

‘You sure that’s a film, man?’: Audience anticipation, expectation and engagement in *Lost in London LIVE*

Sarah Atkinson,
King’s College London, UK

Abstract:

Lost in London LIVE (Dir. Woody Harrelson, 2017) claimed to be ‘a first-of-its-kind film event.’ Shot in one take, in real time, with one camera, entirely on location in London in the early hours of Friday 20th January 2017, it was simultaneously broadcast live to 604 cinemas in America (and to one cinema in the UK). As a stand-alone experience, with a short lead-in, temporally and spatially bound, this event presented a unique opportunity in audience studies research. This article presents and consolidates the findings of three branches of methodological enquiry into *Lost in London*. These include the authors’ own observations at the screening in London, retrospective audience questionnaires, and analysis of the social media activity - before, during and after the screening. A number of themes emerged which I have identified as: Liveness, Novelty, Proximity, Definitional and Audience Expectations. As well as revealing the new ways in which live cinema formats impact upon audience motivations, expectations and pleasures, this project also reveals the challenges and opportunities of mobilising research into live cinema phenomena.

Keywords: Live Cinema, Live Film, Event Cinema, Lost in London, Liveness, Experience Economy, Experience Community.

Introduction

The title for this article – ‘You sure that’s a film, man?’ is the alleged exclamation made by a public bystander (O’Mahony and Davis, 2017) during the live broadcast of Woody Harrelson’s directorial debut *Lost in London* when the on-street observer witnessed a sequence in which an angry and dishevelled Harrelson wrestles a wheelchair-bound homeless man to the floor in an attempt to snatch a £50 note from his grasp. The quotation

captures the essence of what is at stake within this article – the expansion of the notion of what a ‘film’ as a cultural object can be, and what the cultural experience of ‘cinema’ can become. The statement also provokes a discussion on how best to define, articulate and understand *Lost in London* as a ‘new’ form, as well as questioning the implications of the seemingly oxymoronic notion of a ‘live film’ or of a ‘live cinema’. Through my interrogations, I reveal the long-established genealogy of the term ‘live film/cinema’ which excavates similar debates around its cultural currency and applicability.

The claim to newness and originality by *Lost in London*’s creators clearly calls for critical attention. It did indeed unify three never-before combined phenomena in mainstream narrative cinema (but phenomena that all have long historical trajectories and well-established, tried-and-tested technological tools and infrastructures). These three forms are what has come to be known as ‘event cinema’ (sometimes referred to as ‘alternative content,’ ‘simulcasting’ or ‘live casting’); ‘one-take’ cinema conventions; and, live televisual drama broadcast (such as one-off live commemorative soap-opera episodes).

I will firstly interrogate these contextual underpinnings, both the historical precursors and the current contemporary manifestations as well as providing a brief etymology of the term ‘live film’. I will then provide an overview of *Lost in London*, the film’s content and style, the surrounding event in January and its subsequent limited distribution by Picturehouse Cinemas. I will proceed to outline the methodological approach taken during this study, before moving on to detail the analysis and emergent themes that prevailed in the audience data. I will conclude by situating this particular case study in the genealogy of live cinema phenomena.

Context, Histories and Continuities

The international simulcast of *Lost in London LIVE* was made possible by an established ‘event cinema’ infrastructure, which has been evolving since 2003. The ubiquity, popularity and commercial success of ‘event cinema’ screenings involving the broadcast or retrospective screening of live events including music, sport, theatre and opera to cinema audiences, has recently been expanding apace. In 2003, a David Bowie concert was broadcast live by satellite from London to promote his album *Reality*; in 2006, the Metropolitan Opera in New York began frequent live transmission of their performances; the UK’s successful National Theatre Live programme of screenings launched in 2009. Arts Council England’s Live-to-Digital 2016 Report states: ‘With the growing acceptance of the genre and more content opportunities, the market for Event Cinema is forecast to achieve annual revenues of £60-80 million in the UK and \$1billion US worldwide by 2019, with the UK/Ireland currently the global market leader’. Its expansion and diversification is seen across many artistic and cultural forms including event live screenings from museums and exhibitions (Cruikshanks, 2016). The aesthetic style and conventions of event cinema have already been interrogated particularly in relation to how it is filmed and the rhythm and pace of the cutting that takes place. Martin Barker (2012), in his textual analysis of the

National Theatre's live productions, notes how high camera angles provide audiences with 'privileged arbitrary access' and 'bravura moments' – this is distinctive from opera where the 'front of stage' camera is predominantly used (Haswell, 2017).

