The Arena Spectacular from *Ben Hur Live* to *Isles of Wonder*:

Adaptation, Post-cinema and the Postcivil

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The work presented in this thesis is all my own

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Abstract

What is an 'arena spectacular' and why has this genre of live entertainment gained international popularity in the twenty-first century? This study looks at three arena spectaculars: *Ben Hur Live*, *Batman Live* and *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* – all adapted from film or TV productions and performed in London's O2 Arena between 2007 and 2012. I contextualise the shows with the work of Cirque du Soleil, the Millennium Dome and the city of Las Vegas. However, I argue that the format reached its fullest expression in Britain with the opening ceremony to the London 2012 Olympics, Danny Boyle's *Isles of Wonder*.

This study proposes that there are specific affective and economic factors within neoliberal and post-cinematic society that make the spatialised, live and 'unmediated' performance of a known image or hypertext into an attractive commodity. The arena spectacular should be understood via post-cinematic image-making and the fluidity with which images move from screen, to site and back will be explored here as a commercial process of 'remediation'. An aggregate of older devices and media that seems to be defined in heterotopic contradistinction to a digital media regime, this format can be explained through contemporaneous qualities of public space, immaterial labour, government and consumption.

This analysis is an attempt at grasping the 'offer' of these products – through their advertising, merchandise and the shows themselves. What is their affordance; what experiences do they allow and how does this benefit both consumers and producers? Despite their economic and cultural marginality, perhaps these entertainment productions can be seen in some ways as archetypal products of the early twenty-first century.

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<u>Prologue</u>

The first arena spectacular that I saw was *Ben Hur Live* at the O2 Arena in 2009, proposed in its promotional material as:

> a breathtaking combination of light, sound, water, wind and pyrotechnic effects in a show performed in the round, like an ancient arena […] The production will be accompanied by an emotional symphonic soundtrack, an English speaking narrator, as well as 400 performers and 100 animals. (The O2 website, 2009)

A poster for the show, which appeared on a huge billboard over a large roundabout near where I was living in East London, showed a chariot pulled by four horses racing towards the viewer. The poster's large lettering and graphics were reminiscent of Hollywood film posters from the 1950's but also nineteenth-century paintings of the classical world. An online video-trailer tantalisingly showed close-ups of charioteers preparing for a race, shot in cinematic high contrast and embellished with dramatic sound effects, who then careered out into a roaring arena, the crowd incongruously bristling with camera flashes.

I approached this show with an interest in the adaptation of existing narratives into opera, film, novels and other forms. These narratives include ancient texts such as Greek myths and more recent examples – Lew Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur* was first published in 1880. The proposed scale of the production put me in mind of grand opera, as well as the cinematic epic – the category to which the most famous iteration of *Ben-Hur,* William Wilder's film version from 1959, belongs. As part of the complex known as The O2, the 'O2 Arena' has its own narrative as an adaptation of the Millennium Dome. Perceived as an embarrassing failure after it opened in 2000 (see chapter 2), then bought by American company AEG and refitted by architects Populous, it emerged in 2007 as a popular venue for live music, comedy, sport and various other performances. John Prescott, part of the Labour government responsible for its delivery, has claimed that it is 'the most popular venue in the world' (BBC One website, 2009). There had by that time been a flurry of stage adaptations of films such as *The Lion King* (dirs. Roger Allers, Rob Minkoff, 1994 – stage version first performed in London 1999 [John, 1997]) and

The Lord of the Rings (dir. Peter Jackson, 2001 – stage version 2006 [Rahman, 2006]), but these were based on more recent cinema successes and extensions of recognisable brands, as Disneyland is an extension of Disney's films. *Ben Hur Live* seemed different. Although the show did appear a neat fifty years on from the Wilder film, there seemed no real reason to resurrect the Ben-Hur story at that particular moment other than the availability of the arena space itself and the continuity that was suggested between it and the ancient Roman arena. The show seemed like an unusual collision between two objects: the famous film and the arena space. As the result, *Ben Hur Live*, comprises of 'Ben-Hur': the film (although the show drops the hyphen from its hero's name), and 'Live': the arena.

I went to the show curious about this apparently new form of entertainment; wanting to see how the elements I knew well from the 1959 film would be rendered in a live, in-the-round arena production. A large part of my interest was formal and technical – just how was this going to happen? I paid around £50 for a seat somewhere high up the banks of the arena ('ring-side' seats were far more; private boxes more again). Implausibly, the key scenes would have to include a sea battle between pirates and Roman galleys, a high-speed (and for many participants fatal) chariot race, visits to both a leper colony and imperial Rome and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – these all being vital set pieces in the original narrative. This is what we had been promised but how would these possibly take place in front of our eyes, live?

And yet, they did. The particularities will be detailed elsewhere, but it did indeed involve thousands of people in a huge arena, watching a theatrical invocation of the Ben-Hur narrative, with all the formal ingredients promised, including a narrator relaying Latin and Aramaic dialogue in English, live animals and hundreds of performers. In it I found things I recognised from live rock music, cinema, sport, historical re-enactments and more, lashed together into a hybrid spectacle. There were some difficulties in the legibility of the promised and delivered hybrid. The chariot race was inevitably slow looking, compared to the tightly edited film sequence most of us probably knew. The audience seemed not to know what to do when the crucifixion appeared – some cheered. Despite the anachronisms, which had seemed enough of

a part of the marketing so as to suggest a certain irony in the show, the whole thing was seemingly carried out with total seriousness and great emphasis on various kinds of authenticity. There really was a symphonic soundtrack, real live animals, a script performed in ancient dead languages, a celebrity appearance, in Stuart Copeland as the narrator (composer of the show's soundtrack and drummer in The Police) and apparently real danger to the performers in the race scene.

This particular 'spectacular' was not an immediate financial or critical success but, over the next few years, more 'arena spectaculars', as these shows are called, came to The O2 Arena and other similar arenas around the country. These were also often adapted from screen-based originals, such as *Walking with Dinosaurs Live*, first arriving in Europe in 2009 and based on the BBC television programme *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999) and *Batman Live* (2011) benefitting from the extreme popularity of the most recent Batman films. These two in particular certainly found an audience and have been touring the world's arenas since their first performances.

Why does anyone (myself included) want to see one of these shows? What are the attractions of these events to twenty-first century audiences? They seemed to me to paradoxically include imperatives of both rarefied high-culture – which uses the exclusivity of one-off performances, unique artefacts and high ticket prices – and commercial, 'industrial' entertainment – which insists on huge dissemination, recognisable stars and brands and enormous but geographically dispersed audiences. They also seem to be built upon a desire for physical proximity to fictional characters, as if the barrier of the cinema, television or computer screen was being made permeable. These shows offer exclusivity through scarcity in a media landscape that could be characterised by the easy availability of media over the internet and via television: in 2011 a promotional flyer read 'THE ONLY WAY TO EXPERIENCE BATMAN LIVE ON STAGE'. Hyperbole in official statements as well as in advertising seems to be necessary to demonstrate the unique excess of the productions and thereby attract audiences:

BEN HUR LIVE©: The O2 Welcomes its Biggest Epic Yet […]David Campbell, Chief Executive of AEG Europe, owners and operators of The O2, added: "When I heard about the concept for BEN HUR LIVE© I couldn't quite believe it. This is going to be THE show of next year" (The O2 website, 2009)

The promotion for the shows invoke singularity and uniqueness; terms such as 'real' and 'authentic' are often used. A promotional flyer in 2011 read 'Totally authentic, bold and awe-inspiring, BATMAN LIVE will be a completely new way to experience the world of Batman'. Indeed, marketing for arena spectaculars often claims a kind of spectatorial absorption or immersion in a 'world' as a sign of 'realness'; Geoff Jones writes in the *Batman Live* programme 'When you first come into the arena and you see the city-scape, and hear the sounds of the city and the sun setting, and you're really in *Gotham City*, you're a part of *Gotham* City' (*Batman Live* programme, 2011). Again, with *Walking With Dinosaurs Live*:

Watch them walk. Hear the roar. Be there as they fight for survival and supremacy. From the ripple of their skin to the glint in their eye, you will know the dinosaurs really are back! (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* website, 2009)

Such rhetoric implies that there is an 'original object' somewhere, that is being approached from every imaginable direction, looking for the ultimate articulation of that original object. *Ben Hur Live* and *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* claim some degree of historical authenticity, with *Ben Hur Live*'s use of dead languages, and *Walking With Dinosaurs Live*'s pseudo-nature-documentary format ('[m]arvel at the story of their 200 million year domination of life on earth' [ibid.]). Part of the offer of 'authenticity' prevalent in each of the shows' promotion is a version of excess and exuberance, both in aesthetic terms and in the use of resources. These shows cost millions to put on; they involve a lot of people and a lot of labour. For example, *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* is aiming to 'amaze and delight', as one of the 'largest and most acclaimed shows to come out of Australia' (Gerry Ryan, *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* programme, 2012):

It's a dazzling £10,000,000 arena spectacle of unprecedented size and quality set to captivate young and old alike […] After a worldwide tour seen by over 7 million people in 206 cities, the stunning theatrical event WALKING WITH DINOSAURS – The Arena Spectacular is back! (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* website, 2009)

Promoters often employ lists of ingredients. *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* uses lists of materials for the puppets on its website; each large dinosaur contains:

- 433 feet of hydraulic hose
- 971 feet of fabric
- 433 feet of foam
- 53 gallons of paint
- 7 kilowatts of power from 12 truck batteries
- 1094 yards of cabling in each body
- 24 microprocessors control movement along with 15 hydraulic rams and 6 hydraulic motors each (ibid.)

and similarly:

BATMAN LIVE features a cast of 42 actors and circus trained acrobats, a 3D Gotham City landscape, an original symphonic score, a custom-built and state-of-the-art stage, a 105-foot bat-shaped LED video wall, big flight sequences, pyrotechnics and the impressive Batmobile, designed especially for the show by legendary racing car designer Professor Gordon Murray. (*Batman Live* website, 2012)

These claims are indisputable: the show will indeed include all of these things. In claims such as these, it would seem that a correlation is suggested between the expenditure of labour and materials and the level of enjoyment, awe and satisfaction that will be produced in the prospective audience. There is often a conflation of 'realness', 'authenticity' and fidelity to an existing narrative world, indeed, in the hype of the shows' advertising, these are often treated as synonymous ('you're really in Gotham City' *Batman Live* programme, 2011). Apart from

Ben Hur Live, these shows are parts of licensed brands, so are in a legal sense 'authentic'. Both *Batman Live* and *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* make heavy use of their producers' logos (DC Comics and the BBC respectively). They also use established commercial success as proof; the *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* website boasts that '[t]he UK first experienced the Dinosaurs in the Summer of 2009 and performed to 500,000 people across 8 cities and generated in excess of £16 million in ticket sales. It didn't stop there though' (Walking with Dinosaurs Live website, 2009). Ticket buyers are presumed to be interested in and impressed by the financial performance of the show as well as the show itself; perhaps logically, the box office takings are proposed as proof of quality. There is an elision of two types of spectatorship here: one of a live performance, the other of a business.

Considering that these shows are a much more expensive way to experience a particular text than paying for a film or television programme, or book or comic, how does that specific presentation add to their value? One can find oneself looking away from the action to other parts of the set and even the lighting rig during *Ben Hur Live*'s climactic chariot race. Part of the reason for this potential for distraction is the size of the arena; the action is very far away and the actors therefore rendered very small. The arena version is also without a filmic apparatus, which would include the carefully paced cutting between different viewpoints, zooming and close ups that we are familiar with in television and cinema – all entirely absent, as most arena spectaculars do not use live video feeds, unlike live sports and music events. Much of their 'offer' adds up to a type of immediacy: really 'being there' with the characters. On the one hand they seem to propose 'liveness' (to use Philip Auslander's term [1999]) and physical presence as more direct and therefore more real than a recorded, mediated experience. However, on the other they are offering a heightened visibility and awareness of the technology producing the live scene, in the lists of technological and performance elements used in publication and in the arena itself through the wealth of devices that vie for one's attention. Not only that but the adapted nature of the narrative material, the filmic and televisual origins of which form the initial 'hook' for the shows, means that the audience must have the screen-based images in mind as well.

Are these productions merely an oddity, an aesthetic cul-de-sac filling a commercial niche provided by a set of physical spaces left over from other projects, or are they indicative of a more widespread and increasing desire in audiences for direct experience of live productions? How does the term 'live' operate now, when shows such as these act as enlivened invocations of screen-images already seen by their audiences; ritualised visitations by often originally computer generated characters, such as the dinosaurs from *Walking with Dinosaurs*? Although unusual, they each attracted thousands of people to watch, myself included. These are not artistically or aesthetically avant-garde or experimental works (although in economic terms perhaps they are), so how do these shows fit within a commercial and cultural mainstream? The O2 has since been host to horse shows, BMX bike shows, 'arena cross' motorcycling and live versions of television programmes such as *Strictly Come Dancing* (Hopkins, 2004), most recently in February 2016. It would appear that live spectacle is currently booming. But why, in a culture so heavily invested in recorded forms, are 'live' productions still popular and what is the attraction of the live 'spectacular'? How significant is it that these shows happen inside an arena? There appears to be a different economy of visibility in the arena, as there is in stadium spectatorship of sport, where the possibility of zoomed-in close-up views and extreme detail of live television coverage is partly traded for views of the rest of the arena crowd. What is attractive about this? Is the communality of viewing something that we are now prepared to travel for, and to pay more for? The more I looked at the shows, the more traits within them I found repeated elsewhere: in theme parks, shopping malls, themed restaurants, holiday camps, opera productions, 3D cinema and casinos, to name but a few.

Part way through this research, the 2012 Olympics opening ceremony was produced. Surprisingly to me, this strange amalgam of the elements I had found in previous commercial spectaculars and nationalistic pageantry was a huge success. Millions of television viewers watched around the world; 80,000 people were inside the stadium for the ceremony (BBC News website, 2012), which was directed by film director Danny Boyle, and titled *Isles of Wonder*. The event was a hybrid of loosely narrative theatrical, dance and musical performances, as well as the formalities of welcoming the national teams taking part in the

games. An obvious antecedent to the ceremony might have been Millennium Dome, with its mixture of exhibition and performance, however, rather than the Dome's general themes (such as 'faith', 'work' and 'play' often ridiculed as vague and empty [by Stephen Bayley, 1998, for example]) this event presented a strong, simple narrative based upon pride in elements presented as integral to Britain's identity and place in world history, chiefly the industrial revolution, popular music and the NHS.

What was surprising about the reaction to the show was not that people watched it, as the Olympics is guaranteed massive attention, but that people in Britain *loved* it. This assessment from Marina Hyde in the Guardian newspaper was typical:

> deliriously enjoyable, occasionally bemusing, supremely humanistic creation, in which no button remained unpushed, virtually no cultural memory unjogged. Boyle did not disappoint […] he confronted the challenge head-on, embracing the obvious without neglecting subtlety, making good use of the range of English humour, from self-deprecation to outright daftness. (Hyde, 2012)

Despite scepticism about the wisdom of hosting the Olympics at all, a recession (surely an inopportune moment for a multi-million pound spectacle bankrolled by the taxpayer?), an unpopular government, severe doubts about Britain's future place in the world (especially as London was following Beijing's lavish and confident 2008 games), people loved it.

The Olympic opening ceremony, which brings us full circle to the roots of the Millennium Dome as national, governmental statement, is an oddity hard to define outside of pure description and its singular context. However, it is not a radical work. It was understood and enjoyed through a delicately cantilevered set of relations to existing forms, genres and narratives. The impressionistic account of the industrial revolution was much commented upon in reviews and summaries. Hundreds of actors (mostly volunteers) negotiate their way around a huge set showing hills, fields and farms. Grass was rolled back to a soundtrack of drumming and chanting; huge chimneys emerged, smoking, from the arena floor, and people that were initially playing shepherds and Morris dancers became factory workers, who

'forged' a giant set of Olympic rings – all under the watchful eye of Isambard Kingdom Brunel, played by actor Kenneth Branagh. Another, filmed section (played on the giant video screens above the seating in the stadium) starred actor Daniel Craig as James Bond and the Queen, as herself, dramatising the royal entrance of the stadium. The event was approached by Boyle and his team as a *show* in itself rather than simply decorating the ceremonial function of starting the games; it was another 'arena spectacular', again adapting various material (including the director's own expertise) from the screen, into the arena. Boyle understood his task via film:

> "We're trying to make you feel like you're watching a live film being made," said the Slumdog Millionaire and Trainspotting director. "It feels like when you're planning a big sequence in a film. We're trying to make it feel like a live recording of a film that all happens on one evening. We're trying to shoot it in a very visceral way (Gibson, 2012)

The ceremony was also released, later in 2012, on DVD, much like a commercial film release. As can already be seen, all these shows rely heavily upon not only cinematic and televisual source material, but also professional infrastructure and modes of dissemination from screen-based entertainment. The ceremony was a popular and critical triumph, with its mixture of humour, nationalistic solemnity, pop-cultural references, celebrity appearances and extravagant staging. Subsequently, Boyle even received a nomination for a knighthood. It would appear that the arena spectacular – which seemed so anomalous to me at the time of *Ben Hur Live* – had broken into the British mainstream and was welcomed with open arms.

Introduction: What is an Arena Spectacular?

This introduction will establish a working definition of the 'arena spectacular' and situate it within a context and a body of literature. Although there are many ways to approach such a formally complex set of works there are three things that to me make the arena spectacular worthy of analysis. Firstly, there is the tactic of adapting both the original narrative material and forms borrowed from other mediums. This is also a formal concern about exactly *how* the material is presented and presented in a way that refers to other works. Secondly, there is the relation I will propose to 'post-cinema', both as a technological and economic period (i.e. the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, in the global West) and to its reliance on its audiences' familiarity with the material it is often adapting (i.e. well known film and TV productions). Thirdly, there is the socio-political role of the arena space itself, an increasingly standard urban space in Britain within what I will argue is a 'postcivil' society, the character of which is dictated by neoliberal economics. In the twenty-first century, what does it mean for a group of people to (pay to) gather within it for an allotted period of time? As a conclusion to this analysis, I will argue that, as an arena spectacular, Danny Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony found a political and social potential within the format that is built upon qualities found in current media and labour.

After an introductory survey of the arena spectacular and its context, the thesis has three chapters:

- Chapter 1 is focussed on cinema and post-cinema, structured around case studies on *Ben Hur Live* and *Walking with Dinosaurs Live*.

- Chapter 2 describes the postcivil context for the arena spectacular, with a discussion of the Millennium Dome project and Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia' to establish the demarcated space and time of the arena event as an exercise of power. I explore why, in a postcivil, networked society, we might desire boundaries of this kind. In my discussion of *Batman Live* I will address fandom as a particular form of consumption

and one that is emulated in the arena spectacular. Further to this, I look the Las Vegas shows of Cirque du Soleil and the 'experience economy'.

- Chapter 3, as the start of my conclusion, brings these two main concerns of post-cinema and contemporary social spaces, and looks at *Isles of Wonder* and its reception in Britain.

This present section of my argument will establish a body of literature for these areas and establish initial connections between them all. I will start with some detail about *Ben Hur Live*, tracing some of its references and establishing a set of relationships to various other media used to sell the show to its audience. This initial exploration will establish a method with which I will approach my other examples.

Ben Hur Live

The show opened in London at the start of a planned world tour in 2009, at the O2 Arena. The promotion for the show read:

> MYTHS, LEGENDS AND SPECTACLE – THE PERFECT ILLUSION OF A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME ⌜SEP⌝– BEN HUR LIVE means spectacular entertainment for the whole family – it brings the Formula 1 of ancient times to the Circus Maximus of today – staging multiple brilliant scenes such as a naval battle with huge galleys on a sea of fog and fantastic light effects, all imbedded in one of the greatest and dramatic story lines that has ever have been written and produced as a movie […] BEN HUR LIVE will be staged in a 360°- arena in order to give the audience – like in an antique arena – the experience of an exceptional closeness to the event. Thus, the action on the 2000 sqm rink […] can be captured with all the senses, supported by special effects, fire, water, wind and the dispersed dust from the chariot race – the highlight of the antique spectacle. (*Ben Hur Live* website 2009)

As I have said, what drew me to it was the promise of a familiar story and set of images transposed into a new and unlikely setting. The dominant image that encapsulates the contrasts within *Ben Hur Live* is repeated in the poster, the show's website, a video trailer and the show itself: a Roman chariot, driven at speed across the floor of an arena, lit by modern stadium lights and camera flashes. The attraction in this is twofold: firstly the anachronism of the chariot in that setting; secondly the promise of witnessing of a real, spectacular performance, live.
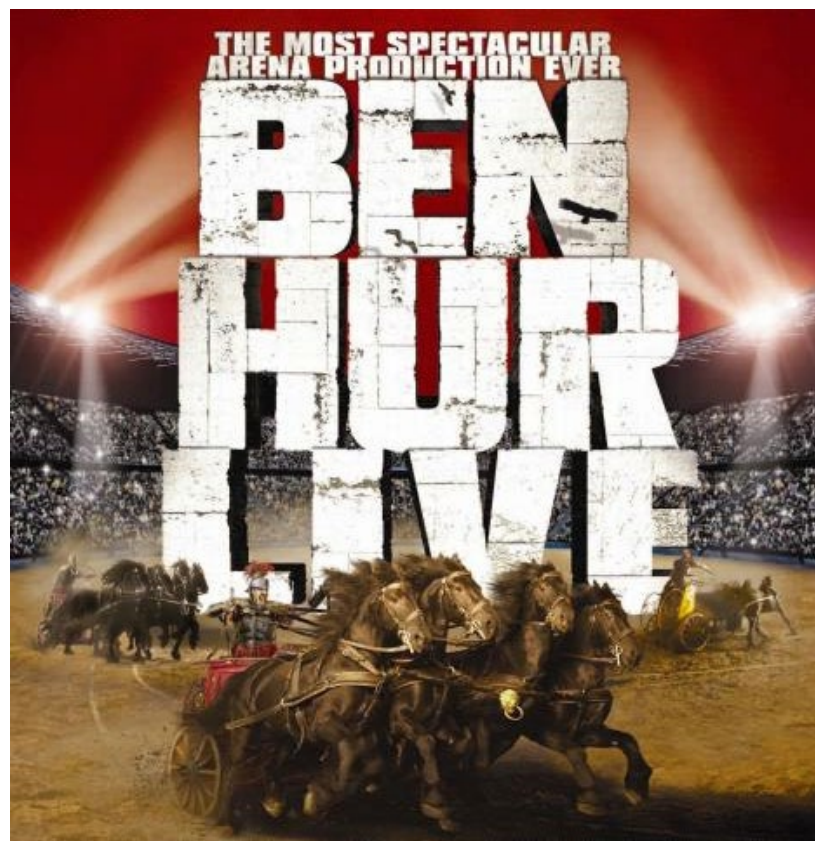
fig. 1 Official poster, *Ben Hur Live,* 2009

The poster reminded me of the poster from the 1959 film version (familiar to me from the DVD release of the film), blatantly borrowing compositional elements, not least the title rendered in monumental stone:
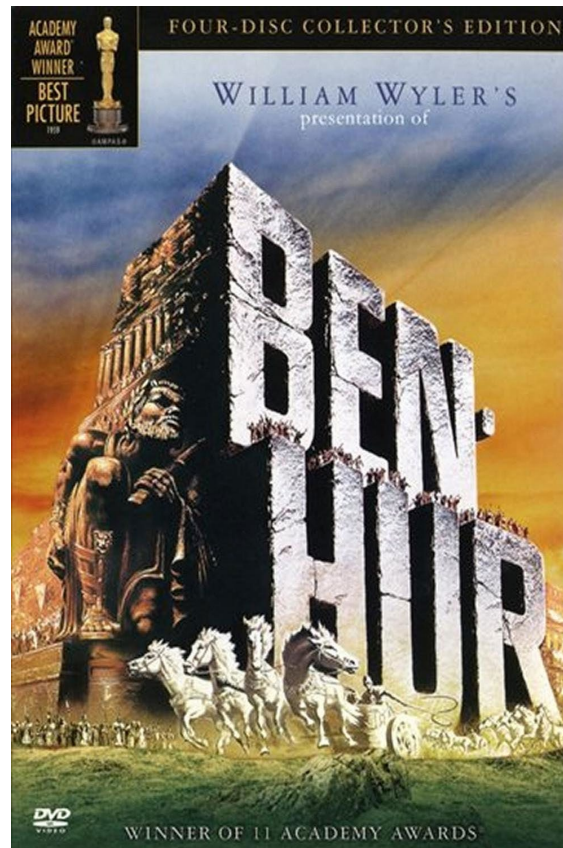
fig. 2 *Ben-Hur* DVD case using original film poster from 1959, 2009

It also reminded me of 19th century paintings such as *The Chariot Race*, by Alexander von Wagner (which I will discuss below), suggesting an awareness in the designers of the long lineage of the representation of chariot races in art.

The show is presented, like all arena spectaculars, as tantalisingly and explicitly hybrid. *Ben Hur Live* provides us with a strange combination of vastly differing types of spectacle and conflations of spaces, time periods and narrative modes – it was nothing if not ambitious. Directed by Franz Abraham and produced by his company Art Concerts, it consisted of acted scenes from the story scripted in Latin and Aramaic, narrated in English by the show's composer Stuart Copeland (of rock band The Police), as well as choreographed dances, horse riding and gladiatorial combat. The production was designed in part by Mark Fisher, famous for his work with Pink Floyd and The Rolling Stones but also as the designer of the 'Millennium Show', part of the 'Millennium Experience' (see chapter 2). It included a sea

battle and a chariot race (both famous set-pieces from the story) and a version of the crucifixion all acted out on a sand-covered arena floor with large mobile pieces of scenery.

fig. 3 Crucifixion scene, *Ben Hur Live*, 2009

Director Franz Abraham himself described it thus:

> It's the power of a rock show, it's the speed of a musical, the magic of a great movie and the passion of a Greek tragedy […] all generations will find their piece – we have even some erotic scenes, we have the religion, we have the race. (Hoyle, 2009)

Ultimately, I found it slow-paced (not unlike the 1959 film) and the differing modes of spectatorship required during the show meant that I did not really know what it was that I was watching, and in what way I was being invited to engage with it. Perhaps others responded similarly; in 2009 it was a financial disaster that ruined its producer and the show did not

complete its planned world tour. However, it returned several years later (although not to London), and continues to tour the world at the time of writing; the show's website currently advertises performance dates in Rome and South Korea. (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009)

fig. 4 Chariot Race, *Ben Hur Live,* 2009 (promotional still)

The arena spectacular show has a disclosed and promoted lineage, in the novel and film versions of the story and promoters use this in their introductions:

> The movie of the same title starring Charlton Heston – awarded with 11 Oscars and still the most decorated Hollywood production of all times [*sic*] – has become a legend long ago. The original book by Lewis Wallace was a worldwide bestseller in the 1900's. But it was not until the film adaptation of 1959 that the incomparable pictures came into being. (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009)

Although they are not mentioned in this history of the narrative, there are also two silent film versions that predate the 1959 version. As if to emphasise the importance of this one particular film version even more, the arena version was publicised as being premiered to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Wyler's film's release (ibid.**)**. This significant filmic history and the

large genre of ancient world epics that the show drew upon (for example, Ridley Scott's *Gladiator*, 2000; more recently his *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, 2014) requires us to view *Ben Hur Live* in a cinematic context – as we are asked to by the show's promoters. The arena spectacular promises to place images from films and television into physical and social space.

By claiming to be based upon the novel, the live show's promoters attempt to assert the most direct lineage from the original text (and also avoid potential copyright issues with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, the Hollywood studio that produced the two most recent films). However, as can be seen from the quotes above and by comparing the two posters, the show does also directly compare itself to the famous 1959 film within its marketing. What the show's promotion doesn't acknowledge are the many painted, staged and other influences, most notably a nineteenth century stage play of the story (by William W. Young and first performed in 1899 – surely the original 'Ben Hur Live'?) These examples in other mediums complicate the proposed adaptive lineage with other formats, both pre- and post-dating the famous 1959 Hollywood film. Why might the promoters of the new live show draw so much attention to film images and so much less to material from other media?

In the promotion of the show, much is made of the technology used and the new achievements in *Ben Hur Live*, but its proposed qualities might equally suggest a Wagnerian *gesamtkunstwerk* (total-artwork [Richard Wagner, 1964]), a Victorian panorama or an Edwardian pageant:

> History becomes alive and makes us forget time. And now, like 2000 years ago, the audience can experience the Roman Empire and Galilee around the time of the birth of Christ, plunge into the arenas of antiquity, to an era that was shaped by dramatic conflicts, tragedy and hope, bread and games. Breakneck chariot races and scenes of an antique naval battle alternated with appearances by gladiators, the performance of orgiastic festivals and vivid Arabian market life. 100 performers, 100 animals, horses and free flying birds of prey, huge backdrops and galleys with expanded sails create

the perfect illusion – an antique panorama with the fate of Judah Ben Hur right in

front of it. (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009)

The arena spectacular might seem like a kind of living fossil – a throwback to Victorian theatre and Edwardian pageantry, or even earlier – indeed, this initial arena spectacular example of *Ben Hur Live* would seem to openly capitalise and depend upon an ancient lineage. There are historical precedents for large-scale spectacular shows staged outside of theatres. Deborah Sugg Ryan has written on the shows produced at London's Olympia (that opened as an exhibition hall in 1886) by Hungarian entrepreneurs Imre and Bolossy Kiralfy (Sugg Ryan, 2010**)**. In 1889, Imre put on a show called *Nero, or The Fall of Rome* that had 'huge sets and hundreds of actors, animals, and extras' arranged into a 'tableau-vivant' (ibid., 47). Although the Olympia had a large stage rather than an arena floor, the Kiralfys' shows show some resemblance to a production like *Ben Hur Live*. However, although the arena spectacular does take influence from these historical precedents, cinema and photography constitute a fundamental shift in spectatorship, both aesthetically and economically. I will also argue that the way the arena spectacular foregrounds both physical labour and the spectacle of financial expenditure are specifically post-cinematic. These types of engagement are responses to economic and social changes specific to the post-cinematic period and, although the result might look superficially similar, are distinctly different to their historical analogues in the ancient arena and in theatre.

The arena spectacular functions by combining familiar elements, it also functions in contradistinction to other forms. The shows are self-proclaiming examples of a new format, not a resurrection of an old one. In these shows definition is almost always in contrast to some other form – they are not film, not theatre, not exhibition – but they bear strong traces of all these. Even before we reach the characters, narratives and tropes of the material adapted in the shows themselves, the format, even the *name* of the arena spectacular adapts other presentational modes and affective codes, as I have shown above. It is oppositional; competitive – 'live' not recorded, 'sited' rather than networked. It relies on an implied paucity

of experience in other media, yet without these other media, it cannot exist. Without cinema, *Ben Hur Live* cannot be made – without broadcast and online advertising to supplement posters and print media, there is now no way to attract a large enough audience to the specific site in which the show will take place.

Ben-Hur has a significant place in film history, including iterations of the story that pre-date the 90 minute-plus narrative-feature format that we know today; Ben-Hur was present when the cinema was new and in flux. In the next chapter, I will show that early cinema was a compound, made up of many existent forms, just as the post-cinematic arena spectacular is today. As examples of how new forms develop, this history will inform my arguments about remediation and the residual (explored below). Like cinema, the arena spectacular is suggested by available technologies, tropes and spaces. The arena spectacular, like early cinema, is a new phenomenon, currently and demonstratively made up from tropes and devices from various mediums. As cinema's development was rooted in the media, society and politics of the late nineteenth-century, I will show that the arena spectacular is rooted in the early twenty-first.

Here we reach the crucial point I want to make about the arena spectacular in relation to its antecedents: *its audience is a post-cinematic one but the show is an attempt at a pro-filmic, unmediated and 'authentic' version of material always already encountered on screen.*

The Arena –Spectacular Format

How does this term 'arena spectacular' itself function; what type of term is it? It could denote a specific medium, in the sense that painting or poetry is a medium. Arena spectaculars certainly use various 'media' within them and this will be an operative term here. The term could denote a 'genre' – a set of readerly and artistic conventions. A genre involves specific uses of specific media, for example the 'ancient-world epic film' or the 'superhero comic'. Alternatively it could be argued that the arena spectacular operates post-genre, or post-medium

– that its rules are constructed around extrinsic ideas of value and of excess, rather than around artistic and readerly conventions. I will argue throughout this thesis that although these shows are new, their newness is in a recombination of technologies and tropes, and as post-cinematic works (a term I will justify below) they are too much part of the medium of cinema to constitute a new medium themselves. The way in which they find an audience – the way they make sense – is in their hybridity (as seen with the lists of 'ingredients' I have already cited); this is the core of all the shows. The chariot racing scene in *Ben Hur Live*, for example, functions as a quotation not only of the film it is derived from, but of sports spectatorship as well. The lists that always accompany these productions suggests to me that all the components might not yet have quite coagulated into a distinct medium or genre, that the constituent parts are still autonomous – as if one is watching individual cogs and gears with tensions and friction between them.

Although all these terms have uses here, I have chosen the word 'format' to refer to the arena spectacular, because of the word's relative blankness its lack of artistic or aesthetic associations. A format suggests simply a way of ordering material. The television 'magazine programme' is a format; the way football matches are broadcast, with certain breaks, features and advertising, can also be referred to as a format. Part of my reason for using this much less evocative term is that the arena spectacular is so new and it may be too early to tell if it is indeed to become a genre or medium of its own – many of the uncertainties I have described above can be seen as analogous to those around cinema in the late nineteenth century (for example, Tom Gunning has explored a time in cinematic history in which film was not necessarily narrative but rather made up of flexible 'attractions' [1990]).

The Arena Spectacular - Literature Review and Theoretical Context

What do prospective audiences understand via the name of this new format? In order to look more closely at the connotations and references within the term 'arena spectacular', I have broken it into its two constituent parts.

1. 'Arena'

The arena is of course an ancient technology; the word coming from the Latin for 'sand', which was strewn across the floor of Roman arenas to soak up the blood of injured combatants and their victims. However, the first part of the format's name more connotatively places the shows in a particular category of space that exists at a specific historical juncture – indoor arenas in post-industrial, mostly Western, cities. The arena spectacular is housed in, and suggested by, the space of these modern indoor arenas. Before the Olympics of 2012, the arena spectacular's principle home in Britain was the O2 Arena, although two of my four main examples toured the country to the likes of Liverpool's Echo Arena and Manchester's Phones For You Arena (and internationally; arena spectaculars seem to have found particularly appreciative audiences in South Korea and Australia). Like cinemas and theatres, they are architectural 'envelopes' that can house extremely various content (Jameson & Speaks, 1992). Indoor arenas like these have roofs, unlike stadiums, and are usually ovoid in shape, with terraced seating arranged around a large, adaptable floor space. The recent arenas are built large, cheap and unadorned: functional steel structures support light metal or canvas roofs; plastic seats are bolted to concrete flooring. The arena, like the sports stadium, is a place of live events – sport, music, comedy and performances of various kinds. They seem to fit Foucault's residual category of the 'other space', separated off from but appended to general space and accessible for certain periods of time (Foucault: 2008). Arenas are also often the venue of commercial expos and exhibitions. London's O2 Arena is housed in the former Millennium Dome, which was initiated under John Major to mark the turn of the millennium, built by Tony Blair's New Labour government and later sold to American Entertainment Group (AEG). As well as the ancient amphitheatres and arenas of Greece and Rome, their modern heritage includes the Crystal Palace of the 1851 Great Exhibition, Alexandra Palace, built in 1863 and the Dome of Discovery and Royal Festival Hall built for the Festival of Britain in 1951. These grand venues, like the Millennium Dome-come-O2, were built for a specific occasion (what Maurice Roche refers to as 'mega-events' [2000]) then repurposed afterwards.

Over the last few decades economic policies of successive UK governments, particularly the widespread and massive regeneration of British post-industrial cities, have created the physical spaces to house huge events such as arena spectaculars. In the British post-industrial city, arenas have become part of the necessary equipment for a city to compete nationally and internationally in an economy based on leisure, entertainment and tourism (equipment that might include other sports venues, concert halls, art galleries, museums and large hotels, see chapter 2; also Miles: 2010, Susan Bennet: 2005). One only needs to note the corporate sponsorship evident in the venues' names to see that these spaces belong to a neoliberalised, commoditised urban space, where boundaries between public space and commercial space have become blurred. Spending on national projects such as the millennium celebrations or the Olympics is predicated upon later returns – the Department for Culture, Media and Sport claimed that '[h]osting the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games could generate up to a £41 billion […] windfall to the economy by 2020' (UK Government website, 2013 – see also UK Government report 'Meta-evaluation of the Impact and Legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, November 2012). Perhaps now the distinction made by Foucault between productive 'general space' and 'other space' is more difficult to make.

Both the O2 Arena in North Greenwich and the London 2012 Olympic Stadium in the borough of Newham were built by the architectural collective Populous. The name 'Populous' suggests the type of building that the collective specialise in – large, social spaces. As well as the easily identified physical space that the word 'arena' denotes, there are also some affective connotations; of mass audiences; of shared spectatorship – even community (as with 'spectacle' below). An obvious distinction between a cinema or theatre and an arena is that the oval shape of an arena means that the audience can always see other parts of the audience. I will show that within a post-cinematic context this is an intentional selling point of arena spectatorship. Indeed, the promise of community, even if it can only be what architect Jon Jerde calls a 'community of consumers' (quoted in Klein 2004: 354), is a more general trait of the 'offer' of privatised urban space and how radical urban regeneration is managed and emolliated for the public, especially with a 'mega-event' such as the London 2012 Olympics.

2. 'Spectacular'

The noun 'spectacular' can suggest a large-scale stage entertainment made up of a mixture of different acts and styles. The Radio City Music hall has hosted a 'Christmas Spectacular' since 1932 (Radio City Music Hall website, 2016) but, although these kinds of event are attended by large audiences, what the term actually denotes is more difficult to establish.

Unlike 'spectacular', 'spectacle' as a noun has a more established, if still nebulous, definition (the Oxford English Dictionary's first citation of 'spectacle' is in 1340; 'spectacular', as noun, in 1890). Jonathan Crary defines spectacle thus:

> "spectacle", since Latin antiquity, has designated that which, having a "striking or unusual character", exceeds the normative or habitual character of visual experience. Its sense of "impressive public display" indicates the consistency with which spectacle has been part of non-coercive strategies of power and persuasion. (Crary in Tony Bennet, 2005: 335)

Because Crary is accounting for twentieth century theories, such as Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle' (Debord, 1970), his sense of the word extends to an entire visual system:

> Spectacle implies an organisation of appearances that are simultaneously enticing, deceptive, distracting, and superficial, and this overlapping of functions supported C20 theories on the analogous functioning of spectacle and ideology. (ibid.)

Debord's theory is relevant here; in short, all that is discussed here would fall within his idea of the total, mediating capitalist system that he describes in *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1970). In a less theoretical idiom, David Rockwell's heavily illustrated book *Spectacle – An Optimist's Handbook* provides another definition, which expands upon the social connotations of viewing spectacles:

> An empty stadium, an open field or a busy urban thoroughfare – each one a public space – undergoes an alchemic process when transformed by spectacle. A group of

strangers fuses into an instant community […] Evolving technologies – the Internet, mobile phones, instant messaging – are radically transforming how we connect. They make the world a smaller place […] however, the experience of virtual community pales in the face of the physical experience of spectacle. Spectacles are larger than life. They imprint memories. They induce a heightened state that can only be experienced in the flesh […] you become part of something greater than yourself […] [in this book] we hope to open a window onto a way of looking at wondrous events that connect people in real time and real space. (Rockwell, 2006: 15)

Rockwell introduces spectacle as an antagonist to the contemporary mediation of relations through electronic technology. Rockwell's sense of collective spectacle as a basic human need has emotive momentum and is echoed in Barbara Ehrenreich's *Dancing in the Streets* (subtitled 'A History of Collective Joy', 2007). Paradoxically it could be read as an antidote to the 'society of the spectacle', however he ignores the widespread association with ideology that Crary identifies. The subtitle 'An Optimist's Handbook' seems to explain why he does not address rather obvious public spectacles such as executions, disasters, political rallies and riots. His selection of events creates some surprising contrasts between the religious and the secular; the reverential and the hedonistic. Rockwell's conception of spectacle seems to involve a kind of basic, human awe at something bigger than oneself. This somehow joins people together via collective viewing; 'you become part of something greater than yourself' (ibid., 15). As audience of a spectacle, one loses some of oneself to the crowd, the mass. Shared spectatorship and communal consumption will, in my section on *Batman Live*, be seen to be at the heart of contemporary fan culture – a mode of consumption that feeds the arena spectacular via communal forms such as the comicon. Rockwell describes them as 'visceral experiences', he does not refer here to the spilled internal organs and bodily fluids of Roman spectacles but to a sensuous and reactive, 'un-thought' response to an event or object (ibid., 20). Spectacles are not necessarily apprehended intellectually, they seduce, they dazzle, they entertain.

Like theatre, spectacles happen in 'real space and real time', as Rockwell says, and to some extent the complicated design of his heavily illustrated book proves the impossibility of adequately documenting a spectacle. Like traditional art spectacle is seen as existing in a specific time and place but unlike, for example, a painting that exists whether someone is viewing or not, spectacle requires a spectator – spectacle exists as affect; impersonal but still embodied emotion, rather than artefact. This quality is one that will be seen to match very well with current trends within entertainment capitalism, as I will show in chapter 2.

This, and more, is all folded into the noun 'spectacular'. In these productions, using the word 'spectacular' as a noun pre-figures its use as an adjective. The format's name itself qualifies a show's content as 'spectacular' – the name gives some instruction on how to watch these new shows.

How is this format bounded; how can we recognise it when it appears? An initial set of tropes include that the arena-based shows in this study all share the scale and technologies of the arena itself and a seated live audience. They often use large props or puppets, actors, live or recorded music and sound effects and live animals and they are always aimed at a mixed age group. Rather than the un-scripted sporting events we might associate with such spaces, during the arena spectacular the arena is a space of adaptation, of recitation.

Arena spectaculars are always 'other' to something, most often a recorded original, hence the 'live' suffix. This definition by distinction will become important when I discuss Foucault's concept of heterotopia or 'other space' and ask whether the arena spectacular is separated from general space and time in any significant way (see chapter 2). The fluidity with which images move from screen to site and back will be explored here as a commercial technique of branding and franchising; an experiential phenomenon of contemporary culture and also as a quality of post-industrial space. I will examine their paradoxical nature – they are live, in an age of recordings; big crowds attend yet their audience is small compared to the TV and film audiences viewing the source material. They are purportedly epic and monumental, yet their narratives are often extremely abbreviated. They promise the exotic, but provide the familiar;

they are new yet rely on well-established traditions. Their marketing always suggesting that the show will be something that the audience has never seen before, something unimaginable, yet they are always actually very simple to read in terms of narrative and composition, and perfectly imaginable formally. They induce nothing like the panic of audiences in the mythic scenes of early cinema with people diving out of the way of a filmed train, or ducking from a gun barrel pointed at the camera (as in Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, [Porter, 1903] see chapter 1). When watching a protracted dance or horse riding sequence in *Ben Hur Live*, I never wondered *why* it had been included, despite its limited narrative function. Somehow, we know what to expect.

There is no literature directly analysing the arena spectacular apart from journalistic comment and review, so what follows is a set of reviews on related and contextually relevant topics. Here they divide into four main areas: adaptation, cinema and post-cinema, theatre and the live and postcivil urban space; subjects that all relate to the case studies that follow.

