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An Orchid in the Land of Technology: Embodied Presence in a Mediatized World

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AN ORCHID IN THE LAND OF TECHNOLOGY:
EMBODIED PRESENCE IN A
MEDIATIZED WORLD

by
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A Thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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This thesis applies the Aesthetic philosophy of John Dewey to the current discourse about mediatization and performance in an effort to explain how a Deweyan conception of embodied aesthetic experience can contribute to meaningful experience and human flourishing in a mediatized culture. The relationship between live presence and technological mediatization is often characterized as oppositional. Through an explication of the process of mediatization and manifestations of presence, this relationship can instead be viewed as reciprocal. An overview of Dewey’s theories of experience and aesthetics refutes dualistic thinking and demonstrates how faculties of perception can be engaged and our capacity for growth can be cultivated through experiences with art.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The art of Theater makes any part of the world a stage for a time, if only the people around the new stage know how to give it their attention. Then the two sides help each other bring off a successful time of watching and being watched. (Woodruff, 2008, p. 4)

My 6-year-old nephew discovers he has mastered a new trick: completing a summersault underwater in a neighbor's pool. Beaming, he demands everyone's attention as he demonstrates his newfound skill. After the second aquatic flip, his aunt thinks to grab her iPhone and record the event to capture and share with those who are absent (namely me...and possibly Facebook). In the video can be seen the child flipping, his feet cresting then submerging before his head comes back around. There are splashes, laughter and congratulations from off screen voices representing unseen people. The video freezes on a grinning boy ready to move on to a new adventure.

The boy has (unwittingly) committed an act of theatre, according to Paul Woodruff who asserts that “we see theater all around us if we open our eyes to what lies beyond the boundaries of fine art” (2008, p. 17). While the performance is not an instance of conventional “art theatre” on a stage with a paying audience, it nonetheless satisfies Peter Brook’s classic definition of a space, a person to move through it, and someone else to watch (1968, p. 9). This figuration is further defined by Woodruff as “the art by which human beings make or find human action worth watching, in a measured time and place” (p. 18). Furthermore, theatre is an important human activity because,
as Woodruff points out, “if we are unwatched we diminish, and we cannot be entirely as we wish to be. If we never stop to watch, we will know only how it feels to be us, never know how it might feel to be another...Watching well, together, and being watched well, with limits on both sides, we grow, and grow together” (p. 10). These twin actions, watching and being watched, are—according to this line of thought—necessary to our development as caring, empathetic, human beings. Woodruff asserts that theatre helps us learn to attend to others, to identify with a community, and become fully human.

Philosopher and pedagogue John Dewey shared Woodruff’s concerns. In fact, to cultivate the operation of theatre as a fundamental human need, we must recognize that theatre is a larger concept than the narrow, traditional definition of drama as a literary field, or art theatre as one of the fine arts which have become set apart from everyday life. This conception is developed in Dewey’s aesthetic philosophy. Dewey believed that isolating the fine arts from everyday life was detrimental to the “significant life of an organized community” (1934, p. 7) and is a symptom of the “compartmentalization of life” and hierarchical classification that he observed in our world (p. 20). The physical manifestation of this separation is the museum. When an art product is placed on a wall or otherwise canonized as a classic, it is decontextualized from “the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience” (p. 3). In essence, what Dewey is saying here is that art tends to be rendered as an object (a sculpture, sonata, play, or dance piece), put on a pedestal as “fine art” and thus is cut off from attaining its fulfillment
as significant experience. In other words, it does not achieve its full potential as experience, and we as perceivers of the artwork are robbed of an opportunity for meaningful engagement and growth.

Dewey observed that most of our everyday life is a fragmented stream of events which we “undergo” and the speed at which random distractions compete for our attention interrupt our experiences from attaining full meaning (p. 45). He believed that the more we are able to have full, rich experiences, the more full our lives will be. And the key to cultivating an experience is the aesthetic quality which endows the experience with a unity and consummation. He even applies this distinction to the realm of politics, wherein “the conditions that create the gulf which exists generally between producer and consumer in modern society operate to create also a chasm between ordinary and esthetic experience” (p. 10). Similar concerns have been raised since the rise of computers and virtual technologies by thinkers such as Sherry Turkle who, in her book Alone Together (2011), observed that “overwhelmed by the volume and velocity of our lives, we turn to technology to help us find time. But technology makes us busier than ever and ever more in search of retreat. Gradually, we come to see our online life as life itself” (p. 17). This condition of life leads me to the central question of this thesis: How can embodied aesthetic experience enhance our lives in a mediatized culture?

Meaningful experiences can be developed through active engagement with works of art, because to Dewey, “art is an event of participation that weaves artworks and appreciators into especially satisfying experiences.” (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 6, Art as Experience, para. 1). Dewey asks us to tear down the wall separating our lives from art, reconnecting the context of
artistic production with that of aesthetic appreciation. Thomas Alexander, in his treatment of Dewey’s theory (1987), summarizes this connection: “the work of art is an event and cannot be innocently confused with the physical object which is a condition for the experience. There is no work of art apart from the human experience” of it (p. 187).

So, how might we embark on developing aesthetic experience in a modern world dominated by media technologies that fragment and speed up our lives? How might the recognition and cultivation of theatre as a necessary part of life be achieved when so much is performed on screens? This brings us to the second part of my thesis and a significant feature of my original example of the boy in the pool: its mediatization.

By recording the live, uninhibited moment, it has become mediated by a technological means, the camera-device. By uploading the video onto the web, the boy’s aunt has unwittingly admitted his otherwise ephemeral action to the realm of the mediatized. Because the recorded image is not “live,” is it less authentic? Is the joy of those watching the moment after-the-fact altered by experiencing it as an image on a screen which necessarily brackets out much of the environment? If those remote viewers had been present at the event, would the performance have been altered? Am I missing an essential element of the experience of the moment by watching it on my computer screen miles away from the pool and long after the proud swimmer has gone to sleep? Or does the moment’s recordability solidify its authenticity?

As our world becomes mediatized, a discourse is needed that takes account of the changes in perception required of the occupant of a mediatized environment. Johannes Birringer has been an instrumental force in
documenting and intensifying academic interest in what is now termed "digital performance" (2008, p. xii). He claims, rightly, that digital technology "has altered artistic practices and aesthetic experiences" (p. xvi-xvii) and goes on to assert that "the traditional paradigm of theatre is transformed" by such technologies (p. xviii). He asserts that the ongoing proliferation of digital interfaces in our lives has "replaced stage presence with online presence" (ibid). The question of presence and authenticity is a central and oft-debated topic, which is summed up by Steve Dixon, who in Digital Performance (2007), provides the context for this exploration and reinforces the need for this dialogue:

The sense of technology having transformed or destabilized notions of liveness, presence, and the 'real' is at the core of a long-lasting debate within performance studies, and is equally important in broader cultural theory. (p. 127)

I intend to contribute to this debate by bringing to the table the aesthetic theory of John Dewey and his emphasis on embodied experience, which I believe can offer a fresh perspective on the issue. While Dewey's aesthetics have appeared only episodically in the discourse on aesthetics in the last half century, I agree with Richard Shusterman (2001) who asserts that Dewey's "crucial insights usually lacking in the analytic tradition...point to the most promising future we can envisage for aesthetic inquiry" (p. 128). Furthermore, Dewey provides a fitting framework for our inquiry precisely because of his conception of aesthetic experience which joins the various parts of any given experience into a unified whole and supports Woodruff's assertion of theatre's centrality to culture.
CHAPTER II
PERCEPTION AND TECHNOLOGY

Defining Mediatization

Contemporary society is permeated by the media, to an extent that the media may no longer be conceived of as being separate from cultural and other social institutions. (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 105)

The idea that the media is encroaching into every aspect of life is not a new phenomenon. In fact media technologies share a lineage with technological advancement dating back to before the industrial age. In his prescient essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin observed:

The mode of human sense perception changes with humanity’s entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. (1968, p. 222)

The view that human perception is contextual and has been shaped over time by “historical circumstances,” particularly advances in technology, is supported by the common belief that travel by train, and later automobiles and airplanes, significantly altered our perception of time; when long distances could be traversed at high speeds, time became relative to our perception of it. Lewis Mumford traced our perception of time even further back to the invention of the clock, which he posited in his essay “The Monastery and the Clock” (1934) as the most influential machine of the industrial era due to its ability to punctuate and separate portions of the day.
and thus it "dissociated time from human events and helped to create the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences (p. 14-15).

Sociologist John B. Thompson (1990, 1995), attributed a gradual alteration in perception to mass media when he stated that the condition of modern society has been shaped in part by the development of communication media technologies, from the printing press onward. Furthermore, Valery prophesied cable TV and the internet when he predicted a time when "we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign" (quoted in Benjamin, p. 219). Benjamin went a step further by asserting that reproduction through the technologies of photography, radio, and film fundamentally altered not only the perceptual faculties we employ but also the nature of art.