In contrast to a formulaic multi-camera aesthetic, *Lost in London* also followed the conventions of 'one-take cinema' pioneered in films such as *Timecode* (Dir. Mike Figgis, 2000), *Russian Ark* (Dir. Aleksandr Sokurov, 2002) and *Victoria* (Dir. Sebastian Schipper, 2016) – released with the promotional tagline: 'One City. One Night. One Take'. This statement is equally applicable to *Lost in London*, indeed Harrelson himself cites *Victoria* as a significant creative influence. These films, which were shot in Los Angeles, St Petersburg and Berlin, are all about place, showcasing and traversing the urban and cultural landscapes, and they were made possible by the portability of digital film cameras. The critically acclaimed *Birdman* (Dir. Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2014) was famously produced *as if* in one take – such is the appeal of this particular style – due to its claim to realist authenticity and temporal verisimilitude, the origins of which can be traced to Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948) which broke with narrative convention by disguising cuts to create the illusion that it was filmed in real time.

Lost in London LIVE also follows a lineage of live novelty broadcasts of television serial dramas in both the UK and US. In 2000, for example, 'Coronation Street Live' marked the 40th anniversary of the soap opera and ten years later, in 2010, 'Eastenders Live' was broadcast live to the nation to mark the show's 25th anniversary. Of course, in the earliest days of UK soap opera production between 1960-1961, episodes were filmed and broadcast live by necessity as a result of technological limitation. But, as with the event cinema infrastructure, live television broadcasts have since been supported by a multi-camera engineered infrastructure in the stable conditions of a studio facility. *Lost in London* was subject to a related discourse of 'novelty' in its promotional strategies as it competed for attention in the context of the 'experience economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 2011).

The audience is first introduced to the unique promise of *Lost in London* through the advertising campaign invitation – 'Watch a teaser for Woody Harrelson's "live cinema event"'. In this articulation of the production, we see the often conflated terms of 'live' and 'event' which are frequently used to describe a range of contrasting phenomena (see Atkinson & Kennedy, 2017a) in order to underscore or highlight their purported novelty.

However, social media responses to *Lost in London's* initial declaration of newness were very quick to dispel the claim that this was the first time that such a cinematic feat had ever been attempted. Respondents pointed to works such as Peter Greenaway's live multimedia project *Tulse Luper Suit Cases* (2003) and Francis Ford Coppola's project *Twixt* (2011) in which the film was remixed live by Coppola himself in response to audience reaction (Gosney, 2016). Blast Theory's project *My One Demand* (2015) is also identified as a precursor. The creators state:

This single continuous shot is streamed live online and to a cinema. As you watch, interact in real time on your mobile in the cinema or on your computer

from anywhere. Our narrator has many stories to tell and one of them could be yours.

The film which lasted two hours was broadcast live in one continuous take in Toronto in 2015 in partnership with the Luminato Festival. Coppola more recently undertook the Distant Vision¹ Project which took place in Summer 2016 at The UCLA School of Theater, Film and Television, and was broadcast live to screenings rooms. As the online documentary stated: ‘Over 100 students and faculty joined him as designers, crew and cast to further understand the process of live movie making, what [Coppola] calls “Live Cinema”’.

These instances collectively highlight the multi-faceted use of the term ‘live cinema.’ The MET opera has also consistently referred to its own offering as ‘live cinema’ (Heyer 2008). The live broadcast of *Tosca* in Rome in 1992 was similarly described as a ‘Live Film’ by the director. This latter example is perhaps the closest in history to the concept and experience of *Lost in London*. It involved 27 cameras in 4 locations, and 400 technicians. It was shot in three acts in three locations: the 16th century church of Sant’Andrea della Valle; the Palazzo Farnese and the Castel Sant’Angelo; and the RAI Studio from where the orchestra played. According to the promotional materials: ‘...two years of painstaking familiarisation with the advanced technological resources... went into the making of what producer Andrea Andermann called a “live film”’ (Alan Cowell, Warner Classics, 1992: 3). There have been a number of live opera broadcasts since this point, by the same producer. The 2010 production of *Rigoletto* has since been referred to as ‘site specific opera’ (Morris, 2015: 52).

***Lost in London* Overview**

The film was first seeded in December 2016 (Pulver, 2016) preceded by a short promotional campaign, which began with a teaser trailer which was a piece-to-camera from Harrelson himself outlining his intentions while standing on Waterloo Bridge, against the backdrop of the London Eye giant Ferris wheel, wearing a Union Jack cap, with the sound of the National Anthem playing in the background. Throughout, place and location are absolutely crucial:

No one has ever shot a movie and live-broadcast it into cinemas at the same time. No one’s ever been that stupid, until now. Join me for *Lost in London*, a movie about one of the worst nights of my life that I thought would make good comedy, and if I fail, I’m going to jump off Waterloo Bridge, into the Thames below, and that should pretty much finish off my career.