Adaptation: Remediation or Residual and Emergent?

The effect that one medium, form, genre or technology can have upon another is a large concern in this thesis, and there are two main theories I will be using: remediation, and the residual and the emergent. Both are useful throughout the thesis, however, I will explain here why I find the concept of 'remediation' the most directly applicable to the arena spectacular itself.

According to Raymond Williams a culture is made up of dominant elements, residual elements and emergent elements. Williams wrote that the 'complexity of a culture is to be found not only in its variable processes and their social definitions – traditions, institutions and formations – but also in the dynamic interrelations, at every point in the process, of historically varied and variable elements' (1977: 121). Williams' examples of cultural elements range from the Church, the British monarchy, trade unions and the radical press. The

residual is what remains active from a previous period; the emergent is what is new and oppositional, and may subsequently become part of a new dominant. The residual elements is also important in Foucault's work on 'other spaces' (Foucault 2008; 1989). There are qualities of the arena spectacular that might lead it to be categorised either emergent or residual, but I find that it is more correctly regarded as part of the existing cinematic dominant.

The theory of 'remediation' states that new mediums come to be understood by being read through prior understanding of older ones. This was introduced by media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their book *Remediation – Understanding New Media* in which they argue that all culture is mediated and that, since we can only understand a new medium through prior understanding of an old one, all culture is also 'remediated' (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Their examples range from how we have come to use computers through visual and linguistic analogies with physical filing systems, to computer games that use book-like interfaces. Although these two concepts are not exclusive to each other (they can both be identified as occurring in the same context), they are distinct from one another – with the practice of the latter always inherently capitalistic.

In his introduction to his book *Residual Media*, Charles Acland applies Williams' theory to various media and criticises what he sees as a preoccupation in scholarship with the term 'new media': '[t]his preoccupation neglects the crucial role of continuity in historical processes […] It ignores the way the dynamics of culture bump along unevenly, dragging the familiar into novel contexts' (Acland, 2007: xixi). He describes our current era as displaying 'an economic and cultural orientation toward novelty and innovation' (ibid., xv). For Acland, observing residual media rather than new media is 'a study of the ageing of culture, asserting that the introduction of new cultural phenomena and materials rests on an encounter with existing forms and practices. The result is both material accumulation and ever more elaborate modes of accommodation' (ibid., xx). Acland's residual phenomena include shorthand writing, 35mm analogue slides used in a folk band's live show and the continuation of live cabaret alongside cinema. His thesis is that these leftover bits of media form part of our contemporary media

landscape, just as important as new media in our experience of culture. If we were to regard the arena spectacular as a kind of throwback to the ancient arena, or nineteenth century spectacular theatre, then 'residual media' would be an operative term – indeed, there are many elements within the shows and their setting that fit comfortably into Acland's category. However, I argue that the arena spectacular thrives as something new within the dominant – not primarily as something residual and aged.

'Remediation' allows newness to be tempered with existing modes of understanding. Bolter and Grusin state that a 'medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of *respect or rivalry* with other media' [my emphasis] (ibid., 65). The primary way that their term is useful here is to describe how arena spectaculars make themselves meaningful, and legible, through relations to other formats. It is also worth mentioning that much of their argument by now is commonplace, and I would even suggest that the arena spectacular's existence proves a level of awareness, and appreciation, of overt remediation. Bolter and Grusin's set of examples emphasise 'newness' – freshness of technology as an attractive selling point (writing in the 1990's, they cite personal computing and video games). It might seem contrary to apply the term 'remediation' to what is essentially not new technology but rather a conglomeration of older ones. The arena spectacular is indeed made up of previously existing technologies, and it is dependent on previously seen images and a range of marketing strategies and an existing set of sites (the arenas themselves) but these all *add up* to a new format: a commercial opportunity and an audience experience that could not have existed earlier in history. If we follow Bolter and Grusin's argument, as something new the arena spectacular *could only* be understood through its remediation of existing media/mediums. One major way that the arena spectacular does this is by *incorporating* them.

I want to return to Acland's term 'residual media', and further explain my reasons for dismissing it as a tool for analysing the arena spectacular. Raymond Williams uses his configuration of 'residual', 'emergent' or 'dominant' elements to temper more common

'epochal analysis' that divides up parts of history too simply (for example 'bourgeois culture' appearing suddenly as totally distinct from 'feudal culture' [1977: 121]). In any historical period, there is the dominant culture (for example, his contemporary late capitalism), elements left over from other epochs (he cites the British monarchy) and emergent elements that will in the future become part of the dominant culture (at his time of writing in the 1970's, this could perhaps include networked computing). Rather than 'archaic' elements that are recognised as 'an element of the past', the 'residual, by definition, has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past' (ibid., 122): 'Thus certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social and cultural institution or formation' (ibid., 122). For reasons of its range of influences and the opportunism of its site, the indoor arena, the contemporary arena spectacular is not truly residual, it is specifically post-cinematic, as I will further demonstrate in chapter 1. Although it might seem to be a revival of ancient tropes (as we see with *Ben Hur Live* in particular), it is very much a product of 'now'.

This reasoning might seem to cast the arena spectacular as a remediated 'emergent' element. Williams writes:

> By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships are continually being created. But it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture […] and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel. (ibid., 123)

Unlike Acland, Williams is not specifically talking about media, he is addressing wider political and social formations and in this sense his formulation will continue to be useful here. However, because of this wider aspect to his argument, we will see that we cannot define the arena spectacular as emergent in a social or economic sense, it is always part of the dominant

– it has to be in order to exist, as its commercial niche depends upon a wide range of marketing tie-ins. Furthermore, Williams also says that:

> in advanced capitalism […] the dominant culture reaches much further than ever before in capitalist society into hitherto 'reserved' or 'resigned' areas of experience and practice and meaning. The area of effective penetration of the dominant order into the whole social and cultural process is thus now significantly greater. This in turn makes the problem of emergence especially acute (ibid., 126)

This increased penetration of the dominant is a feature that is illustrated by the example of the arena spectacular.

Remediation is a process by which 'newness', therefore potential incomprehensibility, is tempered with the familiar in order to provide legibility text, and often in the authors' examples a sellable product:

> Each new medium has to find its economic place by replacing or supplementing what is already available, and popular acceptance, and therefore economic success, can come only by convincing consumers that the new medium improves on the experience of older ones. (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 68)

Another element that often coincides with remediation is 'hypertext'. Hypertext is most strongly associated with the coding structures of websites and databases – in brief, hypertext sits outside the readable content of a page and allows content to be linked to other entries and to be easily searched. Similarly, a narrative hypertext is a set of conventions, tropes and narrative elements that sit outside the text at hand, but allow a navigation of it via other existing texts. George P. Landow defines hypertext as 'multisequentially read text', meaning that when such a text is read, the reader is also considering a group of other texts to which the present one is linked – he gives examples including academic citation and multi-media works that might include mixtures of text, interactive elements and audio-visual material (1997: 4). The clearest example of narrative hypertext here is in the Batman stories but it will also later

pertain to the idea of 'the nation' with the Olympics opening ceremony. More flexible than a series of straight adaptations (like the series of 'Ben-Hur' works already cited), a hypertext allows a kind of negotiated growth of a narrative world, which may, or may not, be arbitrated by a commercial company, or a community of fans and enthusiasts. Fans may engage with a hypertext via writing 'fanfiction' (written as one word) that places characters from a fictional world into new scenarios of the fan-writer's choosing; Rhiannon Bury cites the work of female fans of *The X-files*, for example (2005: 34). Here we have another example of the non-emergent nature of the arena spectacular – whereas fanfiction can be a vehicle for creating new, emergent social formations (Bury writes about queer 'slash fiction' as such – [ibid., 71]), I will show *Batman Live* to be more in line with what Williams calls 'incorporated forms' that exist within the dominant and 'are merely facsimilies of the genuinely emergent cultural practice' (1977: 126). Crucially, Batman is a commercial trademark, and is to an extent enforced as such – *Batman Live* is a legally licensed development of the hypertext-brand and not a DIY work by fans. When coupled with careful remediation, hypertexts can be incredibly adaptable, and therefore incredibly profitable. Because Batman is a flexible hypertext, existing content can be remediated and appear across media, from child-friendly arena show, to violent films.

Rather than William's 'emergent' elements that change the dominant culture, remediating products (and they are all commercial *products* in the authors' examples) find their 'economic place' within it. Bolter and Grusin say, '[t]he goal is not to replace the earlier forms, to which the company may own the rights, but rather to spread the content over as many markets as possible' (2000: 68). They go on to argue that together 'these products constitute a hypermediated environment in which the repurposed content is available to all the senses at once, a kind of mock Gesamtkunstwerk' (ibid.). The idea of aesthetic and experiential 'totality' in art is one that we can see deployed via the list of media Franz Abraham incorporates into his description of *Ben Hur Live*, which has 'the power of a rock show […] the speed of a musical, the magic of a great movie and the passion of a Greek tragedy' (Hoyle, 2009). The joining-up of products and filling of commercial gaps that Bolter and Grusin

describe here again does not easily suggest a 'residual' or 'emergent' position for remediating artefacts, but rather a way for them to find a relevant place within the dominant culture, that for the authors is always the capitalist economies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As an operational part of post-cinema, I will analyse the arena spectacular as part of a dominant culture.

Cinema and Post-cinema

I am placing arena spectaculars on a timeline of entertainment technologies that has over the last century almost exclusively been articulated via screens – first those of the cinema, then of television and now computers and other networked devices. This trajectory leads from relatively straightforward cinema and television towards a diverse and predominantly digital realm that Steven Shaviro calls 'post-cinema' (2010). Following a trajectory of writing from Walter Benjamin, to Stanley Cavell, to Jonathan Beller, I will argue that cinema in a broad sense is still the dominant medium today and has over its century of dominance structured not only our ways of looking, but of consumption, and indeed consciousness. Cinema is of course no longer the only screen-based medium, however, film theorist DN Rodowick writes:

> [o]ur audiovisual culture remains "cinematic" in the sense that the most popular forms of digital media long to recreate and intensify cinematic effects of framing, editing, dynamic point of view, and mobile framing [...] The idea of cinema persists as a way of modelling time-based spatial forms with computers. (2007: 133)

It is because of its absolutely central position in our culture and politics, as well as the arena spectaculars' source materials, that I will contextualise them within cinema – in short, as an unusual example within a dominant system of both consciousness and capitalist exploitation. Cinema is in a state of flux in the early twenty-first century. In *The Remembered Film*, Victor Burgin writes:

> Films today are dislocated and dismantled […] The experience of a film was once localized in space and time, in the finite unreeling of a narrative in a particular theatre on a particular day. But with time a film became no longer simply something to be 'visited' in the way one might attend a live theatrical performance or visit a painting in a museum. (2004: 8)

Now, cinema must compete with television, the internet, computer games and social media, as well as the other non-screen forms of entertainment. Films themselves are encountered in this broad context as well as in cinema theatres themselves.

'Cinema' is a potentially confusing term, which can be used to refer to a physical site, an industrial mode of moving image production or narrative film more generally, and can include both theatrical cinema presentation and the further distribution of films in other ways (by DVD, streamed file etc.). It also includes devices such as the 'cut', the rectangular, usually photographically derived image, synchronised sound, musical scores and narrative – these are devices and tropes of 'cinema'. I will be exploring the origins of cinema and Cavell's ideas on how it affects our way of viewing the world in chapter 1. Since all the elements listed above are still in use, can we already define our current era as a 'post-cinematic' one? The usefulness of this term is by no means self-evident. That we are fast becoming 'post-filmic' ('film' being a material consisting of strips of plastic coated with light sensitive chemicals) seems more plausible, but the film industry and cinema-theatres would seem to remain huge businesses and an extremely popular leisure activity; despite long-standing competition from other media such as television and the internet. Hollywood cinema is often theorised as being historically connected to industrial manufacturing, of the regimented form found in Fordist and Taylorist factories (e.g. Peter Wollen, 1993). However, in his book *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Steven Shaviro writes that:

> we are now witnessing the emergence of a different media regime, and indeed of a different mode of production, than those which dominated the twentieth century.

Digital technologies, together with neoliberal economic relations, have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience. (2010: 2)

Shaviro states that film was the defining medium of the twentieth century, 'cinema' in his usage becomes a shorthand for '20th century media', but he states that we are, in the twenty-first century, leaving that 'regime' behind, hence 'post-cinema'. Consequently, Shaviro writes of 'media works' rather than 'films' or 'movies' – a term which encompasses works that are reproducible and often made up of moving images, using cinematic tropes, but are often produced and/or distributed digitally. The sited cinema presentation of today is itself also adapting in response to the post-cinematic context. I will analyse some of the qualities of digital cinema in my section on *Walking with Dinosaurs Live*, but in addition to this fundamental shift, there are various technical additions to contemporary cinemas when compared to ones from the first half of the twentieth century, including bigger screens, higher definition picture and sound and widespread Digital 3D projections. These technologies, along with increased ticket prices, have contributed to cinema's survival by inflating the event of attending the cinema within a market place that offers films themselves in many different forms.

Although explicitly not of the class of digital 'media works' with which Shaviro deals – which he writes of as 'radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience' (ibid., 2) in their relation to hypertexts and political and economic priorities, I will argue that arena spectaculars are also symptomatic of this post-cinematic, post-industrial context, and are also a new way of articulating lived experience. It is worth noting that Shaviro's post-cinema has a lot in common with what Norman M. Klein calls the 'Electronic Baroque', which for him denotes the historical point at which electronic media merge:

The Electronic Baroque is a horizontalized system of global media that lives inside the remains of national politics and urban culture. It lives inside the residue left by the decline of our public sector. That is why it feels to us like a vapor, like public space turned into data. (2004: 235)

Arjun Appadurai uses the term 'mediascape', with which he denotes not only infrastructures of the dissemination of material, but also the material or content circulated within those systems (1990: 298). However, Steven Shaviro's term 'media regime' more strongly suggests the forcefulness of particular media patterns, and fits with Foucault and Beller's more 'top-down' view of political power within culture and media. As theorists such as Marshall McLuhan and Guy Debord have done with other elements and technologies in media history, Shaviro aligns post-cinematic media with the political imperatives of our time:

> Just as the old Hollywood continuity editing system was an integral part of the Fordist mode of production, so the editing methods and formal devices of digital video and film belong directly to the computing-and-information-technology infrastructure of contemporary neoliberal finance. (2010: 3)

The 'media regimes' of these two periods (cinematic and post-cinematic) both reflect the political/economic make-up of the societies they exist within. If we consider the theory of remediation I have described above, we can see that the tropes employed in post-cinematic works allow products of a new era to be understood by those whose subjectivity is shaped by a previous one whilst technically, and politically, stemming from a new epoch. As well as being symptomatic of post-cinema, the works Shaviro writes of also purposefully reflect or 'map' the effects of the digital, the networked and the neoliberal. It is as much the economic context within which any product is encountered that makes it 'post-cinematic' as the materiality of the artefact itself. A work is post-cinematic because *we* are post-industrial.

In both Shaviro's *Post-cinematic Affect* and Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' essay (Benjamin, 1999) the authors are concerned with relatively new technologies; new media. Both authors also believe that 'the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence' (Benjamin, 1999: 216) and that changes in technology 'have given birth to radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experience' (Shaviro, 2010: 2). In situating the arena spectacular within post-cinema, I am also exploring this new 'media regime', but not through analysis of works using

overtly *new* media. I am concerned with a different kind of newness, which is to do with altering mode of engagement with material *in the wake* of technological change in dominant culture.

An understanding of neoliberal politics and economics is vital to Shaviro's understanding of the post-cinematic, as the dominant political system in which the post-cinematic appears. As I will discuss, neoliberalism is also central to work on contemporary cities, in the work of Anna Minton, Michiel Dehaene & Lieven De Cauter and Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand-Monk. According to David Harvey neoliberalism is:

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (2005: 2)

Harvey points out that rather than simply resurrecting the *laissez fair* of eighteenth century liberalism, as the term 'neoliberalism' might suggest, within this new ideology the state actively preserves and promotes these conditions. The state will even set up markets if need be, typically by privatising utilities, education, infrastructure and natural resources, and use force to ensure conditions are good for business where necessary. It is an ideology that is making irreparable changes to the world's governments, and to *what a government is*. Wendy Brown has written that:

> [n]eoliberalism looks forward to a global order contoured by a universalized market rationality in which cultural difference is at most a commodity, and nation-state boundaries are but markers of culinary differences and provincial legal arrangements […] neoliberalism confidently identifies itself with the future, and in producing itself as normal rather than adversarial does not acknowledge any alternative futures. (2006: 700**)**

Neoliberalism is often presented and perceived as 'post-ideological' common sense – a kind of free-market-Darwinism that now constitutes the only political option. Pierre Bourdieu has written that:

> this "theory" that is desocialised and dehistoricised at its roots has, today more than ever, the means of making itself true and empirically verifiable. In effect, neoliberal discourse is not just one discourse among many. Rather, it is a "strong discourse" – the way psychiatric discourse is in an asylum. (Bourdieu, 1998)

David Harvey writes that '[i]t has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (2005: 3). Mark Fisher calls this mode of understanding 'capitalist realism' and, in his book of the same title, writes that '[o]ver the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is *simply obvious* that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business' (2009: 17). For Shaviro, the post-cinematic is intrinsically dependent upon neoliberal economics, the instantaneous and frantic nature of globalised finance impacting aesthetically upon increasingly fractured narratives that can appear anywhere, anytime in a networked world full of networked screens. Crucial to my use of the term 'neoliberal' is that despite its own claims to being 'natural' and non-ideological, it *is* in fact an ideology, and one that finds power through our current media and technologies. Likewise, the post-cinematic, as the dominant media regime, remediates within itself; offers newness from within the dominant, rather than anything truly emergent and assumes the position of a natural order within media. The post-cinematic, then, is more than simply what happens to moving images without the physical site of the cinema, or after the technology of analogue film disappears and it is the intersection between the post-cinematic and the neoliberal that we see in the arena spectacular that makes it a distinctly contemporary phenomenon.

Theatre, 'Liveness' and Mediatised Society

The 'live' is an immediately relevant concern within arena spectaculars, not least because so many of their titles include the word 'live' (*Batman Live*; *Walking With Dinosaurs Live*). As scripted, live performances to seated audiences, it could easily be argued that the most obvious media remediated in the arena spectacular are those of theatre. Indeed their marketing often mentions the theatre, as in *Batman Live*'s press release from DC Comics: [t]he Caped Crusader has been featured in almost every type of media stage imaginable […] [h]owever, he's long since been absent from one stage—the literal one' (DC Comics, 2016). 'Theatrical spectacle' is, according to Jacques Ranciere, anything that 'place(s) bodies in action before an assembled audience' (2009: 2). The arena spectacular is certainly that, and they could be described and analysed from a theoretical position grounded in theatre using, for example, the work of Bertolt Brecht or Antonin Artaud.

At this point I will explain my limited pursuance of a direct theatrical context for these shows. My initial focus on cinema has followed on from Philip Auslander's idea that screens are now the field from which any cultural form has to emerge, no matter what that form's actual mode of dissemination might be. Screens are our basic cultural life world. Auslander's book *Liveness – Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999) addresses the plight of live performance in a society and a culture dominated by 'mediatized' images. The most important thing about Auslander's thesis within this study is that very idea of 'live' appears with the invention of recording. He argues that 'live' mediums such as theatre are inherently and unavoidably *altered* by the possibility of recording. Therefore, according to his thesis there can be no 'living fossils' within media development – I agree with this, and this will become crucial to the necessarily and inherently post-cinematic nature of the arena spectacular. 'Mediatized' is a term Auslander borrows from Jean Baudrillard (appearing in Baudrillard's *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, 1981**)**, and uses it to indicate 'that a particular cultural object is a product of the mass media or of media technology' (1999: 4). Cultural objects, then, that are received by their audience through recording or transmission.

'Liveness', within this 'mediatized' culture, is aberrant, exotic. In my examples that are directly adapted from screen productions (and the Olympic opening ceremony also contains myriad examples of the same thing, such as Daniel Craig playing James Bond), performance is something that has *escaped* its natural habitat, the screen, to *become* live.

Auslander finds that contemporary 'liveness' has a currency based on an idea of immediacy, that live images and sounds are somehow 'genuine' because they are not mediated, unlike the world of the internet and mobile phones that Rockwell also poses 'spectacle' against. Auslander writes that 'the common assumption is that the live event is "real" and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial' (ibid., 3). However for him there is no pure state of un-mediated image; 'where these concepts are used to describe the relationship between live performance and its present mediatized environment, they yield a reductive binary opposition of the live and the mediatized' (ibid., 3) which is undermined by the inevitable contemporary hybidity of live and mediatized elements (performances are recorded; amplified; include live feeds and digital graphics). Although a live performance might seem like an easy thing to identify, Auslander points out that in contemporary culture and media, it might not be so clear. He even says that 'the relationship between live and 'mediatized' forms in terms of ontological oppositions is not especially productive, because there are few grounds on which to make significant ontological distinctions' (ibid. 55). Auslander writes that 'the word "live" is not used to define intrinsic, ontological properties of performance that set it apart from mediatized forms, but rather is a historically contingent term' (ibid., 60). Although we might refer to Greek drama, or the Roman arena as ancestors of our live performance today, the 'live' only comes into being with recording, in the late nineteenth century (ibid., 56). By this logic, a singer performing a song unamplified on a stage in 1850 would not be doing so 'live', whereas the same singer doing the same in 1860, after the first sound recording, would be performing 'live'. In other words, the 'live performance' is performance remediated by recording. The ontology of cultural elements is always contingent – therefore to be 'live' is essentially modern; it is born of the cinematic, industrial period.

Auslander states that 'the general response of live performance to the oppression and economic superiority of mediatized forms has been to become as much like them as possible' (ibid., 7) and this phenomenon will be seen throughout my examples, perhaps most acutely in Cirque du Soleil's *KÀ* (see chapter 2). Other elements that now complicate any division between the live and recorded/mediatized abound. The British soap-opera *Eastenders* has recently made a number of live broadcast specials (initially in 2010), in which live scenes are interspersed with recorded ones, with the aim of verisimilitude with a usual recorded episode, but with the added risk and immediacy of live performance (perhaps tempting audiences to watch just in case something goes wrong; with the resulting errors circulating as clips on news programmes and social media).

Opera and theatre productions are now successfully and widely broadcast live on cinema screens internationally, with ticket prices in between those of a film and an actual seat at the opera. There are also many examples of recorded media attempting to emphasise event and experience far more. Ben Wheatley's film *A Field in England* (2013), a British production of relatively low budget, was released across cinemas, DVD and online on-demand platforms on the same day, asking the consumer to assess the relative value of each viewing situation which share the 'event' of the film's release, without the factor of a more usual staggered release across the same platforms. Today, in an entertainment marketplace thrown into disarray by digital dissemination that is far harder to police and predict, we see that the use of event, release for sale, performance and live are all in a state of flux across these formats and mediums.

The term 'experience' can be found in marketing everywhere, for example the recent wave of 3D and I-MAX cinema, cinema adverts read 'Experience it in Real D 3D or Imax'. Cinemas, in our post-cinematic era, are heavily invested in the experience of attending the cinema. Any trip to see a film is currently sure to be preceded by at least one advertisement for the cinema itself. A recent advertisement for cinemas shows slow motion shots of audience members supposedly reacting to films they are watching.

fig. 5 Still from advert for Picturehouse Cinemas 2013

Enraptured eyes stare out of the screen, couples move closer to one another, smiles break slowly across faces; horror dawns, in slow motion. The advert features many of these headshots, the cinema audience is presented with an image of itself. What is being advertised is an experience of 'watching' – this is what the experience of cinema looks and feels like, the advert seems to say. In this way, the spectatorial value, reflected in the ticket price, is transferred from the film itself, to the experience of watching.

Although I am approaching the 'live' arena spectacular not from theatre, but from cinema, some of the developmental process, the 'contamination', as Auslander calls it (ibid., 7), from one medium to another is very pertinent. Auslander suggests that the currency of liveness is often as proof of 'authenticity'; he writes that '[i]n rock culture, live performance is a secondary experience of the music but is nevertheless indispensible, since the primary experience cannot be validated without it' (1999: 185). This has an echo in the offer of the arena spectacular as 'experiencing a world', particularly in a show like *Batman Live* where the live version of the narrative is offered as corroboration of the 'reality' of a fictional world. Like Benjamin's aura (see below), this conception of the 'authentic' is to do with sensory immediacy but in a contemporary context, Auslander argues, immediacy is more difficult to identify. Auslander sees live 'immediacy' as increasingly complex and possibly phantasmatic

– we will see in chapter 1 how this desire for 'real experience' can be connected to the phenomenon of digital, immaterial labour in which the world is 'de-realized' (Berardi, 2009). A relatively new phenomenon that complements Auslander's diagnosis of an extremely muddy contemporary ontology of 'liveness' is the live broadcast of stage productions into cinemas. This has been particularly prevalent in the UK with opera productions that are often broadcast from opera houses around the world. Even stranger is the new status of the art exhibition as a ticketed and timed 'event' – one that is occasionally also 'broadcast live' into cinemas, as operas and plays are (the Royal Academy's *Manet* exhibition of 2012/13 was broadcast 'live' into cinemas during its run at the galleries).

Auslander suggests that '[t]he ubiquity of reproductions of performances of all kinds in our culture has led to the depreciation of live presence, which can only be compensated for by making the perceptual experience of the live as much as possible like that of the mediatized' (ibid., 40). The arena spectacular itself bypasses theatre as a discourse, for example, in the cited lineage of *Ben Hur Live* which doesn't include the previous nineteenth century 'live' stage production. The arena spectacular is promoted through mediatized channels, using material taken from mediatized sources, and always remains in reference to these dominant mediums. This is also the reason for not situating the arena spectacular in direct proximity with musical-theatre adaptations of films, such as *The Lion King* (stage version John, 1997) and *The Lord of the Rings* (stage version Rahman, 2006), although these shows follow a similar adaptive path, they too are in reference back to cinema, with that as originator and dominating form. To conclude: I have tried to address the arena spectacular on its own terms, which are cinematic.

Aura, Capitalism and the Authentic 'Experience'

If the arena spectacular is born of cinematic presentation but constitutes a step away from it, what is the key difference, the point of divergence; what does it offer that a film doesn't? According to Jean-Louis Comolli, cinema privileges vision (1980) and Shaviro argues that

television and the internet are primarily aural and haptic mediums (2003: 5-7). Perhaps within a market dominated by these mediums, the arena spectacular creates a sensory niche for itself by emphasising *presence* – physical proximity sold as proof of a 'real' (the nature of this 'real' that is offered will be explored later).

In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin argues that mechanical reproducibility of artworks destroys 'aura'. The aura is a quality unique to a work sited in specific and singular time and space and includes its patina, history, where it is and who owns it. These qualities are apprehended via physical proximity of a viewer to a unique object, performance or even (in Benjamin's own examples) a landscape. Benjamin hoped that mechanical reproducibility would be emancipatory; finally everyone would have their own 'intimacy' with artworks, because a reproducible artwork can appear anywhere, and everywhere 'it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway', 'it reactivates the object reproduced' (1999: 214; 215). Aura is always articulated through relative distance from an artwork; mechanical reproducibility destroys distance because it does away with the unique artifact or event. In her work on the aura and cinema, Mariam Bratu Hansen points out that cinema necessarily destroys sensory distance, regardless of the work's dissemination; cinema 'with its techniques of variable framing and montage, exemplifies this new regime of perception defined by nearness, shock, and tactility' (2004: 21). The technologies of what Shaviro calls our present, post-cinematic media regime (social media, micro-computing, intelligent products, virtual reality headsets, artificial intelligence) can only continue this tendency to collapse physical distance.

Obviously, there have consistently been artworks and phenomena that have not been mechanically reproducible (Benjamin mentions views of mountains, which are still sought out today; today people still go to look at the Mona Lisa in the Louvre) since the time in which film, print and photography have become dominant media. However, I would argue that the performances I am discussing are unusual because they are auratic artworks that *grow out* of cinema, rather than simply survive alongside it. The aura, proposed as demolished by

Benjamin in the 1930's, resurfaces; with characters stepping out through the cinema screen in ticketed arena events that reinstate the 'original', unmediated event. The arena becomes a kind of palimpsest, with the event laid on top of the already-seen film image.

Benjamin's 'auratic artwork' has occupied a much less central space in culture for decades now; trends he observed in the 1930's have continued and grown. As I will discuss in chapter 2, changes in the status of auratic objects have had a profound effect upon urban space as well (see Lash 1990; Lash & Lury 2007; Urry 2002). As Benjamin states, '[t]he presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity […] [t]he whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical […] reproducibility' (1999: 214). As Auslander suggests, the 'live' capitalises upon a common affective association between the screen and the in-authentic, that what is on a screen is less 'real' than something in physical space, as the reproduction of a painting in considered inferior to the 'real' object. Within both fan cultures and branding strategy, something like aura is invoked to ensure loyal consumption of 'authentic' products and spin-offs. Arena spectaculars seem to associate 'live' with 'real' as a marketing strategy. Again, this is a proposed 'specialness' that only makes sense in an age that uses non-auratic recordings as the primary mode of engagement with narratives and images.

The arena spectacular, as a post-cinematic phenomenon, opposes Benjamin's reproducible artwork in several ways. Whereas the reproducible artwork 'brings things 'closer'' (1999: 217), the arena show takes the action (and the venue) physically further away from its audience. It deals in scarcity, novelty and physical presence in a venue, emphasised by the distant views available of the action. The reproducible work is not sited in time and space; arguably the arena spectacular, like older forms that Benjamin cites, has a 'unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (1999: 214). However, whereas theatrical performance could be cast as completely contrary to mechanical reproducibility, the arena spectacular depends so heavily on elements borrowed from screen images, that it *could not be said to be anti-cinematic*. As a remediated element, it is built upon the already dominant, rather than being emergent in itself. The genre could be connected to a trend, contemporaneous with the digital,

that prefers highly visible technologies with industrial-age connotations; Levi's jeans complete with industrial-looking rivets; 'steampunk', 'dieselpunk'; retro bicycles and a resurgence in popularity for vinyl records. These are also popular trends that work alongside, through or indeed are themselves mechanically reproduced images and objects, but at the same time include an attempt at using a reinstated aura.

Benjamin explains the different illusionistic registers of the film (1999: 226). Whereas no one present at the actual film shoot, including the actors, could achieve a view that excluded the mechanics of the shoot (cameras, lights, technicians, etc), the edited and projected film offers an 'equipment-free aspect of reality' that 'here has become the height of artifice', whereas 'the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology' (1999: 226). Benjamin is perhaps imagining someone leaving a factory full of machinery, travelling through a noisy and smoky city in order to watch a seamlessly edited film in the almost sacral dark space of the cinema. Since Benjamin's lifetime the visibility of technology has changed, especially with the digital and communications technology of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the changes he observed have become not only dominant, but naturalised. For example, much of the technology we use everyday is software, hidden within sleek, touch-screen devices. Current computing hides its construction just as much as the film frame does; when we send an email the mechanics of that communication are totally obscure to us, like the equipment edited out of the film. Perhaps this technological context explains some of the attraction of recent theatrical events such as *Warhorse* (puppetry by the Handspring Puppet Company, first performed 2007, at the National Theatre, London [Stafford, 2007]). This show used elaborate puppets, for which all the mechanics of their construction and operation are laid totally bare to the audience: 'South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company brings breathing, galloping, full-scale horses to life on the stage — their flanks, hides and sinews built of steel, leather and aircraft cables' (Global Creatures website, 2016). In a manner reminiscent of Japanese 'bunraku' puppetry, one watches the movements of the puppet but also the puppeteers, who are visible on stage with their character. It seems that in certain live events, audiences *want* to actively suspend their disbelief, rather than enter an immersive illusion such

as is still prevalent in cinema. To crudely reverse Benjamin's poetic phrase, what we seem to sometimes desire today is visible technology in an apparent land of (electronic) orchids.

Pro-filmic Events and the 'real'

Film theorists such as Jean Baudry and Laura Mulvey have used the term 'pro-filmic event' (Baudry, 1986; Mulvey, 1975) in reference to actions, fictional or not that are then committed to film. Digital cinema can work quite differently – there may not even be a 'pro-filmic event' in an era when, as film writer Mark Cousins has said 'any conceivable image [can] be rendered in photographic reality', he says that with digital cinema, 'Want See became Can See' (2011: 456). In line with what Danny Boyle says of his conception of the Olympics opening ceremony as (designed as a 'live film') and in contrast to 'eventless' digital cinema, all these events might be regarded as 'pro-filmic' ones, even if they aren't in fact filmed. It could be argued that ubiquitous, portable filming via mobile phones and other devices makes every event pro-filmic. The Olympic ceremony acknowledged this possibility, as on the arena floor we saw not only roving cameras capturing the ceremony for television, but also the teams of athletes making images with their mobile phones. It prefigures its own value in its worthiness to be filmed; its authentic significance is attested to in its always already pro-filmic nature.

Perhaps here in the no-longer-essential pro-filmic event we do strike upon a residual cultural element. Digital animation, which looses moving images from the physical world and instead embeds them in the world of immaterial code, now means that filming must be remediated, and we reach some interesting points of exchange between the live and the cinematic. On the one hand, a stage version of *King Kong* is in production, with another gigantic puppet in the titular role building on the popularity of the recent Peter Jackson film of the story (2005), whereas for the film version of *Warhorse* (2012), director Steven Spielberg chose to use more naturalistic computer generated horse characters, instead of the extremely popular physical puppets of the play. In both of these examples, we find the 'Want See' and the 'Can See'; in

contemporary image making, both niches; both desires can be satisfied using the same hypertextual material.

The abandonment of the pro-filmic event detaches moving images from that particular 'real'; the events depicted need not ever have been physical ones in the real world. I propose that the arena spectacular, in common with many other contemporary products, offers an auratic 'real' that *grows from* the screen. We already have some different uses of the term 'real' here, and it will be useful at this point to make an initial distinction between the two main usages. In his essay 'The Return of the Real', Hal Foster (1996) writes about the 'image screen' (which is the symbolic order) disappearing in certain works of the late twentieth century, so that we are confronted directly with 'the Real'. Drawing upon Lacan, Foster's argument is that without the image screen, which is the symbolic, that shields the viewer from the world, the viewer is trapped in the 'gaze of the world': '*[i]t is as if this art wanted the gaze to shine, the object to stand, the real to exist, in all the glory (or the horror) of its pulsatile desire, or at least to evoke this sublime condition*' (ibid., 140, emphasis in original – Foster cites, here, some works of photographer Cindy Sherman that use bodily waste). For Foster, the Real is the home of the abject, for without the image-screen the symbolic signifier cannot form, leaving only abstract, uncodified mess. Mark Fisher paraphrases Jacques Lacan's ideas on the Real, which has great importance for his argument about 'capitalist realism':

> For Lacan the Real is what any 'reality' must suppress; indeed constitutes itself through just this repression. The Real is an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality. (2009: 18)

For Fisher, Foster and, as I shall show in chapter 1, Slavoj Žižek (specifically in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 2002), the Real (capitalised) is outside representation and therefore beyond, or beneath, capitalism. This is clearly not the kind of 'real' that the arena spectacular promises, invoked in, for example, claims about 'how real the world of Batman is' (Jim Lee in *Batman Live* programme 2011).

This other 'real', without a capital 'r', here connotes both the 'live' and the licensed, 'genuine' commodity. In this sense of 'real', it is implied that to dispense with the screen is to propose progress along an arc of ever-increasing remediated authenticity in experience, *and* regress to a state of 'un-mediatized' (perhaps also 'un-digitised') experience. To use another example: the rivets on a pair jeans refer back to a previous mode of industrial capitalism, one in which workers did 'real' physical work (so needed tough clothing) and perhaps also when 'real' American clothes were made in America. Without rivets, the denim trousers would simply not be 'real' jeans. The schism between these now unnecessary rivets on our jeans and their points of reference, and the reality of these jeans as products of contemporary globalised capitalism does not, of course, destroy the symbolism that is intended to make one desire the jeans. Rather, this is a set of articulations of a, to some extent, fantastical, nostalgic idea of 'real' and 'truth' that shores up and perpetuates the un-reality of those very claims to 'realness'. This is certainly not an abandonment of the 'symbolic order' of capitalism that Žižek means when he writes of the Real. To return to the arena spectacular, its legibility depends on strong continuity within of a set of commoditised symbols. This will be most clearly demonstrated by my analysis of *Batman Live*, but also has implications for my discussions of visible, material labour; an aesthetic trope that has great currency today.

Postcivil Space

Why might contemporary consumers go to such ritualized, theatrical and expensive lengths to experience these kinds of products, outside their everyday engagement with digital, screen-based media? Perhaps the desire for un-mediatized authenticity, even if this is not the way to find the Real, might be connected to contemporary functions of space.

In the 1960's, Foucault discussed a triadic division of space, into 'topos' or general space (broadly speaking, the space of production, of work), 'utopia', an ideal space that doesn't exist and what he calls 'heterotopia' or other space, which is a residual, separated kind of space that allows reflection, inversion and representation of aspects of general space. In 'Of Other

Spaces' (2008), Foucault presents an evocative but impressionistic discussion of these spaces. The text is applicable here because of the fact that these spaces attached to 'topos' are, although locatable, to a large extent fictive and imaginative. In addition, Foucault's own range of examples include spaces such as the mirror, which suggests that the heterotopia need not always even be a physical space. Perhaps in the twenty-first century, where the functions of different spaces are increasingly overlapping or collapsing into one-another via networked technology, the separate 'heterotopic' space is a residual category that we desire all the more today.

I am using the term 'postcivil' to denote a kind of societal space – usually urban – that has ceased to be governed for the benefit or affordance of a community, but primarily for the interests of business. Jonathan Beller use the term 'screen/society' (2006: 282), to signify the 'convergence of media and society' (ibid., 283) and it is at this point of convergence that we move from the post-cinematic (the subject of chapter 1) and on to postcivil space. Crucially, in my reading of Foucault, the heterotopia today is one that has been co-opted almost entirely by dominant neoliberal government and capital as a space of compensation, rather than emancipation.

David Harvey's simplest definition of neoliberalism is the 'financialization of everything' (2005: 3). For Steven Miles, by the twenty-first century, consumption 'is presented to us as the only solution to the traumatic consequences of a failed modernity and a failed industrialisation' (2010: 6). The repeated gratifications of consumer purchases are compensations for the work, exploitation, instability, conflict and environmental degradation of industrial modernity. Both Shaviro and Fisher identify Deleuze's 'control society' (Deleuze, 1992), rather than Foucault's society of discipline, as a more pertinent model for the way power is enforced under neoliberalism today, as neoliberal power presents itself as natural; as simply the 'way things are'. Shaviro writes that '[t]he control society is characterized by perpetual modulations, dispersed and "flexible" modes of authority, ubiquitous networks, and the relentless branding and marketing of even the most 'inner' aspects of subjective

experience' (2010: 6). This is important because it reflects the degree to which this mode of capitalism becomes naturalised. Fisher writes that control societies 'operate using indefinite postponement […] Work you take home with you… Working from home, homing from work. A consequence of this 'indefinite' mode of power is that external surveillance is succeeded by internal policing. Control only works if you are complicit with it' (2009: 22).

Jonathan Beller's theory of the 'cinematic mode of production' complicates notions of what and how we are consuming when we look at images. Mass consumer culture first appeared alongside mass production in the nineteenth-century, with expositions and worlds fairs as a crucial site of promotion. However, in the twenty-first century, 'web 2.0' products such as Google's search engine blur the definitions between consumer and product (as users of Google whose search data is sold as valuable marketing information, which are we?) For Beller, cinema is a system for the economisation of all perception. According to Beller '[t]he extra-economic creativity of the masses, their quest for empowerment, fulfilment, and why not say it "freedom," are absorbed and rendered productive for capital' (2006: 27). This appropriation of surplus time and energy will also connect with my discussion of the heterotopia, which takes desires for escape and separation from societal space and turns them into useful actions that reinforce the power of societal structures. '[T]he cinematic mode of production becomes the necessary means of extending the work day while reducing real wages on a global scale […] cinema extracts human labor and pays in fun' (ibid., 13) – it is a regime of apparently 'soft-power', masking its own inherent violence. Like Harvey's conception of neoliberalism, cinematic capitalism is a non-declarative global system that shapes and restricts society.

The 'experience economy' is another business phenomenon I will use to situate the arena spectacular. In this business strategy the very nature of commodity is altered. Rather than providing goods or services, businesses instead look for ways to 'charge for time' (Gilmore & Pine, 2011). This is a tendency that is changing cities dramatically; in chapter 2 I will discuss Las Vegas as a test bed for systems of exploitation that can now be seen all over the world. 'Experiencing' is beyond merely seeing or watching and intersects with the concept of 'aura',

as direct experience of something rooted in specific time and place, even if the commoditised experience is necessarily repeatable (if not exactly reproducible). In a fairly straightforward business strategy, these forms offer 'more' than their predecessors, in terms of technology and sensory information; in marketing terms this adds to the 'experience'. Rather than debate the insubstantiality of constructed images, sites or even hypertextual 'worlds' (such as the 'world of Batman'), businesses in the experience economy insist on the *reality* of the experience of those images, sites and worlds, and this realness, this particular authenticity, comes with a price tag.

Commenting upon the decline through the twentieth century of public amusements, David Nasaw writes that '[n]o society can prosper without centers of civility and public sociability', and that '[w]hat we require today is a new generation of spectacular and accessible public amusements to do the same' (1993: 256). Beller's work is useful here to both explain the desire for a way out of more usual contemporary spectatorship of screens (i.e. because it is still work) that might be sold within the arena spectacular. Theatre is often defended as experience that brings an audience together as a community (Philip Auslander cites Peggy Phelan and Eric Bogosian as proponents of this view [1999]). Of the arena, Elias Canetti writes that we enter it and 'turn our backs on the city' (Canetti, 1962: 28). Is part of that which we turn our backs on its anonymity; do we hope to find a sense of communion within the arena, that is lacking elsewhere? It could be argued that, especially in my example of the 2012 Olympics, the arena spectacular provides this. However, this view is not supported by my analysis of the arena spectacular. My use of the term 'neoliberal' is inherently accusatory. It has been used by authors such as Mark Fisher and Anna Minton to expose a destructive and often violent doctrine hiding in 'plain sight' within free-market economics and 'common sense' deregulation, carried out by a neoliberal, self-reducing state. By aligning the arena spectacular with neoliberal politics, I am in essence stating that they are part of the problem, *the* problem of our times – the invasion of rampant capitalism into every area of existence.

I will use Foucault's idea of the 'heterotopia', the 'other space', in order to situate the arena spectacular as part of a dominant system. This is a system that, spatially and politically, is increasingly postcivil and in which people are situated primarily as individual consumers, rather than citizens and members of communities. Foucault is useful here because of his insistence that human space is divided up into portions that have different functions but I will argue, all serve to reinforce the existing power structure. I will argue that the arena spectacular is such a space – one that offers an edge to the digital 'spectacle' (after Debord); something 'real' and 'live' as opposed to networked and recorded, but still part of the same post-cinematic and neoliberal media regime.