When images, sounds, and video (recorded and "live" alike) are available at our fingertips, streamed instantly into devices that can fit in our pockets, the technologies that structure our everyday lives have undoubtedly altered our forms of communication and the ways in which we perceive the world. All levels of social, cultural, and communal engagement have been affected by a parade of textual and image-based media and by technological modes of representation (magazines, television, billboards, the internet, etc.) that deliver them to our fields of perception. This shift in perception is intrinsically connected to the mediatization of society.

The concept of mediatization as a socio-cultural process has been employed in a variety of contexts within modern, post-modern, sociological,
and cultural theories, yet only in the past decade has an effort been undertaken to assemble the various uses of the term into a coherent definition by Danish media theorist Stig Hjarvard (2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2008). Hjarvard maps existing ideas around the concept of mediatization and forms them into a single sociological definition. He states that mediatization is a "long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence" (2008, p. 114). The mediatization of society is evident in the omnipresence of media in today's world and its position as "an independent institution that stands between other cultural and social institutions and coordinates their mutual interaction" (p. 106). Media (that is to say, technologies of communication) have not only amalgamated into a social institution, they have also permeated the realm of other institutions such as politics, science, law, and art.

He goes on to identify two types of mediatization: direct and indirect. These two types are distinct from one another for the purpose of analysis, though they do not necessarily operate in isolation. Direct (or "strong") mediatization is characterized by transformation. This transformation occurs when a non-mediated activity or object is adapted to a mediated form, such as traditional games like chess, which have been converted into computerized versions (2008, p. 114-5). In this case, even though the rules remain the same, the activity of playing the game is fundamentally changed when you make moves by typing on a keyboard instead of moving physical pieces. Whereas, indirect (or "weak") mediatization occurs "when a given activity is increasingly influenced with respect to form, content, or organization by
mediagenic symbols or mechanisms," but the ways the activity are performed are not necessarily affected (p. 115). To illustrate indirect mediatization, Hjarvard offers the example of a visit to a fast food restaurant where the cultural context of the patron is altered; images of cartoon characters greet you and the sale of toys derived from animated films connects the experience of the restaurant with a larger media context. Though this form of mediatization may alter one's choices, either consciously or unconsciously (i.e. purchasing a meal with the toy instead of one without), the actual processes of ordering and eating are not directly changed (ibid).

By now we can see that this concept is distinct from simple "mediation," which is an act of communication through a given medium (telephone, book, e-mail, television broadcast, text message, etc.) within a certain social context. It is important to point out that the message itself as well as the relationship between communicators are indeed affected by the choice of medium (thank you, McLuhan); however, mediation will not necessarily have a transformational effect on the social institution or context wherein it is used, in the way that mediatization does (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 114). For instance in the case of political speech, the video recording and broadcast of a speech (mediation) has resulted in politicians adapting their language to speak in "sound bites" hoping they will be immune to misrepresentation when edited and replayed (a result of mediatization).

In Liveness: Performance in a mediatized culture (2008), performance theorist Philip Auslander writes at length about mediatization and its effects on various forms of theatre, from the traditional stage to rock concerts and courtrooms. He grounds his argument in the postmodern tradition generally,
and the writing of Baudrillard in particular. Our use of the term mediatization will follow that of Auslander, referring to “the mediatized” as cultural objects that are products of the mass media or of media technology (p. 4). He admits to a loose adaptation of Baudrillard who, in *Requiem for the Media*, claims “what is mediatized is not what comes off the daily press, out of the tube, or on the radio; it is what is reinterpreted by the sign form, articulated into models, and administered by the code” (1981, 175-6). While largely ignoring Baudrillard’s more political focus on mediated reality as an overarching semiotic code of simulation, Auslander maintains that the mass media is a dominant force in “contemporary western(ized) societies” and extends this dominant to encompass cultural, and specifically art products, an area Baudrillard omitted from his analysis (p. 5).

The impact of mediatization on artistic expression was first posited by Frederic Jameson, who identified a hierarchy among art forms and a new self-reflectivity of art on its own mediatization: “the traditional fine arts...now come to consciousness of themselves as various media within a mediatic system in which their own internal production also constitutes a symbolic message and the taking of a position on the status of the medium in question” (1991, 162). According to this view, the fine arts are now part of a cultural system that includes and is in fact defined by mass media, rather than operating in an independent cultural economy. Furthermore, arts’ positioning in that system implies self-reflective expression about its place within the system. In this view, any expression of theatre can no longer be simply theatre; it also comments on its relationship to The Media. This theory informs much of Auslander’s argument with regards to the place of
performance within a mediatized culture.

Is it Live, Or...

To foreground mediatized interactions, they must be distinguished from the live. The common understanding of what it means to be “live” as it relates to performance is that the performance is happening in real-time, or in the shared present time between the performer and the spectator. Whether this happens in a shared space is a more complicated topic.

“Live theatre”

Certainly, for the bulk of human history, the only kind of performance in existence was live performance; before the development of technologies of reproduction, there was no need to mark an event as a “live” event. Indeed the same can be said of presence in such events: before broadcast television and radio, one was necessarily present in the same space as the performers in order to experience it. Therefore, we can see that the very definition of “live performance” is historically contingent and reliant on alternatives to the live event. This historical development has created a need to examine further the concept of “liveness.”

Peter Brook’s definition of live performance (or theatre) indicates that it is happening live, in a shared spatial-temporal present. This definition has been embraced and reiterated time and again by performance theorists and practitioners. However, this emphasis on the necessity of presence to liveness has become increasingly complicated by the expansion of multi- and intermedial theatre pieces. Therefore, a more articulated definition is needed that
accounts for the new complexities of our mediatized world. Woodruff provides such a definition as he explicates the concept of theatre in great length: On the most basic level, theatre ("human action being watched") requires a "measured time and space" (2008, p. 38-9). While this definition does not yet necessarily require a shared presence, it does set out a frame for the performance; "marking off space in theatre is a device for meeting the need to distinguish the watcher from the watched" (p. 110). The closest Woodruff comes to answering the question of whether this space needs to be live is by delineating the difference between theatre and film. While he does concede that "the showing of a film is a kind of performance" (p. 44) and that "a presentation of film may be used, properly framed, in a live theatrical performance", he insists that the fundamental difference between the two art forms is that theatre is essentially a live performance (p. 43). The liveness of the performance is integral to theatre because "the arts of watching and being watched are intertwined, and each affects the other" through the interaction between performer and audience who are complicit in making the action worth watching, whereas "the art of filmmaking seeks to make the film worth watching, not the action it is supposed to represent" (p. 43, emphasis added).

The necessity of presence to the impact of live performance is reinforced by Erika Fischer-Lichte who, in her 2008 book *The Transformative Power of Performance*, argues that "what the spectators see and hear in performance is always present. Performance is experienced as the completion, presentation, and passage of the present" (p. 94). This notion contends that the very definition of performance is based on presence, making Brook and Woodruff's claims to presence in performance explicit.
Thus, we can see that the concept of presence is integral to delineating liveness and deserves a thorough exploration.

Concerning Presence

Theorists like Walter Benjamin have considered presence a "material, auratic, proximal 'real'" property of experience; while more recent theories (like that of Birringer mentioned above) have extended its meaning "to include ideas of telematic and deferred, online presence" (Dixon, p. 132), wherein physical presence is implied through mediated words and/or images. We will examine this distinction further, but let us begin by establishing the basic definition of the term, which may be more difficult than one might think.

When speaking of presence in relation to theatre and performance, the discussion inevitably narrows to "stage presence." The concepts of "presence" and "stage presence," often used interchangeably, have a large volume of literature devoted to their definition and description. For clarity, our first task will be to delineate these terms. While "stage presence" is a description limited to performers, the term "presence," in contrast, is broader, referring simply to the perceived existence of a person or thing in a specific physical and temporal relationship with the subject. As Erikson (in Krasner & Saltz, 2006) reminds us, there are a number of ways that we perceive presence and any consideration of it must take account of "how it functions within a specific context, how it motivates, and to what end" (p. 156). In this spirit, we must recognize the distinctions between the performer (one who is watched or witnessed), the audience (those who witness), and the participant
(one who is watched even as watching). As we will see, presence is often conceived as an active process that complicates the relationship between these subjects. In keeping with this dynamism, we will begin by elucidating the concept of presence as experience, practice, medium, and process.

Presence as Experience

An etymological analysis is offered by Giannachi and Kaye (2011) who trace the original meaning of the word through its Latin roots, which translates to “before I am.” They go on to suggest that the term “presence” relates to that which is not only a state of being and a spatial-temporal condition, but it also has a social dimension, as one that is present “to something else or in the presence of something else,” making it a cultural concept as well (p. 5). This analysis also establishes the phrase “being present” as existing both in time and space (ibid), an idea contested by some who insist that presence can be felt through technological media like the telephone, video or text chat, and text message.