This video is indicative of the importance of the ‘paratextual surround’ which continued to set up the film in the lead up to its exhibition, as well as scaffolding and framing its moment of live exhibition, and subsequent distribution.

The night that Harrelson refers to in this first promotional trailer is the one that resulted in the newspaper headline: ‘Woody Harrelson has been arrested following a bizarre taxi chase through the streets of London in the early hours of this morning’ (June 7, 2002). *Lost in London* is based on these *actual* happenings that took place 15 years previously. The film portrays and embellishes Harrelson’s journey across that one fateful night, with Harrelson being followed throughout, and it is all told through his perspective. The trigger for the unfortunate series of events is the moment when Harrelson’s wife reads a tabloid article featuring a sensationalized account of a three-in-the-bed ‘romp’. Horrified, his wife leaves him out alone in the city. The evening unfolds around his desperate attempts to get back to his wife and two children as they’re due to visit the Harry Potter production set the following morning. Harrelson’s behavior and the choices he makes over the course of the next hour or so lead to comedic and calamitous results, including his arrest for damaging an ash tray in the back of a taxi, a taxi chase, and a night in a prison cell which involves a fantasy dream-like encounter with Willie Nelson.

The live broadcast was initially only planned for cinemas in the US but then, less than a fortnight before the event, tickets went on sale in one UK cinema – the Picturehouse Central in London – and very quickly sold out. On the evening, the screening was preceded by two ‘making-of’ films, interspersed with numerous inter-titles which detail the metric information relating to the film – ‘325 Crew, 320 extras, one camera, one take, one chance to get it right!’ – and encouraging audience members to email or tweet in ‘questions for Woody’.

These short films feature footage from the rehearsals and interviews with key cast and crew, all of which serve to lay bare and emphasize the extent to which this production was exceptionally challenging logistically and highly technologically complex. Prominence is given to these technical features in which elements such as the requirement for two square miles of London to be rigged with antennae to pick up and broadcast the camera signal are underscored. Audiences are also shown the complexity of the different locations in which the live action will be staged and captured: a theatre, stairwells, dressing rooms, a restaurant, a moving campervan, a busy nightclub, a toilet interior, city street exterior, inside taxis, a children’s play park, a police van, a police station and a holding cell, as well as that of the final scene which takes place on Waterloo Bridge with the National Theatre in the background.

The film concludes with a pre-recorded excerpt of Daniel Radcliffe’s recollection of Harrelson coming onto the Harry Potter film set with his family the following day, and the speculation of him using it as a hide-out as his previous night’s misdemeanours had, by then, made it into the press (Guardian, 2002). This concluding paratextual epilogue underscores the significance of the notion of celebrity to this creative endeavour, in particular, the importance of the centrality of the figure of Harrelson to audience reception, which I will go on to discuss in more detail shortly.

The credits roll, and a live Q&A session follows shortly afterwards hosted by Chris Hewitt, which includes Harrelson, along with other crew and cast including Director of Photography Nigel Willoughby and Camera Operator John Hembrough.

Methodology

I attended the live screening at Picturehouse Central in London – the only UK-based cinema to screen the film – as well as attending one of the latter post-produced, non-live screenings², the series of which constituted the UK-distribution of the film, and were accompanied by a post-screening Q&A with Harrelson and one of the producers. I monitored press and social media coverage in the lead-up to the screening as well as during and after. All posts from Twitter that included the hashtags #lostinlondon or #lostinlondonlive were collected using Storify. Those most active on Twitter were a combination of journalists, individual crew members, cast members, organisations involved in the production (including the sound designers, stunt vehicles, casting agents, and Fathom Events – the organization responsible for the live broadcast), in-cinema audience members, and on-street observers in London. The associated hashtags were trending throughout the evening. I also used the hashtag to source contacts to send out a post-screening questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of thirteen questions, which collected basic demographic data, ascertained the location of the cinema at which the respondent attended the screening, and asked how they heard about the screening, what motivated them to attend, what they enjoyed most, and whether they would attend or recommend a similar live cinema event in the future. The questionnaire elicited 85 responses from the UK and the US audience. As this was a time-bound experience, the data was unified and manageable (i.e. it was not dispersed across an expansive time frame). I therefore did not require the social media analytical tools devised for expanded and unwieldy data sets (such as that proposed by Bruns and Stieglitz, 2013)

Analysis

All of the responses to the questionnaires and the social media comments were distilled into five main emergent themes: Liveness, Novelty, Proximity, Definitional and Audience Expectations.