<u>Range and Structure</u>

I have now established a context within which to analyse the arena spectacular. I have grounded it in post-cinema and explained why I have chosen to situate it within this dominant cultural system rather than a theatrical heritage. It would be possible to situate the arena spectacular solely in relation to digital images – I have broadened my study to include the commoditised urban and the monetised 'experience'. In her book *Fair Play* (2013), Jen Harvie explores a new turn in performance that could also be used to contextualise the arena spectacular. Her examples include immersive theatre such as *The Masque of the Red Death* (2007) by British company Punch Drunk. There are connections here, particularly to the experience economy, and contemporary labour (the company infamously relies on armies of low- or un-paid workers – a neoliberal hallmark they share with the Olympics) and these immersive shows are also arguably post-cinematic. However, their attempted dissolution of the divide between spectator and performer situates them very far away from cinema – my examples instead attempt to preserve this cinematic boundary.

The three arena spectacular case studies have for the most part been self-selecting, limited as they are to events that have been staged in London since 2007, when the O2 arena opened, up until the London Olympics in 2012. Why focus on Britain? None of my touring arena

spectaculars are British productions – Britain being just one stop on global tours. Aside from the convenience of being able to see more productions in my home country than anywhere else, the reason is the extent of Britain's enthusiasm for the post-cinematic arena spectacular, and the use of it as the model for the Olympic opening ceremony. This ceremony seems to expand upon a latent social and political use of the format and more deeply embed it in current neoliberal ideology.

In Britain, the arenas are built on ex-industrial land (cheap, regenerated land) on the city's edge. Like the ancient arena, they function (or are perceived to function) as part of a city – it matters to an audience that their city plays host to a performance; think of a musician announcing 'Hello Liverpool', or 'Goodnight London!' This might seem to contradict its status as part of globalised, networked 'post-cinema', in which culture is increasingly standardised across the world. However, I will show in my chapter on the Millennium Dome and Las Vegas that today a diversified entertainment industry meets what Steven Miles calls the city of 'spaces for consumption' (Miles, 2010) that are connected as spaces of global capitalism. Furthermore I will demonstrate that a touristic notion of 'aura' (Urry, 2002) can become attached to a reproducible image presented in a specific space. It is in this situation that Las Vegas, despite its apparently unusual economy and aesthetic, becomes exemplary of, and indeed the model for contemporary entertainment-orientated neoliberal urban space. Therefore, in order to analyse the arena spectacular, it must be specifically sited somewhere, even if only temporarily. Britain is as good an example as anywhere – a country that has elected neoliberal governments for the last 35 years; ever since Margaret Thatcher's coming to power (David Harvey, amongst many others, regards subsequent British Labour governments as neoliberal also [Harvey 2005: 2]). However, Britain's pride in threatened institutions such as the welfare state and particularly the NHS, makes this version of neoliberalism particularly contradictory. In my chapter on the Olympic opening ceremony I will show links between the contrary nature of neoliberalism and the nature of the live post-cinematic arena spectacular.

In a sense, this is an historical project, dealing with the first decade of the twenty-first century. I have also limited myself to shows that I attended myself (except for the Olympic opening ceremony). The other objects of study illustrate the context for these shows, in particular digital cinema, the Las Vegas strip, Cirque du Soleil and street theatre company Royale de Luxe. This structure will allow me to broaden the context and impact of the arena spectacular from its most immediate references in cinema and the arena itself, to the city and then to society and the nation. I will argue that the specific shows I am looking at were made in a period of experimentation within the format – one that only really comes to fruition with the Olympic opening ceremony.

In her definition of the film spectator, Michele Aaron says that 'the spectator is not a viewer. The viewer […] is the live, breathing, actual audience member […] This viewer exists in sharp contrast to the spectator as 'subject', a product of the ideological machinations of cinema' (Aaron, 2007: 1). It is this hypothetical spectator rather than Aaron's 'live, breathing' viewer that I will be considering. As with many entertainment products, the audience – the spectator – must be created by intense marketing (the shows' 'offer'). This is one reason why I will not be including material such as audience surveys here. My chapters are neither ethnographic studies of audiences, nor purely technical analyses of the shows themselves. Rather, my analysis is an attempt at grasping the affective 'offer' of these products – through their advertising, merchandise and the shows themselves. What is their affordance; what experiences do they allow and how does this benefit both consumers and producers? As Aaron says, a spectator is a product of 'ideological machinations' (Aaron, 2007: 1), and it is these that I am also interested in.

Another term for Rockwell's 'visceral' response to spectacle could be the 'stupid' response. Rather than a pejorative insult, 'stupid' here is another way of describing the unthinking, simply sensorial absorption of the spectacular. This again might seem contradictory to the detailed references made within the shows, however, the Olympic ceremony was written of in these terms; as 'embracing the obvious' (Hyde, 2012), showing Britain as 'stopping worrying'

about what it meant to be British. Indeed, in a world often felt as complicated and demanding, and in an economy where work and leisure are increasingly mixed (Beller 2006; Berardi 2009), 'switching off' could be a significant part of their appeal. If the arena spectacular is not an 'answer', then perhaps the analysis of it can further clarify what the problems are. These overlapping concerns situate the arena spectacular within a historical lineage of other forms and genres, but also allow an analysis of it as a product of specifically twenty-first century Western culture and commerce. These areas of analysis add up to how the arena spectacular comes to be understood; how it might become legible to its audience; what an arena spectacular *is*.

This a study of a particular media formation, but also of capital: analysing changes in media is a way of tracking changes in capital. Writing about the relation of tourism to general life, John Urry says that studying deviance is a way of learning about 'normality' (2002: 2). Despite their oddness and economic and cultural marginality, as contingent, parasitic works perhaps these 'deviant' productions can be seen in some ways as archetypal products of the early twenty-first century.

Chapter 1: Post-cinema

My case studies in this chapter allow me to look at the arena spectacular firstly in relation to cinema's origins (in literature, exhibitions, theatre and public amusements amongst others), and then to situate it solidly in post-cinema. I will describe a number of adaptations of the Ben-Hur narrative, and establish a set of pre-cinematic practices that fed into mainstream cinema. A symmetry that can be seen in the flexible pre- and post-cinematic landscapes will allow an account of how remediation is demonstrable in the history of Ben-Hur. This account, and what I will argue about cinema's impact upon spectatorship, will further illustrate the arena spectacular's position as part of Williams' idea of a dominant culture, which adopts new elements via a process of remediation. The reasons and shape of this apparently newfound appreciation for old tropes at the moment of post-cinema will be further explored in the following chapter on *Walking With Dinosaurs Live*.

'Cinema' and 'post-cinema' are both terms that I am using to denote historical periods by way of their dominant 'media regimes', as Steven Shaviro would put it (2010); the terms denote more than simply an industrial entertainment system (Hollywood studios, for example), or the technology of theatrical presentation (a projector and a screen in a darkened room). I have already stated that the arena spectacular might initially be regarded as a 'living fossil' – the resurrected 'dinosaur' would be a theatrical spectacle such as the ones staged by the Kiralfy brothers in the second half of the nineteenth-century mentioned in my introduction (Sugg Ryan, 2010), or indeed the original stage version of Ben-Hur, which arrived in London in 1902 and included a live chariot race. However, the generations attending arena spectaculars live in a culture dominated by screen-based entertainments. Because this is a study of a new popular entertainment format, that format must be examined within a twenty-first century context that is sill cinematic.

At the time of its proliferation, cinema represented a huge change in spectatorship, leading to a period of rapid experimentation and necessary remediation. As I progress to the period of post-cinema, we will see a similar period of experimentation, with the arena spectacular as one

result. Cinema can be placed on a continuum of leisure and art that includes the amusements, theatre and exhibitionary practices that spawned it (according to Gunning, 1990; Klawans, 1999), and also industrial tourism (see chapter 2) – ways of spending spare cash and time away from work that all arose with industrial, urban modernity. Following Stanley Cavell's idea on cinema as 'the world viewed' (Cavell, 1979), I will establish that although a lineage can be drawn from other earlier amusements, because of its photographic nature and the manner in which it 'screens' the world for the spectator, cinema represents a fundamental break in spectatorship that affects everything produced after it, including the arena spectacular.

i. *Ben Hur Live*

As a way of exploring the various adaptations of the Ben-Hur story, I will describe how the climactic race scene has been rendered in the different versions of the story and discuss examples of what each new interpretation borrows or discards from its predecessors. Each offers different kinds of detail and uses different methods to engage the audience in a set of images. This chain of adaptations also illustrates the development of cinematic spectatorship, through some very different ways of presenting images to an audience.

Two short chapters in Wallace's 1880 novel *Ben-Hur* describe the chariot race in which Ben-Hur beats his Roman rival Messala, the first of which does nothing but describe the venue's architecture and the audience within it. Wallace's attempt at offering authenticity comes via detailed description and imagining of place. We are given detailed coordinates with which to imagine ourselves inside the ancient circus:

> Directly behind the balustrade on the coping of the balcony is the first seat, from which ascend the succeeding benches, each higher than the one in front of it, giving to view a spectacle of surpassing interest – the spectacle of a vast space ruddy and glistening with human faces, and rich with vari-coloured costumes. (Wallace, 1996: 228)

And on into the next chapter:

> Let the reader first look down upon the arena, and see it glistening in its frame of dull-grey granite walls, let him then, in this perfect field, see the chariots, light of wheel, very graceful, and ornate as paint and burnishing can make them. (ibid., 235)

Like the later arena spectacular, the book emphasises the beauty of the bodies of the racers: 'let [the reader] see the drivers, erect and statuesque, undisturbed by the motion of the cars, their limbs naked, and fresh and ruddy with the healthful polish of the baths' (ibid.). We find a blatant eroticism in the text, something repeated in subsequent films with classical settings.

Similarly to the use of different camera positions in the later film versions, the novel contrasts different perspectives within the arena. The reader's 'view' of the race is controlled by the author, as it is by the film director, unlike the arena spectacular's spectator who is free to look wherever they wish. Almost the whole chapter on the progression of the race itself is told from the perspective of Ben-Hur's relations, amongst the crowd. We are given small sections of dialogue as if we are overhearing other members of the audience: 'there was a prolonged hum of voices in every quarter. 'See, see! The green goes to number four on the right – the Athenian is there […] And Messala – yes, he is in number two'' (ibid., 232). Details of the crowd's reactions to events are interspersed, to give the reader the impression that they sit there within it: '[e]very face nearby, and every face in the lessening perspective, turned to the east, as all eyes settled upon the gates of the six stalls which shut in the competitors' (ibid., 233). In a manner suggestive of the cross cutting of the film versions, Wallace does take the reader down to Ben-Hur's point of view at certain points; 'Ben-Hur felt his own resolution harden […] At whatever cost, at all hazards, he would humble this enemy! […] [h]e had his plan, and, confiding in himself, he settled to the task never more observant, never more capable. The air about him seemed aglow with a renewed and perfect transparency' (ibid., 237). After this midpoint in the narration of the race, we are given a blend of the two perspectives, with an emphasis on that of the spectators:

> So, while the spectators were shivering at the Athenian's mishap […] Ben-Hur swept around and took the course neck and neck with Messala, though on the outside. The marvellous skill shown in making the change thus from the extreme left across to the right without appreciable loss did not fail the sharp eyes upon the benches; the Circus seemed to rock and rock with prolonged applause. (ibid., 237)

Wallace keeps the tension of the scene high by giving the reader the perspective of the arena crowd, most of whom are not exactly sure what is happening. Thus, Wallace achieves an exciting written, purely textual race by contrasting different viewpoints: the a-historical and

disengaged one of the author and reader, the spatially distant but emotionally involved ones amongst the crowd and the physically involved one of Ben-Hur himself.

Alexander von Wagner's painting 'The Chariot Race' was completed in 1882 (it now hangs in Manchester Art Gallery). It was not explicitly drawn from Wallace's novel, but made in a time when it was extremely popular. It captures a dynamic and dramatic scene in one static image. The viewpoint, which is seemingly from another speeding chariot but looking back at the other racers, pre-empts depictions of the race in film. The painting's shape might also seem to pre-empt the super-widescreen format of the 1959 film version.

fig. 6 Alexander von Wagner *The Chariot Race*, 1882

Something it shares with the novel is an attention to architectural detail and the clear illustration of the scene and its occupants. This is just one example of a whole genre of popular paintings of the ancient world, many of which would have toured in exhibitions with huge fee-paying crowds (the work of John Martin is a more famous example, and the subject of a large exhibition at Tate Britain, London; *Apocalypse* [2012] – also the panoramas, dioramas and exhibitions catalogued in Richard Altick's *The Shows of London* [1978]). Incidentally, Walter Benjamin sees the fee-paying, mass viewing of painting as the beginning of the 'crisis' in painting brought about by mechanical reproduction: '[p]ainting simply is in no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience' [1999:228]). Evidentally, painting as a medium also underwent significant disruption at the time of early cinema.

A poster for Marc Klaw and Abraham Lincoln Erlanger's 1899 stage version very clearly

draws upon von Wagner's painting, but has added to it a kind of graphic proscenium-arch:

fig. 7 Poster for 19th century stage version of Ben-Hur

William S. Hart, the actor who originally played Messala in this stage production wrote in his

autobiography that '[i]t was an enormous production, and I have been told that Klaw and

Erlanger had every dollar they possessed in it' (Hart, 1994: 146). In their production, the

chariot race was staged with horse-drawn chariots on moveable treadmills; what Hart refers to

as 'that gargantuan mass of wheels, boards and steel cables', allowing stagehands to determine

the relative positions of the race teams (ibid., 153). Hart describes the scene:

> The whirring of the treadmills, the machinelike cracking of our whips, the pounding of
>
> the horses' rubber-shod hoofs […] [t]he noise was deafening – the applause was
>
> thunderous – we were at the center of the stage – we held there …*we held there*. (ibid.,
>
> 153)

The description of chariots held within the frame of the theatre's proscenium again recalls

paintings such as Von Wagner's but also pre-empts the cinematic framing of the race to come,

in which cameras mounted on moving vehicles allow the racing chariots to stay 'static' within the film frame.

The stage show was highly successful, and even had a London production in 1902 (Ellis, 2003). However, even at this early point in cinema history, comparison to film was inevitable: '[t]he management could hire Madison Square arena for a veritable chariot race and vitascope or vitagraph it […] [t]he pictures on a screen […] would be closer to realism and more faithful in illustration', wrote Hillary Bell in 1899 (quoted in Vardac, 1949: 78). Sidney Olcott did something very similar to that which Bell suggests, when in 1907 he enlisted a group of New Jersey firemen to stage a chariot race on a local beach, and made a fifteen-minute, silent film version of *Ben-Hur* (Benson, 1993). Fred Niblo directed the 1925 epic silent version of *Ben-Hur* for the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio. This time the film ran over two hours and, as well as the chariot race, included a sea-battle scene from the novel. The final cut of the film includes shots in which cast members can be seen jumping into the sea as fires started on the ships for visual effect get out of control, and a real chariot crash in which several stuntmen and horses are visibly injured (Benson, 1993). Despite the apparent loss of life, the film reputedly saved the studio that made it.

In the forty-five years between Wallace writing the story and Niblo's silent film, Ben-Hur and his chariot race had become a story and a set of images available in many different forms – a range that is reflective of the nature of spectacular entertainment during this period in Europe and America. Before moving on to the most famous film version, from 1959, I want to look at some specific theories around early film which especially pertain to the Olcott and Niblo versions.

Cinema, Fairs and Attractions

I have established that 'remediation' is the pertinent model for the kind of formal adaptations that I have described above, and will analyse within the arena spectacular. Remediation is not

a new phenomenon, and a clear example of it can be found in the development of the feature film. As a new medium, in the early part of the twentieth century, it had to make itself understood by reference to older ones, much like the arena spectacular genre does today.

Deborah Sugg Ryan has written that

> [s]pectacle, deriving from both high and popular culture, was a major part of leisure activities in Edwardian Britain. Examples of the spectacular in fine art include tableaux vivants and history and narrative painting. Edwardian visitors to museums and art galleries could participate in the spectacle of the exhibition. There were distinctively spectacular forms of theater […] [i]n addition to these, Edwardians could view lantern-slide lectures, waxworks, fairs, circuses, magic shows, balloon ascents, sideshows, and street entertainers[…] [w]omen had the department stores, and men had the spectacle of professional sport. (2010: 45)

It was into this context of a range of already established spectacles that cinema was born. It therefore remediated them in order to make itself legible. Norman M. Klein has pointed out that cinema, even up to the nineteen-thirties, still used 'Victorian devices' from the vaudeville stage (Klein 2004: 221). In the 1940's (before the Wyler version of *Ben-Hur*), A. Nicholas Vardac wrote an account of the collision between early film and theatre, proposing theatre as cinema's precursor in the production of visual spectacles. Vardac points out that the Broadway version of the story, including fourteen different painted backdrops in its first act alone, resulted in 'a dramatic pattern akin to the editorial fabric of cinema' (1949: 79). Indeed, Vardac cites Fred Niblo's 1925 Ben-Hur film as the pinnacle of a certain tendency in theatre, the 'realist-romantic' cycle (ibid., 251). Early cinema, he argues, was understood via its precursors.

If we regard early cinema in this manner, it appears as something much more like the new hybrid format of the new arena spectacular, rather than the solidified medium we know as 'the feature film' today. In his now famous essay 'The Cinema of Attraction: Early Film, Its spectator, and the Avant-Garde' (1990), film scholar Tom Gunning proposes a revision of

early film history. Gunning's conception of the context for viewing and understanding films in this early period leads him towards 'a conception that sees cinema less as a way of telling stories than as a way of presenting a series of views to an audience, fascinating because of their illusory power […] and exoticism' (ibid., 230): a cinema of attractions. Gunning places film images much more in the realm of spectacle that Sugg Ryan describes above, rather than in relation to narrative theatre. For him, the evidence for this sensibility lies as much in the exhibition of the film as the films themselves – he cites the fact that cinema owners would exhibit individual sequences of film that would be purchased separately, and that one of the major spaces for seeing films was amongst vaudeville mixed bills (1990: 231; 232). The term 'attractions', Gunning borrows from Eisenstein (ibid., 232). However, he is at pains to point out that the origin, '[t]hen as now, the "attraction" was a term of the fairground, and for Eisenstein […] it primarily represented their favourite fairground attraction, the roller coaster' (ibid., 232). Gunning argues that the 'attractions' model has been a constant presence in cinema:

> The 1924 version of *Ben Hur* was in fact shown at a Boston theater with a timetable announcing the moment of its prime attractions […] The Hollywood advertising policy of enumerating the features of a film, each emblazoned with the command "See!", shows this primal power of the attraction running beneath the armature of narrative regulation. (ibid., 234)

Gunnings work establishes the primacy of narrative in film as a later development, rather than a fundamental quality. 1924 is the latest date Gunning cites in his description of original attractions cinema; the popularity of recorded sound for him brings this more overt 'attractions' period to an end.

DW Griffith is often thought of as the inventor of the American feature film, ushering in the medium with his *Birth of a Nation* in 1915. Scholarship around his work reveals further examples of remediation in early cinema. In *Film Follies* (1999), Stuart Klawans proposes that in this period of flexibility and development of the medium, DW Griffith's second epic

historical film *Intolerance* (1916) drew upon Griffith's experience of contemporary American world's fairs: '*Intolerance* must have been inspired by the San Francisco fair, if only because it resembled nothing else' (ibid., 12). Deborah Sugg Ryan also remarks in her footnotes that Griffith must have drawn upon Edwardian pageants for his films (2010, no. 18). In attempting to work in the then new feature film format, both writers argue that Griffith *must have* remediated (although neither use this term) media that were already both aesthetically and commercially established: '[H]e wanted something new; and like anyone in that situation, he could imagine the unknowable only in relation to the things at hand' (ibid., 9). Klawans suggests that expositions were already points of convergence for the various spectacular mediums of the era, before they themselves were subsumed into cinema:

> the World's Fairs brought together the different levels of urban society. They also encompassed many of the forms of nineteenth-century spectatorship. They offered exhibitions of painting and sculpture; panoramas; waxworks displays and dioramas […] Historians have cited all these artforms and entertainments as precursors of spectatorship at the movies. All were available at the fairs. (1999, 13)

Interestingly, the remediation of exhibition into filmmaking worked both ways, with early 'pro-filmic events' being incorporated into an existing economy of exhibitions:

> [Producer Carl] Laemmle had celebrated the opening of his vast new studio complex in Los Angeles, Universal City, only to find himself swamped by 20,000 curiosity seekers. Showman that he was, he ordered the construction of bleachers for future visitors and proceeded to promote Universal City as a tourist attraction, comparable […] to the Panama-Pacific Exposition. (ibid., 9)

This was at the very beginnings of the Hollywood system, but the same tactic was employed on the 1959 *Ben-Hur* film, the sets of which 'became a regular daily tour for the sightseeing buses of Rome' (Freiman, 1959, under 'Random Revelations' – Freiman also states that it was Laemmle that recognised William Wyler's potential when he worked for Universal in the 1920's [under 'The Wyler Touch']). Today in the arena spectacular we can see some of the

same symptoms: a film opening out of the screen into something like a fair. In the early days of cinema, the 'pro-filmic event' was already a spectacle in its own right, a century before Danny Boyle proposed his 'live film' Olympic opening ceremony. We see that, like the arena spectacular of today, early film was a flexible format consisting of a new set of technologies often put to use in ways that remediated older mediums; making itself understood through tropes and techniques already known to the audiences of the time.

Let us return to the depictions of the chariot race. A film version allows an artificial sense of speed to be built up – essentially, a specific sense of *time* is achieved by the way in which *space* is shown; for example, moving cameras that track alongside the chariots, fast cuts from one racer; to another; to a horses hooves. Unlike Wallace's original novel, in the Wyler's 1959 race sequence we are never shown a shot from the spectators' point of view. Although the scene is eight minutes long, the nearest things to this are some shots upwards, from the arena floor towards the spectators. The camera is mostly close on the racers, their horses and their chariots, and almost always at their level. The sequence must have been extremely difficult to film, and this focus on the racers emphasises the fluency with which it has been made. In contrast to the 1925 version, diegetic sound (sounds matching actions and objects depicted on screen) is used rather than music, perhaps to concentrate (in this scene, at least) on a kind of realism also present in the highly detailed sets, props and costumes.

Although Wyler's *Ben-Hur* is an example of Hollywood studio production *par excellence* – in its use of star actors, lavish production, technical innovation and heavy marketing – it could be argued that in fact it stands at the very early stages of 'post-cinema'. The thirty years in between Niblo's and Wyler's films had seen the golden age of Hollywood arrive, peak and begin to wane. At the time, the studio MGM who owned the rights to the story, after having already produced Niblo's version, were in financial trouble and needed a hit film to keep them open (Benson, 1993). To transpose Williams' 'dominant, residual and emergent' model onto the media (if not the societal epoch) of some of my examples: in the late 1950's, when the most famous Ben-Hur film was released, those reading Lew Wallace's original book are using

a 'residual' medium. Anyone going to the cinema to watch MGM's latest film version in 1959 are partaking in a 'dominant' medium – albeit, by that time, one transferring to television. One could argue that the use of the super-wide film format on the 1959 *Ben-Hur* makes it 'emergent' – however, I think this more neatly fits into Williams' category of 'merely novel', as this did not disrupt or replace the, then dominant, cinema presentation. Wyler's Ben-Hur is therefore still a remediating, and rather conservative use of 'cutting edge' film techniques available at the time. In the 1950's, cinema was losing out to television, and it was felt that only large, spectacular productions could draw in crowds in sufficient numbers. Everything about the film is oversized; its budget, its sets and its claims to 'epic narrative' status (see Freiman, 1959). The film was even shot in the extra wide screen 'MGM Camera 65' format (achieving an aspect ratio similar to that of Von Wagner's painting [see above]). Under threat from emergent television, MGM employed 'boosterist' tactics and the selling of an 'experience' (see chapter 2), ahead of the coining of either of these terms in business. We see a re-emergence of a sort of 'attractions' model cinema in the call for the audience to 'see!' the assembled elements, as they were with the separately listed scenes in Olcott's *Ben-Hur*; the inarguable ingredients of the film offered as proof of the value of the film.

We have now reached the origin of the 'incomparable pictures' of 1959, mentioned in some of the promotion of *Ben Hur Live*. As an example of remediation, *Ben Hur Live* attempts to contain a range of images and sounds that in some way match up to the range available in screen images, but with the added trick of live performance: the experiential inflation of the 'new' (although not technologically new) and therefore 'improved'. Reference to this base of existing images in other formats render the show, as an example of a new format (the arena spectacular), legible, and therefore sellable. The arena spectacular isn't emergent or residual because of its reliance upon media that is still dominant. The inevitable comparison to screen images will be seen to be both the biggest promise and biggest potential flaw in *Ben Hur Live*. However, if we assume that not everyone who sees *Ben Hur Live* goes home disappointed (the show is still on tour, after initial difficulties in 2009), what has replaced the excitement of the film; what does the show promise beyond the particular qualities of the older screen images?

<u>Authenticity</u>

The hyperbolic advertising that always accompanies arena spectaculars usually sells a show as the 'most authentic' – in *Ben Hur Live*'s case, this is frequently expressed in terms of a 'journey through time' (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009) – the audience will not just passively watch a show but be transported to an ancient world. For a show actually based on a work of fiction, this pseudo-historical context becomes useful because, unlike other arena spectaculars such as *Batman Live*, *Ben Hur Live* does not represent a recognised, trademarked 'brand'. It cannot become part of what Bolter and Grusin call a 'mock Gesamtkunstwerk' (2000: 68) by reference to branding of the sort we will see in *Batman Live*, so instead it refers to history, as we will see again in *Isles of Wonder*.

Abraham's show is not the only arena spectacular that exploits an historical setting to achieve a certain kind of 'realness'. However, a unique feature of this show's claim to authenticity is Ben-Hur's particular relationship to religious devotion. Lew Wallace gave his book the subtitle 'A Tale of the Christ', as the life of his character Ben-Hur intersects with that of Christ at several points in the narrative. This devotional aspect of the book was no doubt a contributing factor in its huge success, going some way to temper or justify the more exoticist and brutal parts of the story to religious American readers. It could be that the novel became a huge popular success in America because it remediates the bible itself, the one book that most ordinary Americans would be familiar with at that time, even if they had not read a novel before. In Franz Abraham's version we saw an actor playing Jesus, and in perhaps the most surprising part of the production, the crucifixion is acted-out in the middle of the arena floor. This refers us to another performance trope that Abraham doesn't include in his introductory list: the passion play. A reborn Catholic, Franz Abraham is an intriguing figure. On the original release of the show he made much of his own sacrifices for it, and described it as 'an opera for God' (Hoyle, 2009). His own role is hybrid, encompassing both a kind of old-testament-style offering to God and a Romantic self-sacrifice for 'Art'. However, generally the arena spectacular format's proposed authenticity is not connected to historical or religious

truth, it is to do with spectators witnessing actual, real events. This notion of authenticity offered against those 'incomparable pictures' of the feature film version has two major facets: that of 'boosterist' expenditure, and 'authentic experience' of 'liveness' beyond the cinematic 'screen barrier'.

Bolter and Grusin's argument in their book *Remediation* (2000) plots each medium on an arc of 'authenticity', with each new one claiming to be more 'real' than the one previous. They find this easily demonstrable in industries such as computer gaming, where the authors perceive a claim to authenticity through interactivity; a gamer-controlled viewpoint, rather than a predetermined camera shot is proposed as claiming to be more real; more like direct sensory experience (2000: 68). They, in fact, make very casual use of the term 'authentic' which to them seems to be akin to 'affective'; an emotional, or even bodily engagement with a text. For example, rock concerts allow an 'authentic experience' for the audience (ibid., 71); as do theme parks (ibid., 170). The authors' idea of 'authenticity' comes from a forgetting of the act of representation, and therefore forgetting that one is 'reading' a medium rather than a 'real' object (this refers us back to Rockwell's claims about the 'visceral' nature of spectacle [2006: 15]) – or perhaps, experiencing a 'world' as in *Batman Live*.

In his book on designer and architect Mark Fisher, who designed elements of this show as well as the Millennium Show (see chapter 2), Eric Holding identifies this kind of spectacle as inherent to the type of performance on which Fisher worked, which 'draws upon the excesses of its production for the marketing of its product' (2000: 123). This is clearly demonstrated in the 'boosterism' employed in advance publicity materials that exploits remarkable statistical or numerical facts as a way of engaging with its potential audience. Numerical data, showing materials used or money spent, for example, is provided as if representing conclusive evidence that this is, indeed, a 'spectacle that demands to be seen' (ibid.). Holding here acknowledges that, in spectacular shows, we are watching real and demonstrable expenditure, and that is presented as a worthy spectacle in itself.

Ben-Hur has a long-standing relationship to massive expenditure, with both its 1925 and 1959 filmic incarnations nearly ruining (but eventually saving) their studio, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Advertising for the 1959 film attests to its position as the 'most expensive film ever made', it had the 'largest single motion-picture set ever built' for its chariot race scene (Freiman, 1959, under heading 'The Making of the Film'), even its use of the 'biggest sign ever advertising a movie' becomes part of the promotion (Hoyle, 2009). In Ray Freiman's promotional book for the 1959 film, he even cites the amount of human hair that was used to make the wigs for the film: '[m]ore than four hundred pounds were assembled at Cinecittà Studios […] [m]ost of the hair came from peasant women […] famous for their fine hair' (Freiman, 1959, under 'Random Revelations'). In a video interview with the Guardian newspaper, Producer Franz Abraham remained loyal to this tradition in confessing that '[i]f this is not working out, then I am ruined, completely, forever' (sic. Hoyle, 2009). Art Concerts was Abraham's own company, so here he presents the show, which was without any other major investor, as a huge personal risk for himself (ibid.). Through disclosures such as these, made before the show opened in London, Abraham presented himself as a daring visionary. The double-logic of this approach seems to be that a personal project such as his, in which he has invested so much, will be closer to 'real art', but also that Abraham himself is really risking himself, to match the physical risk undertaken by his charioteers. Within a boosterist marketing campaign, financial expenditure is authentic and dramatic – a spectacle in its own right. Personal financial risk can only add to this, making the production itself a dramatic story with interesting characters. These considerations within the production of the show, rather than the experience of watching, add to a complex and indistinct idea of authenticity connected to *Ben Hur Live*, for the most part consisting of proposed direct experience – but direct experience of what?

An obvious point of comparison for *Ben Hur Live* is Ridley Scott's 2000 film *Gladiator*. This hugely popular film might be responsible for the slew of ancient-world epic cinema that in part, provided commercial impetus for a show like *Ben Hur Live*. However, a well-publicised element of *Gladiator*'s production was the enormous amount of computer-generated components required to create naturalistic images of ancient Rome and its huge arena (Cousins

2011 – in fact even actor Oliver Reed's appearance in the film was partly computer generated, the actor having died during the film's production). Part of Abraham's choice of the Ben-Hur story is to do with making a link to a pre-digital spectacle, in reaction to the 'illusion' of CGI:

> The impossible is made possible by the latest engineering. For 2 hours the oldest dream of mankind to go on a journey back in time seems to come true, not only through filmic implementation or virtual animation, but within grasp and sensually noticeable. (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009)

This quote is very telling – note that although technology is highlighted in both instances, filmic and arena, the show has 'engineering', whereas film has 'implementation' and is 'virtual'. The word 'engineering' is meant to connote the physical world: gravity, materials and a physical work, perhaps even a more 'honest' kind of production. In this way the show harks back to an age without computer generated images, which is simultaneously the ancient Roman Empire, Wallace's nineteenth century God-fearing America and 1950's Hollywood. The phrase 'sensually noticeable' is an unusual term, perhaps meant to be sexually suggestive – and I will return to this point shortly. The show's authenticity hinges upon a play between representation and 'reality'. This is different, but related, to the auratic authenticity of, for example, an ancient artefact, rather, this impulse is typified by the show's attempted supersession of the 1959 film and even the technology of cinema-based presentation itself. Rather than the cinema's capability to 'show' an audience things and places (real or imagined – see Woolf, below), the arena spectacular takes us on 'a journey back in time'. It proposes to put the audience in close proximity to these things through physical presence and therefore direct sensory perception of the show, rather than technologically mediated and recorded images. This is the meaning of the term 'live' in the show's title and is also what Bolter and Grusin mean by 'authentic' – getting closer to *the thing*. It is paradoxical that *representation* is proposed as having been dispensed with, leaving pure experience of something 'real', however, this claim only makes sense in relation to the previous film version(s). The

implication is that without the screen, which stands between the cinematic viewer and the action, there is no barrier.

Bolter and Grusin claim that remediation, contains a 'double logic' of 'immediacy' and conversely 'hypermediacy' (2000: 23). '[T]he logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation […] the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible' (ibid., 33). Bolter and Grusin describe a medium such as perspectival painting as being an attempt at transparent 'immediacy' (ibid., 23; they also find this in cinema presentation, following the ideas of Stanley Cavell and Christian Metz). It might seem obvious that an arena spectacular would fall under the category of 'hypermedia', with its various and overt quotations (cinema, comic, circus). However, in terms of live performance, as opposed to recorded actions, it also contains a move towards immediacy, by putting the event in the same time and space as the viewer. As post-cinematic product, it attempts to supersede film by both 'logics' and this is illustrated in the quote above, which emphasises 'the latest engineering' (hypermediacy) and the shedding of 'filmic implementation' (allowing immediacy).

The basis of the arena spectacular's 'live' is the idea of cinematic presentation as 'non-live', the audience 'not present'; the on-screen performances as 'dead.' This can only exist for cinematic/post-cinematic spectators; Christian Metz wrote that a fundamental condition of film is that 'I watch it, but it doesn't watch me watching it'; we are separated completely from the world of the film (1982: 94). This sense of film as a remote world, as screened, meshes with Benjamin's ideas on mechanical reproducibility and the death of the 'aura', as already discussed. Gunning positions his cinema of attractions within the 'Lumiére tradition of "placing the world within one's reach" (1990: 230) – meaning 'within one's *sight*'. By the time the arena spectacular appears, 'the world' is already very much in one's sight – the trajectory of twentieth and twenty-first century media having been one of ever increasing availability of images. To an audience member in the O2, a Google image search, carried out on a smart-phone, brings virtually any image to their screen in moments. We have, in this

sense of availability, achieved the dissolution of the aura and intimacy with reproducible images that Walter Benjamin discerned in the 1930's. The arena spectacular places its images almost literally within one's physical, tactile *reach*, to be directly 'sensually noticeable' – reborn as auratic events.

Does, then, the arena spectacular represent a 'return of the real'? Is the 'real' that of the pre-digital? If so, much of this is achieved via the presence of the actual, living bodies of the performers. In *Ben Hur Live* the performers appear as bodies in peril and bodies presented as sexualised objects. The actual (present, not filmed) flesh of the performers is exoticised and eroticised in *Ben Hur Live*, as in all iterations of the story. In Wallace's novel, he invites the reader to gaze upon the character's bodies: 'let him see the drivers, erect and statuesque, undisturbed by the motion of the cars, their limbs naked, and fresh and ruddy with the healthful polish of the baths' (1996: 235). According to William S. Hart (co-star of the original nineteenth century theatre production), Charles Frohman, a successful theatre producer, said 'Boys, I'm afraid you're up against it – the American public will never stand for Christ and a horse race in the same show' but apparently the American public did and loved it (1994: 149). Indeed, Christ didn't only share the stage with a horse race, Hart wrote that '[i]n the third act of *Ben Hur* I drove a team of horses on the stage among eighty-five dancing girls' (ibid.,150). When speaking of his work on the Millennium Dome show, *Ben Hur Live*'s designer Mark Fisher referred to 'rather sexy and energetic young people doing dangerous and beautiful things only yards away' (Millennium Experience Guidebook, 180) and we see the same logic employed here. Metz's filmic voyeurism is altered: 'I watch it, and it watches me watching it'. This sexualised voyeurism is very much part of *Ben Hur Live*; much is made of the 'orgy' scene in its publicity and these 'erotic scenes' form part of the claim made by its promoters that the show has something for everyone. This component might also lead us to add Las Vegas-style strip shows to Abraham's list of ingredients.

fig. 8 *Ben Hur Live,* 2009 (promotional still)

Part of this voyeurism are fantasies built upon the possibility of really witnessing these bodies

damaged in the several battle scenes or in the chariot race. This is suggested by the references

to the ancient arena, famous for the various deaths met there, but also in part by the history of

the film versions' production. As I described above, the 1925 version includes footage of real,

unintended chariot crashes, and rumours still circulate that the 1959 version contains the same

(Benson 1993). 'Live' is at least in part synonymous with 'alive' – real, living bodies 'within

grasp and sensually noticeable', that could (but probably won't) die, in front of us on the sand

of the arena floor.

Cinematic subjectivity beyond the screen-barrier

All this is always in reference to already-seen film images, but what is the nature of cinema's

'screen barrier' (Rodowick, 2007) and how is it manifested in the early twenty-first century? If

'liveness' is a 'new' device in post-cinema and immediacy is an over-coming of the screen as

barrier, then what is the significance of the cinematic barrier and its post-cinematic traversal?

Following Benjamin's argument that mechanical reproduction, particularly film, marks a break in our perception of artefacts, I propose that we cannot draw a straightforward timeline of spectacle, as Rockwell does in *Spectacle* (2006), we have to impose cinema as a fundamental break. Although cinema has to draw upon what went before it, it changes spectatorship so much that it resets the clock.

Cavell wrote that 'we are not accustomed to seeing things that are invisible, or not present to us, not present with us; or we are not accustomed to acknowledging that we do (except in dreams). Yet this seems, ontologically, to be what is happening when we look at a photograph (or film): we see things that are not present' (Cavell quoted in Rodowick 2007: 64). D.N. Rodowick has written '[t]he advent of photography in the nineteenth century confounded a culture that habitually associated sight or views with spatial and temporal presence […] Sight and space were indelibly associated. This is partially what Walter Benjamin meant by the concept of aura and its subsequent decline in photographic culture' (2007: 64). For example, consider the mythic reaction to this shot of a gun pointed directly at the camera, from Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery*, 1903:
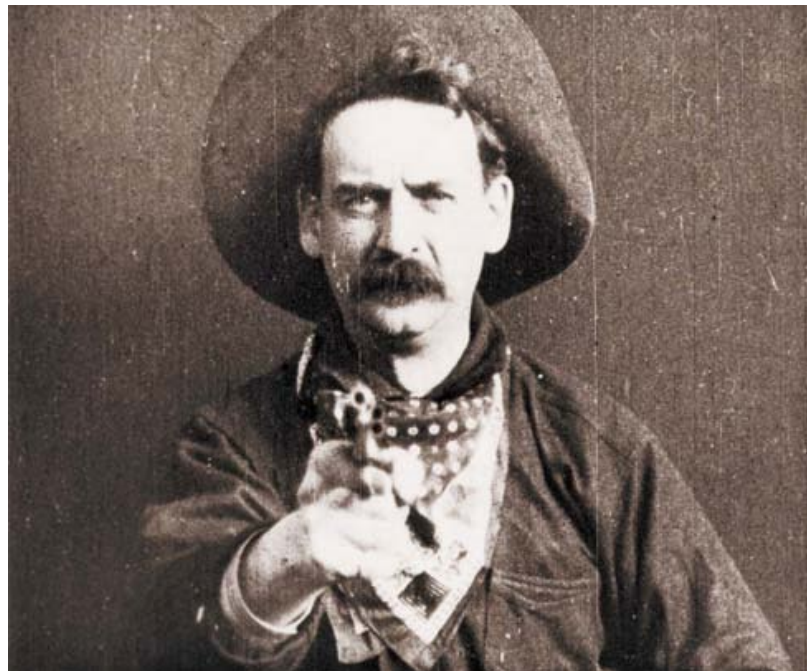

fig. 9 Still from *The Great Train Robbery*, 1903

If we believe stories connected to this shot, audiences ducked out of the way fearful of being shot themselves, so used to connecting vision and spatial presence were they (Nadel, 2005: 429). Walter Benjamin refers to similar encounters with early photography, in which people found the pictures uncomfortable to look at because their subjects appeared to be looking back at the viewer ('A Short History of Photography', 1972). In these instances, early viewers of photographic media could not help but associate vision with presence, so much so that they felt physically threatened by temporally and spatial removed subjects.

It might seem that the screen barrier could have a relation to the theatrical 'fourth wall'; the proscenium-barrier that allows an audience to suspend disbelief and spectate upon a separate, on-stage reality. If the cinema screen is another 'fourth wall', then surely it is not so revolutionary after all. However, there is one crucial and absolute difference: the element of time. The screen barrier is one that lies between the present and the past. Writing on Stanley Cavell's work, Rodowick writes that films present 'a world from which I am absent, from which I am necessarily screened by its temporal absence, yet with which I hope to reconnect or rejoin' (Rodowick, 2007: 63). The coming of the cinema erects a barrier between the viewer and what is viewed, and in the post-cinematic arena spectacular this element of temporal removal remains, despite the 'liveness' of the performance. In 'screening' the world (i.e. putting images of it up on the screen), we also 'screen' (divide) ourselves from it; this is what Cavell argues is the fundamental 'scepticism' of the cinematic subject. '[T]he name scepticism speaks, as I use it, of some new, or new realization of, human distance from the world, or some withdrawal of the world'; the temporal divide that cinema introduces brings a sceptical attitude towards the world as a whole to the fore, and naturalises it (Cavell, 2005: 116). This is such a fundamental change in the possibilities of perception that it is hard to grasp for those born after its occurrence – since then the cinema, and therefore the screened, has been part of the order of the world. This 'screening' perhaps has its point of origin in the creation of *cinema as representation*.

Another significant myth about early-cinema is that the Lumiere brothers terrified Parisian spectators with an image of a train hurtling towards them; people are supposed to have jumped out of their seats in order to avoid being crushed (Cousins, 2011: 23; Nadel, 2005: 429). But in fact, the crucial moment is when those spectators realise that they will not be killed, that they are screened; they are merely *viewing* a world that they are not part of. The illusion is from this point only available to a consciously complicit audience – an audience that, if we follow Rodowick's reading of Cavell, from this point views this screened world with a melancholic desire to 'reconnect or rejoin' with it. The arena spectacular seems to promise to redress this kind of frustration, to undo decades of cinema spectatorship and take the viewer back to a more 'perfect illusion' (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009). The remediated live allows the cinematic viewer to *see things that are present*.

In 1926, novelist Virginia Woolf wrote an essay on the cinema. She questioned whether the subjects depicted in film were:

> more real, or real with a different reality from that which we perceive in daily life? We behold them as they are when we are not there. We see life as it is when we have no part in it. As we gaze we seem to be removed from the pettiness of actual existence. The horse will not knock us down. The king will not grasp our hands. The wave will not wet our feet […] Watching the boat sail and the wave break, we have time to open our minds wide to beauty and register on top of it the queer sensation—this beauty will continue, and this beauty will flourish whether we behold it or not. Further, all this happened ten years ago, we are told. We are beholding a world which has gone beneath the waves. (Woolf, 1993: 55)

This is Cavell's position exactly, beautifully expressed by a writer to whom cinematic subjectivity is a novelty and to whom cinema's 'screening' by temporal and physical absence is much more striking than it is to an audience today.