Jane Goodall corroborates the temporal-spatial definition in her book *Stage Presence* (2008) by tracing notions of presence through human history and outlining the way “having presence” was first linked with the supernatural, the sublime, and the uncanny. This connotation is linked to the divine in the Christian tradition; “presence” marked one who was closer to (read “in the presence of”) God. “We talk of ‘sensing’ a presence...A human being with presence may be said to have an aura” (p. 7). In this original sense, being present implies the authentic aura of which Benjamin was so fond. Goodall also connects this aura to the dimension of time, wherein we
may sense the "energy field" of a person with presence as they approach, "or feel that they've been here, after they've gone" (p. 7-8).

The perception of an aura presupposes the existence of a physical body in space and a perception of a qualitative, material difference when two or more bodies are physically present to each other. Many historical definitions of presence depend upon this concrete characterization of presence. One recent account is by Jon Erikson (in Krasner and Saltz, 2006) whose central argument is a defense of presence which has a recognizable materiality that "has to do with a certain kind of saturation of feeling or thought in the individual" (p. 146).

An alternative view is offered by Dixon who, similar to Auslander, argues that presence, or "presentness" is a fundamental feature of all art when we engage with it; "in purely semiotic terms, there is no significant difference between the image of, for example, a woman wearing a revolutionary flag as described in a novel, painted on a canvas, screened in a cinema, or standing live onstage" (Dixon, p. 132). From this point of view, any claim to the uniqueness of live performance is merely a fetishization or statement of preference. A second issue is that "presence is about interest and command of attention, not space or liveness" (ibid). Therefore, the measure of presence is dependent on the work of art's ability to engage the viewer, which puts all forms on a level playing field because our focus will be pulled to the representation (be it live performer or televisual image) which is more interesting to us as spectators. The representation of choice will be privileged by the individual spectator who focuses her attention on it. "Something is said to have presence when it demands that the beholder take it into account,
that he take it seriously" (Fried, quoted in Dixon, p 134). In other words, presence is created by the content, not the vehicle.

Presence as Practice

To discuss the practice of presence, we must venture for a moment to the specific domain of stage presence, which may exist on an actual stage or figurative one. Stage presence has variously been defined as a type of charisma (Auslander, Erikson), technical skill (Phelan, Goodall, Jaeger), or authoritative domination (Auslander), often a quality which certain people possess and others seek to cultivate through training. Goodall (2008), traces the origin of this concept to its use in describing the classical actor, as a term that entails "command over the time and space of performance" (p. 15) and describes the capacity to bring "a heightened level of vital power" to that space (p. 158). Such a command may be innate or achieved through any variety of training methods, as evidenced by the history of actor training, from the Renaissance forward (Goodall, p. 9). It is worthwhile pointing out—as Fischer-Lichte has done—that in the practice of presence, there undoubtedly is a continuum from the weak (simply a body in space) to the strong (commanding and holding attention), and even a 'radical' presence wherein "what occurred in an action or performance always really happened in the present (2008, p. 97).

Patrice Pavis supports this claim in the Dictionnaire du Théâtre (1983) where he states "'To have presence' in theatrical parlance, is to know how to capture the attention of the public and make an impression; it is also to be endowed with a je ne sais quoi which triggers an immediate feeling of
identification in the spectator, communicating a sense of living elsewhere and in an eternal present” (p. 301). Two key concepts arise in this definition: attention and identification. Many actor training techniques since the time of Stanislavsky have included the practice of focusing one’s attention as a foundational element of a strong performance and a way of bringing oneself, and thus the audience, into a shared state of concentration. The idea that identification with a performer onstage is a result of co-presence becomes problematic if the only way to describe the process is “je ne sais quoi.” This description points toward an inability to accurately characterize the experience of co-presence on the part of the spectator. Goodall positions this mystery at the center of her exploration of the experience of presence.

Goodall’s second connotation of presence is that of “worldly presence” which can be developed through “training and technical prowess” (2008, p. 8). Despite the tension between the worldly and the mysterious, Goodall insists that they inform one another and, though actor training has often sought ways to scientifically reconstruct mesmeric qualities of presence in performance, “there is no getting away from the strange and the uncanny” (p. 11) when aesthetic experience moves the spectator in ways they can neither quantify nor articulate through language. Rather than demystify presence, Goodall challenges us to explore “just how this mysterious attribute has been articulated” (p. 7).

Presence as Process and Medium

Giannachi and Kaye also refer to presence as approaching the uncanny, but from a uniquely phenomenological perspective. Their account
of presence eschews the Cartesian duality of object and subject, opting for a more dynamic conception of the 'ecology' of presence as a flow or an unfolding of that which is "I am" in relation to that which is 'in front of' or 'before'. For them, presence is an active process; the other is presented to the subject (the 'I am') and through this presentation there is an unfolding of identity within and between each which creates a tension experienced as what Freud referred to as the 'uncanny.' In other words, "what is in front of or before the 'I am', returns to the 'I am', and thus discloses, in this movement, that which was contained in the 'I am' but was 'always already' secret to it" (2011, p. 7). This recurrence to the Freudian figuration of the uncanny positions presence as both an active process and the medium of performance. It is through this mutual unfolding that we attend to and identify with others and recognize truths about ourselves through them.

Furthermore, because presence is characterized as an interaction between self, other, and environment that is fraught with tension, it is distinct from an aura or charisma, both of which indicate ease, comfort, and attraction. This tension is liminal as well as "dynamic and shifting," since it takes place "within temporary networks and ecologies" (p. 20). Giannachi and Kaye eschew conceptions of presence which pit mediated and unmediated presence against one another in an oppositional duality. Instead they argue, after Derrida, that the liminal nature of the unfolding process implies that presence as a process is performed, or "produced in the act" and hence is not intrinsic to any particular medium, then "there is no a priori opposition between media (theatrical, electronic, or other) with regard to 'presence'" (p. 19). This view resists the privileging of unmediated over
mediated phenomena of presence and opens up the opportunity for inquiry into the use of media and technology to explore the performance of presence.
CHAPTER III
THE LIVENESS PROBLEM

In Digital Performance (2007), Steve Dixon undertakes a titanic effort to catalog the history and elucidate the essential features of "new media technologies and their application within the performance arts." While theatre and other performance arts have always integrated new technologies, the rise of the computer and various new modes of representation and interaction have invariably given rise to new questions about the nature of performance.

"Digital performance is an extension of a continuing history of the adoption and adaptation of technologies to increase performance and visual art's aesthetic effect and sense of spectacle, its emotional and sensorial impact, its play of meanings and symbolic associations, and its intellectual power" (p. 40).

Dixon painstakingly traces the lineage of digital performance in both mainstream and avant-garde performance traditions; a lineage that parallel's the development of computer arts in general, as evidenced by Oliver Grau's Virtual Art and other works which trace the role of immersive artworks in the prefiguring of cyberspace (p. 40).

In the chapter titled “Liveness,” Dixon posits that this concept has been “a perennial theoretical problem since it divided critics and theatregoers almost a century ago following the incorporation of film footage into live theatre, and it remains a conundrum that is continually wrestled with both in performance studies and in wider cultural and cyber theory” (p. 115). His exploration begins by presenting the most prominent ideas by theorists on
opposing sides of the debate, starting with reactions to the innovation of photography, a technology which—more than any other—formed the foundation of the problem of presence. At odds in the argument over the ontology of photography and its relation to presence and liveness are Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes.

Auras and Emanations

Dixon describes Walter Benjamin's seminal essay as "one of the most cited texts in theoretical discussions of digital arts and culture" (p. 116). As explained in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin firmly believed that the ability to "mechanically reproduce" works of art through means of lithography, photography, or film brought about new considerations regarding the nature of art. He briefly traces the history of pictorial forms of reproduction from stamps and coins up to photography, which was the largest technological leap forward in this domain. He explains how burgeoning technologies of reproduction have, over time, sped up the process of delivery of images (and later accompanied by sound in film) to our senses. While this process has made art more accessible to the masses, it has also undermined the authenticity of the art works themselves.

For Benjamin, the authenticity of an art product is inextricably linked to its physical presence: "the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity" (p. 220). And an object's authenticity, uniqueness, links to tradition, and historical authority are jointly defined as its "aura." Therefore, no matter how beautiful or technically similar the reproduction, "the quality of [the original's] presence is always depreciated" (p. 221).
Benjamin cites the decay of aura as based on two social circumstances: 1) "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly" and 2) the desire to overcome "the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction" (p. 223).

