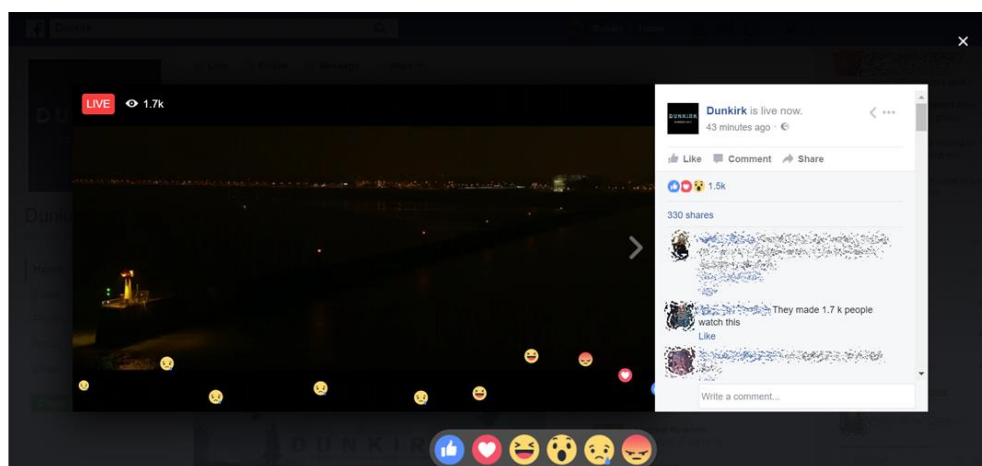


Fig. 6.16 Comment posted two-and-a-half hours in to *Dunkirk*'s live-stream remarking on how ‘they’ (the *Dunkirk* page) “had made 1.7k people watch this”. This comment, and those which came before and after it, are no longer available online.

The second part of this chapter has examined the live moment underpinning the online exhibition of the first official trailer for *Dunkirk*. The impetus behind this use of Facebook Live mirrored the one behind *The Fate of the Furious*: that it was a way with which Warner Bros. sought to navigate the algorithmically-driven News Feed to position, and make more visible, *Dunkirk's* trailer amongst the numerous other calls-for-attention on Facebook's constantly-updated homepage. Going on to interrogate the constellatory domains underpinning this live moment of exhibition, based on my experience of it as it was unfolding in real-time, revealed the ways in which other aspects of Facebook Live's interface guided and encouraged participation and/or interaction. Drawing on concerns around FoMO, the live-viewer counter came forth as one mechanism through which the live-stream's interface presented, but also provoked, participation. This was evidenced in the fluctuating viewership across the live-stream's duration. Focus then shifted to Facebook's pictographic set of Reactions, revealing how they represented a means by which interaction was presented and encouraged during *Dunkirk's* live moment. It argued firstly that they represented an interactive feature through which viewers could interact with the trailer and feel part of a larger community. Focusing specifically on the ability to react to and 'Like' individual comments revealed a further means of interaction, but one heavily indebted to the liveness and fleeting nature of the encounter. Both case studies have illustrated a clear difference in how the liveness of Facebook Live has been mobilised during the online exhibition of film trailers, yet both are alike in what they reveal about why liveness was mobilised in these ways and the impact of this on the way online trailer exhibition was participated in, and interacted with.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how liveness has been mobilised for the online exhibition of film trailers on Facebook. Drawing on concerns around the organisational power of algorithms, it argued that mobilising liveness through the use of the platform's live-streaming tool, Facebook Live, served as a way with which Universal and Warner Bros. could simultaneously navigate and position its trailers within the algorithmically-determined News Feed and make them stand out amongst the News Feed's continually-refreshing stream of content. This, in turn, raised further questions about the other ways in which Facebook organises and controls how users, media producers, and content operate online. It recognised the platform's interface as one way in which this control is exerted. Having established that participation and interaction are important components of the film industry's promotional activities, the first part of this chapter went on to examine how Facebook Live's interface encouraged and presented participation and interaction during the online trailer debut for *The Fate of the Furious*. Interrogating its constellatory domains retrospectively revealed the chat stream as one aspect of Live's interface with the potential to do this. It highlighted how the posting of comments demonstrated an intentional act on the part of the viewer and, thus, their participation in the live-stream, and also drew out instances of interaction between users in the chat stream during the exhibition of the trailer for *The Fate of the Furious*. However, the first part closed by noting that these moments of interaction were few and far between, thus challenging the view that the chat stream was a central feature of interaction. The second part of this chapter examined the online exhibition of a trailer for *Dunkirk*, revealing the ways in which its use of Facebook Live diverged from that for *The Fate of the Furious*.