The 'world viewed' of Cavell's title describes a cinematic subjectivity that becomes the norm in the age of cinema. He writes that '[f]ilm takes our very distance and powerlessness over the

world as the condition of the world's natural appearance' (quoted in Rodowick, 2007: 54). He argues that with acceptance of remote viewing of objects, settings and people (remote in both time and space) the nature of perception changes: 'the advent of photography expresses this distance [from the world] as the modern fate to relate to the world by viewing it, taking views of it, as from behind the self' (Cavell, 2005: 116). In 'What Photography Calls Thinking' Cavell differentiates 'visual representation' from 'visual transcription' (the latter describes photography) 'the relation between photograph and subject does not fit our concept of representation, one thing standing for another. When I see that child there in the photograph […] I know that child is not here, where I am; yet there he stands' (ibid., 117). This altered and fundamentally photographic mode of perception always already includes the 'barrier' of mechanical reproduction, that what we see isn't limited to what appears with us in the space and time we occupy – this is the mode of perception we still live with, and within, today.

It might be thought that we can see a contradiction between Benjamin's dissolution of auratic distance, and Cavell's screening of the world by a photographic barrier, but these observations are not mutually exclusive. Benjamin's non-auratic artwork is indeed potentially accessible anywhere and to anyone; everyone can be intimate with the reproducible artwork. However, Cavell's barrier, which is in the first instance temporal ('[w]e are beholding a world which has gone beneath the waves' [Woolf, 1993: 55]) means that access and intimacy with the artwork (the film) becomes the primary mode of engagement with the world, which becomes automatically sceptical. In linking Cavell's 'world viewed' to a system of capitalist domination that Jonathan Beller describes (and also, in chapter 2, Foucault), I am emphasising the negative implications of industrial and cinematic subjectivity. On the more positive side Cavell uses the scepticism he finds in photography and film to create and define the self, and says that '[a]part from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness as well), I do not understand the value of art' (1979: 22). However, when linked more closely with commodity and capitalistic exploitation, the screen barrier will also be seen as an important feature within consumerist alienation and of political powerlessness within neoliberalism (see chapter 2).

The arena spectacular, then, includes the implicit knowledge of the screen barrier as part of its offer. To refer back to Woolf's impressions of the cinema, in the arena, the King(/Roman Emperor) could shake our hand; the horse (which is always already a film image), actually *could* conceivably knock us down, or more likely one of the actors. In arena spectaculars, this perceptual barrier is proposed as a thing that can be somehow overcome with consumption of these unusual shows. However, these works feed off the still-existing screen barrier, rather than actually destroying it. They remediate as part of a commercial *gesamtkunstwerk*. Since they can only reinforce existing screen-products, how exactly might *Ben Hur Live* incorporate cinematic images, and maintain a 'screen barrier' without a cinema screen?

A promotional video for the Abraham's *Ben Hur Live* suggests a very direct correlation between cinematic images and their 'live' adaptation. It begins with close-ups, in golden light against dark backgrounds, of men putting on armour in slow motion, horses snorting and chariot rails being grasped by strong, dusty hands. In a scene reflective of its nature as promotional material, disseminated in order to build enthusiasm before the event, we see chariot racers 'backstage', getting ready for the race. Immediately we are in the realm of what used to be called a 'swords and sandals' film – of Wyler's 1959 *Ben-Hur* but also Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000); the predominantly yellow-coloured grading of the footage particularly evokes Scott's film, and Zack Snyder's more recent *300* (2006). The footage is cut with sped-up bursts of wheels and hooves, in a style familiar from sports promotion as well as action films. The moving chariot then proceeds into a sandy-floored arena, to cheering crowds common to both gladiator films and contemporary sport. Then comes a long shot of the arena similar to the image in the poster discussed at the top of this chapter, with a chariot circling the centre, incongruously flood-lit and with cameras flashing all around. This spells out the elision of the modern sports arena, with the exotic and violent space of the ancient Roman arena. The video ends with the words 'Enter the Arena' – we are invited to *participate* in the event, to take the role of baying Roman spectators, albeit with permission to use modern camera equipment.

The video illustrates our position as screen-spectators, and then proposes that if we 'enter the arena' we will pierce the screen. This piercing is not in the manner of Brechtian 'alienation' by which an audience becomes empowered by a destruction of separation between audience and actors. Rather, the fiction is shown to be more 'real' by an offered auratic experience of it, that will occur *beyond* screen viewing, as an extension of it. The actions we see in the video are *preparatory*, as if the video images and the cinematic images they so heavily reference are leading up to our presence in the arena; the moment of entry (for the charioteers, and by implication also for us the audience) is where the trailer stops. Whilst the images that we see in this trailer are presented as *creating* the arena spectacular, it seems to say that it itself cannot show us what will happen when we are actually there, ourselves – "so buy a ticket!" The show is presented as the latest development in a line of remediated images and, most importantly, as something that takes us *through* the screen – beyond it, somehow.

Batman Live's video trailer also foregrounds and promotes the show's relation to screen-media; in a computer composited image, the video apparently shows a moment from the show, with the various characters frozen mid-action, and the camera moving around them in a manner reminiscent of the 'bullet-time' technique made popular in the film *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, 1999). Like many other promotional materials for arena spectaculars, it includes images of the audience and their acted awe at the show: the camera glides towards rows of transfixed spectators who appear to be extremely close to the action; a smiling middle-aged man, an awe-struck young girl whose eyes widen slightly (see fig 25, chapter 2). The trailer emphasises the stage setting of the action; every shot bristles with stage lighting, shining at the camera. The frozen moment that the video shows proposes this recorded image as withholding something: the 'liveness' of the show. The trailer's halted-ness is a tease; "if you were here," it seems to say, "with us, you'd see what happens next." The trailer is a medium-specific pun: a video using a technique borrowed from cinema to imitate a paused video, or film still; a halted image made in order to promote a live image by pointing out that it (the live image) *cannot* be halted. The audience would 'have everything' if they were physically present at the show, rather than watching the trailer. Rather than spectating upon a

screen and viewing a world not physically present before you, you are invited to view a real
world that is actually present.

fig. 10 and 11 Stills from video advert for *Batman Live*, 2011

In this way the arena spectacular promises *more* than cinema; more than what the audience
will be familiar with from screen, and therefore temporally screened, spectatorship – the arena
is proposed as *beyond the screen*. But this is a risky gambit. The 'incomparable pictures'
produced in the film versions (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009) must be in the heads of the
spectators – if not the images from the film, then those from the trailer, and the poster, which
both so heavily reference them. This was the view I had of the race from my relatively cheap
seat in the arena:

fig. 12 *Ben Hur Live* at the O2, London, 2009

On the night I saw the show, the audience mostly watched the race as if it was part of a play but some cheered on Ben-Hur as if it were a live sporting event, the outcome of which was yet to be determined. There was, however, little dramatic tension as, although the scene was surely difficult and dangerous to perform, compared to the film this race looked slow. In the arena the producers of the show cannot play with space as Wallace did in the novel, or filmmakers have done since (including the makers of the trailer discussed above). Whereas the film sequences rely on crosscutting shots of the various racers, close-ups of action, details of horses and chariot wheels, in the arena each spectator is has to be content with their one viewpoint, even if they can direct their attention as they please. The film images remain 'incomparable pictures' after all; the screen-barrier remains intact. This is the post-cinematic screen barrier, where the world viewed is still screened from the viewer. Here the screening is not inherently temporal, but rather grounded in the always already seen source material for an adaptation.

The show has 'the power of a rock show, it's the speed of a musical, the magic of a great movie and the passion of a Greek tragedy' and I have added to this list both the titillation of a Las Vegas strip-show and the sadistic voyeurism of the ancient arena. The arena version of the story can be seen as remediating the 1959 film; the production makes sense of itself through the previous film version but claims its 'immediacy' through shedding film technology. The viewing experience is proposed as immediate and live only because it is always compared to watching a film. At the same time, the live arena presentation (also a technological device, of course) is fore-grounded, made 'hypermediate' in its mirroring of the Roman arena and the visibility in the modern arena of lighting rigs, sound equipment and the like (see above illustration). These strategies wed the production to cinema, because they elicit constant comparison to it.

As film was for Benjamin, the arena spectacular is 'new', but the effect is not that of a world-changing technology, nor does it illicit extreme or visceral reactions to it. No one ran out of the arena when Ben-Hur's chariot arrived, no one screams when a T-Rex walks towards them in *Walking With Dinosaurs Live*. Rather than something strikingly new, such as photographic representations of the world animated on a screen, the arena spectacular offers re-presented versions of other forms and material that are quite familiar. Importantly it is not a direct resuscitation of the pre- and proto-cinematic 'attractions' themselves – it can only channel them *through* the cinema screen. This is inherent in not only the terminology of this particular genre (as discussed above, the arena spectacular announces itself as an amalgam in its own generic name and usually the show's individual titles as well), but also the term 'post-cinema', which defines current culture as one best understood in reference to the one preceding it.

I have used the versions of Ben-Hur to introduce cinema as a spectatorial framework to analyse the arena spectacular, and some facets of 'authenticity' that these shows invoke. I have also established the key role of remediation in film history as well as the crucial element of the screen barrier in cinema spectatorship, and argued that that barrier persists, even when the arena spectacular claims to traverse it. If cinema creates 'the world viewed' in the twentieth

century, what has changed since its 'screen barrier' first appeared and what within that leads to the desires for aura catered for in the arena spectacular? In the following section I will discuss the digital and a set of economic and political factors existing in post-industrial societies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries to further explain the arena spectacular format.

ii. Walking with Dinosaurs Live

Walking with Dinosaurs Live, or *Walking with Dinosaurs – The Arena Spectacular*, as it has also been titled, was first performed in Australia in 2007 (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* website, 2009). It reached the UK in 2009 and, according to its website, has been seen by 'over 8 million people in 217 cities' (ibid.). It consists of 'life-size' puppets representing a range of prehistoric animals, with an actor narrating.

The show is a loose adaptation of the BBC television series *Walking with Dinosaurs* (1999), which was made in the style of a wildlife documentary, depicting prehistoric creatures using techniques in computer-generated imagery that were new at the time; it is from this format that the show takes its gently pedagogic tone. The show adapts and remediates many forms and tropes, including cinema, television and puppet theatre. With production company Global Creatures' giant puppets circulating in the arena, the show lands somewhere between a zoo, a circus and a museum display, but Global Creatures suggest that the format is new:

> It wasn't until Sonny Tilders and his team brought these magical and beautiful creatures to life that I realised we had created a new form of world-class entertainment (Gerry Ryan, chairman, Global Creatures (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* programme 2013)

The puppetry of *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* is on a scale similar to that which features in the National Theatre's *Warhorse* (Stafford, 2007) and the productions of street-event company Royal de Luxe (see chapter 2) that both also rely upon very visible technologies in order to set themselves apart from cinema and digital entertainment. Screen representations of dinosaurs are almost as old as cinema itself, for example the first animated film, *Gertie the Dinosaur* by American cartoonist Windsor McKay released in 1914, depicts a line-drawn dinosaur (McKay, 1914). However, it could be argued that the oldest predecessor of this show is the display of fossilised skeletons, which are often constructed to suggest that the viewer imagine the dead creature whilst it was alive and animated, breathing; walking; fighting. Perhaps an awareness of the internal bone structures through displays of fossils inspired the publicity around how

Global Creatures' puppets work and what they look like inside. However, rather than focussing on adaptation as I did with *Ben Hur Live*, I want to use this show to explore post-cinema in more detail – as an aesthetic and technical context and a distinct phase of the post-industrial capitalist epoch.

I saw the show at the O2 Arena in early 2013 – the second time it had toured the UK. The programme includes an account from Tim Haines, the producer of the original television programme:

> [the BBC] wanted [a new series] to appeal to the widest possible audience […] This was only a couple of years after Jurassic Park had come out which set a new benchmark in dinosaur imagery, so rather naively I suggested we use the same techniques to make a series of prehistoric natural history programmes […] Overall the aim was to create an immersive experience that was both spectacular and informative. (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* programme, 2013)

Reminiscent of the narrator in *Ben Hur Live*, this show includes a wandering actor on the arena floor, relaying interpretive information explaining the action via radio microphone:

> The role of Huxley, the Paleontologist who takes you through the 200 million year journey describing the events and the dinosaurs, is played by an actor. His script has been verified by real Paleontologists and approved by the BBC who produced the award winning TV series "WALKING WITH DINOSAURS" on which our show is based. One of their most important hallmarks for the series is that it be as accurate as current science allows – and we have followed in their footsteps, with their guidance. (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* website, 2009)

Like *Ben Hur Live*, it promises to transport its audience back in time. Although the narrator does relay information about the dinosaurs and a narrative of sorts, culminating in the cataclysmic meteor impact at the end of the Cretaceous period, we really just witness the 'animals' 'walking, running, feeding and fighting' (Tim Haines, *Walking with Dinosaurs Live*

programme, 2013). It is a series of vignettes, each introducing one or two species of animal, followed by some action between them, for example, a pack of predators hunting, or horned herbivores fighting. Each scene builds with climactic music and sound effects, and the puppets parade around the arena floor so as to give the whole audience, seated around three sides of the arena, ample chance to see them. Again like *Ben Hur Live*, in the absence of a sequence of filmed and edited shots to direct the viewers' attention, the narrator moves around the arena floor pointing out particular details.

The larger puppets are animatronic and mounted on wheeled bases, with the smaller dinosaurs performed by puppeteers in elaborate costumes, allowing faster and freer movement. It is accompanied by recorded sound and also uses some large bits of scenery and video projection for backgrounds. The show cost $20,000,000 to produce (*Walking with Dinosaurs Live* website, 2009). Its website lists production materials:

Each large dinosaur contains: (based upon the construction of a Torosaur)

- 433 feet of hydraulic hose

- 971 feet of fabric

- 433 feet of foam

- 53 gallons of paint

- 7 kilowatts of power from 12 truck batteries

- 1094 yards of cabling in each body

- 24 microprocessors control movement along with 15 hydraulic rams and 6 hydraulic motors each

Each large dinosaur:

- weighs 1.6 tons a piece (standard family car)

- runs on 6 roller blade wheels

To operate one dinosaur, it takes:

A Team of 3 people: 1 Driver, 2 Voodoo Puppeteers - one operates head and tail gross motion, one in charge of minor movements: mouth, blinking and roars. (ibid.)

The website also lists financial returns; for example an initial UK tour brought '£16 million in tickets sales' (ibid.). Again, we are invited to witness the *spectacle of expenditure*, expenditure of skilled labour, money and materials, demonstrated within 'boosterist' marketing.

The show's programme includes explanations of the production of the show, alongside information about the real prehistoric animals that were the television programme's inspiration. Again, we find Bolter and Grusin's double logic of remediation of simultaneous immediacy and hypermediacy. Any attempt at realism is limited; the puppets appear from inside a giant mouth-like shape, lined with teeth, at the back of the arena, adding a theme-park aesthetic to the set (see fig. 15). The dramatic device of having a human narrator present alongside the 'animals' is not explained through narrative, he is simply there. The narrator is not the only human visible, the smaller dinosaur puppets are essentially costumes and, as well as the dinosaurs' legs, we see the legs of their operators; their respective leg joints facing opposite ways.

fig. 13 *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* programme, 2013

We also see the 'drivers' of the larger puppets in their wheeled bases, positioned low like formula-one drivers, behind domed cockpit glass.

fig. 14 *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* programme, 2013

There is a disconnection within the adaptation of the television programme's title. We, as television viewers, were never 'walking' with the dinosaurs, but then the verb might be attached to the mobile viewpoint allowed by the cameras and a play on other wildlife documentary titles ('Living with Gorillas', for example). In the arena, however, the only person seen to be walking is the narrator, so as he shouts 'Come on, let's go!', we are only made more aware of our stationary, seated view points, and that we cannot 'walk with' the dinosaurs. This experience is in this sense still 'screened' from us.

The show continually references and activates the audiences' sense of scale. Scale is a consistently activated element in these live shows, which all seek to emphasise the size of the action compared to the audience members' own size and the size of the building they are sitting in. The dinosaur puppets fill the arena space of the O2 like no other arena spectacular I

have seen. The size of dinosaurs is one of the recurrent fascinations with them, and this is constantly reinforced during the show by their being seen in front of the seated crowds around the arena's edges.

fig. 15 *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* promotional photograph

The company that produced *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* stand in contrast to Franz Abraham's Art Concerts, producers of *Ben Hur Live*. Unlike that company, which was bankrupted by the ambitious *Ben Hur Live*, Global Creatures is a highly successful special-effects company from Australia, specialising in live performances involving large puppets. Their logo depicts a figure reaching to touch the edge of a circle, encapsulating their *modus operandi* of delivering direct, even intimate, performances to various audiences around the world. Like designer Mark Fisher's work in staging rock shows, Royal de Luxe's street theatre and Populous's architecture, Global Creatures has carved out a specific niche in which they can mount very expensive productions such as *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* and more recently a stage musical of *King Kong* (2013). They also worked with the National Theatre in

London on the puppetry for the highly successful *Warhorse* (which has made £13.5m in its seven year run in London [Brown, 2015]). All of Global Creatures' productions highlight the 'engineering', to use the term appearing in promotion for *Ben Hur Live* (*Ben Hur Live* website, 2009), of their puppets. However, they often work from material that comes from the 'virtual animation' (ibid.) of digital cinema; a current show of theirs listed on their website is an adaptation of the computer-animated film *How to Train Your Dragon* (Sanders, 2010).

A corroboration of this show as 'live' performance appears in exact the nature of the large-scale puppetry. The dinosaurs are controlled by what the company call a 'voodoo' control system, in which a puppeteer manipulates a miniature version of the giant animatronic dinosaur. This foregrounding of the puppetry, which is prominent in the *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* programme and website, and is noted in promotional reporting of the show, is in part to assure audiences that the puppetry is indeed 'live' and not a pre-programmed sequence, unlike animatronics in fixed museum displays; BBC America reports that each dinosaur requires two 'voodoo puppeteers working their "wireless magic above and in front of the stage"' (2014). It also links the manipulation of these huge constructions to that of children playing with small models of dinosaurs, the kind that are available as merchandise at the show. In line with this, their King Kong puppet is built in a way that displays physical human effort and visible labour, beyond the craft of its construction. For example, to lift one of its arms, an operator/performer has to jump off a platform holding a rope, using their weight to winch the puppet's giant limb. With devices such as this, the company show the influence of Cirque du Soleil and Royal de Luxe, who also highlight their performers' physical work.

Global Creatures specialise in adaptations of film and television – all their productions at the time of writing are derived from screen-based originals. The ones cited here are also all digital cinematic works for which a traditional 'pro-filmic event', such as the scene Benjamin describes where an actor performs on set surrounded by equipment, often no longer exists. If there is any 'filmed' action at all, it is likely to be a motion tracking session on a sound stage,

in which animated characters and objects are entirely absent, to be added in later.[1] These shows resurrect the pro-filmic event as a 'residual element' (Williams 1977), only the 'filmmaker' is now the viewer, who constructs the film either with the vision and a memory of an already seen film, or indeed with their camera-phone as they capture their own footage of the event.

In his essay 'The Cinema of Attraction', Tom Gunning briefly mentions a recent, open return to attractions-type cinema in Spielberg and Lucas. I want to suggest a more widespread return that includes the arena spectacular. Gunning writes that:

> in the earliest years of cinema exhibition the cinema itself was an attraction. Early audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated […] rather than to view films. It was the Cinématographe, the Biograph, or the Vitascope that were advertised on the variety bills in which they premiered. (1990: 232)

In this period, which pre-dates a cinematic technique that frequently effaces itself within feature-length narratives, it was the techniques themselves that were on display. In this arena spectacular, the filmic narrative recedes and the technology of the puppet-presentation is watched in its own right. Now, in our post-cinematic era, we can see a return to this with the foregrounding of pure technological 'spectacle' in the arena spectacular, and in particular the visible techniques used in puppetry such as that we find in *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* and the work of Global Creatures in general. As the longest running arena spectacular so far, and one that is wedded to the rise of digital image making, *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* can illuminate the appeal of the post-cinematic 'live'. By analysing this show, which has such a direct relationship to the recent rise of digital cinema via its source material, I want to explore why the spectacle of ingenious, but not necessarily new, technology has become so popular in the early decades of the twenty-first century.

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[1] Motion tracking is a technique by which an actor's movements are recorded then transposed onto a digitally animated character.

Post-cinema and dinosaurs

The inspiration for the original television series was, as Tim Haines says in the quote above, the film *Jurassic Park*, which is something of a landmark in what we now call digital cinema in its heavy use of entirely computer-generated characters (Spielberg, 1993). In his book *The Virtual Life of Film* (2007), Rodowick identifies it as crucial:

> 1993: Jurassic Park makes prevalent and popular the possibility of generating *"photographically" believable synthesised images*. This trend continues with increasing successes throughout the 1990s (2007: 8, emphasis in original)

The 1990's, when both *Jurassic Park* and the original *Walking with Dinosaurs* series were made, was a very disruptive period for cinema. There had been computer-generated characters in films before this point (e.g. *Terminator 2* in 1991, dir. James Cameron; *Young Sherlock Holmes* in 1985, dir. Barry Levinson) but the technology had been limited to the portrayal of creatures made from metallic or smooth and regular, geometric forms (*Terminator 2* featured a robot made of fluid, silver metal; *Young Sherlock Holmes*, one made of flat pieces of glass). By the time of *Jurassic Park*, the software could *erase* the need for certain characters (here, the dinosaurs) to be physically rendered (at least in certain shots). The capability to digitally animate 'living' creatures with skin, muscles and weight, made physical stop-frame puppet animation that had been used previously suddenly obsolete. For Rodowick, *Jurassic Park* sets the trend for digital cinema's replacement of filmed images with digitally synthesised ones. A good example of the is the film inspired by *Walking with Dinosaurs Live*, *Walking with Dinosaurs 3D* (Cook, 2013) – in this production, released twenty years after *Jurassic Park*, all the characters are entirely computer-animated.

Rodowick's primary topic is the replacement of analogue film (i.e. strips of celluloid prepared with light sensitive chemicals) with digital code. *Jurassic Park* is important for him because '[f]rom this moment forward, the major creative forces in the industry began to think of the

photographic process as an obstacle to creativity, as something to overcome, rather than as the very medium of cinematic creation' (ibid., 28). However, crucial to Rodowick's thesis is his statement that:

> [o]ur audiovisual culture remains "cinematic" in the sense that the most popular forms of digital media long to recreate and intensify cinematic effects of framing, editing, dynamic point of view, and mobile framing [...] The idea of cinema persists as a way of modelling time-based spatial forms with computers. (ibid., 133)

It is for this reason that his title refers to film's continuing virtual 'life', rather than announcing its death (although this is amply analysed, documented and grieved in works such as Paolo Cherchi Usai's *The Death of Cinema* [2001]). As Auslander remarks: 'in the era of digital simulation, we are becoming resensitized to the powers of photography and cinema' (Auslander, 1999: 74). Cinema is for Rodowick akin to what the 'live' is for Philip Auslander – something that comes into being, into *consciousness*, via competition with a newer, domineering medium. We return to Auslander's sense of contingency, that there is no such thing as a decontextualised ontology (Auslander 1999: 55).

In the recent development of cinema we see that remediation is *essential* in the digital; an obvious example is that the replacement in cinemas of film projectors with digital ones has been predicated upon the similarity of the viewing experience; '[t]he gradual replacement of the actor's recorded physical presence by computer generated imagery signals a process of substitution that is occurring across the film industry', '[f]or the avid cinephile, it is tempting to think about the history of this substitution as a terrifying remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*'[2] (2007: 7; 8). This remediation is actually what makes the coming of the digital especially evocative of disappearances of the 'real': instead of destroying something, in perfect remediatory fashion it replicates and displaces (what Franco 'Bifo' Berardi calls 'de-realization' [2009: 109]). Indeed, the extent of remediation that has been employed between

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[2] Rodowick refers here to a film plot in which humans are secretly replaced by aliens.

analogue and digital modes of recording means that it is often necessary those defending physical film, and cinema, to explain and remind readers what the actual differences are.

Rodowick defines the ontological difference between the analogue and digitally synthesised images very succinctly: 'As Roland Barthes explained, photography is an "emanation of the referent" that testifies […] this thing was; it had a spatial existence that endured in time […] Computer-generated images, alternatively, are wholly created from algorithmic functions […] it has loosed its anchors from both substance and indexicality' (2007:10). The gradual infiltration of the digital into all elements of cinema (throughout recording, distribution and display) has been a reinvention of what cinema is. For Rodowick, who proceeds from Stanley Cavell's idea of cinema as 'the world viewed', the digital takes cinema's image production out of the world and locks it into human imagination:

> In a previous era of cinematic creation, the physical world both inspired and resisted the imagination; in the age of digital synthesis, physical reality has entirely yielded to the imagination. (ibid., 28)

Film is a record of something that *was*; digital images may not be. According to filmmaker and writer Mark Cousins, with the rise of the digital '[a]ny concievable image could be rendered in photographic reality'; 'Want See became Can See' (2011: 456). He sees this infinite range of possible images as significant but in some ways frustrating. He describes the famous CGI fly-over shots in Ridley Scott's Gladiator as: 'these weightless and point-of-view less moves, exhilarated by the possibility of CGI but devoid of feeling' (ibid., 458). Norman M. Klein writes that what he calls the 'electronic baroque' changes with digital image-making and '[t]he line between the composites (the Artifice) is disappearing throughout the arts and our visual culture. We are indeed in the same place at once, and no place in particular' (2004: 224).

Dinosaurs have a very particular place in our widespread and sustained desire to see the impossible or unobtainable displayed in front of us; close enough that we could *almost* touch it (a quality shared with the live flesh of the performers in *Ben Hur Live*). Like Cavell's slightly

melancholic diagnosis of the 'world viewed', it seems that there will always be a part of us that is frustrated, but equally tantalised, by dinosaurs as part of our world but chronologically far removed from us. The most abundant and convincing moving, 'living' dinosaur characters until this show were on screen, but recent digital cinema makes them both *more* visible, and arguably *less* tangible, as there never was any physical object, nor pro-filmic event. Watching *Jurassic Park*, we know that although actual dinosaurs did at one time have 'a spatial existence that endured in time', the 'bodies' we see on screen did not; exaggerating the fundamental relation (or lack of one) between the physical world and the synthesised digital image.

Philip Auslander writes of live rock music, in relation to recordings of the same music, that

> [l]ive performance thus has become the means by which mediatized representations are naturalized, according to a simple logic that appeals to our nostalgia for what we assumed was the im-mediate: if the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been "real" to begin with. (1999: 43)

The digital, synthesised image has indeed replaced much of what was previously achieved through indexical, filmic effects. *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* can perhaps be read as redressing the balance in this situation, giving back dinosaurs some tangibility and physical existence. It should be noted that although it is most famous for groundbreaking digital images (and consequently this provides the focus for Rodowick's analysis of the film), *Jurassic Park* also features animatronics and puppets extensively, even including some costumed performers as smaller dinosaurs. These techniques are also present in the *Walking with Dinosaurs* television programme. What we see in *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* could be categorised as extending part of the television production, as if the producers were demonstrating an allegiance to the now outmoded animatronic effects. In the arena, rather than archaic elements, these survive as 'residual' elements of culture that offer something that the fully dominant, computer generated screen image *cannot*; 'certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless

lived and practised on the basis of the residue' (Williams, 1977: 122). I am not proposing that as a post-cinematic product, *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* replaces *Walking with Dinosaurs*, or *Jurassic Park*. As a remediating product, it *complements* its predecessors ('[t]he goal is not to replace the earlier forms […] but rather to spread the content over as many markets as possible' [Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 68]). This is evident in the fact that interest in the brand sustained through the live show has led to the 3D feature film, *Walking with Dinosaurs 3D* (dirs. Barry Cook, Neil Nightingale, 2013). With regard to the arena-dwelling dinosaurs, their niche claim to authenticity is perhaps most closely related to their physical size, as the thing that is easily demonstrated in physical performance, rather than framed and edited moving images on screens. Again, we can see clearly that although these tropes and methods do relate to Williams' 'residual' and 'emergent' elements, the commercial logic of remediation remains the more pertinent adaptive scheme.

As well as the production of entirely synthesised images, digital cinema also means that images can be captured at high quality using digital video, rather than on film; this is part of what Rodowick characterises as the stealthy replacement of film. Unlike other major shifts in film production, such as the additions of sound, or colour, or CGI special effects, even, this shift from analogue to digital image capture has been quiet and not nearly as noticeable; it hasn't suddenly changed the way we watch cinematic images (Rodowick, 2007: 7). This is because digital image production 'remediates' the analogue to the extreme. For example, digital animation is always measured against analogue photography; as in the phrase 'photographically believable', quoted in Rodowick above (other examples would be 'footage', 'cut', and so on). Although the process and equipment, and the ontology of the image, are completely different, they are made sense of through the familiar analogue tropes and devices (another example is the persistence, in the UK at least, of the term 'film', synonymous with 'movie'). Therefore, the dawn of digital cinema and its replacement of 'filmic' cinema is neither easy to place, nor complete (yet). Like the change towards post-cinema, it is gradual and complex, and resists what Raymond Williams derides as 'epochal analysis' (Williams, 1977: 121). 'As film disappears into digital movies, then, a new medium may be created, not

in the substitution of one form or substance for another, but rather through a staggered displacement of elements' (Rodowick, 2007: 86).

The ontology of the digital as opposed to that of film is important as far as it brings us to ask whether we have left behind Cavell's 'world viewed'. This would mean that we were also changing our modern subjectivity, as 'the advent of photography expresses this distance [from the world] as the modern fate to relate to the world by viewing it, taking views of it, as from behind the self' (Cavell 'What Photography Calls Thinking' 116-117). For Cavell, film and photography *create the modern subject*, just as much as alienated labour does. This, as I discussed earlier, is the advent of the 'screening' barrier; that leaves the modern subject as always already a voyeur. As Rodowick argues, at the end of film (which was apparent and in progress even when Cavell was writing *The World Viewed* in the early 1970's), it becomes possible and important to realise what it was and what it was *for*. Film establishes a world that is imaged and is essentially absent in both time and space. It is a world that *was*, i.e. there *was* an actual pro-filmic event. This is a quality specific to film and its chemical process that requires its physical presence at an actual pro-filmic event. The digital synthesised image shows a world that *wasn't*. The digital 'movie' was not (or need not have) been captured anywhere or at any time; there is no pro-filmic event necessary. I have already used Rodowick's text to establish our current culture as post-cinematic (he says 'cinematic', as he, even in his title, diagnoses a large degree of continuity between the filmic and digital periods). What happens to this configuration when we *are* accustomed to 'seeing things that are invisible, or not present to us, not present with us' (Cavell, 1979: 18)? Shaviro's prefix 'post' in his term 'post-cinema' acknowledges that although we might be accustomed to cinema and remote seeing, ours in an age that still thinks *in reference to* an earlier one. The arena spectacular adds the option of an image that auratically 'is' to complement digital cinema's 'wasn't' which is still built upon cinema's 'was'.

Digital Cinema and Immaterial Labour

Rather than viewing the arena spectacular as a continuation of certain ideas and forms that have survived cinema, I have now suggested that *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* (and by extension all arena spectaculars) responds to the particular conditions of digital cinema. I have also already aligned the cinematic with modernity and with industry (as does Peter Wollen [1993]). I now want to explore more deeply the 'post-cinematic', as it can be aligned with the post-industrial and the post-modern. In a blog post written since the publication of *Post-Cinematic Affect*, Shaviro has written:

> The movies only gradually lost their dominant role, in the wake of a whole series of electronic, and later digital, innovations […] they include the growth of massively multichannel cable television, the increasing use of the infrared remote, the development of VCRs, DVDs, and DVRs, the ubiquity of personal computers, with their facilities for capturing and editing images and sounds, the increasing popularity and sophistication of computer games, and the expansion of the Internet, allowing for all sorts of uploading and downloading, the rise of sites like Hulu and YouTube, and the availability of streaming video. These developments of video (electronic) and digital technologies entirely disrupted both the movies and traditional broadcast television. They introduced an entirely new cultural dominant, or cultural-technological regime: one whose outlines aren't entirely clear to us as of yet.
>
> (Shaviro, 2011)

This new media 'regime' is, for him, the post-cinematic. As well as the disappearance of physical celluloid film, it means the viewing of films can be very different: 'we are witnessing a marked *decentering of the theatrical film experience*' (Rodowick. 2007: 27). 'The apparent differences between digital screens, capture devices, camcorders, and home computers begin to disappear. Fundamentally, all are variations on the same device: a computer connected to an electronic display'; and at the same time, audio-visual material is now 'accessible in a wider range of contexts than ever before, in multiple locations and on screens ranging in size from the tiny (mobile phones) to the gigantic (IMAX)' (ibid., 125 – see also Victor Burgin: 'Films

today are dislocated and dismantled' [2004: 8]). The medium is in flux, even if, as Raymond Bellour says, theatrical presentation still acts as a condition 'from which every other viewing situation more or less departs' (Bellour, 2012: 206). Even cinemas themselves are now transgressing terms that Auslander and Rodowick use to separate cinema from television by becoming spaces for viewing live transmissions, and no longer simply presenting flat images (3D cinema is obviously not quite sculpture, but still, the attempt complicates a clear definition). Indeed, some cinemas now offer extra novelties such as moving seats that correspond to the action in the film.

The important prefix 'post' in Shaviro's terminology can be explained using the example of a more established term: 'post-modern.' Bellour's point about theatrical presentation as a basic point of departure is an important one. Both the post-modern and the post-cinematic situate a group of cultural, political and economic elements *in relation* to what preceded them and propose that they can best be interpreted via an understanding of their predecessors. As 'post-modern' or 'post-cinematic' subjects, we are, then, rooted in cinema and modernity. This is why Shaviro refers to 'an entirely new cultural dominant, or cultural-technological regime: one whose outlines aren't entirely clear to us as of yet'; we are within a new environment with new 'affects' that we can only map or represent in relation to what we know; the modern and the cinematic. What, then, are the wider implications of digital cinema, socially and economically? I cited Shaviro's elision of post-cinema and neoliberal finance in my introduction. As a very prominent and visible part of the global post-industrial economy, cinema can provide useful analogies for a more general state of affairs. For example, digital cinema is made with a very different kind of labour than analogue film. Film critic Mark Cousins, in his television programme *The Story of Film*, describes digital films as being made with 'long hours in relative comfort, eating pizza', drawing with computers (Episode 14, Cousins, 2011). Whereas older films were explained in terms of their locations and technical innovations (Cousins cites Griffith's *Intolerance*, 1915), the newer digital productions are explained in Cousins' narration over shots of pale men in dark rooms, slouched in front of computers. Entirely animated digital cinema has no 'pro-filmic event'. This is what Cousins (a

filmmaker himself), along with Rodowick, is really identifying. This lack of an original, physical *thing* – even a fictive, staged one – apparently leaves them feeling that the products of such synthesis are without a 'real' (although Rodowick, unlike Cousins, is careful not to make qualitative judgements). This is a subtle problem, all the more difficult to analyse because it is so new; it is a developing problem of the present.

To contextualise this shift in terms of cinematic image production, consider the difference between the appearance of a figure in the background of Wyler's *Ben-Hur* (1959) and a similar figure in Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000). Although a good deal of the set for the chariot race at the end of *Ben-Hur* never existed and appeared on film via matte painting and other camera tricks, a huge amount of it was built in Italy (according to the film's publicity, the biggest set ever built [Frieman, 1959]), in order to give the impression on camera that the action takes place in a crowded ancient arena. In *Gladiator*, however, a section of building one might see over Russell Crowe's armoured shoulder is just as likely to have been animated in a computer and added into the shot during post-production. The physical labour of carpenters, plasterers and painters has been displaced by the immaterial labour of the special effects designer. This is in line with a general ascendency of immaterial labour; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write that:

> In dominant countries, immaterial labor is central to most of what statistics show are the fastest-growing occupations, such as food servers, salespersons, computer engineers, teachers, and health workers. There is a corresponding trend for many forms of material production, such as industry and agriculture, to be transferred to subordinate parts of the world (2005: 114)

Furthermore:

> Other forms of labor and production are adopting the characteristics of immaterial production. Not only have computers been integrated into all kinds of production but more generally communication mechanisms, information, knowledge's and affect are

transforming traditional productive practices, the way control of information in seeds, for example, is affecting agriculture (ibid.)

Infiltration of the digital into every element of film production and display is concurrent with the infiltration of computing into virtually every aspect of human life. Accounts of 'immaterial labour' (such as Cousins' animators working on *Shrek*) are often Western-centric and ignore the very material labour that has to still happen in order to support the immaterial labourers in rich countries. For example, Gregory Sholette writes that 'somewhere on this planet a different workforce toils on a Fordist assembly line in order to make immaterial post-Fordist labor possible in the US, EU, and other developed nations' (2011: 19), although according to Hardt and Negri, immaterial labour does exert hegemonic control over material labour today, as the ascendant mode of production, and forces all labour to 'informationalize, become intelligent, become communicative' (2005: 109). 'Immaterial labour' does not yet replace physical, i.e. non-computer-based, 'labour'; it changes the distribution of labour globally. Crucially for this discussion, for those who do enjoy what Sholette calls the Western, immaterial 'good-life' (2011: 19), it removes physical labour and physical labourers from sight – we enjoy the products of manufacturing but we do not see the factories and those who are employed in them.

I have already mentioned some 'retro' trends and motifs that trade upon an uncertainty about immaterial labour, and I have also mentioned the manner in which cinemas advertise themselves as an experience (see main introduction). We can see these two entwined in the advertising of the Picturehouse chain of art-house cinemas (property of multiplex company Cineworld). In a short video screened before features, the company highlights workers' physical labour in the cinema's building.
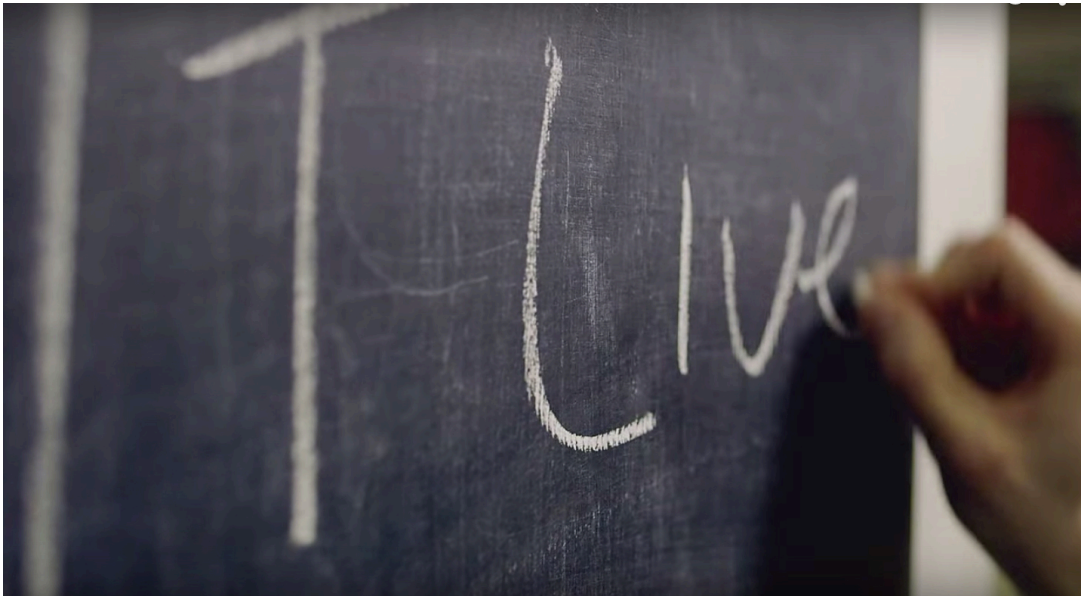
fig. 16 and 17, Stills from advert for Picturehouse Cinemas

Picturehouse is an upmarket version of cinema presentation arguably aimed at middle class

customers. This material labour, presented as consumable 'experience', is part of an extra

offer that supposedly sets this chain above the rest. This is an intentional exaggeration, if not a

constructed fiction by omission – in fact the chain has often been embattled in disputes with its

workforce over pay and conditions and was affected by strike actions in 2014 (BBC News,

2014). The aim is to sell Picturehouse screenings using a pseudo-materiality; as somehow

'artisanal' and handcrafted, in a time when the content is likely to be created by an

international group of networked immaterial labourers and the work of the projectionist might

most often consist of little more than initiating an automated sequence of digital files. Viewed on the online platform Netflix, for example, a video file appears by way of invisible software, hosted in some faraway and unseen server. At Picturehouse, the advert suggests, a film – that may well be that same material – is presented by expert labour, by a group of 'real' workers, and 'by hand'. Here we clearly see a post-cinematic invocation of value-adding and aestheticised physical labour.

The Attention Economy

Aside from digital, synthesised images, what, in relation to this study, are the important elements of the post-cinematic? In industrial modernity people all over the world became more closely and easily connected to people elsewhere in the world, through communication networks and increased trade, and with digital networks, this process has sped up. The end of the systemic divide between the capitalist 'West' and communist 'East' has allowed neoliberal capitalism to profess to being global capitalism. Shaviro writes that 'the editing methods and formal devices of digital video and film belong directly to the computing-and-information-technology infrastructure of contemporary neoliberal finance' (2010: 3). He also writes that we 'now live in the midst of an *audiovisual continuum*', by which he means that we are constantly supplied with moving-image material that demands our attention (2010: 134). This has had a vast impact upon both work and leisure, to the extent that the divide between the two has become contestable (as suggested in Beller's work; below). This is significantly different to the older situation of increasing *access* to television, film and radio and it is this 'continuum' that can now lead to people feeling bombarded by undifferentiated material.

Rodowick says we are experiencing 'a large-scale historical process wherein existing textual and spatial media are transcoded into digital form so as to be manipulable by computational processes and communicable through information networks' (2007: 99). Rodowick proposes the computer as a medium in its own right (2007: 127) and this would apply to much more than just image making. Shaviro says:

this new media environment is instrumental to, and deeply embedded within, a complex of social, economic, and political developments: globalization, financialization, post-Fordist just-in-time production and "flexible accumulation" (as David Harvey calls it), the precarization of labor, and widespread micro-surveillance. (Shaviro, 2011)

Shaviro accuses Rodowick and others of 'waxing nostalgic', mourning 'the passing of a more vital, and more temporally authentic, media regime […] But such responses are inadequate […] these critiques denounce the symptoms of cultural malaise […] without paying sufficient attention to the processes of exploitation and expropriation that generate such symptoms' (2010: 133) – symptoms such as the decline of cinematic presentation, and of physical film itself. It is worth noting that in referring specifically to 'neoliberal' finance, Shaviro is connecting the post-cinematic qualities of films to the networked, deregulated, privatised, rapidly transmitted and computer-reliant nature of contemporary finance, which, as stated above, is part of hegemonic immaterial labour production. Multinational corporations such as TimeWarner Inc, who own DC Comics and therefore help produce *Batman Live* can exist because of neoliberal economics. Shaviro also states that films 'play a crucial role in the valorisation of capital' (ibid., 3); not only do they belong to our present political and economic situation, they promote and strengthen it.

Jonathan Beller's book *The Cinematic Mode of Production* (2006) establishes a schema within which we can regard consumption of screen-images *as labour*. For Beller, in its early days, the cinema introduced a mechanised system of looking, 'the industrialisation of the visual' (ibid., 3 – following Jonathan Crary's argument; Crary, 1999). However, now:

not only do we confront the image at the scene of the screen, but we confront the logistics of the image wherever we turn – imaginal functions are today imbricated in perception itself. Not only do denizens of capital labor to maintain ourselves as image, we labor in the image. The image, which pervades all appearing, is the mise-en-scène of the new work. (ibid., 1)

As well as providing the philosophical framework for looking at the world, the cinematic image *is the site of production*, within which we *work*. For Beller, 'cinema' eventually becomes synonymous with 'capital' – which is not to say that cinema *becomes* capitalistic, it was always so, but that the two become inextricably intertwined, and together now represent a total system of exploitation. For Beller, Cavell's 'screen barrier' would be the same thing as that which presents commodity to consumer – a basic function of consumer capitalism manifested in, for example retail, marketing, product placement and packaging.