Film has presented an equal challenge to performance as photography did to painting. Here, it is the presence and aura of the actor that is displaced by the camera: "the artistic performance of a stage actor is definitely presented to the public by the actor in person; that of the screen actor, however, is presented by a camera" (p. 228). The resulting consequence is that the actor's performance is not seen as a whole once it is submitted to close-ups, contrived camera angles, and editing. Perhaps more importantly, "the film actor lacks the opportunity of the stage actor to adjust to the audience during his performance" therefore, the "audience's identification with the actor is really an identification with the camera" (p. 228). Here we see the most profound impact on the spectator who becomes a voyeur into the lives of those onscreen rather than an active participant in a live exchange between living bodies in real time and space.

Benjamin's argument frequently underpins many performance theorists' "warning of the insidious and destructive power of technology" (p.117). It is certainly apparent that Benjamin is quite attached to authenticity in art. Yet, it is easy to elide (as many scholars tend to do) Benjamin's admission that a photograph, taken as such, has its own brand of aura that is different, yet not less than the image's referent. In fact, he asserts that mechanical reproduction has altered the ontology (without necessarily implying a change in value) of art products: "the work of art reproduced
becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility” (p. 224). This is a point which Auslander (2008) seizes on for his own theory of liveness, positing "that all performance modes, live or mediatized, are now equal: none is perceived as auratic or authentic; the live performance is just one more reproduction of a given text or one more reproducible text" (p. 55). Thus we can see how Benjamin's critique has been used to support both sides of the argument:

"On the one hand, it stands as evidence for the unique aura and presence of live performance, which can only be damaged and robbed by technology, and on the other as proof that technological incursion does not significantly alter reception of performance, since our minds are already mediatized" (Dixon, p. 117-8).

Ultimately, in postmodern theory, reproductions are prized as much as, if not more than, any original thus displacing notions of originality and authenticity (Dixon, p. 18).

In contrast, Barthes' take on the phenomenon of the photograph is quite different. He sees a photograph not as a signal of the dismantling of presence, but rather as "authentication itself...every photograph is a certificate of presence" (quoted in Dixon, p. 118). In other words, the photographic documentation of a moment in time authenticates its reality, confirms that it actually happened. In fact, he goes as far as to say that we are looking at the referent itself, not the photograph; meaning the essence of a photograph is only to be a reference to something real and thus is not real itself (p. 120).

The more compelling portion of Barthes' theory (which has paradoxically been omitted from most of the subsequent liveness debate) has to do with his insistence that Photography's ability to attest for real,
unrepeatable moments and authenticate those moments exceeds its ability to represent. In other words, the fact of my nephew’s aquatic agility was proven true by the video, which is more important than the existence of the video itself.

This is where Barthes most sharply disagrees with Benjamin, by denying the Photograph’s force as a mode of reproduction. He sees the Photograph as "an emanation of a past reality: a magic, not an art" (in Dixon, p. 121). The moment is dead because it has passed, but the recording lives on and is more captivating than the event it recorded. In relating Barthes’ views to digital performance, the photographic image would be seen as more powerful than the live performer when both are utilized in a performance; “it is often the media projection rather than the live performer that wields the real power, the sense of (aesthetic, semiotic) reality” (p. 122). Yet his theory also implies that the integration of photographic elements into live performance does not dehumanize or fragment reality, but rather affirms both reality and humanity.

Performance in a Mediatized Culture

In the preface to the second edition of his book, Liveness, Philip Auslander indicates that he intended it to be contentious, a “conversation-starter” (1999, p. xiii) and the responses to it have proven this intention true. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explicate all of the ongoing conversations around the thorny concept of liveness that Auslander posits, so to start, let us outline his argument and build the foundation for a response.

From the start, Auslander admits to a belief in an oppositional conflict
between theatre and the media. However, he challenges the notion of this binary, which he views as reductive and leads to an assumption that “the live event is ‘real’ and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real” (p. 3). He forms his challenge by deconstructing the inter-medial relationships, examining how various modes of representation remediate each other, and by unpacking “the mutual dependence of the live and mediatized” (p. 11). Following Marshall McLuhan’s theories of the logic of media, wherein, “a new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them” (1964, 158). This idea is advanced by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin, who explicated the process of remediation which entails “the representation of one medium in another...new technologies of representation proceed by reforming or remediating earlier ones” (1996, 339). Historical instances of remediation, a form of direct mediatization, can tell us much about the relationship between live and mediatized forms.

In developing his argument, Auslander asserts that while both film and television remediate structural elements of live performance (narrative, visual vocabulary, a proscenium-like frame), television remediated theatre at a deeper, ontological level by presenting itself as a live medium that could broadcast images of seemingly co-existent and ephemeral moments in a far-off studio or location. Television’s “claim to immediacy” informs its ontology and the way we perceive its content; it has, in Auslander’s words “colonized liveness” (1999, p. 13). Television thus shares a closer ontological relationship with theatre through their mutual ability to represent live moments. Whereas
film is a medium of repetition, since it can be recorded at any time and place, then shown at any time and place (p. 15); thus it is of the past, not of the "live" present the way television and theatre can be. Even when not presented as a live broadcast and when cinematic techniques were introduced in a storytelling capacity, television shows were continually theatricalized by adopting theatrical titles such as "playhouse" and breaking down episodes into acts and scenes with titles; television, in effect, replaced theatre by bringing its content to spectators in their private home space (p. 22). This effect can be extended to new media forms where "the ideology of liveness that the televisual (the cultural dominant that is now expressed through a variety of media) inherited from television (the medium) has enabled it to displace and replace live performance in a wide variety of cultural contexts" (p. 24).

While early television set out to replicate and replace theatre, "live performance itself has developed since that time toward the replication of the discourse of mediatization" (p. 24). This view is supported by Bolter and Grusin, who comment on the reciprocal nature of remediation, where "earlier technologies are struggling to maintain their legitimacy by remediating newer ones" (1996, 352). Auslander goes so far as to suggest that in many contexts, live performances have become almost completely media products, citing examples of arena concerts, comedy shows, and sporting events where spectators only hear what is mediated through speakers and watch most of the event on a giant screen (1999, p. 25). Televisual conventions such as close-ups and instant replays are expected by spectators of large sporting events and the structure of the event has been altered to create "media time-outs"
that allow for commercials aired throughout the televised event (p. 25-26). Professional theatre also continues to design scenery integrating projections, computerized "smart lights," microphones on every actor, and stagings that increasingly incorporate cinematic vocabularies to accommodate an audience that has been raised watching screens.

To support his argument, Auslander co-opts Benjamin's assertion that works of art are designed for reproducibility. He does so by providing examples of direct mediatization that go beyond integration of multi-media in the performance itself to the process of creation. For instance, there are increasing cases of performance artists documenting and webcasting their process at every step through blogs, photography, and video. Such activities are often intended to draw attention to the art works as commodities and thus sell more tickets (or copies).

While many of his points, including his historical reading of the development of media, may be valid, a close reader of Liveness will notice some underlying assumptions that can be challenged. For one, Auslander's argument is based on an economic framework; he tends to relate all aspects of art-making to either a cultural or monetary economy. This orientation is apparent in his reference to Jacques Attali, who delineated the bases of cultural economy as representation (a singular act) and repetition (mass-produced products) (in Auslander, 1999, 27-8). This delineation is most apparent in popular music where a concert is a representation, whereas a CD or mp3 is an example of repetition; the same could be said of recorded theatre or dance performances and art exhibits vs. posters. From this framework, Auslander points out that "by being recorded and becoming mediatized,
performance becomes an accumulable value” (p. 28) and thus live theatre is more and more reliant on the monetary economy through mediatization. For example, one only needs to look at the Broadway marquees ranging from Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* to *Mamma Mia* and *Hairspray* (an interesting case in itself as it began as a film, was remediated as a musical, then re-mediatized as a film musical; the result increased it’s monetary value every step of the way), not to mention recent reality television shows that search for the next stars of Broadway productions of *Grease* or *Legally Blonde*, to see that producers increasingly look to existing media to draw audiences into their theatres.

These examples of large-scale commercial performances (arena concerts, Broadway musicals, professional sporting events) are all well and good, but what about smaller, intimate performances where little if any amplification or video projections are used? Well, he preempts the reader’s objections by making the point that “mediatization is not just a question of the employment of media technology” as we’ve already seen in previous examples (Auslander, 1999, p. 36). It is also the way in which the process of indirect mediatization has altered the way audiences approach many live performances as well as the way presenters package even small scale productions.

This analysis of the relationship between mediatization and economy is intriguing and worthy of exploration. However, to apply economic thinking to all aspects of our inquiry would be too limiting. He asserts that live and mediatized forms of performance carry cultural or symbolic capital (1999, p. 43, 66-67) and frames his whole argument in the domain of “cultural
economy" which he uses "to describe a realm of inquiry that includes both the real economic relations among cultural forms, and the relative degrees of cultural prestige and power enjoyed by different forms" (footnote, p. 1). While this concept may be a useful analytical tool, it ignores the perspectives outside of an economic worldview and furthermore assumes that works of art are products; static items that can be bought and sold. While mediatization may well commodify otherwise ephemeral performance events, a shift in the underlying assumption away from art as product to the conception of art as an experiential process may provide some answers about the role of performance in a mediatized society.

