CHAPTER 14

# A Dialogue About Liveness

*Philip Auslander, Karin van Es, and Maren Hartmann*

## Introducing the Discussants

Philip Auslander can be seen to be one of the veterans in the study of liveness and therefore of one of the central temporalities in relation to media and other performance arts. He published his central book on the topic—*Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture*—in 1999, with a second edition in 2008, for which he also received an important prize (the Callaway Prize for the Best Book in Theatre or Drama). He has since revised some of the arguments in an article on Digital Liveness, published in 2012 (Auslander 2012). Both will be part of our discussion.

On the more formal side, Philip Auslander has been at the Georgia Institute for Technology (Georgia Tech) in the USA since 1987, since 1999 as a professor. As one of the most renowned scholars in the performance field,

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he has contributed to several journals in the field, has written several books (not only the one already mentioned). Next to his academic work, he has been an art writer and critic and published several articles and catalogue essays in that function. Last but not least, he has also served as a film actor.

He will be in conversation with Karin van Es, a more recent, but also very prominent scholar in the field of media and performance studies. Her book came out in 2017 and is entitled *The Future of Live*. In it, she explicitly builds on but also criticises Auslander's approach (both older and more recent). We will pick up on this later. Karin van Es is an assistant professor at Utrecht University in the Netherlands and has recently begun to work on the question of datafication. On this topic, she co-coordinates a research platform and has recently co-edited a book entitled the *The Datafied Society* (Schäfer and van Es 2017). We will return to this as well.

**Maren Hartmann:** I would like to begin by thanking you two for agreeing to discuss the central topic of liveness in relation to our broad concern with *mediated time*. Liveness, as we shall see, is a—or maybe even *the*—central category in media studies' concern with the question of time and media. At the same time, it is difficult to define. Philip, you have called it "a moving target" in the introduction to the second edition of your book on liveness, "a historically contingent concept whose meaning changes over time" (Auslander 2008: xii). The centrality of the liveness category seems to stem from media studies' long-term engagement with television culture and the televisual as the dominant cultural paradigm. In the just-mentioned introduction to the 2008 edition of your 1999 book, you state that it is increasingly difficult to hold on to the televisual as the dominant paradigm—or rather that the digital is challenging that. What would a foreword to a 2019 third edition entail, an entirely new book, a new understanding of liveness?

**Philip Auslander:** I was very much aware of this question when I worked on the revision of the book for its second edition. I wanted to revise it to acknowledge that it was no longer tenable to treat television as the

dominant cultural medium, that digital media had usurped this position, without writing a different book. As you said, one of my basic contentions is that liveness is not a stable, reified concept but a moving target that changes definition over time. What counts as liveness or live experience at one point in time is not necessarily the same as what counts that way at another point. Incidentally, this is not a purely hypothetical question, since the publisher approached me recently to start talking about a third edition!

**Maren Hartmann:**   Karin, your whole book seems to be an answer to that question, isn't it?

**Karin van Es:**   Certainly! We do have a tendency to overlook radio, though. Liveness was equally seen as the defining characteristic of that medium and has been theorised within that context as well, but it was widely taken up in television studies, to such an extent that John Caldwell referred to it as a "theoretical obsession" in this field; but yes, my dissertation was the product of a frustrated master student who was eager to understand the *continued* relevance of the category, and its application to other media technologies. It was specifically concerned with liveness claims by digital media.

**Philip Auslander:**   I agree with Karin about the significance of radio, historically the first live broadcast medium. I addressed the liveness of radio in a couple of articles I published after the first edition of *Liveness*, then incorporated some of that material into the second edition.

## Questioning Mediated Time and Liveness

**Maren Hartmann:**   I would now like you to comment more generally on the question of media and time, or as the title of this book suggests, mediated time. The question is twofold: (a) What is your understanding of medi-

ated time, and (b) how would you relate your understanding of liveness to the concept of mediated time?