Liveness

In response to the question which asked what motivated respondents to attend the screening in the first instance, the most frequent answer was the ‘liveness’ with 82% of respondents stating that this was their top motivation. The second highest response was that they were intrigued by the originality of the event, with 79% of respondents giving this answer. The lowest motivation, only selected by 20% of the respondents, was the story and the stars involved. We then asked a further question about what the respondents enjoyed the most about the event – again the top answer was liveness with 86% of the respondents

answering that liveness was the most enjoyable element. This also manifested in the questionnaire responses with one respondent commenting:

‘Live’ performances are usually reserved for the theater and in some cases TV. To experience something of this caliber on the silver screen is exciting. (Q21)

A further question examined the future intentions of the audience members and how this experience would impact on their future cinema-going behaviour. 82.5% said ‘yes’, they would definitely see a live event again, while nobody said ‘no’.³

On whether this would have been the same experience if it were not broadcast live:

It's like attending a performance art installation or production. If it's available live, why would you want to experience it any other way? (Q30)

This contradicts recent research which examined the importance of liveness in event cinema (AE Consulting, 2016) which claimed that consumers are motivated by Live-to-Digital's economics and convenience, but not its ‘liveness’ (2016: 13).⁴ I am nonetheless going to query the *meaning and operation* of liveness since it is key to the marketing rubric of this event.

This was not live in the Auslanderian sense: Auslander describes liveness as the ‘physical co-presence of performers and audience [...] production and reception, experience in the moment’ (2008: 61). There was no physical co-presence between audience and producers/performers, but as we shall see, the respondents indicated a great deal of perceived or virtual presence through what I describe below as a sense of ‘proximity.’ This research also supported Couldry's contention that: ‘Liveness – or live transmission – guarantees a potential connection to shared social realities as they are happening’ (2003: 3). Indeed, one of the social media viewers commented on the sense of community that was felt in the auditorium at the time of the screening:

Conversation post movie in my theater: #LostinLondon brings back ‘community’ to ‘dying’ in-person cinema? (T3)⁵

As Cochrane and Bonner describe; the ‘cachet’ which liveness brings appealed to the audience: ‘The power of the promotional rhetoric about simultaneity of reception, in tandem with the privilege of being in the originating time zone, is evidenced’ (2014: 6).

The preview footage which was screened at the start of the film ended with a shot of a propped-up clapper-board. This is a key piece of production iconography used to semiotically communicate the film production process (Atkinson 2018). Of course, this particular piece of equipment is redundant in this film, since there are no cuts and no repeated takes, and hence its presence can be conceptualized as a validating reference to the status of the cultural object of a ‘film’.

Other 'live' signifiers included the round of applause that occurred in various cinemas at the end of the screening:

Had a blast watching the world's 1st live movie – my first time in an ovation-giving cinema audience. (T4)

Barker relays a number of accounts from audience members reflecting upon moments of audience applause in the cinema screenings of live opera, which range from being welcome and acceptable in some cases, and awkward and inappropriate in others (2013: 32, 36–37, 62–67). The value of liveness in relation to live television broadcasts have been noted by Couldry who describes moments of live broadcasts as 'a "shared" ritual centre' (2003).

One audience member comments in disbelief at the fact that this is actually happening live:

Did you notice that in the cab that you ripped out the ash tray it had the real time? It showed 2.58 AM? (T63)

There were several comments which expressed the viewing pleasures of the very real possibility that something could go wrong at any moment in the live setting. Harrelson himself had prefaced the entire experience upon this possibility in the teaser trailer:

There are 14 locations for #lostinlondon and 400 crew here to make Woody Harrelson's live film tonight. What could possibly go wrong? (Kate Muir, 1.34am 20th January 2017).

We're ready to get #lostinlondon. I hope nothing goes wrong but I also really truly hope something does go wrong. But in a good way. (T19)

It was a key moment in the world of film and the media. It makes film a bit more like theatre (and the early days of TV): not so much the sense that anything could go wrong (I wouldn't want it to), but knowing something is live makes it more compelling in all respects. (Q8)

Christopher Morris talked about 'the risk of spectacular failure' (2015: 53) in relation to the live film *Rigoletto*. In the case of *Lost in London*, it almost did: a WW2 bomb found close to Waterloo Bridge (a crucial location for the final scene of the film) on the 19th January meant that it was shut down for most of the afternoon and evening, with doubt cast upon whether or not it would re-open in time, fuelling the social media pre-screening buzz.