Media Epistemology

Perhaps the boldest point in Auslander’s argument up to this point is his concept of a media-driven epistemology. He defines "media epistemology" as a pre-formed perception of our reality through the mediation of machines—such as the television and microscope (1999, p. 36). This epistemology reveals the insidious nature of indirect mediatization as it works on subconscious (perhaps even pre-conscious) levels to shape our ways of perceiving our world.

Media Epistemology relates simultaneously to the fact that technical equipment increasingly dominate our worldview and the ways we have been conditioned to perceive the world:

[T]hat the commercial theatre now frequently presents live versions of film and television and camera-ready productions of plays, that live concerts often recreate the imagery of music videos, that the non-matrixed performing characteristic of avant garde theatre proved a suitable training ground for television
and film acting all...has to do with approaches to performance and characterization, and the mobility and meanings of those within a particular cultural context. (p. 37)

If I may offer a personal example of this phenomenon: for many years, I had a rigid preference for recorded music over live recordings. Having listened (and sung along) to my favorite pop songs over and over again, they became like good friends of whom I knew every produced sound. However, listening to a live recording revealed the music to be raw and flawed, with different cadences, the occasional wrong note, and an unbalanced, unpolished mix of instrumental sounds. Going to a live concert presented more of the same: the songs did not sound exactly like they did on the cassette. It took some time before I began to view this as a positive change; that the energy of the human (and therefore imperfect) performer was exhilarating and the changes in the performance reflected a spontaneous reaction to the particular audience, concert hall, and other circumstances that are unrepeatable.

Because my first encounter with the artist was through a slick produced recording, the live performance (or to some extent, the live recording) became a validation, an authentication of the existence of the recording. The concert tour supported the CD, not vice versa. I had learned to listen to music as if it were recorded, and thus expected the live performance to match that recording, note for note. While maturity helped me realize the value of a live performance, my initial orientation to music was that a produced recording should be the standard of quality by which we judge all other instances of it. This is one example of how the media pervades and shapes not only our perceptions, but also our expectations.
This leads Auslander to a postulation that Benjamin’s hypothesis that, in reproduction, “the quality of [the original’s] presence is always depreciated” (see above) has become inverted: “The ubiquity of reproductions of performances of all kinds in our culture has led to the depreciation of live presence,” which is addressed “by making the perceptual experience of the live as much as possible like that of the mediatized, even in cases where the live event provides its own brand of proximity” (1999, p. 40).

Here, Auslander echoes Barthes when he argues that the lines between the live and mediatized are becoming increasingly blurred and in such a space, it is the digital image rather than the live one that becomes the dominant aesthetic force within mixed media performance:

We now experience such work as a fusion, not a con-fusion, of realms, a fusion that we see as taking place within a digital environment that incorporates the live elements as part of its raw material...in this sense, Dance + Virtual = Virtual. (p. 42)

Like Benjamin’s conception that modes of perception are historically contingent, Auslander believes that liveness is equally controlled by innovations in technology. Because our culture has become saturated with digitally-mediated material, such material is "gradually replacing the live within the cultural economy" (Dixon, p. 124). This view establishes the meaning of liveness as "historical and contingent rather than determined by immutable differences" (quoted in Dixon, p 123 [fn44]). This contingent definition, according to Auslander, means that the relationship between live performance and mediatized forms must be understood not with the idea of liveness as "an ontological condition" but that the relationship "needs to be understood historically and locally, in particular contexts" (p. 62-3). This
contextuality provides the foundation for Auslander to dismantle the idea that the ontology of live performance is immutable, an assertion opposite to many performance theorists.

One such challenger is Peggy Phelan, who presents a polar opposite of Auslander when she insists on an essentialist ontology of performance that depends upon its existence in the present place and moment, echoing Benjamin’s argument about aura and authenticity as well as Brook’s definition of theatre. For Phelan, any attempt at reproduction "betrays and lessens the promise of [performance's] own ontology" (Dixon, p. 123). Performance is dependent on "a constant state of presence followed by disappearance," as it is the latter which defines the boundaries of the performance (p. 126). A supporting voice in this debate is Phaedre Bell, who sets cinematic representation—whose signifiers are always absent—apart from live theatre, where signification is dependent on people and objects' full presence. This distinction leads to "fundamental differences in how we read and interpret filmic and theatrical signs" (p. 126). Patrice Pavis goes so far as to suggest that technologies of reproduction not only influence live theatre, but also contaminate it (p. 124).

Auslander’s response is to insist that the digital is the dominant aesthetic force into which the live is incorporated. This implies that, in multimedia art works, film is not read as theatre; rather, the use of film (or other televisual media) in a live performance transforms the event into television (ibid, p. 125). In the face of this bold challenge to traditional notions that live performance has a unique ontology dependent on embodied presence, a more evolved dialogue is needed. Rather than insist on a polar
opposition between media and theatre, I accept the reciprocity between the live and mediatized. However, I reject the notion that the digital is dominant over the live and therefore subsumes it. If the relationship is truly reciprocal, then one form need not dominate the other.
One of Dewey’s concerns was that the speed at which we take in stimuli and information allows few of these impressions to actually take hold and lead to a fulfilling experience. And without fulfilling experience, one cannot live a fully human life; we are not able to flourish. Consider for a moment the speed at which people lived, the number of stimuli present in the Chicago of 1934. Now imagine the same city today. How many more impressions are presented to one’s perception in a moment? Surely, if Dewey were transported in time, he would feel bombarded by the sheer volume of fragmented sensations and information that many of us take for granted as part of our mediatized world. The sound bites, logos, catchphrases, headlines, and 140 character messages that dominate our senses create a pervasive atmosphere of fragmentation. By identifying and cultivating a sense of full experience, we can begin to live a full life. To understand how to accomplish this, we must first recognize what Dewey means by two distinct notions: experience as a whole, and the singularity of an experience, or what he called the “consummatory experience.”

Experience

Experience, in general, is characterized by a continuous interaction between an organism and the other organisms, objects, and activity surrounding it. Several aspects of this definition are important to unpack,
including continuity, embodiment, transaction, and situated-ness. First of all, it is important to recognize that experience is always situated within an environment; it does not happen in isolation, even when it is perceived as an internal process. "The idea of environment is a necessity to the idea of organism, and with the conception of environment comes the impossibility of considering psychical life as an individual, isolated thing developing in a vacuum" (in Boydston, vol. 1, p. 56). Any description of experience, therefore, needs to account for how it functions in and with natural, cultural, and social environments (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 1, section 2). Therefore any component of experience is a part of an ongoing process, "with the idea of the organism already dynamically involved with the world" (Alexander 1987, 129). For example, a man building a wall does so for a reason, maybe he wants to keep animals out of his garden, or perhaps he is employed by a landscaping company. To build it, he must select the stones needed, then begin placing them. The experience of lifting one stone is embedded in and conditioned by this context.

Disagreeing with the reflex arc model of psychology in vogue during his lifetime, which asserted that "a passive organism encounters an external stimulus," which "engenders a sensory and motor response;" Dewey criticized this view of stimulus-response as fragmented and inadequate (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 1, section 2, para. 2). He opted for a view of continuous interaction that could not be parsed into discreet stimuli and responses; just as it is embedded in an environment, experience is organic, reciprocal, and cumulative (ibid). Rather than a view of stimuli and responses as discreet occurrences, Dewey instead employs the terms "doing"
and "undergoing" to signify the reciprocity of one's action in an environment and the action of the environment on the organism. The back-and-forth nature of one's interaction in the world implies an ongoing and adaptive transaction. For an example of this transactional process we can examine that of a man lifting a rock:

In consequence he undergoes, suffers, something: the weight, strain, texture of the surface of the thing lifted. The properties thus undergone determine further doing. The stone is too heavy or too angular, not solid enough; or else the properties undergone show it is fit for the use for which it was intended. The process continues until a mutual adaptation of the self and the object emerges and that particular experience comes to a close. (Dewey, 1934, p. 44)

This rhythm of doing and undergoing creates the possibility for tension and conflict, but also of equilibrium which "comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of, and because of tension" (p. 14). When equilibrium is reached, an adaptation is made and future action is altered. When it is not reached, the experience is unfulfilled. This can be the result of any number of internal or external distractions or of lethargy.