**Philip Auslander:** In some ways, the concept of mediated time may relate more directly to some of my more recent work than to the way I addressed the idea of liveness. In my newest book, *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation* (2018), I address the question of how one can have an immediate (live) experience of a performance from its documentation or other kind of recording. I am working against the grain of a discourse that holds that recording inevitably misrepresents and betrays the live event it documents and can only provide an experience that is separate and distinct from the live performance. My position is that we can and do experience performances themselves from their documentation—the question is, how? Much of my book is devoted to offering an account of this phenomenon. It has to do with mediated time because the performance is necessarily something that took place in the past while its documentation continues into the present and arguably makes that past event part of the present. In this sense, photography and other documentary media literally mediate (in the sense of connect or reconcile) past and present. The act of documenting itself is always also a gesture toward mediating time in as much as it seeks in the present to preserve for the future an event that will soon be part of the past.

**Karin van Es:** Mediated time, as I understand it, is about the fact that media and time are tightly interwoven. On the one hand, everyday life is structured by media schedules, and on the other hand, media themselves are also structured by time. Think also of how media manipulate time, as in the currently highly popular American television show *This Is Us* (Fogelman 2016), which stands out for the way it

combines multiple stories, set in different time periods, into single episodes.

Specifically relevant in relation to how time is mediated today is how popular social media platforms make reference to, incorporate and manage (the passing of) time. It's rather overwhelming! They operate in the assumption that people become addicted to the constant stream of news in their feeds and feel the need to be constantly connected as a result of the fear of missing out (FOMO). Equally central to their functioning is the notion of the *attention economy*, where time is a valuable commodity and figures as a constraint to consumption. With the datafication of our society and the increasingly important role of predictive systems, questions of time have seemingly become even more complex. News sites these days actually report *tomorrow's headlines*.

In reply to your second question, I would propose that liveness can be understood as the particular way media are structured in order to demand attention from people now, rather than later. In short, it is very much oriented around *newness* and constructing the idea of providing unique access to something of social relevance. The abundance of media and media platforms is why I think we are witnessing such a revival of liveness. Each is claiming its significance in the overcrowded media landscape through an appeal to the live.

**Maren Hartmann:**  Let me give you some more background to this last question now that you have answered it: in your work, Philip, I found a definition of mediation as a (often technological) in between. While it stands in between, it is necessary for the immediate to emerge: liveness can happen both immediately as well as mediated, they are not in opposition to each other (Auslander 2008: 56). In most cases, you actually seem to prefer the term mediatisation instead, signifying the in between, but with an

increase. Similarly, in your book, Karin, you describe how liveness is mediated, referring to this process as "the mechanisms through which media production, distribution and consumption are managed" (van Es 2017: 152). And you, too, seem to prefer mediatisation without necessarily picking up that discourse in detail.

In our introduction, we refer instead to the work of Roger Silverstone, even if time is not his main concern (although he mentions the fakeness of pre-recorded live shows).[1] For him, mediation is a question of ethics because everyday ethics can only emerge from communication and this always involves mediation (Silverstone 2002: 761).[2] Mediation is here the process(es) around meaning making, especially in relationships to others—and these are, according to Silverstone, unevenly distributed. Distance and trust are important issues (and their transcendence through media an illusion). Instead, we have a moral obligation to accept the other as different (a highly actual claim, I find). He asks each user to partake in this process of mediation, i.e. to not just be active, but to take responsibility. How would you link this, in some way or other, to your just presented understandings of mediated time?

**Karin van Es:**   The ending of my PhD dissertation reads slightly different than that of the book. In the dissertation, I relay liveness to "the ideal of conversation" (Schudson 1987). Face-to-face interpersonal communication is often seen as characterised by "continuous feedback between participants, multichannel communication, spontaneous utterance, and egalitarian norms". Against this, Schudson points out, communication via mass media is often evaluated as inferior (in the article, he actually debunks the false ideas that exist about face-to-face communication). Essentially, I pro-

posed in the dissertation that liveness was a promise of de-mediation.