Beller therefore would see no need to distinguish the cinematic and post-cinematic; it is all the same trajectory of image-function becoming primary mode of capitalism, however I have preserved Shaviro's distinction because it is useful here to denote a diversification of both the cinematic image and the entertainment industry. All production is now image production; all products are, firstly, images. For example, in a very literal sense, the riveted jeans I mentioned earlier are prefigured as desirable marketing images first. This would make the period of analogue cinema a brief aberrance, in a system on the way to the digital 'attention economy'; merely 'a precursor to television, computing, email, and the World Wide Web' (Beller, 2006: 13). The word 'cinema', then, is a residual linguistic element – '"cinema" is now detached from the film industry and its array of institutions and provides *a figure for the orchestration of material production by images*' (ibid., 26, emphasis in original). This formative relationship of contemporary capitalism to cinema is not peculiar to Beller's work – in *The Age of Access*, for example, Jeremy Rifkin (2000) argues for Hollywood as a prototype for 'networked production'. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi also comments on the temporally unconstrained nature of production today, writing that 'the time apparently freed by technology is in fact transformed into cyber time, a time of mental processing absorbed into the infinite production processes of cyberspace'; '[e]verywhere, attention is under siege' (2009: 79; 108).

Beller's ideas about 'attention economy' support Theodor W Adorno and Max Horkheimer's statement made in the 1940's that '[a]musement under late capitalism is the prolongation of work' (*The Dialectic of Enlightenment* 1997: 137); indeed, Beller says that the 'next moment

in the transformation of the interactivity of the image, cinema's legacy in email and the World Wide Web, make this tendency patently obvious' (2006: 76). Beller's thesis is of a different order to Shaviro's and Rodowick's; being an anti-capitalist diagnostic building directly from the work of Debord and written purportedly in order to allow readers to more effectively resist (something Shaviro says his work expressly cannot do [2010: 138]) the 'cinematic mode of production'. For Beller, the post-modern can be described as:

> the subsumpton of a formerly semi-autonomous cultural sphere by capital. This subsumption of culture registers the change of state necessary to "economic growth," or simply "development" (neo-imperialism) in the latter twentieth century. Culture became a scene, and is fast becoming the principle scene (the mise-en-scène) of economic production. (2006: 25)

Beller focuses upon the 'processes of exploitation and expropriation' that underpin Shaviro's post-cinematic affect and cause the 'mere symptoms' (according to Shaviro) that Rodowick analyses. Beller's thesis is not necessarily grounded in the digital, but it is most amply illustrated by contemporary elements that do now rely upon it – for example, the extraction of profit through advertising by Google, Facebook and other media companies. What was hard to grasp in the early nineties, he says, now seems self-evident (Beller, 2006: 284). The financialised cultural sphere has, using the digital networks described above, by now invaded our whole experience.

For Beller, the coming of the 'screen barrier' (which creates Cavell's 'world viewed') is the arrival of a capitalist device for exploitation. Image making is now always profit-making and perception is now predicated upon cinematic image making; the 'imaginal function' of capitalist production. If we follow the wide claims Beller makes for the power of the 'cinematic mode of production', we can see that it is most definitely not limited to cinema itself, but equally applies now to social structures, governmental strategies and the contemporary urban. In Beller's conception of contemporary capital, then, the capitalistic cinematic image, as extractor of profit, has already burst out of the cinema screen and has

infected all areas of human life; Beller uses the term 'screen/society' (2006: 282), to signify the 'convergence of media and society' (ibid, 283). This is not dissimilar from Norman M. Klein's 'Electronic Baroque', see chapter 2) – a society that, as a consumerist neoliberal one, is really only a structure for organising business relations. This, then, is the post-cinematic context into which the arena spectacular appears.

The 'Real' in Post-cinematic Image Production

The offer of the arena spectacular is of something more 'real'. When comparing works and writing from across the cinematic and post-cinematic periods, one often finds fears of the loss of the real, but attached to different threats. For Auslander, the live is real; for Rodowick, physical film is real (or at least, more real). The digital 'spectacle' as an artificial, virtual order that is infiltrating, infecting or replacing the 'real world' has been the source of great anxiety, frequently explored in fiction (and Shaviro's *Post-Cinematic Affect* is made up of case studies of such works of fiction). Indeed, some of Beller's argument can seem commonplace today. *The Matrix* (dirs. Wachowskis, 1999) has become a pop-fable in this respect because of its digital image production self-reflexively dovetailing with its subject matter; of human beings enslaved within a digital fantasy world – Beller ironically describes it as a 'late-capitalist social-realist film' (2006: 7). In *The Matrix*, it is the human race, as well as cinema, that has, as Rodowick says of digital photography, 'loosed its anchors from both substance and indexicality' (Rodowick, 2007: 10).

Franco 'Bifo' Berardi writes that within the situation that demands the alienation of immaterial, cognitive labour carried out whilst sat at a computer screen 'we can see an effect of de-realization: the social, linguistic, psychic, emotional impossibility of touching the thing, of having a body, of enjoying the presence of the other as tangible and physical extension […] [t]he word "de-realization" refers […] to difficulties experienced by the animated body in reaching the animated body of the other: a pathogenic separation between cognitive functions and material sociality' (2009: 109). Common to all these ideas is the theme of loss – and we

can see this in Cavell also, with his desire to 'reconnect or rejoin' the 'world viewed' that has become screened off by cinematic scepticism (Rodowick, 2007: 63). It is not my intention in this study to encompass a detailed discussion of the philosophical debates around this area of 'the Real'. However, because of the arena spectaculars' claims to 'realness' and 'authenticity' that are predicated upon a specifically cinematic culture, what I do want to establish is a sense of the scale of this central dichotomy of simulation versus the real, even if the boundaries of what each is considered to be in a given context may vary. Perhaps this nostalgia for a lost 'real', no matter how phantasmatic, no matter how engineered, is crucial to how the live performance is felt as meaningful, as fulfilling in post-cinema. One need only contrast Berardi's 'de-realisation' and struggle to reach the 'animated body of the other', to the marketing of *Ben Hur Live* that offers physical performance, directly 'sensually noticeable', to see that these texts all respond, in very different ways, to a similar set of problems. Above all, what is important here is to establish the *visibility* of these debates; my argument being that although they might originate in philosophy or theory, they are also being carried out in popular culture (for example, the pop-philosophical traction of *The Matrix* – eg. the documentary *Philosophy and The Matrix – Return to the Source* [Oreck, 2004]). It is this visibility that I believe proves that the arena spectacular is a response, albeit a commercial one, to a desire; a previously empty niche, and a thirst for something beyond the digital.

There is an important distinction to be made here, between the 'real' – as in capitalist and remediated authenticity or fidelity, and Žižek's 'Real' – the actual facts of existence on Earth engineered by capitalist exploitation. In *The Matrix*, the 'Real' is that which is beyond the exploitation of humankind by the dominant machine-race. Slavoj Žižek uses this as metaphor (in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* 2002), and has written that 'The problem with the twentieth-century 'passion for the Real' is not that it was a passion for the Real, but that it was a fake passion whose ruthless pursuit of the Real behind appearances was *the ultimate stratagem to avoid confronting the Real*' (2002: 24). For example, the adverts I have cited for Picturehouse cinemas present a 'real' that shows the emotional experience of viewers (fig. 5) and details of how the cinema is run 'behind the scenes' as 'real' (figs. 16 and 17). In fact this

is a highly stage-managed, designed 'real' showing a desirable version of contemporary labour that masks a 'Real' that includes, for example, workers in awful conditions mining the rare minerals from which the cinema's equipment is manufactured. With an awareness of the perceived problem of artificiality, capitalism offers an alternative 'real' in myriad ways. Jim Lee in *Batman Live* programme promotes the show by saying 'it's a great experience, we take our kids to these kinds of things, and again it really underscores how real *Batman* is' (*Batman Live* programme, 2011). This is an example of the 'real' of the kind of 'authenticity' that Auslander says is associated with live, physical performance, of one mode of production cantilevering another. The live, physical and non-digital (including the likes of *Walking with Dinosaurs Live*) are just as capable of reinforcing what Beller calls the 'attention economy', because they still articulate themselves with the 'screen barrier' (which always removes us from the Real) as their major point of departure. This 'real' is still inside a capitalist and remediating symbolic order; unlike the 'Real', which lies outside that order and is therefore almost unthinkable.

It is important to note that what distinguishes the 'real', for my purpose here, is not the absence of an electronic screen. The simply non-digital is not necessarily 'the Real'. To assume this would be to fall into the trap of what David Edgerton calls an 'innovation-centric view' (Edgerton, 2008: xv) by posing the latest kind of symbolization and of imaging as an entirely new kind of threat – after all, Rodowick wisely points out that 'numbers, and the kinds of symbolization they allow, are the first "virtual reality"' (2007: 9). Marketing strategies such as those described in Frank Rose's book *The Art of Immersion* expand what is meant by the merely 'real' here. These seem to attempt to immerse consumers in the fiction of the entertainment industries' products beyond the media that they initially exist within. As marketing stunts, characters and motifs from films are made to appear in physical urban space – Rose cites a stunt promoting the film *Tron Legacy*, where a press conference was acted out as if being given by a fictional corporation; a character from the film appeared to steal something from the conference and then be whisked away by a helicopter (Rose, 2011: 292). This micro-narrative ties in with the story of the feature film, acting as a trans-medial teaser

for the film. Similarly, back on screen, Mark Cousins refers to the animated series *The Animatrix*, which formed part of a marketing build-up to the sequels of *The Matrix*: '[t]he various manifestations of *The Matrix* were themselves becoming a matrix' (2011: 460). Like the performances that Auslander says in some way prove the 'realness' of rock music, these marketing stunts expand and underwrite the fictions of films, games and rock concept-albums. They build excitement around the narrative of the product, Rose says, by immersing the audience in the fiction somewhat like a theme park, only no longer spatially distinct from everyday life. Paradoxically, by expanding a fiction and diffusing it, producers make it 'more real' – this is 'attractions' cinema, with a diffused kind of narrative world, and cinema as a set of tropes and images that are reconfigured in various ways, even outside or between screens. The 'immersion' that Rose poses as being so attractive is an almost cartoon-like example of what Beller is so concerned about – as well as an immersion into a narrative, it is immersion into a capitalist symbolic order; a subsumption of yet another part of the world into the 'attention economy'. Indeed, this is realness reinforced by resurgent aura; events usually locked inside reproducible media appearing and being reinforced by auratic, physical manifestations, 'sensually noticeable'. In the enthusiastic and positive work of both Frank Rose and Henry Jenkins (author of *Convergence Culture* [2006]), convergence across media is the new 'total art work' (I will return to these concerns with regard to the 'experience economy' in chapter 2). Immersive marketing reaches us online, via our phones and mobile devices, and in physical space. These examples, along with the arena spectacular, show the adaptive nature of capitalism, a system that can adapt to exploit the gap of the 'real' in a market made up of screen-based images. Business today remediates a desire for something 'real' back into consumption. The arena space (and indeed other sites for the post-cinematic live, such as those in which Cirque du Soleil and Royale de Luxe perform), enclosed and demarcated, might seem to work against this (and I will explore this promise of enclosed, ritualised consumption of live events in subsequent chapters), but with their advertising and branding, tie-ins and online presence, they actually constitute their own kind of convergence, no less totalising than the networked and purely digital spectacle.

These tendencies in seem to remediate past forms into something that is paradoxically both auratic and reproducible. If, as Rodowick says, photography in the nineteenth century confounded a culture that habitually associated sight with presence (2007: 64), then post-cinema is a period that *habitually associates seeing with absence*, but also with capitalist *unreality*. It is this feeling that works such as *The Matrix* address, and in a less overt way, the arena spectacular does the same; we still desire the aura. A crude antidote to the digital spectacle, made with computers and pizza as Marc Cousins describes, and one that capital has certainly latched on to, is the physical; a mode of spectacle that is perceived bodily, without a screen; the puppeteers of *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* and Mark Fisher's 'rather sexy and energetic young people doing dangerous and beautiful things only yards away' (*Millennium Experience – The Guide*, 1999: 180). This is how the arena spectacular is distinctly post-cinematic, and also how it is a compensatory part of 'the ultimate strategy to avoid confronting the Real' (Žižek, 2002: 24). As I argued earlier in relation to *Ben Hur Live*, the extent to which the 'live' (and 'real') can be always aligned to 'the Real' is only present in factors such as the possibility of really witnessing the performers bodies damaged in one of the dangerous scenes we witness being acted out, of a rupture in the scripted and rehearsed image; a diversion from the symbolic order. The arena spectacular, which grows out of cinema, can only 'flirt' with this particular 'Real', and of course we the audience never feel ourselves to be in danger of leaving our own 'script' as seated, safe and detached voyeurs – after all, we won't be called down to the arena floor to dance, or fight, and the dinosaurs will not eat us.

If everything in culture is either 'residual', 'emergent' or 'dominant', then the arena spectacular pretends to be both residual and emergent, but is neither; they are still a part of the dominant culture and therefore are another articulation if its power. Williams writes 'no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention', rather, modes of domination 'select from and consequently exclude the full range of human practice' (1977: 125). However, he continues:

in advanced capitalism […] the dominate culture reaches much further than ever before in capitalist society into hitherto 'reserved' or 'resigned' areas of experience and practice and meaning. The area of effective penetration of the dominant order in the whole social and cultural process is thus now significantly greater. (ibid.)

If we follow this logic, then over the time elapsed between Williams' writing and the appearance of the arena spectacular, this penetration had become greater still. Mark Fisher (the writer, rather than the stage designer) emotively writes that '[w]ork and life become inseparable. Capital follows you when you dream. Time ceases to be linear, becomes chaotic, broken down into punctiform divisions. As production and distribution are restructured, so are nervous systems' (2009: 34). Therefore, although the post-cinematic digital does not represent a categorically different threat (see Rodowick's comment on the 'virtual reality' of numbers, above), it does represent a greater danger, by way of a deeper invasion of capital into our lives and even our bodies.

The Dinosaur's Legs

The direct referencing of extremely popular, digitally synthesised images of dinosaurs in this show, specifically the television series *Walking with Dinosaurs*, but also the film *Jurassic Park*, has allowed me to situate the arena spectacular genre within the digital, by now the primary mode of production and dissemination for images of all kinds. This change has been seen to co-exist and complement the economics of neoliberalism to become what Shaviro calls the 'post-cinematic' and Beller calls the 'attention economy'. In this show, the arena is a container for these creatures, and it is also a segment of the city taken 'back in time', rather like the island on which *Jurassic Park* is set. However, it isn't a prehistoric time we are shown, as in *Ben Hur Live* it is an amalgam of a pre-digital modes of image production. I have attempted to show how the childlike, 'awe-inspiring' spectacle of life-sized dinosaur puppets meshes with very contentious changes in our media, and therefore in capitalism as a whole.

Digital animation's lack of pro-filmic event, or physical event of any kind, means that the pro-filmic event is becoming an exotic rarity, like Auslander's 'live' in the age of recording. The pro-filmic is now remediated via the digital, which is without event. Now the pro-filmic event is consciously staged as such – no longer a means to an end; we are *shown* 'material labour'; real bodies doing 'energetic things'. According to Berardi, 'the digitalization of the labor process has made any labor the same from an ergonomic and physical point of view since we all do the same thing: we sit in front of a screen and we type on a keyboard' (2009: 76). Rather than the immaculate renderings of digital animation, achieved by Mark Cousins' pale men sat at computers, who are essentially doing the same work as ourselves, we see a performer carrying a foam-puppet, their legs clearly sticking out of its stomach.

fig. 18 *Walking With Dinosaurs Live* promotional photograph

In this foregrounding of visible labour, we might align the arena spectacular with other foregrounded 'material labour' such as 'artisanal' food production, we see (because we are shown) the puppeteer, the dancer, the highly-qualified baker. Visible labour can be present as part of the commodity, as a qualification of its 'realness'. I have suggested some reasons for our

culture's mistrust of screens and search for a 'real', in a commonality between cinema's presentation of a world that is past and digital images presenting a world that never was. This desire is one that capital provides for, in seemingly and paradoxically atavistic products such as the arena spectacular. In my section on *Batman Live* I will analyse why we might want to maintain the cinematic 'screen barrier' and defer to hypertextual fidelity and 'real'-ness, rather than 'the Real'.

In this chapter I have sought to situate the arena spectacular solidly within post-cinema. I have outlined a theory of how cinema altered spectatorship and even perception itself in an irrevocable way and I have explained the post-cinematic context itself, particularly in regard to different kinds of labour and their visibilities in the context of the digital. At the start of this chapter I asked whether the arena spectacular actually adds an auratic element absent in cinema, as a reaction to the post-cinematic and a way of increasing markets for images and brands. I have now demonstrated how it does this, and gone some way to explaining why this is an attractive quality for both consumers and producers.

This is all, of course, a process with which consumers are complicit. Colin Campbell has written on the ethic of consumerism. For him, a consumer's motivation is not acquisition, nor even satisfaction of a desire:

> Their basic motivation is the desire to experience in reality the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in imagination, and each 'new' product is seen as offering a possibility of realizing this ambition. However, since reality can never provide the perfected pleasures encountered in day-dreams […] each purchase leads to literal disillusionment, something which explains how wanting is extinguished so quickly […] What is not extinguished, however, is the fundamental longing which daydreaming itself generates, and hence there is as much determination as ever to find new products to serve as replacement objects of desire. (2005: 89)

For Campbell, failure, or more accurately, disillusionment, is essential to consumerism. Incorporating failure might seem anathema to a large industrial production like this and it

certainly wouldn't appear in any marketing material. But consider a successful 'meeting' with

Batman after which perhaps one would need no other experience of him and a pleasurable, and

profitable, franchise would not be needed again. Since remediation is a capitalist technique, it

does not desire, nor is it able to assimilate a truly 'ultimate' product. The arena spectacular

promises fulfilment; specifically transcendence of Cavell's screen barrier but, like all

consumer products, it promises fulfilment of an impossible *daydream*. The fantasy of the

(impossible) transgression of the screen boundary is in fact something that the arena

spectacular shares with all consumer products; the daydream inherent to its economic role. In

the post-cinematic, we see a reversal of the aura under attack that Benjamin described in the

1930's. Now, long after the rise of reproducible artworks, which have become our life-world,

capital offers a type of aura as novelty, but also, as I will explore in my next chapter, as

heterotopic compensation for current immaterial labour.

Chapter 2: The Postcivil

Introduction – 'The Home of Spectacular Cultural Events'

In this chapter I will embed what I have already established about the arena spectacular and post-cinema within a specifically postcivil version of urban space. It is this postcivil space into which audience members must venture in order to see live entertainments such as the arena spectacular 'in the flesh'. This will also necessitate a consideration of the audiences' sense of self within that space. In urban space, we consume in the presence of unknown others, and are ourselves consumed as part of the spectacle. The chapter is arranged around case studies of the Millennium Dome, *Batman Live* and another of Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas and hinges upon a specific reading of Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces', taking into account the changing nature of space in the twenty-first century (2008).

In 2012, purchasers of a smart-phone on the O2 mobile phone network would have found that the screen's background 'wallpaper' image was automatically set to an image of the O2 in Greenwich, home of the O2 Arena. It is not surprising that the company would make such use of the iconic building and a venue it supports via sponsorship. However, there are some curious associations here. The mobile phone, especially one that supports internet browsing, video calls, social media and high quality playback of audio and video files, might be the most archetypal manifestation of remote communication; remote 'presence' – a tool that in many instances dispenses with the need for the user to be in the same physical space as a product they are buying or the person they are communicating with. The O2 Arena and other live venues, on the other hand, depend upon value being ascribed to actual physical presence, 'direct', 'live' experience, rather than storage and playback; proximity and 'being there', rather than being remotely connected. The O2, as well as being an image of contemporary London, and in 2012 one of the venues for the Olympic games, is also an image of centrality and for most customers of O2 in the UK, one of inaccessibility. They will not easily be able to get any closer to the inside the dome than the picture of its exterior they are given with their

phone. How, then, does the O2 become both a successful venue and a positive image used in this kind of promotion?

fig. 19 Pre-set 'home screen' on Samsung mobile phone on O2 network, 2012

Gilles Lipovetsky optimistically states that 'cyberspace is making communication virtual, while individuals are voting overwhelmingly for live performances, collective parties, and evenings out with friends', '[u]ltra-modern society, so affected by conflicting norms, is not one-dimensional; it resembles a paradoxical chaos, an organizing disorder' (2005: 54; 55). Others display a more skeptical attitude regarding similar effects and highlight societal losses; Norman M. Klein writes of the Electronic Baroque that '[b]y 1990, [environment and screen] blur into one – *outside/inside* (public/private) special effects – and become a master code for a new global economy' (2004: 403). The key difference between earlier Baroque and this electronic version is the depth of penetration: 'beginning with *transistors*, the Electronic Baroque adds *prosthetic extensions of the body* (TV, radio, Palm Pilots, telephones) as

miniaturized immersive environments (scripted spaces). This has few parallels' (2004: 403). For Klein the way that this new Baroque works in capital's favour is a key feature. If the post-cinematic attention economy is indeed total and the nature of all production today, how does the arena spectacular capitalise upon offering something enclosed and finite, in both time and space; something auratic? Elias Canetti wrote of arenas that:

> [t]he spectators turn their backs to the city. They have been lifted out of its structures of walls and streets and, for the duration of their time in the arena, they do not care about anything which happens there; they have left behind all their associations, rules and habits. Their remaining together in large numbers for a stated period of time is secure and their excitement has been promised them. But only under one condition: the discharge must take place inside the arena. (Canetti, 1962: 28)

Perhaps in the twenty-first century, the city that we are invited to turn our backs on is actually the 'network'?

It is important to note that these changes to space and social relations have happened gradually, like the replacement of analogue film with digital files for Rodowick and, as we shall see, replacement of public space with private space for Anna Minton; they resist 'epochal analysis', to use Raymond Williams' term (Williams, 1977**)**. This is also a quality of the rise of neoliberal politics. In this chapter and the next I will argue that the arena spectacular, as a part of dominant post-cinematic entertainment and also a part of postcivil space, functions as a heterotopic compensation for this new and uncertain terrain. Additionally I will show that the arena spectacular is not the only example of this kind of spatially and temporally bounded compensation.

This chapter will broaden my study of the interplay between space and screen, and what political implications can be found in connection to that. Steven Miles finds consumerism to have profoundly changed our relationship to cities, 'so much so that the individual experience of the city is filtered through the processes implied by consumption' (2010:12). Architect Jon Jerde proposes a 'community of consumers' as a positive outcome of his approach to city

planning; a collective consumption predicated upon individualism (Jerde quoted in Klein 2004: 354). Indeed, Dehaene and De Cauter observe a tendency to look for the truly public existing within the private (their book includes a chapter called 'The mall as *agora* – the *agora* as mall'): '[t]oday heterotopia […] realizes 'places to be' in the non-place urban realm' (2008: 5). In my analysis of *Batman Live* I will demonstrate the importance of the arena as a social space, however limited that sociality may be. I will show that apparent 'non-places' such as the ExCeL exhibition centre in London are now gathering places for specialist consumers to perform their consumption; where consumption that is more usually carried out at digital screens is temporarily made social and auratic.

As I have argued, rather than being part of a distinct and ancient lineage of large public spectacle, the arena spectacular more properly belongs to a cinematic heritage, and a complex and confused contemporary post-cinematic moment. In this chapter I will use Foucault's 'residual' type of space, the heterotopia, as a tool for my analysis of the original Millennium Dome project. Although far from clearly defined in Foucault's own work, I find that it still has a useful role within discourse around space in the twenty-first century and, since it is always performed in an enclosed space with a large audience, the arena spectacular format. Foucault's category is already residual at the time he was writing, and flexible enough to encompass spaces, such as the mirror, which are not physical at all. Consequently, it is still a useful way of looking at space that can be usefully adapted to the new divisions of space we see in the neoliberalised urban, and indeed in online and screen spaces as well. In addition, I will argue that Foucault shows ambivalence as to the political nature of the heterotopia. Although others have interpreted it as an enabling space of reflection and even emancipation, I will argue that the heterotopia is properly part of the dominant culture and as such is only ever a compensation for that domination. As Williams says, in late capitalism, the dominant penetrates ever further (1977: 126); so too in the heterotopia, which in the post-cinematic attention economy becomes compensation for labouring in front of screen images.

Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter are editors of *Heterotopia in a Postcivil Society*; they state that a 'profound redrawing of the contours of public and private space' has occurred in the latter decades of the twentieth century (2008: 3). In order to describe it, they borrow the term 'postcivil' from Frederic Jameson. In an interview with Michael Speaks, Jameson said that:

> the crucial thing about the end of civil society is that what used to be public is reprivatized, that is, what used to be spaces or places marked by government, by public, and therefore by the public, somehow revert to faceless forms of private control. So that some new kind of thing comes into being that is neither the place of one's private life nor the monumentalization of collective powers. (Jameson & Speaks 1992: 34)

David Nasaw's book *Going Out* (1993) is a history of 'public amusements' in America, in the period roughly consistent with the rise of cinema, the 1880's to the 1930's. He regards the appearance of designated spaces of public entertainment as vital to the evolution of the modern, working metropolis '[r]ecreation and play were not luxuries but necessities in the modern city', with an increasing segregation of work and leisure time (1993: 4). What is reflected in many theories I have already cited is that the digital, the post-cinematic, the attention economy, global neoliberalism and the network society represent the breakdown of established boundaries between spaces – be those spaces delineated by economic, aesthetic or social function. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the entertainment industry and its audience has been in a state of flux, where multiple commercial and aesthetic responses to technological and social changes are in play. The events that I am interested in here happen in public spaces in or near a city, but crucially not public, civil spaces. The O2 is a privately owned space of business first and a social space only to the degree that the attractions of sociability converge with those of the business that controls the space. The desires for embodied sociability in a networked age, that Lipovetsky mentions, mean that the O2 is a useful marketing image for the company, as well as a profitable venue in its own right.

The distinction between public and private space will become important in my discussion of Foucault and the Millennium Dome project, but it will be useful here to anchor the postcivil to the neoliberal ideology described above. Dehaene and De Cauter write that

> [t]he *polis* – the ideal of the city-state – tries to realize the good life via equilibrium between *oikos* (private sphere, household, hence economy) and *agora* (public sphere, the place of politics). 'Economisation' is the erosion of the distinction between these constitutive terms of the *polis*, as is clear from the term 'privitisation'. It is a sure sign of a crisis of 'politics'. (2008: 4)

This crisis in politics is co-emergent with neoliberalism, with its dissolutions of nation, state, community and traditional employment. Margaret Thatcher famously said that there was 'no such thing as society, only individual men and women' (Keay, 1987). In her vision of Britain '[a]ll forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, and family values' (Harvey, 2005: 23). According to Pierre Bourdieu '[n]eoliberalism is "a program of the methodical destruction of collectives," from trade unions and mill towns to families and small nations' (Davis and Bertrand Monk, 2007: x). Although neoliberalism serves financial industries best and most obviously, it also has had a major impact upon production of all kinds. Large multinational companies that produce or own the rights to the arena spectaculars are clear examples of conglomerates that simple couldn't have come about under previous types of government, for example Time-Warner (formerly Time-Warner AOL) who own DC Comics. Jeremy Rifkin has called the recent trend in this field the 'network approach to organising commerce', which 'allows the biggest transnational companies to rid themselves of physical plants, equipment, and talent by creating strategic relationships with suppliers to produce content' (2000: 27). For Rifkin, this is a model that actually originates in Hollywood, where since the 1950's big studios have retained the biggest profits in filmmaking, but also stopped producing in-house. This means that the production can be carried out by contractors with flexible, insecure relationships with the

studio, rather than workers on a payroll, and the main company insulated from some of the financial risks of production.

Jen Harvie has written that British neoliberalism:

> recognises and prioritises the individual's right to seek self-fulfillment and to do so in conditions unrestricted by state-instituted regulations, such as requirements to pay appropriate taxes, to heed trade restrictions or to observe employment laws […] In neoliberal capitalism, these principles of diminished state intervention and enhanced individual liberty to seek self-reward work in the service of maximising private profit. Simultaneously, the welfare state is diminished as taxation shrinks and government 'intervention' […] is rolled back. (Harvie, 2013: 12)

Neoliberalism has in many ways already destroyed the concept of 'the public', for example, Anna Minton discusses the disappearance of the term 'public good' in British planning policy therefore replacing citizenship with consumption (Minton, 2012). Minton argues that in twenty-first century, neoliberal Britain, civil spaces are no longer created, and even when urban developments are funded by the taxpayer, the results are usually sold off, as with the Millennium Dome site and later the London Olympic Park. Minton's *Ground Control* describes exactly this political and economic context; of the Olympic developments, she writes that:

> [f]ar from the civic-minded legacy promised, this is the architecture of extreme capitalism, which produces a divided landscape of privately owned, disconnected, high-security, gated enclaves […] The stark segregation and highly visible differences create a climate of fear and growing mistrust between people, which together with the undemocratic nature of these new private places, erodes civil society. (2012: xii)

In our neoliberalised society, we increasingly navigate the world primarily as individual consumers, whether we pay with cash or, as Beller argues, with our attention. Designed and commodified 'experiences' such as shopping, but also arena events and spectacular mega-

events, are becoming the primary form of public assembly. However, they take place in private spaces, such as the ones Anna Minton studies, and this affects the possibilities they afford. As stated earlier, David Nasaw mourns the passing of public, 'mass' amusements: '[t]hey are all gone now […] [t]he spectacular yet tawdry, wild, and wonderful Dreamlands only a subway ride away'; '[t]he movie palaces have been torn down or multiplexed into oblivion. And the huge and heterogeneous crowds that gathered there have been dispersed', '[w]e have lost not simply buildings and parks but also the sense of civic sociability they nourished and sustained' (Nasaw, 1993: 1). Klein states that he does not 'care deeply whether the old cities return' but is more concerned if 'we lose our urban *political* heritage' (2004: 345). More pragmatically, Minton warns that, in a typically neoliberal manner, private spaces are surreptitiously replacing public ones; central to Minton's anxiety about these spaces is that they *appear* public whilst actually being private. Whilst a street might seem open, anyone transgressing the allotted commercial function of that space can be ejected at will. New private urban spaces 'are ducal domains, cities for public ritual, but not for "democratic ways"' (Klein, ibid.). For clarity, I will denote the dependency of neoliberal space on the residual heterotopia using the term 'neoliberal heterotopia'.

The 'Tourist Gaze'

'The Home of Spectacular Cultural Events' is the slogan on a sign promoting Liverpool to users of the city's John Lennon Airport. The sign shows a performance by French spectacular-street-theatre company Royal de Luxe, commissioned by the city for 2012. Liverpool is a good example of a post-industrial city proclaiming itself as now relying on leisure and tourism for a large part of its economy. In this chapter I will consider Las Vegas as an archetypal city of tourist spectacle; a blueprint of sorts for experiential consumer-tourism in cities, such as Liverpool, all over the world. Las Vegas has developed along lines that other cities can now follow, 'the city has transformed itself from a single-focus tourism economy (gambling) to one

that models the commercial profitability of entertainment retail to the world' (Susan Bennet, 2005: 418).

fig. 20 Advert promoting Liverpool as a tourist destination, 2014

Arena spectaculars arrive in the British city at a historical point where the spaces to house them have already arrived, through neoliberal urban regeneration projects. Arenas are always connected to cities, in Britain we find the 'London O2 Arena', the 'Liverpool Echo Arena', the 'Motorpoint Sheffield Arena'. This was also true of ancient arenas but cities are obviously very different now from those that developed the ancient arenas of Greece or Rome. We no longer have demarcated walled cities and most of the population in Western countries like Britain is now urban. The effects of communications technology mean that every citizen is now arguably urban, both commercially and socially. Further to that, many arguments have been made to the effect that cities and countries all over the world are becoming more and more similar (see Rem Koolhaas's 'The Generic City' [*S, M, L, XL* 1995] and Marc Augé's *Non-places* [1995]).

To succeed in the field of tourism, city leaders try to offer something distinctive; to create a 'brand'; Liverpool is branding itself as 'The Home of Spectacular Cultural Events'. Mass-tourism, which John Urry argues is a quintessential modern and experience based upon local differences and separations in time and space, centralises presence, and communal experience (Urry, 2002). Modern mass-tourism is also a consumerist experience. Qualities we might associate with tourism such as pleasure, excess, sensory experience and presentation of the exotic lead me to consider the live show as tourism, that might even take place in one's own city. This trope found another articulation in the Olympic opening ceremony, which not only presented Britain for consumption to the rest of the world, but also back to itself. This is a continuation of a trend that, in the nineteenth century, saw cities become 'spectacle' in their own right; an idea perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the building of the then controversial Eiffel Tower in 1889 (see Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities*, 1998; Altick, *The Shows of London*, 1978). This tendency has become ever more prominent, to the point where cities such as Las Vegas exist almost solely as touristic spectacle.

John Urry argues that although travel for pleasure has always existed, '[t]o be a tourist is one of the characteristics of the 'modern' experience' (Urry, 2002: 4). He links its development to the exponential growth of British industrial cities in the nineteenth century (ibid, 5) and names the first mass destinations as seaside resorts such as Blackpool. Although it is now part of post-modern experience too, we still find that tourism is based on something like 'aura'. We find the remains of the Romantic 'cult of beauty' that Walter Benjamin saw as disappearing in the 1930's. Rather than the easy intimacy of the reproducible artwork, tourist experience is based on irreproducible in-situ consumption, for which the consumer must travel *to* the object: 'positional goods' that are bought and consumed at the site of production (ibid., 39). Tourist industries provide services and goods such as transport, restaurant meals, guided tours, shows and hotel rooms. As a whole, the tourist industries provide *time away*; their products exist in contradistinction to the everyday – what Foucault describes as 'heterochronisms'. There are two main features of this experiential category; firstly its existence as a monetised and

marketable commodity and secondly as an experience for the visitor of something 'other', something outside their everyday life.

The Experience Economy proposes that rather than necessarily spatial separation from one's life, today's consumers desire, or should be made to desire, separations in *time* (Gilmore and Pine, 2011). The publicity for arena spectaculars, and other live shows, often uses the word 'experience'; the implication being that an 'experience' is something above and beyond watching something. The live adaptation of a film like *Ben Hur* takes the film, a commodity which could be purchased as projected image in a cinema, or transportable recording and turns it into an event that must be 'experienced'. Within a fully-fledged experience economy, the only possible experience would be much like a tourist's – it would be paid for, last a set amount of time and be essentially separate from the rest of one's life. These usually involve specially demarcated spaces, for example a themed restaurant, but they also offer a kind of narrative separation: the theme of the restaurant might involve an imaginary transportation to the country whose cuisine the diners are partaking in; the space exists as a fiction.

If the contemporary 'network' is the contemporary city, perhaps the spatial separation of the arena is primarily a tool to enforce the temporal separation of the show from a more general audio-visual continuum. The temporal unity of a film in a cinema, for example, is eroded when that same film is available anywhere, anytime via the internet and mobile screen devices, as clips to be watched wherever and however. The arena show, however, enforces a specific duration, in a specific location. Might the arena spectacular, as post-cinematic, post-industrial and neoliberal heterotopia, offer the semblance of an 'edge' to the digital spectacle? If, as Beller says, we labour in front of images, we might seek out *these images* 'mirrored or reflected' (Foucault 2008: 17) in order to find what he calls a 'heterotopia'.

i. The Millennium Dome as Heterotopia

One of the fundamental components of the live-spectacle is that it happens in a specific space and time, and in a theatrical space of one sort or another. This section is an analysis of a specific place – the Millennium Dome/O2 – the sentiments and political will that produced it and how these might operate within a contemporary British postcivil society. The O2 Arena, is just one example of an indoor arena in Britain. Many have similar, if less famous, roots in the re-use of damaged 'brown-field' land and the regeneration of economically stagnant areas within post-industrial cities. Although arena spectaculars typically tour to other arenas as well, this particular arena has a history that is illuminating in terms of the governmental imperatives behind 'mega-events' (Roche, 2000) such as the millennium celebrations and the Olympics – these two in particular providing historical brackets around my three commercial arena spectaculars all produced between 2000 and 2012.

Maurice Roche's category of the mega-event includes sport such as the world cup, 'expos' such as the Millennium Experience, music festivals and many other large-scale, temporally and geographically sited events and will be seen to share some qualities with the heterotopia. The mega-event is a political, social, aesthetic and economic phenomenon that appears with industrial modernity. Maurice Roche explains the term in his *Mega-events and Modernity*:

> As modern cultural events, mega-events are a genre which comprises a mix of two major sub-genres, namely 'exhibitions' and 'performance'. As performances they are eclectic forms and involve a mix of some or all of the following performance genres: ritual, ceremony, drama, theatre, festival, carnival, celebration, spectacle. (2000: 9)

They are spectacular, unique events, defined and delineated in time and space, and in this sense they remain auratic. Events co-existent with early film such as the Great Exhibition and the Worlds Fairs, discussed in chapter 1, would be early examples of the mega-event. As Roche explains, they are also always instrumentalised, both politically and economically:

> Mega-events, particularly sport mega-events, provide resources to counterbalance [...]
> destructurations of lived space in late modernity. They offer possibilities for people to
> reanimate the sense of their world as involving spatial distances and differences.
> (ibid., 224)

The mega-event is in some ways defined in opposition to the arena spectacular: a part of their being 'mega' is their unrepeatable nature, whereas the arena spectacular is performed over a series of dates in a tour of different locations. A mega-event is temporary and usually part of the city, all be it a liminal zone towards its edge. However, although the mega-event is temporary, usually it is prefigured as having a lasting effect of some kind – the much-discussed 'legacy' of the London Olympics, for example (as in the report 'Meta-evaluation of the Impact and Legacy of the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games', UK Government, 2012). Roche writes that:

> [s]patially, mega-events uniquely, if transiently, identify particular urban and national
> places in the national, international and global spaces of media and tourist markets and
> the gaze of their consumers. Temporally, mega-events operate within event calendars
> and planning processes spanning generations. In a world of 'flows' they provide
> symbolic and real channels, junctions and termini. In a world in which space-time is
> said to becoming increasingly 'compressed', their calendars and periodicities create
> distance and space. In a world which is arguably becoming culturally homogenised
> and in which places are becoming interchangeable, they create transitory uniqueness,
> difference and localisation in space and time. Sociologically they offer concrete, if
> transient, versions and visions of symbolic and participatory communities. (2000: 7)

We can see these impulses and sentiments reflected in the publicity for the Dome, an introduction in the guide for the 'Millennium Experience' exhibition (held there throughout 2000) reads:

> The experience of visiting the Dome can open people's eyes to new ideas and show
> new products and policies at work. It can excite and inspire everyone, especially

young people, while providing excellent entertainment. A day at the Dome should be an amazing memory for the rest of your life. (*Millennium Experience – The Guide* 1999: 9)

A distinctive piece of architecture by Richard Rogers' company, the Dome consists of a huge, white, tent-like roof held in place by tall yellow struts. The design drew upon structures built for the Festival of Britain: the 'Dome of Discovery' and the 'Skylon' tower (which lent it's shape to the yellow supporting struts). The Dome was initially designed to house 'an exhibition with appeal for everyone' (ibid., 8). 'The contents of the Dome were developed around three broad themes – who we are, what we do and where we live – which are explored in fourteen zones'; the Dome, then, was construed as a kind of national or perhaps, even more presumptively, a global mirror, allowing us to examine this 'we' that was constructed for us (ibid, 8). Despite its ostensible aim as 'an expression of optimism and hope' (ibid., 9) there is another prevalent narrative attached to the Dome: that of its perceived economic and political failure; the Dome as 'ruin', however, this is not my focus here. I will instead explore this seemingly fundamental desire or need for demarcated, separate spaces visited for periods of demarcated time, and explain how this idea persists in post-cinematic culture and politics. Roche's ideas on the mega-event are relevant here in explaining the goals of such productions, but it is Foucault's heterotopia that reveals the more general political use of demarcated, separated sections of time and space.

The Dome was an attempt to mark the global event of the turning of a new millennium by first reclaiming a piece of toxic land, building a landmark structure in an economically depressed part of London, and then filling it with a mixture of exhibits and performances. Like the Olympics in 2012, this was a governmental project rather than a commercial one (albeit one that from the start would depend upon sponsorship, hence the 'new products' mentioned in the quote above from its guidebook); one that attempted to express something about Britain at a particular time, and also something about those in power at that time. The Dome and its original exhibition was often proposed as exploring some of the concerns around a recently

post-industrial Britain trying to find a place in a globalised economy, for example Elizabeth Wilhilde wrote in a promotional book on the Dome that:

> [o]ur century has seen momentous changes brought about by technology, changes that have often been bewildering both in their scope and their rapidity. The result has been a widespread suspicion of modernity, a turning away from the present in favour of the nostalgic haven of the past. The millennium presents the opportunity to turn and face the future, to make a difference to the world and the way we live. (Wilhilde, 1999: 183)

The exhibition happened at a politically pivotal moment, in which New Labour assumed the mantel of a project started by the previous Conservative government. Reflected in this quote we can see Tony Blair's purported turning away from the nostalgic cultural policy of Margaret Thatcher's governments under which, for example, the National Trust was established (see Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country*, 2009). Working before the actual completion of this particular mega-event, Roche writes of it that 'as the flagship of an armada of minor events nationwide, the expo event [i.e. the Dome] provides a high-profile, readily identifiable and potentially memorable platform for the celebration of New Labour's versions of contemporary Britain and its visions of a new nationalism' (2000: x). Roche's work allows us to see a lineage for projects like the Dome, however in Wilhilde's text, we can also see that whilst representing a 'turning to the future', the Dome is supposed to show this future as challenging and uncertain (and we shall see later how starkly this contrasts with the nostalgic confidence of the Olympic opening ceremony). The 'Millennium Experience' was a blend of exhibition and live shows (indeed, the elaborate 'Millennium Show' that played daily through 2000 might well qualify in retrospect as an arena spectacular), which as well as eventually providing a significant venue for arena spectaculars, also drew upon similar influences in cinema, theatre, circus, worlds fairs and expos.

Foucault's fundamental supposition in 'Of Other Spaces', which was originally delivered as a lecture in 1967, is that in human society space is divided up into different categories: the space

of everyday life and other spaces that reflect or distort that space by representing it. The 'heterotopia' is a contested term, as to both its actual meaning and the possibility of its application to today's societal spaces. The heterotopia is to be understood as 'a sort of effectively realized utopia'; real but exterior places where all real sites of culture can be found represented, 'a kind of places that are outside all places, even though they are actually localizable' (Foucault, 2008: 17). As well as the voluminous list of verbs that heterotopias supposedly claim (they invert, reflect, suspend, amongst others) there are many other frustrations and contradictions within the text. Foucault's category of 'other spaces' might suggest spaces of alternatives; freedom from the norm – spaces of emancipation, even. However, much of Foucault's diagnosis casts them as very much part of the social order: alternative spaces that *allow* continued conformity; mechanisms for the safe containment of aberrant desires. The concept of the heterotopia is a slippery one. As Keith Hetherington writes the heterotopia is 'concerned with the relationship between freedom and control and the ways that they are woven into the spaces of social ordering' (1997: 11). However, Foucault's 'epoch' is not necessarily the one we now occupy. The diversity of Foucault's own examples now suggests yet more, contemporary applications, although according to Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter 'when putting on heterotopian spectacles, everything tends to take on heterotopian traits' (2008: 6). In Foucault's text, he suggests that heterotopias are a residual element in society (even then, in 1967), so how might they apply now, in a globalised, neoliberal and post-cinematic society? It is possible that the term is now defunct, however the discourse still surrounding Foucault's very short text (I will be citing several recent books devoted to it) suggests otherwise.