The transaction between organism and environment is also dynamic and contextual. Depending on how a moment is framed, a stimulus could also be a response and vice versa (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 1, section 2). Such a conception rejects the idea that experience is strictly cognitive; instead Dewey seeks to BOTH ground experience in the body and the organism in nature thereby dissolving dualities of body/mind and organism/environment. This is an ecological model: "mind, body, and world are mutually created by their ongoing interaction" (chap. 1, section 2, para. 12). In this perspective, the mind and body are coordinated in one organic
“sensori-motor circuit” which both undertakes perception of the world and acts within it (Hildebrand, 2008). When a child beholds water in the pool on a hot day, he does so within the context of ongoing activity, out of which emerges an impulse to jump. This compulsion is more than just a motor response because it began with an act of seeing, which is simultaneously an intentional act and physical stimulation of the eye. One reaches out not as a response in itself, but as a reaching-guided-by-seeing (ibid).

Furthermore, boundaries between the environment and organism are dissolved because they are “mutually implicated at each moment; they are aspects of one situation fundamentally related through the act” (Alexander, p. 135). The act, according to Dewey is the basic unit of experience, initiated by impulse and unfolding over time. Impulse is rooted in instinct, it is a spontaneous and creative response to the tensive nature of the situation, as discussed previously. It is the phase of the act “in which the need for reconstructing the situation is apparent, and one seeks the best response” (p. 139). If, once in the water, our young hero feels it is icy cold, the impulse hits him quickly—through sensori-motor coordination—to jump out. Herein lies the potential to be changed by the experience, to learn from it.

Learning and Growth

Hildebrand summarizes Dewey’s process of learning as “movement from an initial disequilibrium (confusion, doubt) toward equilibrium (satisfaction, knowledge). The learner is not an empty vessel or a wax tablet, ‘impressed’ by discrete and external stimuli, but an agent actively engaged with her environment and growing insofar as she frames and uses events in
experience” (2008, chap. 1, section 2, para. 7). The discomfort of the cold water makes the young boy see the water differently and he will likely approach it with more apprehension next time. His habits will be changed through a readjustment of the situation. A habit, for Dewey gives structure to experience as “a cumulative linking of acts” (chap. 1, section 2, para. 15). To be able to swim, one needs to be involved in thousands of acts which accumulate into a full activity, at which point we say we have learned to swim.

It should now be apparent that the body-mind is an integrated whole engaged in the act, and it is the act which provides a context for meaning. The creation of meaning is an active process and accomplished “by observing how instincts are built into personal habits and, more generally, how they are valued by the social and cultural contexts in which they function” (chap. 1, section 2, para. 9). Thus we see that meaning is necessarily social because it is arrived at through symbolic communication within our social environments: “individuals become aware of their individuality only through a social context and the ability to regard themselves from the social perspective... Meaning is the very struggle to make the world coherent; it is the ongoing process of trying to make sense. This is a communally shared task” (Alexander, p. xix). When experience becomes endowed with meaning, it has reached a point of consummation, what Dewey calls an experience.

AN Experience

Zeal for doing, lust for action, leaves many a person, especially in this hurried and impatient human environment in which we live, with experience of an almost incredible paucity, all on the surface. No one experience has a chance to complete itself
because something else is entered upon so speedily. Resistance is treated as an obstruction to be beaten down, not as an invitation to reflection. An individual comes to seek, unconsciously even more than by deliberate choice, situations in which he can do the most things in the shortest time. (Dewey, 1934, p. 44-5)

Perhaps it is the last sentence in the quote above that strikes us most as a truth of contemporary life. Don’t we often get caught up in multi-tasking, attempting to “do the most things in the shortest time,” even at the same time? The speed at which computers operate has become the standard by which we measure human capacity. Turkle speaks to this in Alone Together: “overwhelmed by the pace that technology makes possible, we think about how new, more efficient technologies might help dig us out. But new devices encourage ever-greater volume and velocity” (2011, p. 280). However, to insist, as Dewey does, that a life worth living is one that makes the most of the potential for full, enriching experiences in every moment of our lives is a bold yet highly valuable existential and moral statement. When we recognize that “present life’s dysfunctional routines,” as Hildebrand puts it, deaden “the live creature” and create “a profoundly felt loss of meaning, making these routines more aesthetic can awaken us to the possibility of a better future (2008, chap. 6, Conclusion, para. 3).

To understand the aesthetic dimension of consummatory experience, let us turn to Dewey’s own examples:

A piece of work is finished in a way that is satisfactory; a problem receives its solution; a game is played through; a situation, whether that of eating a meal, playing a game of chess, carrying on a conversation, writing a book, or taking part in a political campaign, is so rounded out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation. (1934, p. 35)

These examples illustrate the prerequisites of an experience: “to undergo a
series of events which hang together (have unity), exhibit character (have a theme or pervasive quality), and end with some drama (consummating, not just terminating)” (Hildebrand, 2008, section 3, para. 6). A consummatory experience is distinguished by a qualitative unity, the quality pervades an experience, provides it with a sense of wholeness: “in going over an experience in mind after its occurrence, we may find that one property rather than another was sufficiently dominant so that it characterizes the experience as a whole” (Dewey 1934, p. 37). This quality is often emotional or imaginative in nature. Our young hero, situated as he is in a social environment, has witnessed someone doing an aquatic flip and decides he wants to do it as well. His determination is the emotional quality that drives the various attempts at the summersault. Once he has mastered it, the experience has reached its feels complete; the connection between doing and undergoing, or one’s action and the consequences are coordinated until a mutual adaptation is reached that brings the experience to a consummatory close. The unity of his striving is what drives the experience toward an endpoint, and endows the experience with what Dewey acknowledged as the aesthetic dimension. It is this dimension that gives an experience “its name, that meal, that storm, that rupture of friendship” (p. 37).

Experiences lacking in qualitative unity and consummation, or “anesthetic” experiences are too often assumed to be the norm (Dewey, 1934). There are many things that limit experiences by impeding our ability to perceive the relations of doing and undergoing: imbalances occur when we move so fast from one activity to another we cut short the completion of any particular act (imbalance toward doing) or when we daydream and receive
impressions that flow through our minds without taking root (imbalance toward undergoing) (p. 44-45). Hildebrand elaborates on this model, establishing three categories of limiting forces: “(1) interruption (phone calls, computerized alarms, advertising, or even a sneeze during a romantic kiss); by (2) hyperactivity (overcaffeination, incessant multi-tasking, demanding bosses); and by (3) passivity (habits of laziness, procrastination, the desire to ‘be entertained’)” (2008, chap. 6, section 3, para. 9). In contrast, we only truly have an experience when it is fully and consciously embodied. When experience is fully embodied, we live “in the moment,” follow it through to its end, and endow experience with its aesthetic value.

Thinking Like an Artist

[T]he origin of art lies ultimately in this very moment of being fully alive. (Alexander, 1987, p. 194)

The project of reconnecting art and aesthetic experience with everyday life begins with understanding the purpose of art which, "in Dewey’s view, is to create especially aesthetic experiences" (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 6, section 4, para. 1). To do so requires a participatory transaction that opens up another set of dualisms which Dewey takes upon himself to deconstruct; artist/spectator and artistic/aesthetic, both of which are concerned with an opposition of art’s production and perception. For an art product to be both artistic and aesthetic—a merging Dewey laments the English language does not accommodate in one word—the artist must embody “in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works” and likewise, the appreciator must imagine how the work was made to perceive what the artist was attempting to achieve (1934, p. 48, 54).
A painter plying his craft "must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing and where his work is going. Moreover, he has to see each particular connection of doing and undergoing in relation to the whole he desires to produce" (Dewey, 1934, p. 45). Art is a process of communication; as such, artists create with the end in mind, knowing it will have an audience and crafting the work so that audience has a particular experience. The artist is set apart from others because she is "not only especially gifted in powers of execution but in unusual sensitivity to the qualities of things" (p. 49). In the act of creation, the artist applies these "powers of execution" through their chosen materials, while "attempting to form a sympathetic and imaginative projection of what appreciators will experience later on" (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 6, section 4, para. 3). Likewise, the appreciator is called upon to recreate the impulsion and process of the artist.