The preceding behind-the-scenes 'making of' featurettes also fuelled this sense that 'something could go wrong at any moment' through its detailing of the technical complexities of the shoot – the camera needing to stay in contact with the antenna to

ensure a continuous, unbroken broadcast, and the potential of the sound cutting out, with the placement of multiple microphones about the actors and the sets. As Director of Photography Willoughby states, 'There are many things that could go wrong.'

Chris Hewitt, the post-screening Q&A host, captured the affective sense felt on set in the following Tweet:

Still buzzing from the Q&A, and from watching the successful high wire act that was *Lost in London*, a film perpetually seconds from disaster. (Chris Hewitt, 20/1/17, 8:48, Twitter)

Novelty

A popular response to emerge was the appreciation and notability of the novelty of the experience and recognition that this was 'new' as illustrated by the following comments:

A new aesthetic form, given the unpolished look of the movie and the on-the-go feeling it left viewers with. (Q28)

Complete LIVE one camera shot movie has not been done. That is a new form of production. (Q13)

It's something that has obviously never been done and provides a bit more to the viewing experience. (Q22)

Proximity

This was a facet of the experience which I noted as an observer to the live broadcast of the film and, as mentioned above, it certainly afforded an additional sense of co-presence. A sense of proximity manifested in a number of unique ways:

1. There was a proximity to the performers, particularly Harrelson.
2. Textual proximity and closeness through the analysis of look and sound: the unmixed audio, unpolished dialogue, dimly lit spaces, and muted (unbalanced) colour both exposed and revealed in the artifice of the film's live construction.
3. Through making-of, behind-the-scenes materials, audiences witnessed the moment of the film's actual, real-time making.
4. Proximity to one another as audience members.
5. Closeness to industry.

Proximity to the performers

Lost in London afforded an authentic closeness – a sense of proximity – to the action and

the actors, normally subjected to the distancing veneer imposed through intense post-production manipulation. This aesthetic, coupled with the preceding 'making of' behind-the-scenes materials and the post-film interactive and intimate Q&A combined to afford a different type of audience engagement to a traditional film screening. Here the centrality of Harrelson as the celebrity figurehead of this project is key, and is highlighted by the audience appreciation of his self-exposure:

Achieving intimacy with the makers during their exposed, vulnerable, & wholly committed state of endeavor. (Q87)

Woody Harrelson and everyone who contributed to making this film, gave me personal insight on how not one person is perfect. But, is not afraid of showing their flaws a celebrity. (Q63)

These comments are indicative of a para-social intimacy experienced by the audience in their reception of Harrelson as accessible, flawed and human. Furthermore, they underscore the importance of the star to the matrix of reception to *Lost in London*. Various accounts from celebrity studies help us to understand the interconnected links between celebrity and media events which are clearly mobilized here (Couldry, 2003; Bennett, 2010; Turner, 2013).

This intimacy was felt to add to the authenticity of the film narrative:

A film like *Lost in London* felt more realistic than any other film you would see because of the added dramatization. (Q81)

There are also a number of 'direct exchanges' between audience members and performers> One such example is shown below in which an audience member questions the techniques behind a particularly memorable moment, known as the 'vomit' scene (which received a great deal of attention in the twitter feed), in which Harrelson unceremoniously vomits into the mouth of a girl in the public toilets:

#lostinlondon How many times was that vomit part rehearsed/

Reply from actor: three times with vomit, countless without!

Return reply – Dear god. Definitely paid off. I almost inhaled beer it was so surprising!

Textual Proximity

The unmixed audio, unpolished dialogue, dimly lit spaces, and muted (unbalanced) colour both exposed and revelled in the artifice of the film's live construction. It resulted in a sense of proximity to the both the moment and the tools and people of production, which was evidenced in the Twitter responses, where there were multiple tweets from people working

in the production as well as from the actors and performers. One tweet from Red-TX audio company reads:

Wow, we've just finished mixing and providing live sound FX for #lostinlondon live to the US, great job to everyone involved, history made.

Behind-the-scenes proximity

My own proximity as audience member was also invoked in the queue to enter the cinema. There was something wonderful about wandering the icy, winter early-morning London streets killing time before the early morning screening (1am UK time), then seeing those same streets and all the familiar iconography on the screen – the red buses, the black cabs, and the police vehicles. For arguably the first time in narrative cinema history, the time of production was collapsed into the time of exhibition and reception. Cinema audience members witnessed the moment of the film's making, whilst simultaneously being exposed to the mechanics of its creation. As one respondent commented:

It made non-movie buffs (like me) curious about this type of production and its history, and made me excited to share the fact that I participated in the event. Win-win! (Q30)

Audience proximity

There was no 'prohibitive' distancing or objectifying warning at the beginning of the film – the screening wasn't preceded by the usually obligatory standard FBI warning, there was no request to 'switch off your mobile phone'. Instead, audience members were encouraged to engage with social media activity: text appeared at the beginning of the screening which instructed audience members to use the hashtags, and provided an email address to send questions to. The instantaneity of the connection between the event and the audience is evidenced in the simultaneous comments that were posted during the viewing:

#lostinlondon it's only a few seconds in and I already love it. Was it fun to produce? (T33)

There was also audience members' proximity to one another other as they formed into a cohesive 'viewing community.'