I have already explained my reasons for using remediation as a theory rather than the residual – here we find a cultural element that *is* usefully framed as residual. The heterotopia describes a residual human need for spatial otherness, but it is this need; this desire for otherness that is residual – the *forms* that heterotopias take may be residual, archaic, emergent or dominant cultural elements themselves. In a wider sense, I will show that the heterotopia (and especially the neoliberal heterotopia of today) is a tool of the political *staus quo*; Foucault's text, in my

reading of it, is an ambivalent diagnostic, not an emancipatory polemic.

Although it might seem that different locations are more and more alike, at the same time a country or a city, or a region of that city must make itself distinct in order to be marketable:

> the specificities of place are increasingly undermined in a context in which consumption is no longer constrained by time and space […] [t]he uniqueness of place is undermined in a situation in which the market obliges places to advertise themselves as having generic qualities […] [m]eanwhile, the image of the city has become an essential element of urban currency. (Miles, 2010: 165)

Increasingly the way in which to make distinctions between places is through what Foucault calls 'heterotopias': museums; cafés; beaches; cultural institutions and transient mega-events. Arguably it is these spaces of leisure and culture that in Western cities (as 'The Home of Spectacular Cultural Events') now take the economic, central place of trade and industry in the cities of the past. If so, can they remain heterotopic whilst taking this central economic role, which might suggest that they are more part of general space, 'topos'? Fittingly for a concept that pivots upon reflection of real society, the mirror is given as a key example of a reflecting space that is both utopic and heterotopic – if the mirror is an 'other space' as Foucault suggests, then why not the fictive screen image, or the internet? Indeed, many of the rituals and activities that Foucault cites now take place via screens, rather than physical space – screens that themselves might be viewed anywhere. The present epoch, then, might be one chiefly concerned with connected images, rather than connected spaces.

Foucault's 'other spaces'

Since the heterotopia is a concept that is interpreted in various ways, it will be worth analysing the original text in some detail. Foucault argues that there are three kinds of space: regular space, utopia – which doesn't exist as real space but as idea or image – and heterotopia, which is enterable, demarcated space that somehow reflects or images regular space. Heterotopias are

designated areas that are separate from regular space (and also periods of time separate from regular time) and he argues that although by the time of writing they are residual elements from a previous configuration of space, these demarcated 'other spaces' have been a constant in human society. Foucault's sense here fits Raymond Williams' configuration of cultural elements, which would cast a residual heterotopia as something 'formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present' (1977: 122). Foucault's examples of heterotopias range from the mirror, the brothel, the cemetery, the ship and the garden. The first few paragraphs sketch out an interpretation of how the idea of space has changed since the Middle Ages and more dramatically through the nineteenth century. He writes that following the passing of space as emplacement, '[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition' (2008: 14). He says that his epoch is one of relations between sites (2008: 15) but points out that space has yet to be entirely 'desacralized'; 'perhaps our life is still ruled by a certain number of oppositions that cannot be touched' (2008: 16). So the 'heterotopia' and its spatial counterparts are residual formations – these are divisions left over from a time of more thorough 'emplacement'. There is nothing in the text that necessarily distinguishes the heterotopia from the 'third space' (Edward W. Soja 1996), that important kind of space that is neither work, nor home, but I would suggest that most of Foucault's examples have more of a sense of ritual; of occasion, than merely not being at home or at work.

Foucault's propensity for focusing on margins; the spaces outside or on the edges of society, is famous from his work on prisons and asylums, but here he is more concerned with spaces that have a function for 'normal' citizens; marginal spaces that can have a *routine* use, rather than a corrective one. Foucault's examples are all within or appended to the political state; they are all societal spaces. Plain 'space', which has its 'others' in 'utopia' and 'heterotopia,' is purely functional, and 'utopia', although important, doesn't actually exist as space. Foucault is interested in the peculiar category of 'ones that have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralise, or invert the set of relations designated, mirrored or reflected by them' (2008: 17). He states that '[t]he heterotopia has the

power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are themselves incompatible' (2008: 19). The theatre's stage brings together various sites in the form of different sets, placed on the same physical location, and the cinema is a room with another space superimposed onto one of its walls, but the key example here is the garden: '[t]he garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world' (2008: 20): here Foucault refers to Persian gardens which traditionally represent within them 'the four parts of the world', and states that the modern zoological garden has this idea as its source. Another similar example could be the 'expo': the large exhibition bringing together examples of other cultures, industry and artefacts from colonial adventure (examples of this trope would include the Great Exhibition of 1851, the American 'worlds fairs' and the Festival of Britain in 1951). It is this tradition that the Millennium Experience takes up. Further aligning the mega-event to the heterotopic, '[t]he heterotopia begins to function fully when people find themselves at a sort of absolute break with traditional time', in 'slices of time – which is to say that they open onto what might be called […] heterochronisms' (2008: 20). There are two opposite types of heterochronism, Foucault says; ones of 'time that accumulates indefinitely, for example museums and libraries' and those 'linked […] to time in its most futile, most transitory, most precarious aspect, and this in the festive mode' (2008: 20). The Dome's exhibition falls between these two 'opposites', offering both accumulated knowledge of human life, but also a segment of time out of one's own life; as Roche writes 'in modern large-scale complex societies [...] people reflect on and periodise their biographies in relation to the readily identifiable and memorable great public events which affected them during the course of their lives' (2000: 5). The heterotopia is not generally freely accessible to the public, it involves a system of entry and exit that 'both isolates them and makes them penetrable' (2008: 21). Entry can be compulsory, like a prison, or one must go through certain rites or purifications, '[o]ne can only enter with a certain permission and after having performed a certain number of gestures' (2008: 21). Foucault's final principle is that they have a function in relation to the space that remains, in one of two ways: 'Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes all real space […] as even more illusory' or their role is in 'creating

another space, another real space as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is disorderly, ill construed, and sketchy. This would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation'. Foucault's compensatory examples are the brothel (heterotopia of illusion) and the early Puritan and Jesuit colonies in America (heterotopia of compensation, 2008: 21).

In his discussion of Foucault's text, Peter Johnson uses the older meaning of the word heterotopia: 'a medical term referring to a particular tissue that develops at a place other than is usual. The tissue is not diseased or particularly dangerous but merely placed elsewhere, a dislocation' (2006: 77). This is crucial to how I will employ Foucault's ideas: the heterotopia is in this way inherently benign to the system it is contained within. As Johnson also states, Foucault does not ascribe any transformative or emancipatory function to heterotopias. They reflect society, but it is not suggested that they disrupt or alter it; in fact many of his examples are essential for the maintenance of the existing order, such as the prison, or the merchant ship. Others, like the Puritan colony, are necessary amputations of parts of a society, although still connected both psychologically (as threat) and economically (through trade). Johnson's commentary points out, and I would agree, that '[a]lthough Foucault describes heterotopia as 'actually existing utopia', the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation' (2006: 84).

Heterotopias and the Postcivil

There are two obvious contestations that would inevitably accompany any contemporary deployment of Foucault's ideas. Firstly, it could be argued that space has become either more homogeneous since the time of his writing, or conversely so heterogeneous as to defy the triadic categorisations Foucault gives. Secondly, perhaps what we mean by 'space' has changed so much since then, that his terms of reference might restrict the concept's usefulness.

Foucault wrote that:

perhaps our life is still ruled by a certain number of oppositions that cannot be touched, that institution and practice have not yet dared to undermine; oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example, between private space and public space […] between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work. (2008: 16)

Foucault does not suggest what might happen to his triadic division of space as mankind moves even further away from what he marks as a medieval notion of 'emplacement'. Some of his formulation on space – made before the internet and at an earlier period of globalised consumption and labour; when the West still had a major economic alternative in 'second world' state communism – still seems recognisable and applicable to our own in the early twenty-first century. For example, Foucault's proposition that 'our experience of the world is less that of a great life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein' (2008: 14) would still seem to have meaning in reference to 'network space' (Dehaene & De Cauter, 2008: 4). Indeed, this phrasing of his wouldn't be entirely out of place in the guidebook to the Dome, quoted above.

Fifty years after Foucault wrote this text, do we still live within a set of relations that 'delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another'? Again, many of these changes in culture can be connected to the changing nature of 'aura', that quality of specific objects in specific places that Walter Benjamin described in the 1930's:

> What is aura? A peculiar web of space and time: the unique manifestation of a distance, however near it may be. To follow, while reclining on a summer's noon, the outline of a mountain range on the horizon or a branch, which casts its shadow on the observer until the moment or the hour partakes of their presence – this is to breathe in the aura of these mountains, of this branch. (Benjamin, 1972: 20)

Benjamin continues:

Today, people have as passionate an inclination to bring things close to themselves or even more to the masses, as to overcome uniqueness in every situation by reproducing it. Every day the need grows more urgent to possess an object in the closest proximity, through a picture or, better, a reproduction […] The prizing of the object from its shell, the destruction of its aura is the mark that the sense of the sameness of things in the world has grown to such an extent that by means of reproduction even the unique is made to yield up its uniqueness. (ibid.)

But notions of distance and technology have changed, even beyond what Benjamin foresaw. John Urry maintains that the aura is still an essential part of tourism based upon in-situ consumption of what he calls 'positional goods' (2002: 39), after all, without its effect on the conceptualisation of distance, why would anyone travel at all? Looked at this way, one can find strange combinations of contemporary auratic and non-auratic artifacts, for example, today a film shown at a cinema might not be regarded as auratic, but perhaps the cinema – the room itself; even its audience – could be.

Scott Lash states that 'the cultural realm is no longer 'auratic', in Benjamin's sense; that is, it is no longer systematically separated from the social', '[t]he demise of aura entails the obliteration of the distinction between the cultural and the social' (1990: 11; 159). In this sense, the aura depends, or depended, upon the distinctions made in the theory of the heterotopia. This would suggest that aura depends upon heterotopia; 'other space' allows these 'special objects' to be special, for their proximity to be observed as such. Although physically demarcated portions of space, cemeteries for example, still exist, a significant portion of important human activity takes place without it, within the non-space of digital networks (discussed in my previous chapter). Further to this, real physical spaces are increasingly seamlessly connected, using those same networks. Paradoxically, because of the penetration of more and more spaces by communications networks, more spaces display the third principle, that of juxtaposition of different sites. The train carriage, for example, which Foucault

mentions as an 'extraordinary bundle of relations' (2008: 16), is now typically a place of work, entertainment or sociability, or all three, as well as transportation.

A concept that was vast and unwieldy in application from the start is perhaps even more so now. The story of how the Millennium Dome was created; why it was felt necessary to mark the year 2000 with a sited exhibition, will help demonstrate the persistence of the demarcated heterotopia.

The Millennium Dome

In a BBC radio programme on the Dome and the Millennium Experience architect Mike Davies, part of Richard Rogers' architectural practice, described the structure as an 'envelope' (a term Frederic Jameson has also used in connection to post-modernist architecture – Jameson & Speaks, 1992). Indeed, the separation between the structure of the Dome and its contents has often been emphasised not least because of the perceived failure of the exhibition; Rogers' own job sheet on the building reads:

> For RRP, the project was a resounding success – the building itself was remarkably inexpensive (£43 million for groundworks, perimeter wall, masts, cable net structure and the roof fabric) […] involving standardised components that delivered the building within fifteen months and under budget. Its content, however, was altogether less successful and was savaged by the press (Richard Rogers Partnership, 2010)

The building was commissioned before its contents, which were explained in rather vague terms such as 'an exploration and celebration of British ingenuity and progress' to be arranged in themed 'zones' (BBC Radio 4, 2010). Stephen Bayley, at one point a creative consultant on the Dome project, has written 'it was not an intelligent design, even if it was an impressive structure. It produced a space so vast it hobbled the imagination of those charged with filling it […] [w]hen asked, David Hockney said it would be best left empty' (Stephen Bayley, 2007). It seems apparent from Bayley's 'insider' account that the structure itself was prefigured as a

monumental envelope, with the contents left unspecified until an extremely late stage. Virginia Bottomley, a Conservative minister at the time of the project's conception said that '[t]he concept was that we should have a focal point. At critical times the population has been on pilgrimages to places like Canterbury. There is just something that celebrates great journeys. We wanted people from all round the country to be able to feel they were participating in this celebration' (Irvine, 1999: 44). After much debate, Greenwich was chosen as the site for such a focal point, partly because of the meridian line and the connotation of passing time. With its attendant transport links and infrastructure and the reclamation of a patch of disused, contaminated ex-industrial land, the project carved out a newly regenerated space within London to be the centre of the millennium celebrations. Is this an archetypal 'other space': a separate space, demarcated in order to act as an imaginative focal point for the rest of the country? David Hockney's suggestion that it should remain empty seem to understand this as the primary function of such a space as a fulcrum for a national imagination, rather than a tool for some other purpose; purely a heterotopic *space*, rather than the complex mega-event it was to house.

A visit to the Dome is not just a geographical journey but also an allocation of time made by the visitor; for most visitors coming from outside London, quite a significant one. This aligns with Foucault's example of the festival; heterotopias are, as Foucault puts it; 'most often linked to slices of time […] heterochronisms' (Foucault, 2008: 20). One prominent slogan for the Dome was 'One Amazing Day' and, as such, the visit to the Dome promoted as singular and distinct from the rest of the year. Part of the proposed appeal for the Dome was its temporary nature (it was always only going to be open for one year), hence the use of the singular 'amazing day'. Indeed, beyond this, the millennium celebrations were an attempt to create a year long heterochronism. The fact that the Millennium exhibition spaces and the live Millennium show ran for the whole year marks the whole year 2000 as a period in which to consider the past and the future: '[t]he millennium presents the opportunity to turn and face the future, to make a difference to the world and the way we live' (Wilhilde, 1999: 183). We can see, then, that heterochronic sensibilities persist, and we can see them again in the London

Olympics, demarcated as a period, '2012', that consisted of not only sport-events, but the 'cultural olympiad', that added up to a festival-like period only notionally connected to the games themselves, extending the 'eventfulness' of the event.

A promotional book that preceded the Dome's opening quotes Alex Madina as saying '[t]his is not a museum, it is not an art gallery, nor is it Disneyland […] The Experience is a comment and it's asking you to engage and complete that circle' (Wilhilde, 1999: 156). The visitor's looking and experiencing is presented as integral, as completing (as I will also show in my analysis of the Olympic opening ceremony: in both of these national productions, we see a call upon viewers to become part of the show, as if this were a patriotic duty). Many of the exhibits were based on multimedia, temporal elements, and the dome also included live performances, including the 'Millennium Show' which ran three times a day throughout the whole of 2000 (others included promenade performances outside of the Dome's central arena space, connected to some of the exhibits [*Millennium Experience – The Guide*, 1999]). This show is of obvious relevance to this thesis, as another live 'spectacular'. Mark Fisher, known for his work with the Rolling Stones and other rock musicians (and who would later work on *Ben Hur Live*), was part of the production team. His sentiments echo those of Philip Auslander's on 'mediatized' culture cited in my introduction:

> These days people get most of their entertainment through the television so the sheer shock of seeing anything modern and live may mean we'll need to hand out cold compresses afterwards […] [w]e want to make it accessible. But even so it will probably be quite confrontational for people to see rather sexy and energetic young people doing dangerous and beautiful things only yards away from where they are standing while they are being buffeted by loud rock music. (*Millennium Experience – The Guide*, 1999: 180)

Here, again, we find what is presumed to be the massively magnified, visceral impact of live spectacle to be found in Rockwell's *Spectacle* (Rockwell 2006). The music for the show was composed by rock musician Peter Gabriel, who said 'we must tell the story of the post-

industrial landscape and the dilemmas that will face us […] M for Millennium and also M for Empowerment. People will come into the Dome and experience this assault on their senses and get ideas to realize more of who or what they want to be' (*Millennium Experience – The Guide* 1999: 104 – I will return to this question of the self in my section on *Batman Live*). His interpretation of its purpose would seem to fit Foucault's principle that heterotopias have a function in relation to 'all the space that remains' – here, that function being to inspire people in their lives when they return from the Dome; the Dome as heterotopic mirror.

For Foucault, the mirror is, confusingly, both non-existent space (utopia) and 'other space' (heterotopia):

> it is starting from the mirror that I discover my absence in the place where I am, since I see myself over there […] it renders this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the looking glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since, in order to be perceived, it has to pass through this virtual point, which is over there. (Foucault, 2008: 17)

Michael Bracewell has written in criticism of the Dome that:

> [to] the majority of British citizens, the Dome did not exist as a real structure on the Greenwich peninsula; it existed as an idea, filtered and refracted through the trick mirrors of mass media, to become a kind of allegorical site – a tabular rasa on to which the nation projected or dumped its sense of self. (Bracewell, 2002: 295)

This is not contrary to its builders' intentions, what went wrong is that the Dome became a negative allegory of Britain and its leaders.

The Dome was described, as I quoted above, as exploring 'who we are, what we do and where we live' (*Millennium Experience – The Guide* 1999: 8). As heterotopic mirror, the Dome exhibition constructs a national, or even a human 'we' – a collective subjectivity that it then attempts to show and reflect back to the visitor. Bracewell points out that this was not necessarily a positive image of a self, and in fact this reflection happened remotely through

media coverage. In terms of a national consciousness, like Foucault's mirror-space, the Dome both does and doesn't exist as a space. Although, like Foucault's mirror, the site is not necessarily experienced as a physical one, it allows the viewer to construct their own viewing; it allows them, and the nation, to reconstitute themselves.

Emancipation or Compensation?

Now we reach a key point about the heterotopia: whether to regard it as an emancipatory social element or a part of an essentially repressive social order. Peter Johnson's 'Unraveling Foucault's 'different spaces'' seeks to debunk many previous readings of the text, particularly those that ascribe an emancipatory quality to 'other space'. He writes that in fact, they are an instrumental part of any existing social order.

> Although Foucault describes heterotopia as 'actually existing utopia', the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation [...] with Foucault there is no inevitable relationship with spaces of hope. It is about conceiving space outside, or against, any utopian framework or impulse. (Johnson, 2006: 84)

If 'utopia' is unreachable, then the heterotopia is the only compensation for the 'topos' we find ourselves in. Foucault's final principle of the heterotopia is that 'they have, in relation to the rest of space, a function' and that that function is either an illusion that 'exposes all real spaces' or to create 'another real space [...] of compensation' (2008: 27). The mirror would provide a simple example of the former, unreal illusionary space (as would the cinema, or the theatre). These heterotopias show spaces that one cannot enter but might illuminate the 'visitor' about another, real space. An example that Foucault uses elsewhere is the carnival – a real space and time that can be entered. Mikhail Bakhtin's famous conception of them in medieval times fits with the heterotopia; he explains that they inverted usual hierarchies, representing 'society turned upside down' (1984: 3). The carnival is surely a compensatory

heterotopia, one that Bakhtin argues allowed 'a special kind of communication impossible in everyday life'; a space where life is reordered in a fashion more to the participants' liking and then returned back; 'they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated […] during a given time of the year' (ibid., 10; 6). Although Bakhtin emphasises the frequency, intensity and pervasiveness of carnival in the medieval world, the carnival is not a revolution; the temporary upturning of the social order is not meant to lead to actual, permanent societal change: 'they do not command nor do they ask for anything' (ibid., 7). In Bakhtin it seems more like an occasional venting, where citizens get to be and say what they are not allowed to in everyday life. I would argue that in this example we can see that the heterotopia of compensation is *always* a space of political coercion, the carnival as much as the prison: the brothel as well as the clinic. This interpretation of the heterotopia puts it in line with Adorno and Horkheimer's more definitively repressive 'culture industry' which, although it may well 'reflect' and 'expose' exists to occupy 'men's senses from the time they leave the factory in the evening to the time they clock in again the next morning with matter that bears the impress of the labor process they themselves have to sustain throughout the day', thereby keeping the labourer compliant and disciplined (1997: 131). This heterotopic compensatory space might also 'reflect' or 'expose' regular space as Foucault says – but these functions are themselves enclosed within the heterotopia that necessarily remains separate from regular space, and therefore *change nothing*. Rather than a representation of a space intended to allow an audience to see their predicament and throw off their ideological chains, the heterotopia offers temporary and contained distraction: a way to sublimate frustrations and dissatisfactions, safely outside of general political space.

Those heterotopias that constitute spaces of entertainment have clearly changed since Foucault wrote 'On Other Spaces', in Western economies becoming far more integrated into mainstream economic production, as well as technologically disseminated in various new ways. In *The Cinematic Mode of Production*, Jonathan Beller uses the term 'screen/society' to denote just how far entertainment space and regular space have merged – consumption of images now constitutes production, as part of what he calls 'attention economy' (2006: 282).

In digital commerce, we can identify clear examples of the 'attention economy' and blurring of boundaries between useful and cultural space, in the myriad examples of services provided online for no charge, as long as the user is also prepared to be exposed to adverts. The Millennium experience was promoted to potential sponsors as offering 'a complete presence marketing vehicle, showcasing products and values and providing a unique point of difference over competitors […] sponsors will be integrated into "every aspect" of on-site presence at the Dome "providing sustained exposure to and interaction with over 12 million visitors' (Irvine, quoting government promotion of the Dome, 1999: 107). Reliance upon sponsorship, which is essentially the sale of advertising space, within such projects is still commonplace – the 2012 London Olympics is an obvious recent example. Indeed, with its blending of work and leisure, many elements of neoliberal urban space make the heterotopia hard to clearly identify. In Beller's example of the 'social-realist film' *The Matrix* (2006: 199**),** the titular 'matrix' hides real space, which is one of complete domination and exploitation. If we employ Foucault's terms within Beller's more recent theory, the 'matrix' is a darkly heterotopic image – a space to occupy the imagination, but one without utopic hope; one that enforces the existing order by offering compensation for the deprivations metered out by that order. But crucially, inhabitants of the matrix do not know they are inside it; they do not know that it is only an illusion and a compensation. If all perception has, as Beller argues, been turned to cinematic profit, how can a space usefully mirror or represent anything, as this representation would simply be another site for the extraction of profit? This might be the central paradox of any contemporary, postcivil and neoliberal heterotopia: although it might now be the usual experience of space, one cannot leave it or even perceive the edges of it.

Recent uses of the theory seem to repeatedly find that heterotopia today is either everywhere or nowhere. Michiel Dehaene and Lieven De Cauter (in *Heterotopia and the City: Public Space in a Postcivil Society* [2008]) write that '[w]ithin network space, heterotopia has to a large extent changed its function. Rather than interrupting normality, heterotopias now realize or simulate a common experience of place' (2008: 5). They argue that Foucault's conception of space pivots on a distinction between the public and the private, the heterotopia being

private and restricted and therefore separate to public civic space. Due to privatisation and other neoliberal policies and trends I have outlined above, this distinction often does not exist in twenty-first century cities. Dehaene and De Cauter propose that the 'heterotopia embodies the tension between place and non-place that today reshapes the nature of public space' (2008: 5). Their writing exists alongside what they term 'a requiem for a civil culture' (2008: 3). Foucault's spaces are almost always abstract examples of types of place – each iteration of his examples would in reality be localised and specific; they would have an accumulated meaning to a societal group (a *specific* cinema in a specific place; indeed, even a specific mirror). 'Non-place', a term coined by Marc Augé, refers to transitory space without identity (Augé, 1995). For citizens today, urban space might be seen to proceed towards 'non-place' – a rootless, entirely commercial space without history or unique societal meaning; interchangeable with other spaces throughout the world that share its economic function. This has become a common trope in thinking about the development of urban space.

Neoliberal policy coincides with and relies upon technology such as the internet, which facilitates instantaneous movement of capital and further frees markets. In a set of contradictions typical of neoliberalism as an ideology, it depends upon both a conservative jingoism and the transient space of non-places. In fact, the Millennium Dome is a good example of this: it is proposed as a global statement about the future, but one that can only be made by Britain because of the designation and marking of the meridian line in Greenwich, a line that is crucial to the system of time keeping which leads to the turning of the 'new millennium'. With some irony, architect Rem Koolhaas has proposed an exaggeration of this tendency, as 'the generic city'; where the past and therefore identity has become too small for exponentially expanding humanity to all share and dwell within. Koolhaas sees his 'Generic City' as having dispensed with identity based upon history, meaning that it no longer relies upon the 'aura' of an historic centre. The generic city is one beyond the historic city – it is pure 'other space' (and/or 'non-place') without space. The 'generic city' is freed from the tyrannical 'centre' which previously would hold the oldest, most important sites:

> The Generic City breaks with this destructive cycle of dependency: it is nothing but a reflection of present need and present ability. It is the city without history. It is big enough for everybody. It is easy. It does not need maintenance. If it gets too small it just expands […] It is "superficial" – like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning. (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995: 1250)

The generic city is a fiction, but some of its superficiality; its disregard for history; its permeability and its constant renewal might seem to be realised within the contemporary neoliberalised city (Las Vegas, as I will show at the end of this chapter, is perhaps the closest example of an actually existing generic city). The generic city is not a heterotopia, it erases the need for them; in its infinite adaptability it provides everything, for everyone – indeed, as it does not yet exist, it would be more accurately described as a utopia. A space that for Augé is exemplary in its lack of meaning, the airport, becomes the most identifiable spaces in the generic city: 'Once manifestations of ultimate neutrality, airports now are among the most singular, characteristic elements of the Generic City, its strongest vehicle of differentiation. [They] have to be, being all the average person tends to experience of a particular city' (ibid., 1251). For Koolhaas, further to the cessation of public/private divisions, place itself, so far as it is defined by identity, also disappears, leaving only constantly changing non-place. With the constant flux of the 'Generic City' would come the pervasive network space which breaks down distinctions between work and leisure, public and private. To borrow Foucault's final example, on board a twenty-first century ship, a transportational non-place, life may not be that different to life on land, with work revolving entirely around a computer interface connected to the internet (see also China Miéville 'Floating Utopias: Freedom and Unfreedom of the Seas' in *Evil Paradises* eds. Davis and Bertrand Monk 2007).

In retrospect, the Dome occupies a sympathetic position to non-place and generic urbanism. Obviously is was a unique destination, 'millennium central' for the year 2000, (Irvine, 1999: 51) unlike the repeatable experience of transport hubs Augé criticises. However, the very language used to promote it refers us to those 'meaningless' spaces of supermodernity. The

'zones' of the Dome seem at pains to create a sort of non-place, by reliance on vague, suggestive and presumed international cross-cultural themes like 'Play', 'Mind', 'Spirit'. During the year 2000, the Greenwich 'envelope' became an exhibitionary non-place – and yet, it was still built. The examples I am presenting (the arena spectacular, the Dome, Las Vegas and the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony) support Foucault's claim that human society still needs separated spaces in which to deconstruct or otherwise process the events and functions in regular space. Foucault's closing remarks are telling. In describing the boat as heterotopia, he diagnoses its function as one not only of economy, but of imagination: '[i]n civilisations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the pirates' (2008: 22). Although this closing note compares heterotopias favourably with an alternative system of power, it does support a reading of the heterotopia as non-transformative, non-emancipatory. Heterotopias are part of a system that, through compensations, forego the need for the political totality of a control society, yet are still disciplinary devices. As much as the structures of both space and power change, this pay-off continues to be required. We still have a desire for demarcation, and aura in some form, even if this is less and less achievable due to the increasingly porous boundaries of the networked elements of contemporary labour (be that in employment or value-producing attention).

Screen as Heterotopia

An essential feature of the heterotopia for Foucault is that it is a real space that one can *be within*, or at least, in the example of the mirror, see oneself within. Although space might be constructed quite differently (as 'network space'; as 'non-place'), the need for other space persists. We have already seen that heterotopias are images of societal space, and also that these other spaces can contain images (e.g. the cinema), however, they also are spaces into which citizens can enter. Rhiannon Bury discusses 'cyberspace as virtual heterotopia' that allows a networked social space for members of online fan communities (2005: 166) but her focus is on interpersonal communication allowed via online space. Can the case be made for

screen images, in line with the example of the mirror, as heterotopias in their own right? Roland Ritter and Bernd Knaller-Vlay (1998) offer a contemporary example of a heterotopia; images captured by webcam, as used by Jennifer Ringley on her webpage 'Jennicam' (1996-2003 – see also Victor Burgin's discussion of 'Jenny's Room' [2004]). The camera and webpage imaged Jenny in her bedroom at regular intervals, whatever she was doing, and made these images available to viewers of the page, but also to Jenny herself. Like Foucault's mirror, the webcam 'gives me my own visibility', as well as transmitting to other screens (Foucault 2008: 17). The webcam shows the user to themselves, in a space (Jenny, in her room, for example), but also known to the user is the fact that that image is potentially being viewed in numerous other spaces; 'it renders this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the looking glass [/screen] at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since, in order to be perceived, it has to pass through this virtual point, which is over there' (Foucault, 2008: 17). Typical of the contemporary heterotopia, this one is complicated by the fact that 'Jennicam' also eventually became Ringley's place of work, charging subscribers for the right to view the site. Dehaene and De Cauter maintain that '[h]eterotopian spaces are necessarily collective or shared spaces' (2008: 6) – this is also a quality of the rapidly disseminated ('shared') digital image. This is a quality of digital imaging that we also find illustrated in the capturing and uploading of audience members' own footage of arena spectaculars onto YouTube, giving their own 'visibility' to themselves in that past moment on the arena terraces (see next section on *Batman Live*). It seems clear that rather than being an example of utopia or heterotopia, the internet itself is a new extension to 'space', consisting of examples of all categories; the market, the workplace, the brothel, the cemetery and even the mirror. Here we see the heteropic location remediated into screen, online space.

Much screen-based entertainment now complicates the idea of being in space. 'Game space' is occupied by the player of a computer game and contemporary cinema increasingly offers 'immersive experiences', using 3D and surround sound to place the viewer 'in' the world of the image. Game space in particular seems, like the mirror, to occupy the space of the utopia

and the heterotopia. The player escapes into, consumes and exists in that space. The player identifies with, even 'becomes' the character they are playing, they are in the game, but the space of the game is not 'real'; Norman M. Klein comments that '[c]yberspace will respond to alienation, but with communities that remain disembodied' (2004: 86). Perhaps the contemporary version of the heterotopia exists in the leaving of one's identity, and the entering into a fantasy identity; an avatar; a username? This fantasy is not utopic, as the user will be required to return to quotidian reality and general, physical space at some point; it is, rather, a type of support for an identity back in actual space.

A continued need for the heterotopic might be demonstrable in the open adaptation of existing narratives and forms. Changes in scale might now be more important than changes in location; James D. Faubion says that heterotopias are 'extreme – in their exaggerations of scale, but also in their reductions, their miniaturisations and diminutions' (2008: 32). When these adaptations acknowledge an original or a predecessor, they are not so much about being 'new', more as 'distinct' from another product (again, 'remediation'). If, as Beller says, we labour in front of images, might we not seek out images of these images (mirrored; reflected; inverted) in order to find the space of imagination Johnson says is inherent in the heterotopia? We might look for *The Matrix* shrunken to an animated short film (as in *The Animatrix* video anthology [Wachowskis, 2003]), or remixed as a YouTube video, or expanded to an epic trilogy of feature films. As heterotopia, the live adaptation of a film does not disrupt it; it does not offer an alternative to the narrative or images within it. It simply offers a separate space, intimately connected to that original container, but contingent upon it. In this configuration, the Batman film *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2009) might be 'topos'; actually *becoming* a superhero would be an impossible 'utopia', and the arena spectacular *Batman Live* its heterotopia. Temporary citizenship in the heterotopia of fandom is granted to those who pay the ticket price, turn up and make the appropriate gestures, as Foucault says the entrant to any heterotopia must (2008: 21).

Neoliberal Heterotopia

The story of the Dome and its becoming the O2 brings us back to a consideration of neoliberal, postcivil space. The Dome's contents were perceived as a failure, which was enough to make it concretely a failure for the PR-conscious government that produced it. Although originally put in motion by the Conservative government of the early 1990's, the Dome became a flagship project of Tony Blair's New Labour; John Prescott, then Deputy Prime Minister, reportedly told Blair 'If we can't make this work, we're not much of a government' (Irvine, 1999: 64). Its producers knew it would act as a mirror for them as well – for the likes of Bayley and Bracewell, an allegory of the substance-less ideology of New Labour. Its designers misjudged the tastes of its prospective visitors, a mistake not repeated during the 2012 Olympics, as I will show in my final chapter.

Even more significant than the unintentional self-satirising that it represented for New Labour, is the eventual sale and 'regeneration' of the Dome into the O2. Prescott has since described the O2 as 'the most successful entertainment venue in the world'. Prescott was often called to defend the Dome project: 'People said [the Dome] was great. It did not cost the public money – it came from the lottery. It was a vision and we were very excited about it […] [w]e have decontaminated the land, put in a transport system and the true vision is coming. It is becoming the best entertainment centre in Europe' (Matthew Tempest, 2005). It is the regenerated, private non-places of business that are the proper context for the Dome. In promotional photographs the Dome is often pictured with the corporate towers of Canary Wharf rather than older surrounding areas of East and South-east London.

fig. 21 Illustration from *The Millennium Dome*, Wilhilde 1999

The true vision is coming – in this statement, Prescott is perhaps inadvertently referring to the real priority for the Dome all along: to privatise it, in true neoliberal fashion. Whilst it might appear to have offered a vision of our present and future, with visitors expected to leave awed and inspired, ready for the Britain of the new millennium, it actually offered an adjunct to corporate, neoliberal politics, a microcosm of social and political relations as they were, and were to remain. The Dome only became 'successful', beyond its position as a landmark, when the content was provided by new owners American Entertainment Group; when it was demoted to an unusual link in a chain of indoor arenas. Like the arena spectacular genre, the story of the Dome is one of capitalistic opportunism and expediency; in becoming the O2, the Greenwich site has been adapted from a governmental project into a profitable, private space. The transition of the Millennium Dome to the O2 is an exemplary neoliberal move – a project that managed to route huge amounts of public funds into private hands in the name of building a lasting public monument is sold off to an international media company, to then become highly successful as a private venue. If the O2 is a heterotopia at all, it is a neoliberal and postcivil one.

I have now demonstrated that the tensions and relations within Foucault's 'heterotopias' text are still relevant, even if still contentious. In the arena spectacular format, the live and physically present image functions as a contemporary use of the residual demarcated heterotopia – separate from regular screen-consumption, which in today's attention economy is always production as well.

ii. Batman Live

Batman Live was an international touring live show that reached London's O2 Arena in the summer of 2011. This case study will bring together considerations of remediation, post-cinema and the neoliberal heterotopia, but also the element of fandom. It was advertised as 'THE ONLY WAY TO EXPERIENCE BATMAN LIVE ON STAGE' (promotional flyer, 2011). The obligatory list of components runs as follows:

> BATMAN LIVE – World Arena Tour is a 15 million dollar stage production with an engrossing and original story featuring a cast of 42 actors and circus trained acrobats, a 3D Gotham City landscape, a symphonic score recorded by a 92-piece symphony orchestra, custom-built and state-of-the-art stage, a 100-foot bat- shaped LED video wall, big flight sequences, illusions, pyrotechnics and the impressive Batmobile, designed especially for the show by legendary racing car designer Professor Gordon Murray. (*Batman Live* Official Site, 2012)

YouTube user 'xtol8' posted a video of the show for online viewers in 2011 (xtol8, 2011). Some online comments made on the video suggest that the show itself was well received:

> Oh my gods, I saw this when it was in my town and it was SO BRILLIANT. So amazing. It was so good that even my mom wanted to see it a second time. AJKSLDJFSJDKLS SO BEAUTIFUL! (sic., comment by 'gothamcitybadgirls' xtol8, 2011)

> I seen it at the O2 It is amazing (sic., comment by PHopeHere, xtol8, 2011)

However, with the deployment of the powerful existing set of texts that is the Batman franchise comes a strong 'fan culture'. This entails some very direct comparisons to other mediums and adaptations of those texts, particularly cinematic ones:

> They dont even put black eye makeup on Batman? What the fuck […] In every single Batman film, Batman had black eye make up on. Keaton, Kilmer, Clooney and Bale wore it so you wouldn't be taken out of the movie. So you're telling me at 3:05 [minutes] that it doesn't looks stupid? In the comics you dont see his eyelids. It throws

you off, the only skin you should be seeing is his mouth and thats comics and film.

(sic., comments by TheOurVids, xtol8, 2011)

To this commentator, the live version fails in the inevitable comparison to film. The imperfect visual manifestation of the comic book character 'throws you off' and makes the construction of the image too visible (although this discrepancy only becomes apparent because YouTube user 'xtol8' who posted the footage has videoed the show using a camera with zoom – in the arena, from a distance, the lack of eye make-up is not visible). In order to deride it, other users in the same trail of comments compare the show with the unpopular films directed by Joel Schumacher (*Batman Forever,* 1995 and *Batman and Robin*, 1997 – clips of which are also readily available on YouTube, with long trails of derogatory users' comments).

Within the existing fanbase, this show is bound to come under the heightened formal and aesthetic scrutiny of extremely attentive fans. Its promotional material described it as:

> [b]ased on an original story being created exclusively for the show, BATMAN LIVE is a theatrical extravaganza of thrilling stunts, acrobatic acts and illusions [...] Totally authentic, bold and awe-inspiring, BATMAN LIVE will be a completely new way to experience the world of Batman. (promotional flyer, 2010)

This framing of the piece makes clear its relation to an established narrative world, or 'hypertext' – 'the world of Batman'. The comparison to existing iterations of the same hypertext also intensifies the idea that the show either *succeeds* or *fails*, although the criteria and judgement might be hard to pin down. For instance, why does Batman only begin to 'look stupid' and fail without the black eyelids he possesses in comics and films?

Even within his superhero origin-story, the Batman character is directly 'post-cinematic' in one sense, being born of Bruce Wayne's childhood fandom of Zorro, who he sees on the cinema screen the night his parents are killed, depicted in the first scene in this show. *Batman Live* also appears on stage 'for the first time ever' at a distinctly post-cinematic juncture in the life of this longstanding franchise, due to the huge success of director Christopher Nolan's

Batman films (Nolan: 2005, 2008 and 2012). The Batman narrative also complements its use as commercial franchise as, within the narrative, Batman already operates as a brand, of sorts, relying on a distinctive iconography of logos, 'trademarks' and distinctive accessories. *Batman Live* is the most obvious example in this study of a new work making use of an existing 'hypertext' – a set of stylistic and narrative conventions accumulated through various manifestations of characters, narratives and settings. Whereas *Ben Hur Live* and *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* do rely upon established narratives and aesthetic tropes, they do not have the hypertextual wealth, or the extraordinary fame and popularity that is to be found in the Batman franchise. The already-known nature of a hypertext sometimes allows for an abbreviated communication of a story or narrative world, around which the audience are required to flesh out the text before them with details they know from the much bigger, more complex hypertext. Crucially, a hypertext allows different and often contradictory iterations of a fictive world. Many separate creative teams, in virtually all mediums, have articulated the Batman hypertext and there is continuity between all these different versions. The franchise is also policed directly by the owners of the brand, to make sure certain 'facts' about the characters are maintained. To impose Foucault's divisions upon the Batman hypertext, to a fan the comics, TV shows and films represent 'regular space', with the arena spectacular appearing as unusual and special 'other space' – a way to engage, even outside of their more usual ways of consuming Batman images.

'Fandom' can be defined as 'a form of continuous and emotionally involved consumption' (Sandvos, 2005: 136). The constructive qualities of fan texts including soap operas, rock bands, or football teams – as art, as therapy or as self-construction – are hotly debated, because of their 'mass' and commercial nature, with suspicions coagulating around theories such as Adorno and Horkheimer's 'culture industry' (Adorno, 1997). As can be seen in the fans' comments cited above, Batman exists as a set of individual texts, linked by a hypertext, and current technology and communications means that comparisons across franchises can be ever more easily made. Like remediation, fan texts are understood through prior knowledge of other texts. Fandom is a mode of consumption that is arranged in such a way that new

products proceed from others within specific genres, serials and franchises. As well as remediated legibility, what is pursued within a set of fan texts is credibility. The 'real' of a fan franchise is in a sense opposite to Žižek's 'Real' – the realness of *Batman Live* is what situates it absolutely in a symbolic order of both hypertextual fidelity (e.g. Batman's eyelids being painted black or not) and signs of the copyrighted, licensed 'genuine' article.

In many ways, a theatrical presentation of Batman is apposite for a story containing many theatrical references: masks, special effects, even quick costume changes; theatricality is one of Batman's 'super-powers', another important one being lavish wealth. As with all arena spectaculars the awkward mix of genres and mediums is both the strength and weakness of the show, commercially and aesthetically, demonstrated in the negative comments already cited. However, of all my examples, this is perhaps the most theatrically fluent and formally confident in its hybrid nature, mimicking or encapsulating theatre, cinema, circus and even the reading of comic books. There are some intriguing contrasts here. The space of reception for comic book fan texts might be presumed solitary or limited to small social groups – a teenage bedroom, a darkened cinema, a comic book shop. How does Batman end up in an arena seating thousands? Perhaps the scale denotes nothing more than the huge popularity of Batman, beyond any other comic book character, the arena spectacular format itself being evidence that Batman is not just for specialist 'true fans', but part of mainstream culture. This popularity was brought about chiefly through film versions of the character, so how does the arena version exist alongside and in relation to the cinematic ones? I will use *Batman Live* to further demonstrate how remediation works to create a commercial *gesamtkunstwerk* – not as total art work but as 'total brand', offering products to highly engaged consumers in multiple formats.

What this particular arena spectacular allows is the chance to analyse an intersection of the political and economic situation of the post-cinematic 'attention economy' with the more affective and personal consumption of fans. As fan texts are increasingly screen texts first, does Cavell's 'screen barrier', which should mean that 'distance' dictates 'the modern fate to

relate to the world by viewing it, taking views of it, as from behind the self' (Cavell quoted in Rodowick, 68), still exist in such consumption? This case study will begin by situating this use of the Batman hypertext within the post-cinematic context of its other recent iterations and tracking the show's remediatory devices. Then I will consider how this hypertext operates as a fan text, and how that status impacts upon the arena spectacular version.

Post-cinematic Batman

Batman Live took place on a specially made stage that was installed on the floor of the O2 Arena. One end of the arena was curtained off, with a freestanding, bat-shaped wall, forming the back of a peninsular-like stage. Seating was set up in a horseshoe shape around the stage and additional seats were installed on the flat floor space immediately next to the stage; its shape reminiscent of a fashion catwalk.

fig. 22 Image from *Batman Live* programme 2011

Hanging above the stage was a large rig to accommodate the enormous number of lights but also, as the show progressed, performers on stunt wires. The show was touring arenas around the world, and the set-up is evidently designed to slot easily into different arena spaces. This

was the world of Batman made real, made physical, but (like comics and feature films) still portable. As the audience entered, the bat-shaped screen displayed a video loop of a cityscape at night; animated features such as searchlights and blimps passing through the sky were complemented by effects played out on the substantial sound system. On the stage itself there were small models of buildings. The story began with the Wayne family standing outside a miniature cinema they had apparently just left – a model barely taller than they were. Despite their relative sizes, the live performers in this show were overshadowed by the spectacular design of it. The story rapidly retold the origins of both Batman and Robin. Dialogue was delivered using radio-microphones, and the acting was exaggerated and pantomime-like. The story's main function was to facilitate the introduction of the major characters from the franchise and consequently became a series of vignettes relying upon the depth of the extended hypertext, each consisting of a location, a new character and some action.