In experiencing this live moment of exhibition as it was unfolding, it identified two other aspects of Facebook Live's interface – the live-viewer counter and the set of Reactions – as ways in which participation and interaction respectively were encouraged and presented during the exhibition of *Dunkirk*'s trailer, outlining how Reactions in particular served to mitigate the limitations of the chat stream outlined in the first part.

The case studies in this chapter have revealed how the live-streaming of trailers online represents one strategy through which the US film industry has sought to make its trailers stand out amongst the immeasurable call-for-attention on the endlessly-updating homepage of one of the platform society's most influential platforms. In turn, these case studies reveal more broadly how the US film industry has used liveness as a way of responding to the increasing agency that platforms have over content and audiences through their algorithmic and interfacial structures and protocols.

Overall, Part Three of this thesis has charted the ways in which liveness has been mobilised during the exhibition of film trailers online. It has outlined the different ways in which live-streaming in particular has been used to complement the exhibition of trailers at fan conventions, and to underpin the exhibition of trailers on social networking sites. It has argued that liveness has been mobilised in these ways as a means by which to control and increase the visibility of trailers within the increasingly challenging and competitive online environment for short-form audio-visual content being reconfigured by an emergent platform society. As with the Part Two of this thesis, Part Three's focus on the online exhibition of film trailers has revealed how cinema's relationship with liveness extends beyond the

exhibition of film, manifesting itself in the promotional practices for feature films in online spaces affording new opportunities for live promotional experiences.

Conclusion

Contrary to all the talk of dinosaurs, this is more a period of adaptation than extinction. Instead of distinct old and new media, what we have is a complex cultural ecosystem that spans the analog and digital, encompassing physical places and online spaces, material objects and digital copies, fleshy bodies and virtual identities.

(Taylor 2014: 8)

This thesis has examined the mobilisation of liveness as a promotional strategy in film trailer exhibition. It has done so in response to two overarching research questions: in what ways is the US film industry mobilising liveness in the exhibition of film trailers; and why is liveness being mobilised in these ways? This conclusion will first reflect on how the four case study chapters have responded to these core questions, outlining how and why liveness was mobilised in each of its case studies. Having established how these research questions have been answered, this conclusion will then reflect on the original contributions to knowledge that this thesis makes, tying these to three distinct but interconnected themes that emerge across all of the chapters.

The Mobilisation of Liveness in Film Trailer Exhibition

Part One established the conceptual and methodological frameworks of this thesis, positioning it at the intersection of two distinct areas of film and media scholarship: trailer studies, and live and experiential cinema research. It then established the methodological 'constellation of liveness' through which each case study would be examined. Parts Two and Three went on to consider a series of

case studies through their respective constellations, revealing simultaneously the different ways in which liveness has been mobilised by the US film industry in the exhibition of film trailers, and the different reasons why it was mobilised in these ways.