During the PhD defence, and later when it was reviewed, this proved to be a problematic claim, and the critics were right: such a proposition underplays the institutional stake in liveness. So in the book, following Nick Couldry's lead, I stressed liveness more as a social category in Durkheim's sense, and I also engaged more with the work of Paddy Scannell, particularly in relation to how liveness works to create *communicative entitlement.* Anytime I am asked to talk or write about liveness, I return to Scannell's example of the surveillance camera. He explains that such a camera, as it records, has the quality of immediacy, but not liveness. Liveness, Scannell so nicely argues, is the product of hard work (switching between multiple cameras, editing, etc.). It is ironic then that liveness is often linked to mundaneness and boredom (see, for example, Netflix's April Fools' joke of 2017 with Will Arnett), and I think that my approach to liveness is very interested in deconstructing the process of mediation, not per se by pursuing the details of the hard work Scannell alluded to, but by asking questions about the particular liveness a medium lays claim to: how does the medium mediate (between people, people-events, people-institutions)? What promises are made about the relations forged in the process?

**Philip Auslander:**   For what it's worth, I don't think I can agree with Scannell's point about the surveillance camera. For one thing, I don't find the distinction between immediacy and liveness helpful, since historically immediacy has been understood to be one of the central characteristics of liveness, especially (but not only) in the context of media discourse. For another, surveillance cameras and webcams are always embedded in multiple contexts that frame them in particular ways and give them meaning,

whether in the context of surveillance and security or in the context of an intimate view of someone else's life. I don't think that the effect of liveness results only from the work of media producers engaged in editing, etc. The work of those who produce, frame, and interpret CCTV, for instance, equally generates the effect of liveness.

I know Silverstone's work, but I am not intimately familiar with it. However, I found what sounds like a very similar position in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (I'm referring primarily to *Truth and Method*) who also argues that we must respect the alterity of the other (he is concerned particularly with historical artefacts that have been *othered* by the passage of time) and that dialogue with the other on this basis is an ethical obligation. I agree, but Gadamer also argues that the past with which we can engage is "not really past", but is always already embedded in our present horizon. Inasmuch as aspects of the past are foundational to our present horizon, there is no unbridgeable gap or chiasma between the two. Rather, the past-in-the-present becomes a common ground between past and present that makes dialogue possible. Based on some of what I said here, it should come as no surprise when I say that Gadamer's thought profoundly impacted my thinking about performances and their documentation!

## Constructing Liveness

**Maren Hartmann:**   Another question I had also refers to the meta-level, i.e. the question of where you locate your work on liveness. In their introduction to a special issue on *Media Times,* published by the *International Journal of Communication*, Anne Kaun, Johan Fornäs and Staffan Ericson divide up their engagement with the topic into three different blocks "(a)

time, history, and memory; (b) liveness, presence, and simultaneity; and (c) cultural techniques (Kulturtechniken), infrastructures, and Eigenzeit" (Kaun et al. 2016: 5207). While such ordering always follows a pragmatic logic in order to make material more accessible, it obviously follows a content logic as well. When we begin this book with a section on "norms and categories of time" and (nearly) end with "the time of (your) live"—this interview—we obviously follow a similar, but nonetheless different order.

I would like to hear your reaction concerning the placement of liveness in these different orders. How far is liveness in your eyes a normative category? How does it relate to the question of memory and history, and where is its materiality?

In some sense, I am picking up on your critique, Karin, which refuses to put liveness into one category only (i.e. ontology vs. phenomenology vs. rhetoric) instead of all three. Maybe we are unnecessarily categorising time in these structures, and maybe we are simultaneously reducing the idea of liveness through that ordering process.

**Karin van Es:** Media time is, of course, a far broader category than liveness is. So the ordering logic they make there makes sense to me in that it places concepts into chronologies (history is concerned with the past, liveness with the now, etc.). My issue with the way liveness had been theorised before was that it had always been reduced to either the properties of a technology, an affective encounter or an ideology. These ways of understanding liveness failed to explain—as I mentioned earlier—the persistence of the category and its application to a whole host of other media technologies. For instance, defining it in terms of simultaneity: how simultaneous do transmission and reception in media have to be for it to be regarded as live (White 2004)? That's why we need to see liveness as a construction. This

seems to also be the direction in which Philip's thinking has evolved.