Dewey offers us an example: when the Parthenon was built, it was created within a context, fulfilling a need for the Athenian community. Though it served a strictly functional and spiritual purpose at the time (the Greeks thought of architecture as a craft, rather than art), it is now revered as a piece of enduring art. To approach the Parthenon as a work of art, one must keep the original context in mind, remembering "what the people into whose lives it entered had in common...with people in our own homes and our own streets" (1934, p. 5). To fully experience an art product aesthetically is to grasp its significance within the context of which it was created: the individual and community experience. As Dewey puts it "without an act of recreation the object is not perceived as a work of art. The artist selected,
simplified, clarified, abridged and condensed according to his interest. The beholder must go through these operations according to his point of view and interest” (p. 54). This definition of work of art as process is further explained as a collaboration, through reconstruction, the perceiver of an artwork is also a creator.
CHAPTER V

ALTERNATIVE PHENOMENOLOGIES

"My body is a movement toward the world and the world my body's point of support." (Merleau-Ponty, in Carman & Hansen, p. 271)

Let us now return to the debate over the live and mediatized to see how Dewey might contribute to this conversation. As we can now discern, this topic tends to lead theorists to make hyperbolic exclamations and dodge final answers to the question of ontology. Dixon suggests we turn to a phenomenological exploration to assist us. He challenges Auslander's conclusion which removes the spatial, physical presence of performers from the equation, by stating that (at least from a perceptual standpoint), "liveness has more to do with time and "now-ness" than with the corporeality or virtuality of subjects being observed" (2007, p. 127). While this perspective simplifies the problem of liveness, it also oversimplifies it, because in actuality, reception modes differ for spectators of live and recorded performances. They are watched in different ways.... Watching film, video, and digital media is a more voyeuristic experience than watching live performance, since in the literal sense of the word, the onlooker is looking from a position without fear of being seen by the watched (p. 130). Perceptive senses are engaged differently in each case, and are affected by the presence or absence of live performers.

In her chapter titled "Embodiment and Presence," (in Krasner & Saltz, 2006), Suzanne M. Jaeger seeks to affirm the ontology of presence as a real, lived phenomenon by arguing against postructuralists like Derrida and
Auslander who "reject the possibility of any singularly meaningful experience of self-presence" (p. 122). She critiques how Derrida and his followers, specifically Auslander who has applied Derridean thought to performance, apply a micrological, linguistic approach that assumes what is true for language is generalizable to all forms of experience. She asserts that "linguistic accounts of meaning by themselves fail to acknowledge how aspects of the object and of the environment contribute to the synthesis of perception" (p. 135). To Derrida, meaning is the result of re-contextualization whenever words or gestures are repeated in new contexts; therefore signified meanings are always absent, as is the subject (p. 127-8). Following this line of thinking, communication is based on differences which in themselves are nothing and therefore cannot be present. To further explain this denial of self-presence in Derrida's overly formalistic mode, Jaeger quotes Joan Scott who states that, "it is no longer individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience.... Experience is a linguistic event" (p. 128). Although this theory seems to exclude the possibility of embodied presence as a meaningful experience, Peggy Phelan's contribution opens up such a possibility. Phelan suggests that performance is transformed into something different if it is recorded because it can only exist in the present and that it "becomes itself through disappearance" (p. 129). It is this ephemerality that leaves open the possibility for meaning outside of the text, and thus outside of Derrida's linguistic analysis. It is, in fact, the very materiality of the physically present performer and spectator that gives performance a unique ontology.

Jaeger corroborates Phelan's analysis by insisting that the investment
of a performer in the moment is "always concretely visible" (p. 125). A recognition of this sort of embodied presence is a feature lacking from Auslander's theory. In the process of making his argument, he "disregards the importance of the body" while admitting "that although mediatized performances engage all of the same senses as live performances, they may well engage the senses differently" (ibid), which leaves open the possibility for an ontology of presence. To lay out such an ontology, Jaeger rejects the formalism and generalization in Derrida's ideas and develops a framework for understanding meaningful experience which focuses on the ways in which our senses are engaged phenomenologically (p. 131). She does this through the perceptual theory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose work closely aligns with Dewey, as we shall see.

The Body in Space

While Derrida and Auslander are focused solely on linguistic meaning, Merleau-Ponty provides an alternative view of meaning, which utilizes Dewey's model (Alexander, p. 129). Merleau-Ponty builds on Dewey's body-mind coordination and develops it into "bodily powers of perception" that include the physical, social, and emotional in addition to the cognitive and linguistic, all of which he refers to as "modalities of perception" which are intentionally connected to features in our environment (Jaeger, p. 132). Such modalities do not function in isolation, but rather interact and influence one another in a process he referred to as "synesthetic perception" wherein the object of our perception is the culmination of all powers of perception at our disposal (ibid). This returns us to the idea that perception and the meanings
we attribute to the world are not strictly a matter of cognition, but are products of a complex interplay of physically constituted perceptual faculties.

Merleau-Ponty’s epistemology depends on embodied perception and one’s presence to an object in an environment (p. 134). He asserts that we experience the interplay of our various "powers of perception" as a unity, or "body schema" whereby "sensations are laden or 'pregnant' with meanings that remain hidden until given representation" (p. 134). We actively seek to uncover meanings, motivated by the fact that our perception will always be incomplete because the perceptual material of any environment or activity is limitless and as one being, we can only take in so much. The unity experienced is thus a "function of the complex, active, embodied engagement with the specific features of the environment" and therefore has both temporal and spatial dimensions (p. 135). Our body schema synthesizes our perceptual powers through a dynamic interaction with the environment in a rhythmic unfolding as we engage with the object of our perception (p. 135-6). Each person, due to the uniqueness of our bodies and histories, has a particular style—or recognizable pattern—of engaging with the world. Our habits of perception are mutable by nature because of their connection with the environment, which is in continual flux; "the unity of the bodily schema is therefore open and limitless" (p. 137).

Presence, here, is explained as a reconfiguration of the body schema, as a "perceptual openness" to stimuli, and therefore represents "the possibility of transformation in familiar, habituated, and socially entrenched patterns through which one experiences the world" (p. 137-9). Because the particularities of the environment have an effect on our style or "manner of
being in the world" (p. 138), we may critique Auslander's dismissal of ontological distinctions between live and mediatized performances: While the same perceptual faculties may be engaged in the viewing of either form, they are certainly engaged in different ways as the body schema is transformed by the unique type of engagement offered by the type of media used and the form of liveness experienced. If related to another through email, video chat, or by telephone, we will call on a different configuration of our perceptual schema and the style of how we relate through a medium will change with the medium itself.

What Dewey Offers

Several features of Merleau-Ponty's perspective overlap with and expand on Dewey's: the situated-ness of the perceiver in an environment, the connection of mind-body perceptual faculties, and the unity of a perceptive experience. All of which supports the potential of embodied aesthetic experience to enrich our lives.

Dewey's concept of embodied, consummatory experience is of use in our discourse on mediatization not only through because of its contribution to aesthetic philosophy, but also through its metaphysics and its implications for the ethical formation of the individual and community. We have already touched on the metaphysical importance, namely how "aesthetic experience exemplifies the most vivid and condensed example of experience at its most integrated...Such a degree of fulfillment represents life--including intellectual inquiry--at its most satisfactory" (Hildebrand, 2008, chap. 6, Introduction, para. 4). This dimension of Dewey's model provides an overarching
contribution to contemporary thought that encompasses other, more practical applications which we will explore in more detail as they comment on and relate to our discourse on mediatization.

Aesthetics and Media

As an aesthetic philosophy for the modern world, Dewey’s model can provide a framework for exploring the role of presence in performance and its relationship to media. Dewey, unlike Benjamin, did not make any explicit comment about the authenticity of a work of art as an attribute of its presence; he was much more concerned with the presence of a perceiver and their ability to attend to a work of art—most of his examples of art objects were paintings, sculpture, and architecture. However, he did write extensively about the materials, or media employed in art-making and their expressivity.

Dewey briefly articulates the difference between art forms that utilize the artist’s body as medium (the “automatic arts” including dancing, singing, dancing, story-telling, tattooing, etc.), and those which utilize materials apart from the body (“shaping arts” such as sculpting, painting, weaving, etc). Even after making this distinction, he reminds us that since art is a human endeavor, all art is, at some point, subject to the movements of the human body (with the exception of those objects create by machine). “Something of the rhythm of vital natural expression, something as it were of dancing and pantomime, must go into carving, painting, and making statues, planning buildings, and writing stories” (1934, p. 228). Thus, the distinction between automatic and shaping arts is a continuum rather than dualism, a theme that
will surface again soon.

He goes on to condemn any attempt to rank the arts into a hierarchy of classes as “out of place and stupid”, insisting that “each medium has its own efficacy and value” (p. 227). This supports the claim that mediatized arts exist on a level playing field with live performance yet denies Auslander & Birringers’ claim to digital media’s dominance. Can digital media still be considered works of art with equal authenticity to the “live” or present art work? The answer is complicated and involves an evaluation of the medium’s expressive properties.

In his discussion of media, Dewey provides criteria for assessing artwork. By this he means the ability of the art object to create an opportunity for meaningful aesthetic experience (which constitutes the “work of art”). This expressivity is accomplished through the artist’s selection of all available stimuli, or “energies,” as Dewey calls them, and ordering of this material through the art object in ways that interest or engage us. Technical mastery over one’s media marks artistic creation, and thus a “true artist” who, in Dewey’s view “sees and feels in terms of his medium and the one who has learned to perceive esthetically emulates the operation” (p. 200). Note that his definition of an artist here explicitly includes the perceiver, reinforcing the idea of audience as active collaborator and artwork as process. Technique and intent also play a role in this definition. One may create (or see) a work of art in virtually any object if one enters into its creation (or reception) with aesthetic intent.