Chapter 3 examined the use of 'live trailers' during the broadcast television advertising break, focusing in particular on live trailers for *Assassin's Creed* on Channel 4 and *The Greatest Showman* on FOX. In each case, the production, distribution, and exhibition of the trailer was consolidated into a single, temporally-bound event. Building on previous experimentations with the form of both the television ad-break and its advertising content, the chapter outlined how liveness was mobilised as a way to experiment with the structural form of the televised trailer. This experimentation manifested itself in the fluid combination of live and recorded trailer footage for *Assassin's Creed*, and in the borrowing of thematic and aesthetic qualities from other forms of entertainment for *The Greatest Showman*. The chapter argued that liveness was mobilised in these ways as a way of preventing the kind of ad-skipping that Grainge and Marich have argued presents such a threat to the television industry and its advertising partners.

Chapter 4 examined how live viewer participation was employed during the televised exhibition of trailers for *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and *War for the Planet of the Apes*. In each case, television viewers were encouraged to participate in the trailer exhibition strategies by having a say in which trailer would be shown in the next ad-break. The chapter illustrated a shift in the way this participation was facilitated. The former case study built on a precedent of televised second-screen participation by encouraging viewers to vote in real-time

via Twitter, whilst the latter asked viewers to vote by using their remote control and navigating to another television channel. The chapter argued that liveness was mobilised as a way of navigating the multi-screen living room and harnessing the wandering attention of the television viewer within it.

Chapter 5 focused on the exhibition of trailers for *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker* at Star Wars Celebration in Orlando and Chicago. It examined how, in each case, the trailers' convention exhibition was simultaneously live-streamed online via YouTube Live. The chapter charted a shift in the online exhibition of these trailers, observing how the interruptive presentation of *The Last Jedi's* trailer gave way to a more inclusive means of exhibition for the latter. The chapter argued that, in diverging from standard practice by live-streaming the exhibition of exclusive convention content, liveness was mobilised by Lucasfilm as a means by which to exert control over the online and offline exhibition of its trailers. It argued that this was in response to the increasingly common threat of leaked content and its subsequent impact on studios' promotional strategies.

Finally, Chapter 6 focused again on the live-streaming of film trailers, this time examining trailer debuts for *The Fate of the Furious* and *Dunkirk*, both of which employed Facebook's live-streaming tool, Facebook Live. The chapter examined the ways in which Facebook Live's interface encouraged and manifested participation and interaction between viewers, and between viewers and producers. Having established at the chapter's outset the precedence given to Live videos on Facebook's News Feed, the chapter argued that liveness was mobilised by the US film industry as a way of responding to, and navigating, the algorithmically-determined News Feed.

Evident above are a number of chapter-specific arguments that this thesis makes in response to its overarching research questions. Taken together, these case studies contribute toward making a number of key and original contributions to knowledge which emerge around three distinct but interrelated themes: eventfulness, expansion, and experimentation.

Eventfulness, Expansion, and Experimentation

As was detailed in Chapter 1, this thesis is located at the intersection of two areas of scholarship which have emerged parallel to, though independently of, one another over the past two decades. In examining the mobilisation of liveness in film trailer exhibition, this thesis makes original contributions to both.

The first key contribution is to the field of trailer studies, which has championed the film trailer as a viable and valuable site of academic scrutiny. The first part of Chapter 1 closed by proposing liveness as a strategy with which the US film industry might eventise trailers and their exhibition. Part Two of this thesis demonstrated the ways in which this manifested itself during the televised exhibition of trailers, revealing how the television ad-break and its content were constructed as discrete events in their own right. Chapter 3's focus on live trailers revealed how the promotional rhetoric surrounding the trailers ("the world's most dangerous ad-break"), as well as practical experimentations with their structural form, together sought to distinguish and elevate both trailers within the "dailiness of broadcast television" (Wilson 2016: 176). Meanwhile, Chapter 4 revealed how live viewer participation was harnessed within ad-breaks which were more broadly constructed as 'ad-break takeovers'; a strategy which sought to turn the live ad-break into a 'must-see', 'hyped' event that viewers would "want