With regard to normativity, my book does suggest that there is an ideal against which people evaluate the live. In the case of eJamming, for instance, it became clear that people were upset by the latency they experienced and the inability to share sessions with an audience, but also with *The Voice (John de Mol 2011)*, people on Twitter complained that the show wasn't live because East Coast had already tweeted spoilers.

More specifically, my argument is that we need to see liveness as a socio-technical construction. This allows us to appreciate the multiple forms of the live that populate our current media landscape. These forms are bound as category by the role they fulfil in society.

**Philip Auslander:**  I absolutely agree with Karin that we should see liveness as a socio-technical construction and that this construction has multiple facets, but I think my interest at present is more in how people experience things in the moment as live than in the ways liveness is structured by technology, media, economy, and cultural discourses. My thinking on this may be somewhat reductive (an accusation I am willing to sustain!) and I'm certainly not suggesting that there is no connection between immediate experience and larger framing influences, but more and more, I come to think that liveness is on the side of the spectator or audience and need not be locatable in the object of perception. To put it simply, a recording of music may not be a live event in itself, but I experience it as one when I play it back. The real-time playback is a live event as far as I'm concerned because I experience it as such. I'm not entirely sure that this is because the technologies and cultural discourses involved have constructed the playback of a recording as a live experience (through what Karin calls the metatext) in the same

sense that television or radio assert their liveness even when the materials they convey are not themselves live. More and more, it seems to me that some of these questions, particularly in the discourses of theatre and performance studies and related fields in which I intervene most often, come down to a difference of perspective: the ontological perspective versus the phenomenological perspective. Ontologically, recorded music is not live, but I experience it as such phenomenologically. My interest in the topic of liveness was spurred originally by ontological considerations, but I have increasingly come around to thinking that the audience-centred phenomenological perspective is the more important one.

## Differences in and Experiences on Liveness

**Maren Hartmann:**   In a way, this last comment seems a perfect link between both your approaches, but I will return to this point later. Let me be a bit more basic now, since you mentioned the discourses of theatre and performance, Philip: you come from the just-mentioned performance-oriented background, while yours, Karin, is much more media focused. Could you describe how far these backgrounds have shaped your take on liveness, or rather: is there anything specific to liveness in the media-context vs. the liveness in other cultural contexts?

**Philip Auslander:**   One difference my background makes, I think, is that I take traditional live events such as theatrical performances as the starting point for defining liveness. For example, I recently finished an essay for a collection on analysing music videos. The editors asked me to contrast music videos with audio recordings of music, but the audio recording is not my point of reference for the music video: it's the live concert performance. The key difference

between theatrical liveness and media liveness (such as the liveness of broadcast media but also of live streaming and social media) is that the latter does not require (and never has required) the physical co-presence of performers and audience in the way that the former does. Near the end of *The Future of Live*, Karin defines liveness in terms of "real-time connectivity" (2017: 155). This is a good formulation for talking about the wide range of current media-driven experiences of liveness, and perhaps the common denominator of all live experiences, but it sidesteps the issue of physical co-presence that is so central to the discourses that define liveness in the first instance from the theatrical point of view. My historical perspective is rooted in seeing all subsequent developments of liveness in relation to the basic theatrical situation. Because of this orientation, I am less concerned than I think Karin is with how liveness itself is constructed institutionally, for example. At one level, the liveness of theatrical performances or concerts, whether traditional or not, is pretty self-evident (I am referring again to the physical and temporal co-presence of performers and audience). What is constructed institutionally is the *value* of live experience, especially now since it is in the interests of a range of cultural institutions to assert the value of traditional live performance on which their survival depends. It is this discursive construction of the value of the live—perhaps not the live itself—that I was trying to examine in *Liveness* (2008) across three different socio-cultural realms (theatre/television, popular music, and intellectual property law).