It felt novel. Staying up late to watch it was part of the charm. It was cool thinking that it was all happening a stone's throw from where I was. I enjoyed the Q and A afterwards – I was as interested in the process as in the actual film. It was nice to see the whole cast and crew coming together to celebrate pulling it off. (Q47)

This statement invokes the notion of an experience community which has been defined as ‘temporally fleeting and shallow gatherings of people brought together in elaborate, highly constructed and crucially commodified narrative environments’ (Atkinson & Kennedy, 2017: 18). This shallowness of exchange (which is not sustained) is noted in the work of Gruzdt et. al. on Twitter as an ‘Imagined community’ (2011). One respondent commented:

The excitement I felt waiting for the live Q&A that followed was unexpected. I think at that moment ‘real time’ became real for me! Also it was during that time my daughter began getting responses to her tweets from producers. The world got really small and intimate all of sudden. (Q81)

This remark is indicative of the sense that audience members felt ‘part of a specific interpretive community’ (Bourdon 2000: 550). These various emergent critical terms all indicate of the increasing need to understand and articulate the people, formally known as ‘audiences’, in the context of an expanding ‘experience economy’.

Industry Proximity

The viewing conditions and the paratextual framing of the film also enhanced this proximity, and shaped the audiences’ subjectivity in ways that are not normally experienced in cinema auditoria. There were also comments from bystanders and observers in the street (including the one who questioned the reality of the film) who visited the location to watch the ‘actual’ filming activity:

Couldn’t sleep so I’ve decided to get #lostinLondon ... just behind me is Woody Harrelson. (T18)

The quotation which provides the title for this article ‘You sure that’s a film, man?’ alludes to the challenges of the definitional debate that also took place over social media and in the questionnaire responses.

Definitional

There was a great deal of this ‘unprompted’ definitional discussion on Twitter in an attempt to express and capture the essence of what was happening:

Lost in London is a 21st Century art form. It’s live theatre; it’s also a movie. It truly puts the event in Event Cinema. (T32)

The questionnaire followed up on this by asking audience members to describe what it was that they saw and the responses are interesting and varied:

This medium was a true screenplay – a live play performed on screen. (Q3)

The live film is somewhere between a play and a traditional film. It's got the energy of a play with the variety of options available on film. (Q15)

This is stage and film copulating. It's entirely new, yet completely familiar. (Q33)

As the comments above illustrate, there was a constant reference to the hybridity of the form in which the aesthetics and formal practices of film and theatre, screen and stage are seen to merge.

Expectations

Of particular note were the subsequent raised expectations on the part of the audience and the indicative 'always on,' instantaneous nature of digital culture:

@WoodyHarrelson please get on the marketing 'cause I need a t-shirt, a sweater, and maybe a mug too. Will purchase. (T51 5:18am 20/01/17)

How come #lostinlondon is only trending now?? Wish I knew about it sooner. (T6) ...20/01/17 8.17

Why isn't anyone live reviewing lost in London. (T68)

Of course, these latter comments allude to unrealistic practices, and this final comment prioritises the experience's novelty above all else:

The problem is that now it's been done. What next? (Q59)

Conclusion

Lost in London provides a unique site for audience research. As opposed to studies conducted across dispersed sites, for prolonged time periods, this live cinema event was spatially and temporally bounded, with audience participation also documented on social media. This factor provides both key opportunities for research and numerous challenges including the (hyper-) temporality of experiences, the methodological complexity of 'event' capture and analysis, and the ephemerality of social media coupled with the exponential growth and apparently unquenchable, voracious appetite for novelty within the experience economy.

The emergence of some live film generic conventions – the co-presence and access to making-of and behind-the-scenes materials revealed before the screening itself – is consistent with event cinema experiences when during the breaks (while the 'live' theatre

audience is enjoying the interval) the cinema audiences view live, behind-the-scene action on screen, as well as pre-recorded interviews and content with the performers and production team.