to make an appointment to watch” (Channel 4 2014a). To the same end, Part Three revealed how the mobilisation of liveness in the form of live-streaming made trailers and their online exhibition stand out within algorithmically-driven online ecosystems. Chapter 5 outlined how YouTube Live represents a means by which to eventise audio-visual content and rank it higher in search results not just on YouTube’s platform, but also more broadly within parent-Google’s search ranking ecosystem (Sehl 2020; Wilbert 2020). Chapter 6 made a similar observation, noting how Facebook Live videos appear higher on News Feed than other, non-live, audio-visual content (Kant & Xu 2016). Liveness has emerged across this thesis as an ‘indexical marker’ (to re-purpose Jonathan Gray’s words), serving to hail an audience to these unique, temporally-bound moments of exhibition. Yet, liveness has been granted almost no academic attention in trailer studies literature. Similarly, despite suggestions in the same literature that trailers have the potential to reach event-status, little has been done to interrogate precisely how this might manifest itself in practice. This thesis situates itself in these lacunae. Examining trailer exhibition in the face of liveness makes an original contribution to trailer studies literature. It does so by offering a lens for understanding how trailers and their exhibition are being eventised, made louder, and made to stand out in a complex media ecosystem of immeasurable other forms of audio-visual content and calls-for-attention, and in spaces over which the US film industry has increasingly little control.

Chapter 1 brought this discussion of trailers into conversation with another area of academic debate around cinema’s evolving relationship with liveness. This thesis makes a second key contribution to the latter of these emergent bodies of research. In response to a renewed audience desire for

“atmospheric, immersive and participatory cinematic experiences” (Atkinson & Kennedy 2016a: 140), research in this area has primarily centred on the expansion of film’s exhibitory experience beyond the cinema auditorium. The second part of Chapter 1 closed by foregrounding an unexplored suggestion that promotional materials had the potential to become multi-spatial, temporally-bound live experiences in themselves, and that investigation of how this might manifest itself would offer an understanding of how liveness was being mobilised beyond the exhibition of film. Much like the debates put forth in the literature on live and experiential cinema, Parts Two and Three of this thesis highlighted how it is in spaces beyond the cinema auditorium that liveness is being mobilised in relation to trailer exhibition. Part Two centred on its mobilisation on broadcast television, revealing the ways in which trailer exhibition strategies have exploited television’s propensity for liveness in ways they have not necessarily needed to in the past. Part Three examined live moments of trailer exhibition online, exploring how evolving tools such as live-streaming have provided new means by which to exhibit and experience content online. Yet, trailers and their exhibition have not been granted any attention within research on live and event cinema. Examining cinema’s evolving relationship with liveness in the context of trailers and their exhibition thus makes an original contribution to these debates by offering a lens for understanding how the US film industry’s mobilisation of liveness has expanded beyond the exhibition of film (but similarly in spaces beyond the cinema). In doing so, this thesis simultaneously broadens the scope of live cinema research to position trailers and their exhibition as part of a wider, concerted industrial mobilisation of liveness by the US film industry, and responds directly

to Atkinson and Kennedy's call for the "continued mapping and critical study" (ibid.: 267) of the ever-evolving field of live cinema.

In addition to this, the constellation of liveness framework through which these instances of trailer exhibition were examined also makes a key contribution to live cinema literature, as well as to wider discussions of liveness. Recalling the case made in Chapter Two that liveness cannot be approached nor understood from a single perspective, this thesis has proposed a definition of liveness which treats it as a multi-dimensional construct. In the context of this investigation, liveness is simultaneously characterised by its real-time transmission of – and temporal co-presence with – an unfolding event, and by its mutual-construction through textual, industrial, spatio-temporal, and audience-related factors. As demonstrated in its use and application across this thesis, this refined conceptualisation of liveness offers a more nuanced understanding of both the phenomenon's multifarious nature in the contemporary media ecosystem, and of how live moments themselves are underpinned by an interconnected array of constellatory components. In turn, my adaptation of Karin van Es' constellatory model makes an original contribution for how it takes into account the changing and multifaceted nature of liveness, constructing it as a constellation of practices that are brought into being and shaped at the intersection of variable paratexts, spaces of participation, audience configurations, and – importantly – an interchangeable object of study. My iteration of the constellation of liveness offers a scalable framework that can transcend the study of trailers and be used to understand the live moment underpinning other forms of media, including – but not limited to – other forms of promotional and editorial content.