**Karin van Es:**    Interestingly, the department where I work (and where I also obtained by my MA and my PhD degree), the Media and Culture Studies department at Utrecht University, provides education and carries out research in the field of theatre and performance studies, and as a matter of fact, I discov-

ered my PhD topic whilst attending a seminar series on liveness as a master student. The series explored the historical debate around liveness and mediatisation in media and performance theory. In it, we read the work of Philip Auslander and Steve Dixon alongside that of Jane Feuer, Mimi White and Tara McPherson. So ultimately, what I do now is inspired at least in part by a more performance-oriented tradition in thinking about liveness, but Philip is absolutely correct in that the objects of study themselves foreground certain questions (with the context, in theatre studies, perhaps being performance, co-presence and the body/aliveness rather than technological mediation, framing by media institutions, and so on). In the end, however, I do find we have much to offer each other—as is evident from the fact that my book owes a lot to the work Philip had done before.

**Maren Hartmann:**    Karin, in your book on *The Future of Live* (van Es 2017), you propose to characterise liveness as a *constellation*, consisting of metatext, space of participation and user responses (in your introduction you still speak of institutions, technologies and users/viewers). This is your attempt at overcoming the shortcomings of existing theorisations, ontology, phenomenology and rhetoric, and earlier in this conversation you mentioned that your approach in interested in deconstructing the process of mediation, putting an emphasis on the relations that emerge from the process, i.e. the constellation. Philip, on the other hand, offers a new emphasis on the documentation of liveness and its (re-)creation of liveness in the (phenomenological) experience of the user. Would this also fit into your constellation definition, Karin, and vice versa, could you see your (new) emphasis fitting in with this concept of constellation, Philip? Does constellation offer an emphasis on the phenomenological without reducing it to this?

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| **Karin van Es:** | We cannot ignore the *experience* of liveness, and my proposal to analyse constellations of liveness acknowledges that. Returning to the example of eJamming mentioned earlier, the case I analyse in Chapter 4 of the book, exposes how people can *feel* that something isn't live, even if it is advertised as such. The music collaboration platform was criticised for its latency issues (which actually concerned minute, fractions-of-a-second delays in audio signals) and for not providing the opportunity to share jamming sessions with an audience. For users, the platform therefore didn't deliver liveness, and their experience also served to expose the other dimensions of the construction: the rhetoric that accompanied the platform and its technological affordances. So in this respect, the phenomenological is certainly essential.

 This reminds me also of the example provided by Jerome Bourdon (2000), of a family watching a live programme (an idea reinforced by a series of codes in the text, such as direct address, etc.) and later discovering that they had been watching a videotape. He uses it to explain how liveness is not only about technical performance but also spectatorial belief, supported through specific codes, and how the two don't always overlap. (I don't, however, much like his proposal to distinguish between *degrees* of live television.) To my mind, liveness is a particular interaction between institutions, technologies and people and creates different forms of the live, and again, you need all three—including the phenomenological dimension—for something to stabilise as live. |
| **Philip Auslander:** | At present, my work does not move in this direction, but there certainly would be value in thinking, for instance, about the relations that underlie the status of performance art documentation and its uses in both the art world and the academic world to raise questions about whose interests are served |

by different discursive configurations of the relationship between the document and the performance to which it relates.

## Caring and the Longue Durée

**Maren Hartmann:** Continuing with the question of phenomenology: Karin already mentioned Paddy Scannell's work on liveness (and he is an author in this book), which I would briefly like to return to. In his work on television and liveness, he stated that the sociological engagement on this topic is too short-sighted in a double sense: it focuses only on live TV and on today. Hence, the *longue durée* gets lost. Scannell's second important point is his emphasis on *care structures*, i.e. the idea that broadcasting, especially in its live versions, is taking care of us—as individuals, but also as members of our societies (through explaining the world, through offering structure, etc.), which is what Karin also referred to. While this argument is fairly easy to follow for radio and television, he would subscribe the same function to digital media and liveness, albeit in more complex (and sometimes contradictory) ways.

My first question in this context is: where do you see your work with regard to the longue durée? The second would be how far you agree with the idea of care structures (especially in relation to such ideas as constellation and documentation)?

**Philip Auslander:** I think I can say that I am interested in the longue durée in the sense that I have traced the continuing evolution of the idea of liveness from before the concept existed (because there was no experiential alternative in the realm of performance) through the eras of theatrical liveness, broadcast liveness, Internet liveness and now social media liveness and tried to be attentive to important turning points in this long-term development. At the

same time, my particular interest is in the immediate experience of someone perceiving something as live, like the example of recorded music I mentioned earlier, or experiencing a performance from its documentation.