Dewey also distinguishes between expressive media and materials which are merely “vehicles” for art works. “What makes a material a
medium is that it is used to express a meaning which is other than that which it is in virtue of its bare physical existence” (1934, p. 201). Musical instruments, for example, deliver sound to our ears. However, because they have the capacity for expression, they are more than simple vehicles in the way that a phonograph is a vehicle for delivering sonic art works to our ears (to use Dewey’s now antiquated example). Allergic as he is to dualisms, Dewey posits this distinction as a continuum rather than an opposition. For instance, the printed book began as a vehicle for literature; however, over time it has influenced the presentation and form of literary works through page size, typography, and illustration. The same could be said of digital media: though photography, film, and later video began simply as ways to reproduce, document, and present images of the world, the expressive capacity of each medium was quickly put to use with attention to technical elements such as composition, light, shape, editing, and other properties. Of course, just because a medium has potential for expression, does not mean it is art.

To return to our original example, when the boy flipping in the pool is recorded on a smartphone which is immediately sent to others with no editing or thought given to the framing, composition, or lighting, it can be argued that this is not an example of art because those properties of the video which maximize its capacity for meaningful aesthetic experience have not been intentionally utilized. The intent of the videographer was simply to document and share a fleeting moment. On the other hand, since aesthetic experience is inherently transactional and collaborative, the perceiver practiced in aesthetic inquiry might see in the video artistic intent and attend
to it as aesthetic experience in all its fullness. One who has learned to perceive aesthetically may see art in any medium. While this is an exceedingly important point for moral development and human growth, let us take a moment to consider the various qualities of aesthetic experience, and how they relate to presence in liveness.

We can extrapolate Dewey's discussion of the phonograph as vehicle and not the art object itself to other modes of reproduction and delivery: posters, Compact Discs (or mp3 files), Blu-ray discs, and other forms of reproduction would fall into the category of vehicles and as such, provide access to a work of art, but do not constitute the object of art with which we have an aesthetic experience. Dewey is concerned with the nature of experience in the here and now; for him the present moment is encapsulated in the work of art as intermediary of communication between artist and perceiver (1934, p. 123). We have already established that, as embodied schema, perceptual faculties are engaged differently in encounters with live versus mediated or mediatized art objects, therefore it can also be argued that a live instance of art provides an opportunity for a more complete aesthetic experience. While a poster of the Mona Lisa or a recording of the Brandenburg Concertos allow us access to enduring art products (now) with which we can have a meaningful aesthetic experience, the experience of the works live (in the present here and now) will engage more of our perceptual faculties and thus provide a more complete aesthetic experience.

As mentioned above, the aesthetically-oriented perceiver can make an aesthetic object out of most any object. So, the viewer of the online video of our boy's aquatic feat may be able to fully attend to it and the experience of
watching the video may be fully aesthetic. Yet, that same person at the pool experiences it fully embedded in the environment to which it belongs, with all of the accompanying birdsong, hot air, and energy of emotion electrifying the scene. All of these elements congeal in the perceiver’s body schema to create a more full experience, endowed with a greater degree of aesthetic quality.

Dismantling the Beauty Parlor of Civilization

As previously discussed, Auslander’s ideological tendency to think of art in terms of commodified products limits their use to a consumerist worldview which values art objects only in terms of their market or social capital. A Deweyan approach would dismantle this idea; in order to bring together the world of art and everyday life, the view of art as products to be bought, sold, and displayed needs to be reconsidered in light of their capacity for meaningful experience. In Hildebrand’s view, “the more invasive and magnetic the pull of commodification and trade upon an indigenous art-making community, the more rapidly the intimate and social functions responsible for art deteriorate. In place of those organic functions there is imposed an impersonal world market which reduces artworks” to nothing more than instances of fine art (2008, chap. 6, section 2, para. 14).

Dewey’s views on commerce and mechanization were certainly a product of his time as industry was in full swing and film itself was a relatively new medium. However, several statements give us clues to the relationship of reproductive technologies in aesthetic experience. First of all, he believed strongly in the ability of science to bring humans closer to the
natural world, which “has always been the actuating spirit of art,” thus the quest of science is brought closer to that of art (Dewey, 1934, p. 339). And so, he believed that any new kinds of experiences, forms of observation, and ways of engaging with the world can and should be integrated into the art-making and appreciating process. The growth of humanity is ample ground for artistic exploration and opens up possibilities for expression and experience. This view could support the integration of new technologies into forms of performance, whether they be artistic or mundane.

Secondly, he believed that mass production reinforces a long-held belief in the separation of the fine arts and useful craft (the latter of which carried significantly less esteem, historically speaking.) He states that “the mechanical stands at the pole opposite to that of the esthetic, and production of goods is now mechanical;” a process which stole the “liberty of choice” from craftsman and thus diminished the ability to endow such products with potential for aesthetic experience (ibid, p. 341). He does, however allow that mechanically-produced objects have form that can only be viewed as aesthetic when the object fits into “a larger experience,” and so the larger environment (also transformed by industry, or more recently the information-economy) is implicated in the figuring of aesthetic placement of industrially designed and created objects (p. 342). He points out, as I have earlier, that “the habits of the eye as a medium of perception are being slowly altered in being accustomed to the shapes that are typical of industrial products and to the objects that belong to urban as distinct from rural life. The colors and planes to which the organism habitually responds develop new material for interest” (ibid).
This trend has become even more apparent in the age of the computer, when you consider the aesthetic considerations of Apple in the design of their devices which has extended to most if not all forms of mobile devices. Certainly we are now accustomed to a world where products manufactured for functional purposes are also designed to be aesthetically pleasing. In spite of this, we must examine whether these objects are contributing to an environment that encourages fulfillment and growth through aesthetic experience or if the beautiful design merely encourages a system of commerce based on what is lacking in our experience and the constant desire for more. We hunger after an iPod or smartphone because of its beauty and function; it promises to fill a void in our lives, but will it lead to more complete experiences or will it only enter us into a cycle of more lack and want? I submit that the integration of aesthetic design into consumer culture works counter to the aims of aesthetic experience outlined by Dewey. These objects become elevated by consumer culture in much the same way that a museum elevates "fine art" and robs the objects of their capacity for engagement in future experience. In fact, he concludes Art as Experience with a virtual call to arms in a "revolution" that requires "affecting the imagination and emotions of man" until "the values that lead to production and intelligent enjoyment of art [are] incorporated into the system of social relationships" (p. 344). Only when this incorporation is complete will the project of Deweyan aesthetics reach its full potential for political and moral transformation.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION:

IMPLICATIONS FOR AN ARTFUL LIFE

A work of art accentuates this quality of being a whole and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive, whole which is the universe in which we live (Dewey, 1934, p. 195)

This thesis began with a statement on the value of theatre to everyday human experience and attaining the fullness of life. According to Robert Woodruff the art of theatre, if translated into everyday life, helps us grow as individuals and as a community. To do so we must learn to attend to others, engage in reflective practice, and understand one’s connection to the larger community, all skills brought to life through successful engagement with art (as formulated by Dewey) which can teach us to live an artful life. Attention to others in the here and now is a central theme in Dewey’s theory of experience, and as such provides practical tools to enact Woodruff’s directive.

In learning to attend to theatre, we practice cultivating full aesthetic experience, which can in turn teach us to enhance our everyday experiences through “attention to a present situation, adjustment and growth in light of that situation, and the harmonious unfolding of that situation with the funding of past experience and present potentials” (Stroud, 2011, p. 73). We learn to identify and select the elements in our environments to lend our attention. In doing so, we wake up to the possibilities implicit in our world. We can see “how life’s harried pace fragments attention, defeats natural impulses toward inquiry, and coerces the worship of dangerously simplistic efficiencies” and how our reactions to harried life – often retreats into passive
recreation or hyped-up levels of activity – also fail to produce genuinely meaningful aesthetic experiences” (Hildebrand 2008, chap. 6, Conclusion, para. 2).

Mediatized images and forms of communication need not displace or replace our temporal-spatial presence to one another. With aesthetic development comes the ability to recognize fragmentary and dysfunctional experiences for what they are, to separate them out from more meaningful aspects of life, and attend to them with greater appreciation, engagement, and fulfillment. This has implications for artists, critics, and educators as well as educational institutions. With aesthetic education, students are given the tools to increase their ability to focus, choose what interactions are deserving of attention, and develop an awareness of their place in the world and how to be more fully engaged in it. Artists and critics can also work as public educators, helping the general public to access artworks and learn how to engage with them. To do this, we need a more thorough consideration of how this philosophy might be put into practice through the methods of aesthetic education.
REFERENCES