Despite its claim for newness *Lost in London* was built on traditional frameworks, and drew from established narratives modes, codes and conventions, and depended upon a well-established technological infrastructure. It also follows a clear line of historical antecedents. It drew upon established industry distribution, exhibition and promotional mechanisms, including traditional press-releases and mainstream media promotion. As claimed by the initial marketing hyperbole for *Lost in London*, it was indeed a one-of-a-kind event, and remains so. It doesn't represent a commercial, scalable model of distribution in and of itself. Its subsequent UK cinema distribution passed without much fanfare. The activity surrounding its release was a somewhat muted affair in relation to the big social media splash that it made when it was broadcast live. What it has undoubtedly provoked is a debate around what a film can be and what a cinematic viewing experience can become.

To the credit of filmmakers I thought the aesthetic was not all that different than any other single cam style film. Everything was so sharp and choreographed so well that it quickly felt like I was just at the movies (Q20).

As a very recent case study, it is yet to be understood whether the *Lost in London LIVE* format heralds a disruption to traditional production, exhibition and distribution practices or just a novel marketing strategy aiming to generate attention and build interest leading up to a traditional film release. This was made evident in a comment by Fathom Events, which showed the nature of their interest and investment in the production. The company proclaimed that 'marketing is key' and went on to say that 'some cinemas could have put on *Lost in London* in multiple screens due to the PR the event picked up – reportedly over 500m impressions!' (Digital Cinema Media, 2017) On the other hand, we might view this case study as a cost-effective production strategy that, in compressing the time of filming, radically reduces the budget required for on-location production, in contrast to CGI, special-effects films which are costly and extremely time-consuming to produce.

What are revealed through these analyses are the new ways in which live cinema formats impact upon audience motivations, expectations and pleasures. This is most keenly evidenced in this particular case study whereby audience members actively responded to the 'call to action' to engage before, during and after the screenings in the social media paratextual surround. Ultimately, this manifested in more demands, with audiences wanting to know specific details of production and performance techniques and gain a closer proximity to the celebrities involved, while making further calls for more and deeper access, generating more marketing and information. It is clear that increased access is coupled with increased expectation. In the context of an increasingly on-demand culture, these expectations of instantaneous access always threaten to exceed the technical, aesthetic, and material limitations of the form.

Biographical note:

Dr Sarah Atkinson is Head of Department of Culture, Media and Creative Industries at King's College London and co-editor of *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Sarah has published three books and numerous articles on the impacts of digital and networked technologies on film & cinema audiences and film production practices. Contact: sarah.atkinson@kcl.ac.uk.

Bibliography:

- Atkinson, S. (2014) *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Atkinson, S. (2017) 'Hangmen Rehanged – Fusing Event Cinema, Live and Sensory Cinema in the Evolution of Site and Screen Responsive Theatre' in Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. *Live Cinema: Cultures, Economies, Aesthetics*, New York: Bloomsbury, pp. 243-264.
- Atkinson, S. (2018) *From Film Practice to Data Process: Production Aesthetics and Representational Practices of a Film Industry in Transition*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. (2017a) 'Live Cinema Conference' Report, *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, 12, pp. 133-140.
- Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. (2017b) *Live Cinema: Cultures, Economies, Aesthetics*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. (2016a) 'Introduction – Inside-the-scenes: The rise of experiential cinema' *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 13 (1), 139-151.
- Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. (2016b) 'From Conflict to Revolution: The secret aesthetic and narrative spatialisation in immersive cinema experience design', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 13 (1), 252-279.
- Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. (2015a) 'Tell no one: Cinema as game-space - Audience participation, performance and play' *G|A|M|E: The Italian Journal of Game Studies*, 4 (1). [online] https://www.gamejournal.it/atkinson_kennedy/. Accessed 30th October 2017.
- Atkinson, S. and Kennedy, H. (2015b) "'Where we're going, we don't need an effective online audience engagement strategy": The case of the Secret Cinema viral backlash' *Frames Cinema Journal*, 8. [online] <http://framescinemajournal.com/article/where-were-going-we-dont-need-an-effective-online-audience-engagement-strategy-the-case-of-the-secret-cinema-viral-backlash/> ISSN 2053-8812 Accessed 30th October 2017.
- Auslander, P. (2008), [1999] *Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture*, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Barker, M. (2012), *Live To Your Local Cinema: the remarkable rise of livecasting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bennett, B. (2010) 'Michael Jackson: celebrity death, mourning and media events', *Celebrity Studies*, 1 (2), pp. 231-232.
- Bourdon, J. (2000), 'Live television is still alive: on television as an unfulfilled promise', *Media, Culture and Society*, 22 (5), pp. 531-556.
- Bruns, A. and Stieglitz, S. (2013) 'Towards more systematic Twitter analysis: metrics for tweeting activities', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 16 (2), pp. 91- 108.
- Cochrane, B., and Bonner, F. (2014) 'Screening from the Met, the NT or the House: what changes with the live relay', *Adaptation* 7 (2). [online] <https://doi.org/10.1093/adaptation/apu015>

Accessed 30th October 2017.