As far as care structures are concerned, I can see how this concept remains valid today for talking about American television and radio for certain. I can also see how it could be extended to social media, for example, and perhaps certain kinds of gaming. I am less certain of its utility for talking about the Internet. Tara McPherson talks about the liveness of the Internet as residing primarily in our navigation of it, making it a kind of liveness that "foregrounds volition and mobility" (or at least creates the feeling that we are exercising mobility and volition).[3] Arguably, on the Internet, we depend less on the care structures offered by the various sites we access and more on those we create for ourselves through our specific navigations of cyberspace. Perhaps we need to think more of structures of self-care in this context.

**Karin van Es:**    I know that Scannell took issue with the scant historical consideration of liveness in my book (and he assigned Braudel as reading when I organised a master class in Amsterdam a few years back). I understand this remark, and there is a certain truth to fish being unaware of water (the impact of technologies only really becoming clear over time necessitating a reconsideration of what was the norm before), but I hope that my work does show a commitment to questioning newness and to charting change and continuity. I certainly find that a historicisation of new media is essential. Moreover, the concept of *constellations of liveness* is not medium specific and therefore facilitates tracing and comparing liveness over time.

As for the notion of care structures, what I like about it is the idea of intent and hard work it draws

attention to. Again, a surveillance camera offers immediacy, not liveness. You can't just turn on a webcam and call it live! However, in his consideration, Scannell tends to stress the integrative role of radio and television and avoids questions of power and ideology. The question of our orientation to media and their power to construct reality is important to consider as well (and in this respect, I align myself more with the work of Nick Couldry).

**Maren Hartmann:** Even if this takes us a step back in some ways, I propose the following: as has already become very clear, liveness implies an *at-this-moment-in-time*. This harks back to the notion of *kairos*, of the special moment (which needs to be caught), in contrast to *chronos*, the everyday habitual sense and structure of time. One could claim that liveness' quality lies in its emphasis on just this moment, the now of its experience (not necessarily, as we have seen, of its production). At the same time, the experience of a live performance is often meant to turn into a memorable event, since only that transformation into a lived past seems to make it worthwhile (I am not sure this applies to the experience of the documented in the same way), and this tendency for *memorability* (or memorabilia?) seems to have become more so with the visibility of one's past in the digital documentation of one's life (of one's live?). How far does this shift both the experience of, but also the theorisation of liveness?

**Philip Auslander:** This is an area of discussion that is rife with paradox, since the very *specialness* of the live event not only makes it desirable but also prompts the desire to preserve it in some way to be experienced again through recording, documentation, re-enactment, etc. The much-discussed, sometimes banned, use of mobile phones at concerts is an example. The phone can be used to make a video of the concert to preserve it for repeated viewing, to take selfies or videos that show one was present at the event and

perhaps who one was with. It can be used to report on the concert or stream it to people not present at the event, and so on. (A friend of mine recently texted me during a concert he was attending to ask me a question about the equipment the musicians were using.) Those opposed to mobile phone use at concerts claim that all of this sullies the special-ness of the event, but there is probably an equally persuasive argument to be made that the mobile phone provides the concert goer with a different but equally special way of experiencing the event. I'm not sure this analysis requires a new theorisa-tion of liveness, but it is one of many current medi-ated experiences of the live that should be examined through theoretical lenses.

**Karin van Es:**    In my work, I actually try to trivialise the special-ness of liveness and expose its indebtedness to media power. This is precisely what triggers a host of questions about what, how and why something is demarked from the ordinary.

## Being-in-Which-Time?

**Maren Hartmann:**    Researching time has necessarily led me to think more about the often-addressed relationship between past, present and future. While I am also sceptical of all-encompassing concepts such as acceleration (e.g. Rosa 2015), I am quite intrigued by this question of the collapse of the future into the present and potential problems that arise from this (a similar question is the one about the loss of utopian thinking). I have a hunch—and maybe this is rather naïve—that liveness is related to this ques-tion, that maybe a drive to experience liveness—mediated or not—takes place in order to reassure oneself of *being-in-the-present*.