Finally, this thesis opened by grounding this investigation within broader concerns to do with an emergent platform society and new screen ecology. Central to these concerns is how new online platforms – and the services available on them – are reconfiguring the ways in which traditional media industries are needing to operate in the twenty-first century. This thesis makes a key intervention in these discussions by proposing trailers as an as-yet-unexplored lens through which we can understand how the US film industry – and its advertising partners – are attempting to navigate this emergent and complex media ecosystem. In common among the case studies examined here has been the ‘world-first’, ‘first-time’ nature of these mobilisations of liveness. As noted previously, Part Two charted the ways in which television’s propensity for liveness has been mobilised in ways it has not been in the past. As was exemplified in the paratextual commentary surrounding the case studies, the live trailers of Chapter 3 represent the first (and, to-date, only) instances in which film trailers have undergone the ‘live ad’ treatment. Similarly, the employment of viewer participation for the exhibition of the *Planet of the Apes* trailers represented the first time that television viewers were afforded a say in which film trailer would be shown during a broadcast television ad-break. Part Three charted the ways in which live-streaming was used to break from, or play with, established industry practices around online marketing. The case studies in Chapter 5 were the first examples where a trailer’s exclusive debut at a major fan convention was simultaneously streamed online, whilst the examples in Chapter 6 represented the first instances in which Facebook Live was used to underpin the debut of a new film trailer. The mobilisations of liveness examined across this thesis in relation to film trailer exhibition can thus be said to represent experimental, exploratory

manoeuvres rather than established or even emergent industry practice. The study of live trailer exhibition makes a key contribution to discussions around the platform society and its new screen ecology by emerging as an important site for exploring the ways in which the legacy US film industry is experimenting with, and responding to, this emergent new media ecosystem in contexts beyond the well-documented distribution of film, television, and other legacy media content.

That said, the global situation at the time of writing-up this thesis – in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic – might challenge this assertion as to the experimental nature of these mobilisations of liveness. The pandemic, with its enforced lockdowns and closures, has subverted traditional means of producing, distributing, and exhibiting (promotional) content, resulting in content producers and advertisers turning to new technological means through which to exhibit their content. In a *Wired* article by Sophia Epstein written during the pandemic's initial peak in Spring 2020, Gregor Pyror (co-chair of law firm Reed Smith's entertainment and media industry group) observed how live-streaming had "totally exploded" (in Epstein 2020: 49) since the virus' worldwide outbreak. Indeed, he went on to highlight how:

companies that normally wouldn't think about streaming are having to, [meaning that you] can see this shift towards livestream becoming mainstream. [...] The longer it [the pandemic] continues, the more widespread adoption [of live-streaming] will be.

(in *ibid.*)

The *Tenet* example used in the Introduction is a good illustration of this. As Donald Mustard pointed out, it was because of the pandemic that he and Christopher Nolan decided on Fortnite as the launch site for *Tenet*'s second trailer. As alluded

to in the industry responses that were quoted, it begs the question of whether Nolan would have chosen this platform had it not been for the pandemic. After all, the first trailer for *Tenet* was exclusively released in cinemas in August 2019 and was not uploaded online for almost a month, serving as an illustration of the preference Nolan has on foregrounding the cinema experience.

Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether mobilisations of liveness as a promotional strategy – and, indeed, live strategies in general – do become ‘mainstream’ as a result of the changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic. For now, this thesis has revealed how liveness has been mobilised as a way of eventising and experimenting with trailers and their exhibition in spaces beyond the cinema, and how these mobilisations are illustrative of a legacy US film industry attempting to find its place in an increasingly complex, twenty-first century, media ecosystem.

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