- Couldry, N. (2003). *Media Rituals: A critical approach*. London: Routledge.
- Cowell, A. (1992) *Tosca: In the Settings and at The Times of Tosca*, Warner Classics. Rome 1992. DVD booklet. Directed by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi, Produced by Andrea Andermann.
- Cruikshanks, L. (2016) 'Pompeii Live: Performing Objects', *Museum & Society*, 14 (3), pp. 446-455, [online] <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/cruikshanksu>. Accessed 30th October 2017.
- Dayan, D. and Katz, E. (1992) *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Deller, R. (2011). 'Twittering on: Audience research and participation using Twitter', *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 8 (1), pp. 216-245.
- Digital Cinema Media (2017) Event Cinema Conference and Awards Report (2016) 8th February, [online] <https://www.dcm.co.uk/news/event-cinema-association-conference-and-awards-2017>. Accessed 30th October 2017.
- Gosney, K. (2016) 'Coppolavision', *The 405*, 14th April, [online] <https://www.thefourohfive.com/film/article/coppolavision-146>. Accessed 14th July 2017.
- Gruzd, A., Wellman, B., and Takhteyev, Y. (2011) 'Imagining Twitter as an Imagined Community', *American Behavioral Scientist* 55 (10), pp. 1294 – 1318.
- Haswell, J. (2017) Panel discussion: Opera cinema, the modern Gesamtkunstwerk? At Opera cinema: a new cultural experience? Symposium, King's College, London, 16th June 2017.
- Guardian Unlimited Staff, (2002) 'Harrelson arrested after London taxi chase', *The Guardian*, 7th June, [online] <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2002/jun/07/news>, Accessed 10th July 2017.
- Heyer, P. (2008) 'Live from the Met: Digital Broadcast Cinema, Medium Theory, and Opera for the Masses', *Canadian Journal of Communication* 33, pp. 591-604
- Mills, B. (2013), "'A live film"? Failing to notice television', *Journal of Popular Television*, 1 (1), pp.105–111.
- Morris, C. (2015) The Mute Stones Sing: Rigoletto Live from Mantua, *The Drama Review*, 59 (4), pp. 51-66.
- O'Mahony, D. and Davis, B. (2017) 'Woody Harrelson vows to 'never' shoot a live film in one take again', *Evening Standard*, 20th January, <http://www.standard.co.uk/showbiz/celebrity-news/woody-harrelson-vows-to-never-shoot-a-live-film-in-one-take-again-a3445336.html> Accessed 7th July 2017.
- Pine, B. J., and Gilmore, J.H. (2011). *The Experience Economy*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business.
- Pulver, A. (2016) 'Woody Harrelson's Lost in London film to shoot and screen live', *The Guardian*, 15th December, [online] <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/dec/15/woody-harrelson-lost-in-london-live-cinema-owen-wilson> Accessed 4th June, 2017.
- Roscoe, J. (2004), 'Multi-Platform Event Television: Reconceptualizing our Relationship with Television', *The Communication Review* 7, pp. 363-369.
- SOLT (2016) *From Live-to-Digital: Understanding the Impact of Digital Developments in Theatre on Audiences, Production and Distribution* Report, AEA Consulting for Arts Council England, UK Theatre and Society of London Theatre (SOLT), October.
- Turner, G. (2013). *Understanding Celebrity*. London: Sage.

Notes:

¹ This project has not been released as a DVD or online, but some of the EPK footage can be viewed here <https://vimeo.com/175960112/3846472146> [Accessed 7th July 2017]

² At the Duke of York's Cinema in Brighton on 29th April 2016. Other screenings were at: Edinburgh, Liverpool, York, Cambridge, Brighton and London during a two-week tour in April and May 2016.

³ All others answered 'maybe' to this question.

⁴ The report states: 'The survey of audience members suggests that in fact "liveness" does not drive demand for Live-to-Digital, nor affect the quality of the audience experience. Just 17% of surveyed Event Cinema attendees say "liveness" is "very important"; 33% say it is "somewhat important". Those who stream are even less likely to say "liveness" matters; only 9% called it "very important" and 20% "somewhat important"' (SOLT 2016: 13-14).

⁵ Quotations identified with a 'T' are those which are taken from Twitter, those marked with a 'Q' indicate a response from a questionnaire.