As well as the eponymous 'live' element, video was also crucial to the show. The logo-like, bat-shaped wall was made up entirely of video screens, used for all the backdrops, and to play video sequences that expand upon, or occasionally replace action on stage. The screens were articulated, to allow actors and props to enter through sliding sections, so that rather than appearing from the wings of a stage, characters appear from out of the screen, as if they are walking out of the animated world it depicts. The slippage between screen images and physical props was expertly orchestrated – in one scene a table appeared on screen, only for an actor to jump onto it; it being in fact a physical object that had been wheeled in through the parted panels of the screen. All the video material was computer generated ('digitally synthesised', as Rodowick would term it); nothing photographic ever appeared on the 'bat-screen'. This is perhaps in reference to the drawn, comic book origins of the characters, but also inevitably now to digital cinema as well. A tight relationship between stage actions and screen material meant that vertiginous effects could be achieved, with aerial performers suspended in front of fast moving 'cameras', with 'shots' swooping around buildings and suggesting movement that would be impossible with more conventional theatrical staging. In some action scenes performers on stage were accompanied by drawn, graphic characters on

the screen; Batman fought live assailants, in front of additional, drawn ones. One scene – a car chase, therefore a difficult thing to stage – was 'performed' entirely by a video sequence. The screen was also used to explicitly reference the comic book format; at several points the shot would pull out, revealing the preceding scene as a frame in a page of a comic, which would then turn to reveal the next scene as another comic book frame, which was then zoomed into.

fig. 23 Fight scene, *Batman Live*

The use of terms such as 'the world of Batman' in the show's promotion is crucial: what that terminology connotes is not only the narrative world of the characters, but also the affectively involved consumption of the fan. That Batman exists in a 'world' suggests not only the level of detail present and therefore potential specialist knowledge available in connection to the character but also that the hypertext itself offers a level of immersion akin to entering a different 'world', traversing the 'screen barrier', as the characters do when they walk out of the articulated screen. A promotional flyer for the show reads 'Live Action Adventures don't get any bigger!' (2011 flyer). The term 'live action' is usually used to denote the use of actors, rather than animation techniques, or puppets in filmmaking, for instance, the Christopher Nolan Batman films are also 'live action'. There are a complicated set of relations between *Batman Live* and the Batman films and TV series, both animated and acted. The show is often compared to the film versions, as in the comment quoted at the beginning of this chapter ('in

every single Batman film, Batman had black eye make up on'). A promotional trailer, discussed in chapter 1 in relation to one made for *Ben Hur Live* (see figs. 10 and 11), still seems at pains to explain itself through cinematic language as promoting something that *is not* a film – an 'is' to contrast digital cinema's 'wasn't'. Again, it is this definition in distinction to cinema that ties the show precisely to cinema, and makes it post-cinematic.

Christopher Nolan's Batman films, with which this show coincides, attempt to bring the character into closer proximity to a recognisable 'real world', or at least a world that we recognise from other film dramas, rather than drawn, comic book fantasy. Specifically *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) was an attempt to turn the Batman story into a kind of hyperbolic 'mob' film. Great emphasis is put on Heath Ledger's intense performance as the Joker, reportedly achieved by the actor locking himself in a hotel room for six weeks and practising in front of a mirror (Empire Online, 2008); probably the first approximation of 'method' acting in a superhero film. *The Dark Knight* is also unusual in its overt reflection of real-world political issues of the time. The film explores the use of torture and the responsibilities of those administering 'just' violence, amidst American worries at the time of release over methods used in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. As a further modification of the tropes of filmed Batman, Nolan chose to use Chicago locations for his Gotham in *The Dark Knight* – here tall towers of concrete and glass replace the more usual gothic, East-coast and snowy Gotham of previous films, which was always a caricature of New York. Nolan's Batman also makes a trip to Hong Kong, placing his Gotham on a global network of cities, connected in the film by organised crime but also international commerce. These changes were made to make these particular superhero films more serious, 'grown-up' and believable, taking the story out of the realm of cartoon allegory and into a more recognisable world. This is also a remediatory move, where the new breed of 'grown up' superhero films remediate – makes itself understood via – other film genres such as the disaster movie or the mob film. In contrast, *Batman Live* has been perceived (and often presented) as being produced for children. Several journalists commented on this, the show being described in the Guardian's review as 'a two-hour extravaganza carefully crafted to delight small boys' (Jones, 2011). Indeed, the show's website

batmanlive.com describes it as 'The Ultimate Family Night Out' (*Batman Live* Official Site, 2012). Although this quality might limit the appeal of the show for adult audience members without children to accompany them, it does highlight what a flexible hypertext Batman is – in contrast to this family orientated marketing, the three most recent Batman films are all rated as suitable only for ages 12 and above in the UK. The producers of *Batman Live* seem to have identified and exploited a gap in the current range of Batman products that had become 'grown-up' and more serious.

Nolan's films and *Batman Live* both use the currency of increased 'realism'. However, *Batman Live*'s realism is not pictorial or in actor's performances; its realism is in the show's remediation of other formats; its effective representation or appropriation of various forms of viewing, including cinema, comics and television. Here this remediation is not only how we as an audience make sense of the arena spectacular genre, as I have already established with the previous shows, but also how the show is presented as a credible part of the franchise. Remediation, as we have seen, contains a 'double logic': 'the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation […] the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible' (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 33). It might seem obvious that *Batman Live* would fall under the category of 'hypermedia', with its various and overt quotations (cinema, comic, circus). However, in terms of live performance, as opposed to recorded actions, it also contains a move towards immediacy. As post-cinematic product, it attempts to supersede film by both 'logics'. An example of this 'double logic' is one of the fight scenes which involved Batman and numerous villain-characters, which presented a real challenge for the show. As a remediating form, the arena spectacular must make sense of itself through the montage techniques of cinema, and to a lesser extent comics. A filmed punch can appear to have impacted on an actor's jaw by way of camera angles, zooms, a quick cut and additional 'foley' sound effects added later. The action can be rehearsed and re-shot until the desired effect is achieved. Using slow motion and sped-up footage, the speed of the action can be altered for added impact. Within a sequence, numerous small actions can be edited together to give the impression of a flurry of activity –

punches landed in quick succession, within a physical space described by multiple shots. When one sees Batman 'do his things live' (Geoff Jones, *Batman Live* programme) in a fight scene, one is seeing a stunt performed in real time and real space, rather than cinematic edited sequence; this is the appeal of immediacy – the technology of the camera, the edit and the screen do not stand between the viewer and the 'real' action. But without editing, sound effects, etc, and viewed from far away in an arena seat, the action sometimes appears slow and lacks impact (as I found with *Ben Hur Live*). Therefore, the producers employed a hypermediating barrage of effects, with multiple centres of action, rapid changes in lighting, recorded sound and their 'bat-screen' animations, to fill the stage so that, even without the control of vision that film allows its makers, no matter where the spectator looked there was something happening. Batman faught one assailant; Robin another; more ran onto and around the stage – the screen showed the computer-generated 'backdrop' spinning to imitate a rapidly moving camera and additional, drawn enemies running in and somehow being dispatched by the heroes on stage. In this manner (which is somewhat similar to that employed in the large dance and action scenes in *Ben Hur Live*), the show attempts to present a range of images and sounds that in some way match up to the range available in screen images, but with the added trick of live performance. As Bolter and Grusin say:

> Each new medium has to find its economic place by replacing or supplementing what is already available, and popular acceptance, and therefore economic success, can come only by convincing consumers that the new medium improves on the experience of older ones. (2000: 68)

Bolter and Grusin state that a 'medium in our culture can never operate in isolation, because it must enter into relationships of *respect or rivalry* with other media' [my emphasis] (ibid., 65). Within a powerful franchise and hypertext like Batman, I would extend their term 'respect' to actual *representation* of other media. To older attendees, the version of Batman that looms large in relation to the live interpretation is the TV series starring Adam West, running from 1966 to 1968 (West, 1966). This was a humourous version of the comic and, like the later live

show, attempted to incorporate graphic elements from the comic books. In fight scenes, blows were represented by drawn inter-titles of onomatopoeic words; 'Pow!', 'Whack!', in the style of a drawn, comic book fight sequence. The series openly remediated the comic book form. *Batman Live* goes further, becoming a complicated *ekphrasis* of the comic book; an attempt at *depicting* the act of comic book reading. This is most obvious in the computer animated scene-changes mentioned above, on the backdrop bat-screen. At these points, the 'camera' in pulled out to reveal the previous scene as a drawn panel; the camera then pulled back in to another panel as the next scene commences. As in digital cinema, the movement of the animation and the unavoidably filmic language I am using to describe it is also 'remediating' cinema – there is no 'camera' used in the production of these computer-generated animations. Bolter and Grusin's set of examples emphasise 'newness' as an attractive selling point. Seen in the context of the recent Batman films, *Batman Live*'s immediacy/hypermediacy might function as a distinction from the sleek, comparatively naturalistic and smooth quality of Nolan's filmmaking, and this is perhaps a conscious commercial strategy. In the *Batman Live* programme, Jim Lee emphasises the newness of the hybrid medium of live spectacle, as distinct from the ascendant medium of computer-generated images:

> This show is something we haven't seen before, and I think that's the real selling point here – it's not just CGI. The creative team have been really clever about all the ways they can tell a story, through live action, through digital experiences, through the back drop, through things that are pre-filmed and I think that they have created something that's very unique (2010)

There is a combative and hierarchical element in this comparison; it's 'not *just* CGI'. However, as Bolter and Grusin say,'[t]he goal is not to replace the earlier forms, to which the company may own the rights, but rather to spread the content over as many markets as possible' (ibid., 68). As DC Comics say themselves:

> The Caped Crusader has been featured in almost every type of media stage imaginable – from radio shows and award-winning animated television series to video games and

blockbuster film franchises. However, he's long since been absent from one stage—the literal one. (DC Comics, 2016)

A perfect brand exploiting all possible applications and iterations, thereby absolutely maximizing profit, would surely be one from which there was no need to ever stray; nothing that it cannot provide – a set of remediating products nested inside one hypertextual brand, thus persuading the consumer that they *must* pay for the same content across different media. This surprising range of diversification within 'Batman™', with comics, television, film, games and live performance; with each deployment of the hypertext cantilevered with others. This is what the post-cinematic landscape allows the franchise.

Entering 'The World of Batman' – Fandom and Space

A fan hypertext – licensed brand or not – can allow fan communities to form around it. This kind of public, shared fan consumption requires a social space of some kind. Questions of fandom and community are predicated upon a productive relation to an idea of one's 'self' in the presence of others. In *The Saturated Self* (1991) Kenneth J Gergen argues that, in Western post-modernity, we have a self that is made up of connections. For Gergen this represents a huge, ontological change in what it means to exist socially, what he terms 'self as relationship' (1991: 140). For Gergen, this change has been brought about by rapid technological change through the twentieth century (ibid., 3). Similarly in *Landscapes of Power*, Sharon Zukin writes that:

> Technology reinforces the idea that local communities are archaic […] In the nineteenth century, the railroad and the photograph lost the immediacy and depth of a foreground view of place, although they made distant places more accessible. Today, simultaneous exchanges by electronic media tie together even the smallest places, but destroys the social distance that made experiencing them so distinctive. (1991: 12)

Some of these changes also lead to the contestations of the heterotopia explored above. If the self has indeed become 'relationship' as Gergen suggests, which would be supported by Rockwell's advocacy of public spectacle, then perhaps what we see proposed in the arena spectacular is a specially heightened awareness of one's relationship to a group; to a crowd, no matter how temporary that relationship might be. How, then, does this type of spectatorship, align with current trends in consumption?

Cavell writes that '[a]part from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneous granting of otherness as well), I do not understand the value of art' (1979: 22). The consideration of the self and the other is also crucial to the experience of being in an arena; within the arena spectacular these are implicated as part of the 'experience'. Elias Canetti has written of arenas more generally that:

> the crowd is seated opposite itself. Every spectator has a thousand in front of him, a thousand heads. As long as he is there, all the others are there too; whatever excites him, excites them; and he sees it. They are seated some distance away from him, so that the differing details which make individuals of them are blurred; they all look alike and they all behave in a similar manner and he notices in them only the things which he himself is full of. (Canetti, 1962: 28)

Unlike a cinema, in the oval of an arena, one will always see other audience members; through their visible presence 'otherness' is granted, as Cavell puts it, much more directly than in the cinema. The etiquette of that situation means that even in the dark, the audience member will see camera flashes, coloured lights etc, and always hear people around them. In his 1903 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (Simmel: 2007), Georg Simmel proposed 'reserve' as the key social characteristic of the modern city – in which, rather than the interpersonal relationships we might find in small towns and villages, anonymity allows the city dweller to function. For Simmel, in order for the city to fulfill its primary function – that is, as market – emotional and communal life must be curtailed and the self carefully preserved as separate to the other. It is partly this that Rockwell's 'spectacle' is proposed as antidote to: 'a public space

[…] undergoes an alchemic process when transformed by spectacle. A group of strangers fuses into an instant community' (2006: 15). Philip Auslander agrees with this to an extent, but with reservations:

> It is surely the case that a sense of community may emanate from being part of an audience that clearly values something you value, though the reality of our cultural economy is that the communal bond unifying such an audience is most likely to be little more than the common consumption of a particular performance commodity. (1999: 64)

In this sense, the latter part of the quote from Cannetti above becomes operative: 'details which make individuals of them are blurred; they all look alike and they all behave in a similar manner and he notices in them only the things which he himself is full of'; in this sense the other members of the audience might function as little more that props in the arena (Canetti 1962: 28). The self within an audience becomes a key concern in the offer of the arena spectacular because images of audience members are so central to their marketing. For example, the advert for *Batman Live* discussed in chapter 1 pictures actors as individual audience members in close-up shots watching the show (fig. 11; fig. 26, below). Likewise, the advert promoting *Ben Hur Live* ends with a computer generated shot of a chariot rolling past a huge bank of darkened seats, bristling with bright camera flashes. The performance in a sense does not happen without 'you' being there to witness it, with the rest of the audience. The arena spectatorship can therefore be regarded as comprising of a mixture of cinematic 'voyeurism', the pleasure of *looking on*, and of participation that we might associate more readily with sports crowds, carnivals or ritual. In a pageant or carnival there is no audience as such; everyone is a participant (as Bakhtin writes, 'carnival does not know footlights' [1984: 7]). However, the arena spectacular, like a cinema, has a seated audience that for all their potential cheering or waving flags, remain separate from the action. Arena spectaculars would seem to deny both the fluidity of movement, equality and personal proximity of the crowd *and* the penetrating intimacy of the cinematic 'eye'. In *Walking With Dinosaurs*, the actor playing

the narrating paleontologist shouts 'Come on, lets go!' as he runs across the arena floor – making it painfully obvious that we, the seated audience, are in no way 'walking' with the dinosaurs, we are simply watching. However, we are certainly incorporated into the show – we watch from one side of the arena as a dinosaur puppet leans over the audience on the other side.

Fans are part of contemporary popular culture; '[b]eing a fan is […] not a universal human condition. It is based on forms of consumption and a separation between actor and spectator that are inherently intertwined with the rise of capitalism and industrial modernity and, more specifically, with twentieth century consumerism' (Sandvos, 2005: 113). Fandom is therefore also native to the cinematic period, and clearly persists into the present post-cinematic one. The 'separation between actor and spectator' that Sandvos identifies is where much criticism of fan texts originates – that instead of galvanising the audience to action (production of their own texts, meanings or changes to their own circumstances), fans simply consume a '*heimkunst*'; 'an art or craft form which has nothing to say but the false illusion of a meaningful world' (Sandvos, 2005: 159). For Beller they would be labouring within a part of the capitalistic attention economy, however, for other critics this does not preclude the value that the fan might also create for themselves. My aim is not to question whether there is 'value' in fan engagement with mass/pop cultural artefacts such as the arena spectacular. Rather, their relevance here is in the degree to which fan consumption can explain the workings of the remediated *gesamtkunstwerk* of branding and the immersive nature of live 'experiences'. Like an arena, fandom has a defined inside and outside: one *is* a fan, or one *is not*. The arena spectacular format might suggest that this boundary is more permeable than it might seem – that one can temporarily be a fan, as a tourist; one might 'enter the world of Batman', and then leave it. As the quote from 'TheOurVids' above shows, even commenting on the online forums around Batman can require a level of familiarity, if not expertise; attending the arena show does not; leading to what the comment-writer deems as necessary corrections having to be made to audience members' opinions of the show. It may be a specifically post-cinematic set of conditions that make this articulation of identity attractive as

a purchasable experience. These issues need to be addressed within terms of authenticity and 'realness' of product and spectatorial experience; both of which are recurrent in the selling of the arena spectacular, but with very particular articulations here because of the comparisons across mediums that come with fans' analyses.

Jim Lee, a comic book artist and co-publisher of DC Comics, writes in the *Batman Live* programme that 'it's a great experience, we take our kids to these kinds of things, and again it really underscores how real *Batman* is' (2011). Lee is referring here to the 'live' element as reinforcing Batman's realness, perhaps proposing the theatrical display as unmediated, therefore more transparent and genuine, as we have seen with previous shows. But in what way is Batman 'real'? Batman doesn't have the paleontological realness of dinosaurs, nor the historical-religious realness of *Ben-Hur Live*. Surely the highly visible technologies of the arena presentation underline exactly how un-real Batman is, how dependent upon technological mediation any representation of him has to be? The question of relative 'real-ness' across various adaptations of comics is often present in their reception, as in the quote above regarding Batman's lack of eye makeup. In that instance 'realness' (or simply not looking 'stupid') is constructed between texts, as fidelity to a received hypertext or set of genre tropes. Presumably the 'realness' Lee refers to is to do with a real emotional involvement of Batman's fans, the fans with whom any arena-audience member shares their experience of *Batman Live* in an almost ritualistic way. Batman's 'realness' is also supported by his financial weight. One way in which *Batman Live* definitely is real is that this particular hypertext is also a commercial brand. The word 'authentic' is used in the advertising to allude to the fact that the show is a licensed iteration of that brand, as well as authentically 'live'. In recent years, films and games based on comic book characters have far outgrown their origins in commercial terms – and ensured the survival of DC Comics by making it an attractive purchases for larger media companies like Warner Brothers (similarly, DC's rival Marvel Comics is owned by Disney). However, films and games, like recorded music, are vulnerable to theft and piracy in a way that the live performance is not. *Batman Live* might be regarded as

commercial speculation; an experimental way for a company like DC Comics to diversify into markets rendered comparatively profitable because the product is un-stealable.

Batman™ certainly is a real, and valuable, commodity. Even so, individual components within the wider franchise still need qualification through fidelity to a hypertext for fans to accept it. Traditionally within the franchise, each new screen incarnation of Batman (i.e. those directed by one particular director, such as the Tim Burton films, or the recent Christopher Nolan trilogy) is accompanied by a re-designed 'batsuit' costume, and a new 'batmobile'. *Batman Live* complies with this, thereby proving its veracity to fans as a full member of the Batman franchise. This is just one of many important signifiers of 'officialdom' necessary to a production of this kind – of course, with a highly profitable brand such as Batman, the name and logo are not available unlicensed. Warner Brothers Consumer Products control *Batman Live*. Their president, Brad Globe, has said that 'Batman is one of the most iconic and recognizable brands in the world' (Jay Cochran, 2011) – the deployment of a recognised brand is the principle claim of *Batman Live* to authenticity. It simply *is* Batman, trademarked, licensed and endorsed. But the term 'real' also connects to a consistent flirtation in comics with slippages between the various social realities their characters exist within, for example Batman/Bruce Wayne's existence between the rich upper-class and the criminal underworld. Comic books transposed into live-action film and now stage presentations pivot upon this intrusion of comic book fantasy into a more recognisable, human and physical space. In the programme, Geoff Johns, chief creative officer of DC Entertainment, explains the rationale behind it: 'you're really in Gotham City, you're a part of Gotham City and so you're an active participant in this story' (*Batman Live* programme, 2011). Again, our activity as spectators is suggested in this pre-emptive account of the show, one in which the character of Batman, to be played by actors, is presented as if he were a real figure, like a musician that one can see perform live after having first heard recordings: '[w]hen Batman comes out and you see him do his things live, it's just a completely different experience than anyone has ever had with Batman' (ibid.). Jim Lee, co-publisher of DC Comics, expands on this:

To see a character in a Batman costume, ducking about on stage, is something that would not work with a lot of other superheroes that have powers that enable them to fly or lift up cars and throw them. Batman is in our world, slightly different, but in our world, and something that's very believable. (ibid.)

The show bears some resemblance to a ceremony or ritual, where the performances become performative of the 'realness' of the hypertext. The presence of the actors – real bodies sharing the same space and time as the spectator – is crucial even if they are just points around which the technology of the production pivots.

Within an existing set of products (comics and films, and more recently video games), what does *Batman Live* offer that is new? Cinema privileges vision, comics are usually serialised graphic narratives examined at the reader's own pace, and games offer interaction and activity – Batman Live offers *presence*. On entering the arena, the spectator 'enters' Gotham, like a tourist enters Venice, or Las Vegas, or any other spectacular location. The 'place' of Gotham, even if it is a portable one, is an important product here. 'Every member of our audience is a special guest and we have created this show to give you an "in-person" experience of seeing Batman, live for the first time', says the *Batman Live* website (2012). The show might seem to exist for fans; initiates; those already affectively engaged with the hypertext and its 'world', as a comic convention does. However, the website of the show is at pains to point out that the show is for anyone:

FAQs: 'What age and interest is appropriate for this show?

- BATMAN LIVE is a totally unique experience – a completely new way to experience the world of Batman.

- For those who are less familiar with Batman, this is the ideal introduction to these characters.

- This is not a musical but a live show with a thrilling and engrossing Batman story, filled with action and spectacle that appeals to adults, teenagers, kids and families.

The show has been carefully written and produced for the entire family to enjoy from age 5 to 105! (ibid.)

The net is cast extremely wide, which may have had commercial benefits, but how might the commercial practice of remediation impact on the element of 'fandom' and the modes of spectatorship possible with the show? Referring back to the video trailer for the show, where we, the audience, are shown *how* to watch it; the show also remediates the idea of *being an audience*. As well as illustrating the appropriate response in its marketing, in the arena itself the show represents the different forms of reading and spectatorship that already exist within the franchise. It constantly refers the viewer to other forms of spectatorship, and also the other spectators in the arena. Something that exemplifies this is the fact that the show is geared to parents *and* children – as well as watching it themselves; the parent watches the child watching the show.

Might we consider some of *Batman Live* to remediate fandom and fan-spectatorship? If so, we might hope to find performance of a fan hypertext in a large, public space within existing tropes of fan culture, as in the arena, as I stated above, the crowd is always noticeably present. From any seat in the O2, the audience member could always see, even in the dark, the banks of seats opposite them or to the side. In fact, battery powered lights were on sale before the show and during the interval, so that in the dark of the show, small points of coloured light were waved and precisely positioned individual members of the crowd. Unlike a cinema the crowd was not urged to be particularly quiet; rather than a reverent hush, a rustle of food packaging and the noise of people threading their way in and out of the arena permeated the amplified soundtrack. There is indeed one major format for collective appreciation of comic book characters that precedes the arena spectacular: the comic convention, or 'comic con'.

I attended the MCM Expo London Comic Con in the same year as I saw *Batman Live*, 2011. Like the live show, it was held in a large, corporate owned 'non-place' – this time the ExCeL (Exhibition Centre London), very much part of the postcivil landscape of the East of London and also later to become an Olympic venue in 2012. MCM stands for Movies Comics and

Media and much of it was taken up by promotional stands for video games (the 'media' of the title) as well as upcoming film releases. In the building's central hallway, amongst the fast-food chains serving long lines of teenagers and patient parents, hung posters from a medical conference that coincided with the MCM in the ExCeL's busy and varied calendar (it also hosts events such as arms fairs [Minton 2012: 13]). The event was attended by huge numbers of young fans, many dressed as their favoured game, film or comic characters.
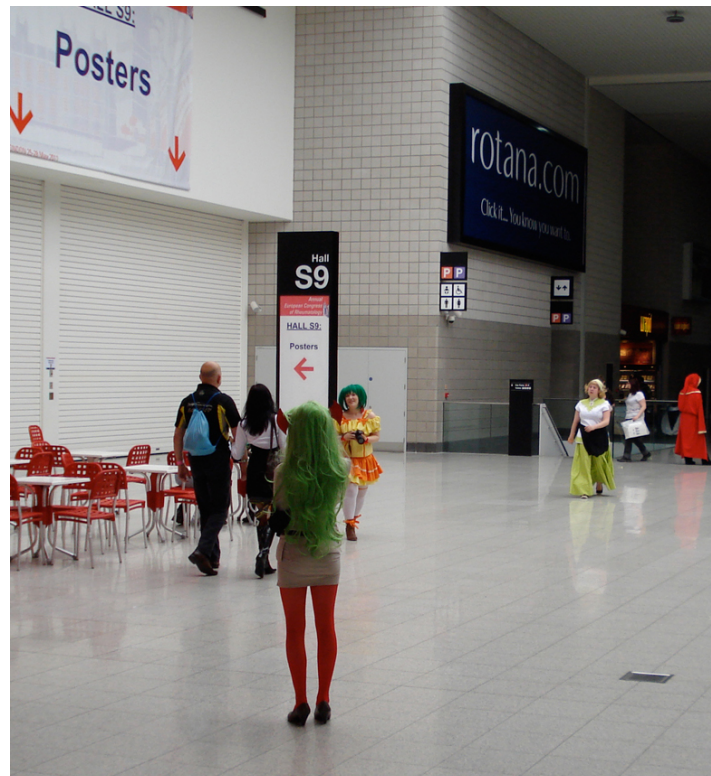

fig. 24 MCM Expo, 2011

A prominent feature of contemporary comic cons is 'cosplay', the practice of making and wearing costumes based on a fictional character's design often carefully studied and manufactured by the wearer themselves. Many examples of cosplay costumes are modelled after the *World of Warcraft* fantasy universe (an extremely popular online game), Japanese animé and Manga characters; even the *Transformers* film series. At the 2011 MCM, a whole section of the expo was devoted to cosplay, including workshops, talks and exhibited examples of costumes, swords and guns. I heard a talk by a woman who was at that time making a living touring the world and wearing her *World of Warcraft* costume for gathered

fans. Although initially a DIY trend, cosplay has now become a kind of cottage industry, with experienced makers selling their creations, or making them to order; many items were on sale at MCM in 2011. Again, we see a re-ordering of labour in a post-industrial context, producing this very particular type of 'artisanal' commodity. There was a palpable air of festive excitement; here a group of young people performed their fandom in a social arena, but one that was safe, sanctioned and enclosed; a heterotopia. The costumes and masks worn by many signify the importance of this space as 'other' to their usual lives; their usual selves. But this carnival does not take place in public, civic space; not the city street or square as Bakhtin's carnival does. The whole logic of it is to facilitate esoteric consumerism and takes place in just part of a huge building without identity of its own; both a 'non-place' and an 'other space', and an example of what Steven Miles calls a 'space for consumption' (2010). The comic con is essentially an exclusive, temporary market – exclusive in that it appeals to a very specialist group of shoppers, as well as usually charging an entry fee. Cornel Sandvos writes:

> fan performances are always constituted between text and context by turning the object of consumption into an activity with a given micro field of social and cultural relations. Performance implies the existence of an audience for fan consumption and a process of interaction between performer and spectators. (2005: 45)

Like tourism, the comic convention is a device that, for the visitor, makes 'other' the spaces and acts of consumption – it makes them into novel experiences, by way of the specificity of the event; it even gives the consumer an audience. It makes the consumer not only a spender of money and a receiver of goods, but also makes explicit their role as performer in a social space. Like fandom itself, this kind of theatricalised consumption has become common in late-capitalism, as I will show in my next section on Las Vegas.

The comic con is an established trope within fandom but it is also an evolving one. Comic books themselves played a small part in the convention I attended, which felt more like a trade fair. Comic cons are famous for a dual actualisation of fan-texts: firstly through appearances by actors, artists and writers who are connected to specific hypertexts, and secondly by fans

dressing up as their chosen character. By remediating these elements of the comic con, *Batman Live* seems to attempt an amalgamation of the two: an appearance by Batman 'himself', and a costumed performance, this time by an actor rather than a fan. By adapting Batman into the new genre of the arena spectacular, the producers extend the range of auratic experience present in the franchise already which, as 'mock Gesamtkunstwerk', is more than capable of housing them (Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 68). The cast of *Batman Live* do the dressing up for us. Large teams of professionals create elaborate costumes and props; activity evidenced in the programme with production stills. This all acts as a stand in for 'cosplay', but can still be connotative of an attempt at personal 'entry' into a world, a world of diligent fandom.

fig. 25 *Batman Live* programme page on the making of the show

In *Fans* Cornel Sandvos opposes pessimistic arguments about 'mass culture' (Sandvos, 2005). According to Sandvos, Guy Debord 'implies that these performances of spectators can only ever function as hollow ersatz to the lost emotional qualities and rewards of authentic, non-commodified life' and this is belied for him by the real emotional value that the author finds in fandom (Sandvos, 2005: 51). He further states that '[p]opular texts and icons […] may be

commodities and means of capital accumulation to the media industry, yet they are appropriated by fans as meaningful resources in their everyday lives' (Sandvos, 2005: 13). Sandvos finds that fans do construct meaningful and productive relationships to, and real communities around, fan texts. Although it might be true that fans find the objects of their fandom useful, I am not sure I could agree that these objects are 'appropriated', as this suggests some use that is counter to the aims of their producers. Being a fan is an affective and financial investment, which pays figurative dividends to the fan's constructed self. At the same time this pays literal dividends to those owning the object of that fandom. As Beller says '[t]he extra-economic creativity of the masses, their quest for empowerment, fulfilment, and why not say it "freedom," are absorbed and rendered productive for capital' (2006: 27). Sandvos discusses fandom as a tool with which fans define their own identity, through consumption of mass-produced popular culture. Arguably, fandom offers ways to construct one's identity through allegiances to large institutions and narratives. In fandom, delicate links exist between commerce, aesthetics, consumption and the production of meaning.

In the promotional video for the show, one spectator is shown wearing a Batman t-shirt; fans' presence is anticipated by the producers as part of the show – this is another part of the authentication of the experience. The fan t-shirt, which is also a commercial product (as commemorative merchandise), has socially symbolic qualities. Being a fan means that one is not only a consumer but also a kind of advocate. A fan displays their membership of a social group – membership to which might be extremely important to the fan; think of a football team's fans, for whom that fandom might be a lifelong, even an inherited commitment. In this way, fans can be seen as defining themselves through consumption of products. As we have the arena show incorporates the rest of the audience as part of the image, so where better to present one's identity in a visual way? In the audience at *Batman Live* in the O2 there were many self-proclaiming Batman fans, marking themselves out with esoteric t-shirt designs, relating to various incarnations of the franchise. These fans, by wearing items of merchandise, particularly items other than those available for purchase at the event, were signalling to the rest of the audience that Batman is already part of their 'selves'. I will now argue that the

associations to sophisticated and invested appreciation of texts make fandom, as affectively involved consumption, an attractive and advertised 'experiential' commodity *in itself*.

Self, Safety and Screen Barrier

Has post-cinema and the postcivil also changed the nature of 'fandom'? Is the level of detailed attention to a chosen text or texts typical of all consumption now? Sandvos writes that '[i]t has become impossible to discuss popular consumption without reference to fandom and fan theory, just as it has become next to impossible to find realms of public life which are unaffected by fandom' (ibid., 3). Today it is 'good' to be a fan – politicians go to football matches; soap opera storylines are national events and 'fan objects' appear at our most important national ceremonies (including the Olympic opening ceremony, for example, with the use of the James Bond character). The video trailer discussed above calls the show a 'live action arena adventure', with the word 'adventure' presenting spectatorship as an almost physical activity. But the arena spectacular does not offer involvement, it offers defined spectatorship; we are even *shown* this; it is illustrated in the trailer. We are not going to become part of the world of Batman, we ourselves need not even dress up. I will argue that what *Batman Live* offers is a tamed, bounded version of a fan experience, but why might a tamed version be desirable? Perhaps the frequently employed motif in comics of the dissolving of self into a fiction and the frequent association of fandom and violence explains the contrary nature of *Batman Live* in terms of a realistic intrusion into 'real space'. The commodification of fan experience also comes about because of the effort required to 'be' a fan, as well as the stigma. To return to cosplay: here it is important that an individual; *someone*; not a factory, made an item. Much as it is now possible to buy cosplay items as a kind of artisanal product, incorporating visible labour, but without commitment of time or skill that it would take to make it oneself, we can buy tickets to an arena spectacular that *feels like* affective engagement with a fan hypertext. We can maintain what Simmel calls a metropolitan 'reserve', whilst still achieving a palpable proximity to an auratic performance.

Let us return to the characterisation of fandom as empowerment, of personal development and becoming. Comics are cultural field that often appeals to readers and viewers as also being potential producers. In the *Batman Live* program, Jim Lee writes:

> Ever since I was a little kid I was always drawn to comic books. I remember sitting on the kitchen floor in my parents' home drawing these characters. Drawing *Batman* in particular was really exciting because when you draw you're sort of experiencing the stories […] you really do feel like, certainly as a kid, that you could be *Batman*.
> (*Batman Live* programme 2011)

Here, Lee sets up an imaginary ladder of becoming: from childhood fan, to artist (the role from which he addresses the reader) – and then perhaps potentially on to 'real' superhero. Conventions such as the London MCM Expo include drawing workshops for aspiring comics artists. Writing specifically about fans involved in an independent film festival, Steven Bailey mentions the common idea that underground culture offers the possibility for the roles of producer and consumer to become interchangeable; 'the fluidity of roles and the development of circuits of production and distribution does offer points of contact, however fleeting, with a utopian subjectivity offering more than a passive position within a media culture' (Bailey, 2005: 98). He says that this echoes 'one of the hoariest chestnuts of Marxian utopianism, the communist (wo)man who is a fisherman in the morning and a poet in the afternoon, suggesting a utopian end to the alienation of producer-consumer dynamics' (ibid.). This is so rarely achievable within existing economic conditions it is essentially a fiction. Such fantasies are usually only ever a compensatory heterotopia. The clear separation between audience and performance; between arena and general urban space, means that although the viewer shares the space and time of the performer, their attendance need not encroach upon their own construction of self, in the way that more consistent and involved fandom might. Batman is a good example of a narrative that can benefit from being neutralised and made safe in this way, in order to broaden its appeal into a *gesamtkunstwerk*-like total-brand. Bailey points out that 'fans bear a more conscious and intense affective relationship to media objects; as numerous

commentators have pointed out, ''fan' is derived from 'fanatic'' (Bailey, 2005: 4). Batman stories themselves often have a group of deluded zealots in them who follow Batman's enemies; deceived by an enthralling fiction (in *Batman Live* the joker is assisted by a group of criminal carnival performers). The recent films have, as discussed earlier, brought the narrative closer to a recognisable 'real world'. Here, instead of fantastical caricatures all the characters are disturbed and damaged individuals, led to dressing up and violence by their own traumatic pasts, not least Batman himself. The sense of danger connected with consumption of narratives such as these is lent weight by crimes such as an attack on a cinema audience in 2012. James Holmes killed 12 and wounded 58 people at a screening of Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*. Holmes entered a cinema dressed in combat gear, his hair dyed orange and according to police calling himself 'The Joker.' Incidents like this, and the way they are reported, have lead many people to fear the perceived cultish marginality of fan cultures – Bailey cites the aftermath of the Columbine shootings in 1999; 'the image of harmless, laughable geeks who needed to 'get a life' was replaced in favour of a nearly apocalyptic vision of nihilistic monsters taking moral instruction from degenerate rock stars and receiving weapons training from video games' (2005: 2). Perhaps it is in he connection to events such as these that we find the impetus for 'tamed fandom', packaged as an 'experience': that the affectively involved consumption of fandom is read as an identity defining trait, which in its ultimate expression becomes pathological. Gunman James Holmes might be seen as having remediated an appropriated screen image with which he had become obsessed, and resorted to extreme violence as self-construction. With recent attempts cited above to make branded, fictive 'worlds' more 'real' (Rose, 2011), it is perhaps not surprising that some survivors of Holmes' attack later said that they were initially convinced that Holmes was part of a planned show to complement the film screening (Pilkington, Ed and Williams, Matt, 2012). In a disturbing reversal of those early twentieth century spectators who were reportedly scared of a filmed gun pointing out of the screen at them in *The Great Train Robbery*, a twenty-first century audience was confused when actual guns were pointed at them in the cinema.

The arena spectacular offers the intense 'Real' of a fan's love (with a capital 'R'; the Real that subverts the dominant symbolic order), repurposed as a 'real experience.' In *Batman Live* the transgression of a representation/reality boundary and the idea that characters might step out of the screen, or that the viewer might step inside, is a link to the ur-myths of cinema: the train that threatened to squash its Parisian audience; the gun that was about to go off in their faces. But we are already cinematic, sceptical viewers. We do not want the negative associations that fandom brings; we do not want to become children – or worse, alienated 'psychos' like James Holmes. In a manner Mark Fisher argues is typical of the neoliberal politics of our age '[t]he attitude of ironic distance proper to postmodern capitalism is supposed to immunize us against the seductions of fanaticism. Lowering our expectations, we are told, is a small price to pay' (2009: 5). The loner, or even, killer, teenager is totally other; completely outside the safe arena space, which becomes the space of simple, childish suspension of disbelief, rather than potential collapse of self into cultish fandom. Lee writes about himself as a *child* making these steps towards possibly 'becoming' Batman – for the reader of the programme notes, it's the *watching* of the child's belief that is offered; in it is offered as part of a product.

Bailey points out the importance of the internet in present fan cultures – in fact, comic cons are arguably an 'archaic' element in Raymond William's sense, as so much of fandom is now played out over the public but potentially anonymous platforms of the internet. Bailey says the domestic and private site of internet use allows a 'splitting of the self such that an individual can entertain the monomaniacal passions of the geek while retaining a meta-identity which contains this aspect of the self […] [t]he sense of the Internet as a relatively enclosed virtual world provides the opportunity for an enthusiastic display of one's inner 'geek' with relatively little risk' (2005:195). The arena spectacular could be seen in similar terms, as an analogue of internet-based fan-consumption; equally safe and limited. Again, the arena spectacular is a product of the post-cinematic and digital age, and operates within that age's structures. The hypermediacy of the arena spectacular, obvious even in the advertising for *Batman Live* with its dramatic faux-freeze frame effect, is a tactic against a dissolving sense of self. It rebuilds defined edges, through clear spatial and temporal (heterotopic) restrictions around a narrative

that in other iterations bleeds into reality and possibly the audiences' selves, giving them a simple, sited and temporary engagement with that world. The arena spectacular supports Cavell's 'world from which I am always screened', but attempts to, at the same time, appropriate or approximate the collective viewing fantasy, carnival and connoisseurship of fandom. In remediating an entire franchise into one hybrid entertainment form, *Batman Live* takes an immersive fan hypertext and makes it safe and simple for touristic consumers.

Gotham as a Tourist City

Batman Live shows the diversification of one particular business and brand into a new area, a blatant piece of capitalist expansion. Rather than intrude fantasy characters on what seems like a realistic (filmic) world as Nolan's films do, *Batman Live* expands the text into an environment, as Disneyland was an expansion of Disney's films. In *Batman Live*, the Batman hypertext becomes a portable tourist city; temporarily installed in each arena it visits. It becomes a physical space that one can enter, or at least look upon, as a spectator. In the arena Gotham becomes a physical, and social space, albeit one, unlike the comic convention, divided into spectators and performers. *Batman Live*'s '3D Gotham City landscape' ('3D' being a term that surely only gains currency in connection to 3D cinema and computer animation) is reminiscent of the Las Vegas casino-resort New York New York, only with reduced agency – 'in' this portable Gotham one cannot even walk around, we can only sit around its edge.

Fandom involves consumption of commodities but the arena spectacular can offer it as commodity in itself. *Batman Live* is a vicarious, touristic 'experience' of fandom. This might be appealing to spectators because of the cultish associations of deep fandom, which carries associations with lonely youths, or worse, real violence. What *Batman Live* promises in its marketing is an authentic experience of Batman's world. This 'authentic' version is proposed after the more familiar cinematic, televisual and printed versions of the narrative. This can be seen as a post-cinematic strategy of diversification on DC Comics' part, after already having diversified into film, as a way of continuing to make a profit from their established characters

and brands. Fandom is a phenomenon that comes into existence with mass/popular culture, and is originally a twentieth century one. The particular post-cinematic turn that *Batman Live* represents within the Batman brand is a distinctly twenty-first century one.

Batman Live is not for fans in particular, although of course it doesn't exclude them. It doesn't necessarily detract from the cachet of the 'original text', in fact it presents the act of representation of that text, in its incorporation of graphics referencing the reading of comic books. This is apparent in the title: *Batman* – familiar; *Live* – new mode of representation of the familiar. The franchise has expanded beyond a fan-base and in order to accommodate new consumers, it has adapted in order to offer tame, safe versions of fandom, whilst preserving the affective associations of that fandom.

fig. 26 Still from video advert for *Batman Live*, 2011

The arena spectacular, in its remediated, hypermediated presentation of Batman does not offer a reflection of the self, as Sandvos says fan readings do. We encounter the screen barrier again, 'the modern fate to relate to the world by viewing it, taking views of it, as from behind the self' (Cavell 2005: 116). There is a remove, made spatial by the space of the arena (the physical chasm that separates the spectator from the actors – and most of the other spectators), the presentation of spectatorship in the advertising and the emphasis on accompanying children to the event – that one might watch someone else watching.

iii. Las Vegas and Cirque du Soleil

In my previous section I suggested that Gotham as the setting for *Batman Live* was a portable

tourist city. I now want to look at an actual tourist city, far away from London, but

increasingly influential as a model for experiential consumption. Las Vegas is an illustration of the convergence of the post-cinematic and the postcivil. After considering Las Vegas and the company Cirque du Soleil that perform so prominently there, I will move on to consider how we can see similar trends in not only performance but also postcivil urban space when companies such as Royale de Luxe perform in British cities.