Or, put differently, Karin, you refer to Rebecca Coleman (2017), who talks about multiplication of

the present with the help of various digital media (a potentially less pessimistic reading). Again, one could try to relate this multiplication potentially with a reference to liveness as a rather particular form of experiencing and developing the present.

Is this too simple a reading of this potential relationship?

**Karin van Es:** For me, it seems more of a question about being there (or here) *together*. I think it is important to not neglect *the social* in thinking about what liveness is and does. It's about participating in the water cooler conversation, a collective experience (cf. Dayan and Katz 1992), and connected to the idea of *communicative entitlement* (Scannell 2001), but yes, there is also that feeling that you can turn the course of history because the event is unfolding now.

**Maren Hartmann:** Philip, you have been accused of too negative a take on liveness, which you reacted to in the second edition of your book. I still feel a slight question mark behind it all from your side, but understandably so. Nonetheless, my last question for you two is: what is your personal experience of liveness: what makes it special? What may be problematic? Is there any live experience—in the broad sense that has been defined throughout this conversation—which sticks out for you?

**Philip Auslander:** My most meaningful initial experiences of liveness were as a young theatre actor (I am an actor still, as you mentioned in introducing me, though only on screen now). I remember the excitement of being backstage just before going on, sometimes peeking through the curtain to see and try to assess the audience ("good house"/"bad house"). Studying acting and theatre, I was constantly told about how important liveness is as a defining characteristic of theatre, but the concept was always presented as being sort of ineffable, basically an article of faith rather than a theory or philosophical concept.

Much later, I became curious as to why there had been no study in the context of theatre or performance studies that addressed this essential concept directly and was surprised to discover, as Karin mentioned, the extent to which it had been taken up in television and broadcast studies but not in theatre studies. My apparent scepticism about liveness is not about the concept itself but about the discourses surrounding it. It is clear, for example, that I do not believe that the approaches I have encountered to differentiating live and recorded performances on ontological grounds stand up to close inspection. I value live performance, but as a lifelong fan of popular music, I also value canned performances. My experience has been that staunch advocates for theatrical liveness tend to mystify the concept and are unwilling even to try to specify what it is or how its value is construed. They also tend to denigrate non-live experiences of performance as necessarily inferior to live performance, which I think is nonsense (to be blunt). Non-live performances can provide very satisfying aesthetic experiences and, since most people experience most kinds of performance in other than live forms most of the time, it makes sense not simply to dismiss those actually normative experiences of performance and to question the privileging of the live that is still endemic to most discourses around theatre, performance art, music and related forms.

**Karin van Es:**    My most lasting experiences of liveness are also early ones. Living abroad until my early teens, I got exposed to what I might call an *exaggerated* form of Dutch culture (involving many supposedly culture-defining texts, events, and stereotypes). This involved the collective, live watching, along with other expatriates, of soccer matches played by the Dutch national team. Occasions like these were celebrated as contributing to our shared cultural identity and connecting us to our home (a home

where I had in fact never lived back then). Looking back now—with an impeding Brexit and other developments informed by extreme nationalism—I have mixed feelings about this experience. At the same time, it also evokes associations with a related issue currently at play in the Netherlands. In the aftermath of the success of the Dutch women's national team (and the poor performances of the men's team) gender inequality in terms of representation (on television) and pay is gaining public attention. This also involves questions about what is broadcast (live)—questions that tie in in turn with doubts as to whether a *public* broadcaster should be paying the high licencing fees for airing matches of the men's national team. In both cases, it is the *politics* of the live that stick with me.

**Maren Hartmann:**   And politics are never easy, especially not at the moment. A great thanks, however, for these inspiring answers—and for an interview that was not conducted live, but feels in fact very live-ly.

## NOTES

1. Quite the opposite: the paper clearly underlines the dominance of the spatial paradigm at the time.
2. Silverstone outlines that "mediation has significant consequences for the way in which the world appears in and to everyday life, and as such this mediated appearance in turn provides a framework for the definition and conduct of our relationships to the other, and especially the distant other" (Silverstone 2002: 761).
3. McPherson (2006: 202).

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