Philosopher Bruce Bégout writes that:

> Las Vegas is nothing more than our everyday cityscape. What has become established in the middle of the Mojave Desert: the might of entertainment dictating the flow of life; the organization of the city through shopping malls and amusement parks; non-stop, day and night bustle in the streets and covered walkways; themed architecture that combines commercial seduction with childlike make-believe; the subjugation of city dwellers by an opium of televisual spectacle (since the casino hotels of Las Vegas correspond to TV shows represented in three-dimensional form) – are all things we are already familiar with, and will be induced to become even more accustomed to. (2003: 12)

For Bégout, Las Vegas, although seemingly exceptional, is becoming the model for every city today. He writes:

> That 'Las Vegas is only the final destination awaiting us is equally confirmed by the fervour with which every city in the world sets out to renovate its old industrial areas with the implantation of leisure complexes and shopping malls that barely conceal their inspiration. (2003: 12)

Norman M. Klein also writes of the central role Las Vegas plays in contemporary urban space:

> The signature of the Electronic Baroque is the occluded, immersive, scripted space, modeled at first on shopping malls, casinos, theme parks […] But nowhere have these experiments in the Electronic Baroque been fiercer than in Las Vegas and Los Angeles. These two cities became our laboratory. (2004: 336)

Klein often writes of Vegas as an outpost of LA and also allies what he calls Vegas' 'architainment' with cinema and television; '[a]rchitainment might rigidly set a path for gamblers, but the excuse is that this show works like a movie. You obey like an audience while you walk through. The views echo camera angles you've seen in movies, a pan of the city during the opening credits' (2004: 343). Las Vegas also houses at least one example of the diversification of film industry – Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's 'MGM Grand' resort, which since 2004 has hosted Cirque du Soleil's show *KÀ*. As well as acting as a laboratory for entertainment architecture, with a kind of mutual feedback relationship to theme parks and shopping malls around the world, Las Vegas is useful here to contextualise post-cinematic live stage shows. After all, inside the twenty-first century casino resort, one is as likely to find a theatre as a craps table or bar. Klein writes that

> [c]orporate Vegas was marketed more as a "family resort destination." It became the corporate headquarters for gaming around the world, with massive alliances between cinema, retail and tourism on a scale never before possible before the nineties. Architainment was a coming-of-age, a grammar for a new political civilisation. (2004: 343)

Cirque du Soleil have such a commanding grasp upon Las Vegas shows that their permanently installed productions that run for years, playing twice a day. So instrumental are the company to Vegas's current state that Susan Bennet has written that '[n]o account of the redevelopment, restylization, and destigmatization of the Las Vegas brand in the 1990s could fail to give center stage to the productions of Cirque du Soleil' (2005: 419).

The arena spectacular is a post-cinematic phenomenon that offers a location-specific experience. Vegas today is at the forefront of a experience architecture that means it pursues that same goal. Gilmore and Pine's book *The Experience Economy* (2011) promotes the selling of 'memorable experiences' rather than commodities or services:

> It's no mere coincidence that other industries try to model the way the entertainment industry is organised […] Their stock and trade is selling short-term access to

simulated worlds and altered states of consciousness. The fact is, they are an ideal

organisational model for a global economy that is metamorphosing from

commodifying goods and services to commodifying cultural experience itself.

(Gilmore and Pine, 2011: 29)

The experience economy is well established in Las Vegas, and so if we follow Bruce Bégout's argument, of Vegas as new urban blueprint, is also becoming so everywhere else. In this section I will be proposing Las Vegas as a consumerist city, a postcivil neoliberal paradise that *remediates what the city once was*. This is crucial for understanding London and other UK cities as postcivil.

Cirque du Soleil's *KÀ*

The MGM Grand is at the Southern end of the main Las Vegas strip. From the hot street, one goes through dark, cooled and carpeted walkways, past The Rainforest Café, banks of slot machines and bars. Before entering the theatre, *KÀ* audience members could first have their picture taken with costumed attendants, who divided their time between this and entertaining any queuing guests. After being seated by more costumed attendants, it could be seen that the stage had aerial gantries built behind it and out into the auditorium; above their heads and around the walls, onto which cast members occasionally ran. Gouts of flame belched from where the stage should be, but where instead there was simply a wall and then a black, smoking pit. A recorded soundtrack played out from the theatre's sound system, and occasionally from tiny speakers embedded in each seat's headrest. As show-time neared, more cast members appeared in the auditorium, running along the front stage-wall and between the seats. The show opened with a floating raft appearing from below the stage-area, being rowed through empty space, galley-style. This was the first of several moving-stage set pieces. The raft/platform/stage was suspended on huge hydraulic lifts behind it, and could tilt and rotate, as if floating on water. Later, this platform became static floors, a beach, or disappeared altogether to leave an empty pit once more. The show included some more circus-like

elements; clowning sea creatures and shadow puppet tricks, as well as acrobatics. *KÀ* is unusual amongst Cirque du Soleil's work in having a narrative – usually their shows are held together by theme, or music (in Las Vegas, they produced a show based upon the music of The Beatles, *Love*, and an 'erotic' show, *Zumanity*). The show presents an vaguely orientalist and un-mechanised fantasy world, despite the presentation of that world being extravagantly dependent upon complex and expensive technology and in this sense is reminiscent of James Cameron's CGI-heavy, 3D film *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009). *KÀ* told the story of 'Imperial twins' who become separated, then reunited in battling an evil force, and was without words except a very short, recorded introduction. Although unusually narrative for Cirque du Soleil, the story was clearly not the priority of the show, and it largely gives way to the special effects, music and dance.

Cirque du Soleil also perform in the O2 and around the world. Their recent film *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away* (Adamson, 2012) was meant to extend the reach of their live shows beyond live presentation (although it only achieved a limited cinema release). The company is, like Global Creatures (who produced *Walking With Dinosaurs Live*), another example of a large global entertainment business. Bennet writes that, in Las Vegas, Cirque du Soleil:

> sets a new definition for spectacular entertainment in the contemporary theatre, and demonstrates with brazen clarity a concept that relies on the multicultural textures of the global marketplace while simultaneously constructing an imagined universal address hailing, as it were, any and every tourist to Las Vegas. (2005: 420)

Cirque du Soleil have developed a 'non-place' aesthetic which is rooted in the exoticism and orientalism of traditional circuses and shows, but within which any recognisable content is abstracted and detached, allowing them to perform anywhere in the world. We can see something akin to this 'universal address' in the ambitiously broad appeal of *Batman* Live; '[t]he show has been carefully written and produced for the entire family to enjoy from age 5 to 105!' (*Batman Live* website, 2012). For example, Cirque du Soleil's music uses un-recognisable words and is performed on a wide range of instruments from different traditions;

costumes include elements of kabuki, Chinese circus and French art nouveau. When they use pre-existing recognisable music, it is the ubiquitous Elvis and The Beatles; edited into smooth medleys, and lyrically bear no relation to what is happening in the show (never has 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' seemed less about hallucinogenic drugs).

KÀ is not an arena spectacular, but Cirque du Soleil are important forebears of the format (this show pre-dates all those I have looked at), not least in the anodyne and child-like nature of their show's content. Cirque du Soleil worked with designer Mark Fisher on *KÀ*, who had already contributed to the 'Millennium Show' (and would later work on *Ben Hur Live*). Indeed, there are many similarities between the 'Millennium Show' and *KÀ* as well as between the spectacular streets of Las Vegas and the 'zones' of the Dome. Although not mentioned by Foucault, the city is as clear an example of an 'other space' as one could hope to find. It is separated from other US cities by desert, and most visitors travel there for holidays; breaks from their regular lives. It has also become home to many almost unbelievable representations of other places (fictional or real) and times, in the form of 'casino resorts' such as 'New York New York', 'The Venetian', 'Caesar's Palace' and 'Treasure Island.' Bennet writes that '[i]n effect, the city has theatricalized global tourism for its own destination brand' (Susan Bennet 2005: 418). If the heterotopia still exists, then it exists as Las Vegas, but it is certainly Peter Johnson's heterotopia of compensation; of enforced power, of apparent excess but actually precisely formulated and controlled consumption.

Like the arena spectacular, Cirque du Soleil are post-cinematic. They directly respond to this context in this particular show, but also in their attempt at 'synergy' and diversification, in their 3D film *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away* (Adamson, 2012). 'Synergy' is Michael J. Wolf's term for techniques that bring the same content in very various forms – '[d]igital technology is thus uncoupling entertainment products from any specific medium and making them portable across multiple platforms' and this is a trend that even live performers like Cirque du Soleil are trying to capitalise on (Wolf, 1999: 92). *KÀ* itself contains many remediated cinema references – one scene seems to draw from factory scenes in *Metropolis*

(dir. Fritz Lang, 1927) as well as *Modern Times* (dir. Charlie Chaplin, 1936), in which some of the show's characters become part of a spinning machine. This wheel-shaped cage is implicated in the villain's plan to somehow industrialise the world of *KÀ* that seems inspired in part by pre-industrial China and Japan – industrialisation being a theme we also find in the Olympic opening ceremony. The biggest set piece of the show is a battle scene performed vertically, so as to give the audience a 'bird's eye' view. Performers are suspended in front of the stage, which has rotated to form a vertical wall, from high-speed electric winches. The two opposing forces run at each other, jump and flip over each other and perform various martial arts-style moves, at a very quick pace, in a complicated and apparently perilous choreography.
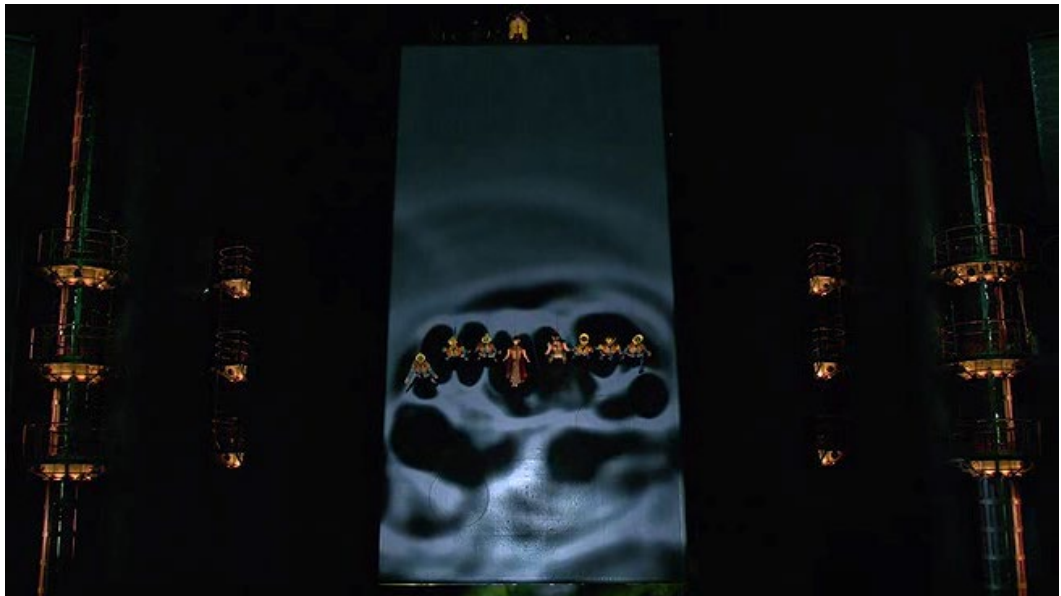

fig. 27 Still from *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away*, 2012

The special effects in the show aim to compete with those of feature films, with the added excitement of liveness, of death-defying stunts performed in the same space and time as the audience, as in an arena spectacular. Unusually for a stage show, the mechanics of the production allow it to copy moving camera techniques from cinema; even placing the audience's viewpoint 'above' the action as in the image above. This is pure post-cinematic boosterism, a technical and acrobatic set of stunts that are almost incredible, but exist in contrast to the invisibility of the workings of cinematic techniques. The fight choreography for

KÀ can be seen as drawing upon martial arts sequences in *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, 1999), with a related emphasis upon exaggerating 'camera' movements and manipulating time (some of *KÀ* is performed in 'slow-motion'). However, rather than the CGI and bullet-time techniques of *The Matrix*, in *KÀ* (albeit with a huge amount of computer control backstage) we have live, visible technology.

Cirque du Soleil have regularly appeared on television (that was how I first encountered them, appearing in mixed bills like the British Royal Variety Performance), and their film *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away* represents a further effort on their part to break out and diversify beyond the large theatres and arenas they perform in. The film starts with a performer falling during an act – the performer falls towards the sandy floor which gives way, and thus the main characters enter the 'world of' Cirque du Soleil (they ultimately never return, the film ends abruptly, leaving the 'world' as a kind of life after death).

fig. 28 Still from *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away*, 2012

They both fall onto a desert, with series of circus tents in the distance, like the themed buildings of Las Vegas rising out of the Nevada desert. It is, again, almost wordless, perhaps because the company is French Canadian whilst the shows (and the film) were made for international export. The majority of the film is shot in Vegas casinos, and attempts to use

existing sets and routines stitched together with a very minimal narrative. It makes Cirque du Soleil seem like an old silent-era Hollywood company, with a set of performers on the payroll and a studio lot with various pre-made locations, and comes close to a post-cinematic 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning, 1990). The translation of the performances of Cirque du Soleil acrobats into *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away* travels in the opposite direction to *Ben Hur Live*'s translation from screen to live performance. Whereas Ben-Hur's chariot appears slow when seen live, here what is designed for live, single viewpoint consumption is under the scrutiny of multiple cameras, close-ups, slow motion and 3-D recording. Despite its reliance upon cinematic tropes, the 'birds-eye-view' battle scene from *KÀ* seems to have caused problems; the filmmakers even make the decision to film it from the side with the camera tilted to match the stage's own angle, losing the effect, and there are lots of shots that include the ceiling and the technical apparatus hanging from it (out of view at the actual show). The final scene involves several minutes of the two main characters spinning in an extended aerial display, but because of the editing together of multiple shots of the film we don't see an act as one continuous motion and any admiration for duration or stamina is lost. *Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away* is a bit like being at one of the shows, but it doesn't include the audience; there is no applause until the very end. The film works as a kind of fictionalised documentation, with the social aspect of the theatre taken away, but with some aesthetic elements of liveness retained.

Because of their massive success, Cirque du Soleil form an important part of an account of the contemporary big-budget, global and spectacular 'live'. Having demonstrated how their shows function post-cinematically, I will now discuss Las Vegas itself as exemplary neoliberal, twenty-first century urban space that illustrates the burgeoning experience economy better than anywhere else.

Las Vegas as the Urban norm

Steven Miles notes that the pressures of globalisation mean that post-industrial cities everywhere have become consumerist places of entertainment (Miles, 2010). Michael J. Wolf

has written enthusiastically about the explosion in the entertainment industry in the 1990's, and posits Las Vegas as a town that has benefited, through record growth figures, for one simple reason: 'Las Vegas is *all* about entertainment. There's nothing else there. You gamble, see shows, play golf, go sightseeing […] Las Vegas is a "one industry" town, and that industry is entertainment' (1999: 3).

Las Vegas is an interesting example of what John Urry calls 'positional goods': things that must be consumed at the site of purchase, the stock-in-trade of tourist industries (2002: 39). Las Vegas grew from being a small oasis town in the Nevada desert because of relaxed controls on gambling; customers would travel to that specific location to enjoy an entertainment not available elsewhere. Now that gambling is legal elsewhere in the US, and even online, making it unnecessary to travel at all to take part, Las Vegas has changed. In the 1970's, architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown saw Las Vegas signage as admirably efficient advertising and decoration for the simply built casinos behind them (*Learning from Las Vegas*, Venturi, 2007). Now those signs have developed into theatrical entertainment architecture, with the gambling found within almost incidental to it:

> By 1988, planners in the gaming industry knew that over forty American states would legalize gambling […] by 1997, 52 percent of all Vegas revenues came from the resorts themselves, rather than from gambling. (Klein, 2004: 336)

Now, as an entertainment and retail city, Vegas 'summons theatricality as a primary tool in the persuasion of tourists that their experience is somehow more than they might have locally, either at the theatre or in the mall' (Susan Bennet 2005: 420). Bennet also writes that:

> in 1996 the city became the US's number one tourism destination for domestic travelers. Its transformation arguably might be better described as one from "Sin City" to "The Entertainment Retail City", since it provides both US and international tourists a dizzying sample of the rest of the world, albeit in simulacra and irrespective of the visitor's home nation. In many ways, Las Vegas performs America to the rest of the world, the rest of the world to America. This is a performance that goes far beyond

> Auslander's dismissal of the possibility of authenticity […] It is instead invested in the very fact of inauthenticity. (2005: 419)

Las Vegas has managed to make the experience of *itself* into the 'positional goods' rather than simply the gambling. Las Vegas and its simulations, its highly authentic inauthenticity, has become 'auratic', in spite of itself.

The reason it is worth discussing the nature of space in Vegas in detail is that, firstly, the arena spectacular exists only in spaces such as this: themed, private, consumerist spaces, be they in America, England or elsewhere. Secondly; not only does Vegas draw upon Hollywood design, but industry there proceeds by the same logic that I described in my earlier chapter on post-cinema. Vegas is actually an even more direct example than those Beller gives of the 'attention economy': users (or, viewers) of slot machines and craps games empty their own pockets straight into the machines they are sat. Indeed, as urban blueprint, it is central to the post-cinematic urban, in that it employs both the tactic of the auratic destination, and the post-cinematic offer to enter an authentic (branded) narrative world. Vegas shows us that some of the tactics used in the film industry – of resuscitating aura, of brand synergy and diversification, of immersion – are important parts of the contemporary urban. Las Vegas is a sign of things to come; what is contained there today will indeed be the blueprint for all future urban spaces.

If we agree with Bégout's statement quoted at the head of this chapter, we are all living in Vegas now: 'Las Vegas is nothing more than our everyday cityscape' (Bégout, 2003: 12). Fundamentally, I am approaching Vegas as an extreme example of urban trends we can find repeated the world over; the remediating logic of the theme park, which mimics some of the tropes of the urban, carried back over into the tourist, consumerist city. Norman M. Klein cites Vegas as a 'scripted space' in which power is demonstrated and exerted through 'special effects' (Klein, 2004). Furthermore, Vegas is a city that has a totally different history to an ancient city like London. It is 'postcivil' in a different way, as it never *was* 'civil' – it is a

recent construct created by business interests, the likes of which are cropping up all over the world now (as in *Evil Paradises*, eds. Davis and Bertrand Monk, 2007).

Despite Bégout's Euro-centric perspective on Las Vegas and the 'inferior' American culture that he sees as having produced Las Vegas (a culture that, he writes, 'pulps all human events into an electrochemical swill of parody which leaves absolutely nothing in one piece' [2003: 13]), his ideas on the city are pertinent here. Bégout calls Vegas 'Zeropolis'; 'the non-city which is the very first city, just as zero is the first number', the original city of our present culture (ibid., 22). The 'zero' also signifies its superficiality as well as its originary status, although 'it has to be said that on this void it has built an empire' (2003: 29). If the nineteenth century saw the city become spectacle (Altick, 1978; Sugg Ryan, 2010), then what is so unusual about Vegas? The great exhibitions were also city-like spaces there to be consumed, therefore is the 'Eiffel Tower' in Las Vegas so different to the original one in Paris?

Bégout writes of Vegas as the degree zero 'of architecture and culture, the degree zero city of sociability, art and ideas. The any-place town where everything begins again from zero' (2003: 22). Perhaps Las Vegas is the manifestation of Koolhaas's 'generic city, that 'is the city without history. It is big enough for everybody […] It is "superficial" – like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning' (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995: 1250). Bégout says that '[w]hen it imitates New York or Paris […] this is not out of any nostalgia or desire to be a city […] it is a city without shame that swallows up other cities to the point of reappropriating their urban icons, in its own style, and supplanting them as a tourist destination' (2003: 85). Klein notes that such was Vegas' sense of itself as destination that 'in the boom of 1999, there were rumors that a Vegas/Vegas hotel was to be built. The entire Strip would be condensed to 5/8 scale' (2004: 342). Architect Jon Jerde is quoted by Klein describing his aim to create 'the space without space […] globality merging into a singular place […] the globe simultaneously and instantaneously' (2004: 360). Bégout also says that 'the casino hotels constitute the original forms of the privatisation of public space. They are enclosed and codified enclaves in which everything is organized with a rigour that

leaves nothing to chance' (2003: 37). Las Vegas is a different kind of city because, according to Bégout, it exists after the division of public and private space ceased to exist. Increasingly, older cities like London and New York are becoming private spaces that allow consumerist expenditure as the only valid engagement; in Vegas there was *never anything else*. It is an immaculately consumerist and neoliberal city, increasingly copied by others.

Theming and Restriction

Like the heterotopia and the safe fan-experience discussed previously, which preserves a consumer's sense of self, theming has a distinct connection to security, safety and control. Las Vegas today is not so much a 'city of sin', but more a gigantic theme park for all ages; a city of commercial entertainment, in which transgression is written out of the script of the architecture, but remains as a 'theme'.

The most obvious architectural feature of Las Vegas, and a major way in which the casinos are 'enclosed and codified' (Bégout, 2003: 37), is in their 'theming'. As Mark Gottdeiner (1997) and Steven Miles (2010) have pointed out, this is a prevalent feature across commerce today, from fast food restaurants, to theme parks – the London O2 currently houses themed 'streets' that are reminiscent of Las Vegas-type themed architecture, and the Olympic Park in London was certainly themed, around the games themselves. A decorative or architectural theme is a designed deployment of a set of motifs that narrativise a space (in a way that complements designed 'experiences' as we shall see below). For example, the Casino resort Caesar's Palace has a Roman theme, which dictates the style of the décor and narrativises the activities available within this theme (the shopping area in Caesar's Palace is called 'The Forum Shops'; its theatre: The Colosseum). Much like a hypertext, and an arena-spectacular-adaptation, a theme has boundaries and rules (in the Forum Shops, the interiors of the shops are as normal, but the shop-fronts maintain the theme). We have already seen how the heterotopia can be regarded as a tool of control and suppression, albeit one of compensation rather than violence,

so does a themed, scripted environment represent an intensified version of that organisational tactic?

Theming is heavily planned and therefore it suits large-scale urban design completed as one project, like Jon Jerde's Citywalk project in LA, discussed by Klein (2004), rather than gradual development like a traditional high street with multiple property owners and builders. Theming means that a narrative is created from a cohesive environment. By being planned, we can also say that theming always has a specific goal; it is always 'scripted' as Klein says. Bégout says that the theming of buildings is not reconstructive; it doesn't replicate an 'original', it is cinematic 'the thematic element thus serves to endow a locale with the atmospheric unity of a film' (2003: 73). This process, according to John Urry, is one in which the inauthentic is 'made authentic' (quoted in Miles, 2010: 142) and given its own kind of aura. For Gottdeiner theming springs from the increasing centrality of entertainment:

> a focus on the need for entertainment articulates with every aspect of our society, including politics, education, work, and the serious discussion of social issues. With this cultural change has come changes in our expectations that make entertainment a premium of social encounters, thereby reinforcing the saturation of commercialized entertainment throughout our culture. (1997: 75)

The tightly controlled themepark environment is an appropriate analogy for Las Vegas; Miles, in line with Davis and Bertrand Monk, sees spaces for consumption as functioning by the exclusion of a feared or undesirable 'other' ('space defined for consumers and not everyone is in a position to consume' [2010: 158]). According to Matthew Wilson Smith, 'Disney conceived of his "land" as an answer to Coney Island […] that typified, for many middle-class Americans, the corruption of modern urban life'; Disney is quoted by Smith as explaining that 'my wife used to say 'But why do you want to build an amusement park? They're so dirty.' I told her that was just the point – mine wouldn't be' (Wilson Smith, 2007: 121). The theme park is a tightly controlled environment with a very specific set of rules and intended outcomes and experiences and today people even live in themed spaces (Celebration, Florida,

a town built by the Disney company in the 1990's). Like Disneyland's appropriation of the American 'main street', Las Vegas also offers 'an apparently varied entertainment landscape that is underpinned by consumerist conformity' (Miles, 2010: 156). Bégout emphasises the illusionistic nature of casino-space, and how this is instrumental to their policing:

> The impression of sheer frenzy and the reality of surveillance are combined to give rise to an urban space in which the lack of visible boundaries competes with the presence by stealth of a very well-developed strategy of subduing individuals. (2003: 33)

He identifies here another key feature that makes Las Vegas the urban degree zero, that of security, one that Anna Minton has explored in the recent, neoliberal British context (Minton, 2012).

For Miles, consumerist space 'is not entirely communal but it offers a sense of communality that is deemed by the individual to be communal enough' (2010: 15). Likewise, for Bégout, (and unlike the Bakhtinian carnival which reverses social structures):

> the urban amusement park that is Las Vegas only reproduces, if not underlines, social and economic segregations. The antisocial violence of the city, its lawless, creedless nature, which could have led to an unusual political posture, as the first an-archist city in history, is in fact carried out for the sake of a goal which is unfailingly and wholly traditional and conservative: *for certain people to profit thereby*. (2003: 14)

This trajectory casts Vegas as an example of what Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk have called 'evil paradises'; 'dreamworlds of neoliberalism' (2007). These are places where the 'winner takes all ethos is unfettered by any remnant of social contract and undisturbed by any ghost of the labour movement, where the rich can walk like gods in the nightmare gardens of their deepest and most secret desires' (2007: ix). These unsustainable 'dreamworlds' are for the monied ruling class; 'today's luxury themed environments […] function as alternative universes for privileged forms of human life' (ibid., xv), the range of experiences available in

Las Vegas offer the ordinary consumer a taste of this carefree hedonism, limited to a heterotopic time and place.

Mark Gottdeiner, who is on the whole positive about 'theming', writes that 'themed environments may control crowds, but they cannot orchestrate the meaning of the experience. Each individual user of the themed, commercial space has the opportunity to pursue a form of self-fulfilment through the creative act of consumption' (1997: 158). However, after having argued that themed environments, whilst geared to consumption, do not dictate 'meaning', Gottdeiner seems to sympathise with David Nasaw's worry about the end of the modern city's mixture of the public and private space: '[o]ur themed environments are only limited substitutes for the kind of rich public spaces that are nurtured in a healthy society with open cities and a strong public sphere of action' (1997: 159 – see Nasaw 1993: 1).

Tourism relies upon many of the features of Foucault's heterotopia, both as spaces and as time (heterochronisms). Indeed, this is present also in Miles' 'spaces for consumption'; 'the power of consumerism is indeed founded on its ability to seduce the consumer through specific variations of space and place' (2010: 8). As I established in the previous section on Foucault, his heterotopia is articulated in connection to general (actual) space and utopia; which isn't real. Las Vegas can be taken as a city that in Foucault's terms should include all of these three, and I should point out that although it is of course also a place where people live, work, go to school, etc, my focus is on the experience of the consumer of Las Vegas; the visitor around which all else orbits, as the centre of this single-industry town. Representational heterotopias have become unbound in Vegas; 'like no other, the city that never sleeps has exploded the bounded space of the amusement park, freed spectacle from the dark, enclosed hall of the cinema, and put television screens on the walls of the buildings' (Bégout, 2003: 116). However Bégout's discussion of Las Vegas is still concerned with divisions of space and time (or the lack of them), as per Foucault. He still approaches the city with these residual divisions in mind, more than thirty years after Foucault first wrote about them. After all, Las Vegas is still separate and bounded from the rest of the world, and can still be discussed as an entity.

Although Bégout regards Las Vegas as a duplicitous 'utopia', this notion of regulated fun within which citizens forego 'jouissance' (ibid., 39) is exactly my understanding of the heterotopia; '[w]ith an indisputable talent for recuperation, [American society] has kept the idea of a critique of everyday banalities, but has at one and the same time endowed it with the form of a simple recourse to collective fantasy limited to a given space and time' (Bégout 2003: 52).

The Experience Economy

Within themed architecture, we find that certain activities are preferred, if not required. Gilmore and Pine's *The Experience Economy* sets out guidelines for business wishing to exploit these kinds of scripted encounters in the commercial world (2011). The book helps to show how the ethos and aesthetic of Vegas leaks out of that city and translates to other places around the world – two of Gilmore and Pine's founding examples of the experience economy are Las Vegas, 'the experience capital of America' and Disneyland, the first park to immerse guests in 'an unfolding story' (ibid., xxv; 4). It is important to note that *The Experience Economy* is not a critique or a theory; it is a manifesto. The authors are obviously pro-business; some of it reads like an inverted version of critiques of capitalism already cited (e.g. Bégout; Beller; Adorno & Horkheimer), where the fears of critical theorists are re-cast as business opportunities. There are other texts offering related programmes of themed and experiential marketing for business-minded readers – I have already cited Frank Rose and Michael Wolf (2011; 1999), but the tone of Gilmore and Pine's is especially evangelical. In their proposal, all business would become primarily presentation, 'experience', and only secondarily an exchange of goods or services:

> Goods and services are no longer enough [...] [t]o realize revenue growth and
> increased employment, the staging of experiences must be pursued as a distinct form
> of economic output. Indeed, in a world saturated with largely undifferentiated goods

and services the greatest opportunity for value creation resides in staging experiences.

(2011: ix)

If they wish to survive in the coming 'experience economy', the authors propose that every business becomes a stage on which the consumers' desires are acted out. Gilmore and Pine propose the marketisation of memory and experience. It is a super-self-aware version of consumerism (which can also be linked to fan consumption), in which the complicity in fantasy is fore-grounded and boldly illustrated during the customers' engagement with the product.

The economisation of 'experience' is largely a device with which to charge for time – in this sense it is far more straightforward than the attention economy, in which the 'purchase' of time and the point of profit is far more obscured (but also more invasive) and once business starts to think this way, there are innumerable sections of time that currently pass uncharged for and therefore 'wasted':

> few [ski] resorts recognize the one place where the entertainment element is inherently part of the skiing experience and seek to enhance its value: the ski lift! It's the place where people relive their runs, tell jokes and stories, and look bellow at fellow skiers. The commodity mindset mistakenly thinks that the ski lift merely performs the function of transporting people from the bottom to the top of the mountain. An experience mindset […] would look for ways to add fun to the lift experience.
>
> (Gilmore and Pine, 2011: 61)

Gilmore and Pine promote the selling of 'memorable experiences' rather than commodities or services – in their minds these offerings are outdated and undesirable to consumers, who are now looking to purchase *meaningful time*, rather than mere things. They say that '(w)hereas commodities are fungible, goods tangible, and services intangible, experiences are *memorable*' (ibid., 17). Live events are often framed in exactly this way – *The Nutcracker* ballet at the O2 had the tagline 'The Christmas Spectacle You'll Never Forget'.

Like the arena spectacular, 'experiences' are new products that don't necessarily rely upon new technologies; they might be as simple as altering an employee's uniform, or the terms with which they address their customer. The 'experience economy' is, like Beller's 'cinematic mode of production' another example of capitalistic exploitation finding yet another niche for profit extraction. It is another response to the post-industrial and to post-cinema (companies such as Disney, MGM and Universal are trailblazers in 'experiences'), even when the experience sold is literally one of the cinema (as I discussed in relation to Picturehouse Cinemas' advertising campaigns in chapter 1). 'The Experience Economy' is an element of 'zeropolis' that has already leaked out; so much so that the American 'they' of Bégout's writing can now be altered to a global 'we'. Susan Bennet writes that:

> theatre has survived in a global fiscal paradigm that might otherwise find this art form's demand for unique, live production by a skilled labor force on a daily (or something approximating daily) basis to be at best anachronistic, and at worst extravagant to the point of infeasibility. (2005: 412)

However, the logic of the experience economy is easily applied to cultural experience. Culture becomes valued as enriching experience. The live adaptation of a screen-based text is a neat example of the logic of the experience economy; transforming what could be classed as a straightforward commodity (the film) into a memorable, experiential event that requires physical presence and proximity – and a higher cost to the consumer (making it what they would call a 'higher echelon' offering). Gilmore and Pine themselves refer to the process of adapting a film into an experience, such as the rides at the Universal Studios theme park in LA:

> Most such escapist experiences are essentially motion simulator rides based on popular adventure or science fiction movies […] These rides perfectly express the shift from the Service to the Experience Economy. It used to be, "You've read the book, now go see the movie!" Today, it's, "Now that you've seen the movie, go experience the ride!" (2011: 50)

Following a similar trajectory, the live adaptation extends the moving image commodity into more sensorial registers, including the building in which it is performed, the crowd with which the consumer encounters it and even the necessity to travel to the venue. It also provides opportunity to purchase memorabilia of the event – further purchases that illustrate the memorable nature of the event. Experiences are memorable and therefore aggregate around a self, adding 'value' – hence the availability of fan t-shirts at all of my live spectacular examples. Memorabilia is the value of an experience made manifest; made into a commodity.

'Experience' is a broad term that is difficult to define, but in Gilmore and Pine's usage it is something akin to the 'theme': an experience has a narrative and is considered as a whole. 'Experiences' are unusual, they are somehow special and significant. In marketing, when something is described as such, it is implied to be somehow *more* than simple spectatorship. To use my example of *KÀ*, here the stage show was extended into an 'experience' by, amongst other things, the costumed attendants interacting with queuing customers and the chance to (pay to) have one's photograph taken before or after it.

The cited products of the 'Experience Economy' are almost aimed at a wealthy American consumer base, although the influence (and export) of them can be found in all the countries of the world, and almost all economic groups. In many ways the experience economy can be seen as an extreme, immersive process of branding. In catering this is typified by the Rainforest Café chain of restaurants, but elements of it can be found in lower price options such as McDonalds. For companies like DC Comics, the diversification of their offerings into increasingly novel and therefore attractive forms became important, and remediation of their products and ideas into 'live' experiences is a clear example of this. These events I am looking at demonstrate that the principle of it is already influencing many levels of business and may soon become systemic, as the book's authors hope.

Ing-ing the thing

'Ing-ing' is a process of Gilmore and Pine's invention whereby a commodity is replaced with an activity. This transition from noun to verb clearly shifts the emphasis of the product provided. Customers and suppliers are thus encouraged to think about 'dining' rather than 'dinner', 'buying' or 'shopping' rather the thing bought. What this also means is that that activity is turned into a representation; an *image of that activity* that can be advertised and sold before it is then 'experienced' as something planned, scripted and guaranteed. The great fear for businesses, say Gilmore and Pine, should be that the product they offer becomes 'commoditised' – downgraded from a memorable and therefore valuable experience to a mere 'thing', to be acquired as quickly as possible; for its use value, not its entertainment value.

A factor that is missing from the book, but is to me an obvious incentive for this model's implementation is that 'experiences' *cannot be stolen*. Unlike a ripped video file, they can only be distributed in their intended context, their intended staging, outside of this they simply cease to be the experience that is supposedly desired by the consumer. The designed experience can therefore be seen as a tool of commercial control – scarcity and exclusivity as protection from theft or cheap imitation. For example, 'bootleg' videos of cinema presentations are a well established way of stealing moving images, and the arena spectacular does circulate in this form; as can be seen from my case studies, attendees often capture copious amounts of video footage that is uploaded to online platforms like YouTube. However, the monetary value of the 'experience' is not eroded as easily by the video representation of it; watching someone else's footage is fundamentally different from being there, in the arena.

As I have already mentioned in my introduction, cinemas are a good example of a business that has embraced the 'Experience Economy' that serves Las Vegas businesses so well. In the contemporary cinema, rather than being invited to 'see' what the film itself offers as Tom Gunning describes in the 'cinema of attractions' model (see chapter 1), we are invited to pay for the experience of watching in its own right; the film being separate and a mere commodity.

Cinemas are a huge business, despite the product they offer (feature films) being available more conveniently and more cheaply elsewhere, rented, bought on DVD, or even stolen via very easily accessible pirate sources. Cinemas therefore are heavily invested in the 'experience' of attending the cinema; any trip to see a film is currently sure to be preceded by at least one advertisement for the cinema itself. Following a strategy that fits neatly into Gilmore and Pine's logic, the cinema and the film have been effectively 'ing-ed', into 'watching', 'cinema-going', 'experiencing'. There are, of course, various technical additions to contemporary cinemas when compared to ones from the first half of the twentieth century: bigger screens, higher definition picture and sound and 3D projections. Jeremy Rifkin cites 1950's Hollywood as a precursor to this idea of investment in 'experience' over product. In the 1950's, studios faced with declining returns experimented making fewer but more spectacular films – the 1959 film *Ben-Hur* being a good example (Rifkin, 2000: 25). These technologies have contributed to the reason why cinema's survival, transferring it from an everyday commodity into a 'special experience'; the emphasis shifted from seeing a film to 'see-ing' a film.

The Politics of the Experience Economy

The experience economy, like architectural theming, is a tool of exploitation. The text explicates the economic theory behind much of contemporary entertainment and leisure but also shows the rampant, evangelical nature of 'economisation' which is also the central tenet of neoliberalism:

> Human beings have always sought out new and exciting experiences to learn and grow, develop and improve, mend and reform. But as the world progresses further into the experience economy, much that was previously obtained through non-economic activity will increasingly be found in the domain of commerce. (Gilmore and Pine, 2003: 163)

For Gilmore and Pine, 'the Spectacle' in Debord's sense (Debord, 1970) is not a moral threat, it is simply an outmoded business model; anachronistically relying upon passivity rather than engagement. The Experience Economy relies upon complicity from the consumer in acts of theatre. The Spectacle simply does not go far enough; the fully-fledged experience economy will *alter* the consumer, who will no longer be simply a spectator. Rather than sit back, the consumer of 'experiences' is 'engaged' and even expected to deliver appropriate lines of dialogue when prompted. They see this change as inevitable:

> Those who decried previous economic shifts […] failed to stop the Progression of Economic Value to higher-echelon offerings. It happened despite their protestations. Therefore, we believe that the moral emphasis should not lie on whether commerce should shift to experiential offerings […] The moral emphasis must be placed instead on *what kinds of experience will be staged*. (2003: xxvii)

Engaged viewers within the experience economy are complicit in their own construction as *spectators of their own viewing*. Like other models such as Henry Jenkin's 'convergence culture', Frank Rose's 'immersion' and Gottdeiner's 'theming' in architecture, the Experience Economy is all about producing 'engagement', rather than passive consumption – engagement being an indication of the depth of enjoyment and therefore potential price. But if consumption is about illusion and complicity anyway, as Colin Campbell argues (see end of chapter 1; Campbell, 2005: 89), how is the experience economy substantially different? In short, it isn't, apart from in its scale and intensity. As in cinema, as part of the attention economy it is about the depth of the intrusion of capitalisation into human life; '*more offerings should find ways to explicitly charge for time*. Time is the currency of experiences' (Gilmore and Pine, 2003: xv).

Like Wagner's 'total artwork', the monetised experience has a moralistic power. The authors cite the fact that restaurant 'TGI Fridays encourage employees to decorate their hats and braces […] no profanity, though, thank God' (ibid., 229). They applaud the seeming expression of the employees' personality but are interested only in an abridged and censored form. Making something into a packaged 'experience' often seems to involve rendering the

original referent inert and safe; TGI Fridays wants to present a 'creative' and expressive workforce but without disaffection or derision, just as Disneyland imitates the American high street, but without dangerous traffic or crime (we shall see similar abridgment of British history in the London Olympics). The authors acknowledge that escapism is central to their proposal – often that escape seems to be into a kind infantile consumerist state, where the customer puts the provider of the experience into the role of protective parent. Employees and customers are configured as happily working through a given script, providing a degree of safety and guaranteed outcomes. Whilst this might be more 'engaging' than regular dining, shopping or spectatorship, and it might exploit a greater degree of the actor/consumer's mental and sensorial faculties, it would not allow a greater degree of agency. For example, the 'script' for the employee is not likely to include an option to strike for better wages; the script of the consumer is unlikely to include haggling down a price. The experience economy, then, like the space for consumption, and the heterotopia, is a device for control.

Two examples of experiences cited by Gilmore and Pine are the 'Build a Bear Workshop' and 'The American Girl Place'. That these shops are designed in order to sell cheaply made products at inflated prices to children seems indicative of the nature of much of the proposed economy. Seemingly without irony, 'Build a Bear Workshop' – an international chain of shops – turns simply buying a toy into a mock-experience of 'making' the toy; re-injecting a fore-grounded and highly visible kind of labour that is a sanitised version of the cheap third world labour such companies rely upon (a similar irony is not missed by Bégout in Vegas, watching people at slot machines: '[a]ll these people compulsively engaged in a repetitive and physically ridiculous task in which they don't even take any pleasure make you think of slave workers in some Southeast Asian sweatshop' [2003: 29]). Las Vegas slot machines, then, are a perfect experience economy endeavour, persuading customers to sit and put money into them, with nothing gained except the 'experience' of gambling.

Gilmore and Pine do criticise certain experiential products:

there is another side to the Vegas experience: the readily available alcohol, drugs, nudity filled nightclubs, and prostitution. Unfortunately, these are every bit as much a part of the Experience Economy as any other entertainment or escapist fare […] most of the experiences mentioned above, while engaging and memorable, are certainly not virtuous. (2011: xxvi)

Prostitution could in fact be the perfect example of staged experience, the 'oldest profession' that would prove the ineluctable logic of the burgeoning experience economy. Another 'experience' on offer in Las Vegas is the opportunity to fire a gun. Gilmore and Pine do not mention this particular Vegas offering, but it is as readily available as the call girls and alcohol – 'the firearms experience', as 'Machine Guns Vegas' describes it in their advertising (quoted in Mr Dallas, 2012). 'MGV' offers an upmarket 'experience' including a lounge and black-clad hostesses. I am not sure whether they would classify this as a morally desirable part of the experience economy, but it certainly fits into it as a business. The machine gun range offers the chance to pretend to be administering deadly force to another human being, as one has seen done in a thousand films: 'flat-screen monitors play war movies nonstop — Black Hawk Down during a March visit', writes an online reviewer (ibid.). At MGV, one can even opt for the same model of gun used to kill Osamer bin Laden (ibid.) – the fragmented, post-cinematic narratives of action films and news coverage converging around a monetised 'experience'.

Scripted Spaces

Norman M. Klein puts Las Vegas in a historical continuum of 'scripted spaces':

The scripted space is the dominant model for consumer-built environments, from casinos to shopping malls to theme parks, and finally to tourist plans for existing cities […] it mixes populism and political repression. Scripted spaces that rely on illusionistic effects bring on "happy imprisonment" and "ergonomic controls." Certainly Disneyland qualifies as happy imprisonment, and Citywalk, and the cybernetic computer for that matter. (2004: 322)

This definition would encompass the spaces that house the themes, monetised experiences and performances I am discussing. Klein describes Coney Island as a place full of romantic danger, a place of sex, petty crime and ethnic mixture, all of which Disney removed from his 'scripted' park (see also Wilson Smith, 2007: 121). Remediating capitalism draws on what is already existent; '[a]musements and all the elements of the culture industry existed long before the latter came into existence. Now they are taken over from above and brought up to date' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997: 135). The 'scripted space' is, Klein admits, an elastic category; they need not even be physical spaces (he also cites films, even facial expressions), but fundamentally '[i]t is gentle repression as free will' (2004: 11).

> How is this scripted freedom accomplished? The entrances and exits are often fixed, and the perimeter isolated from the world, as at Disneyland. From front to back, the choices are defined; yet somehow the walk is supposed to feel open. The design has to justify the price that the spectator pays. The trade off must "appear" flexible somehow, reveal many ways to go, even if there are none. You are always at a fork in the road, deciding to give up this for that. Thus, the player can enjoy feeling a "little" bit trapped. (ibid., 11)

Why "little" in ironic inverted commas? Because the consumer is *absolutely trapped*. The pleasure of feeling of being a 'little' trapped is a way to hide absolute domination. Like the heterotopia, and the carnival, the scripted space (and the scripted, economised Experience) is based upon the need for spaces and time periods that contrast to the everyday.

The term 'script' for Klein is never far away from its use in the film industry, and, like Benjamin (1999), he uses the tightly controlled and technological environment of the film shoot as analogy:

> Imagine a sound stage circa 1955 as the model for a theme park. The interior is kept in quarantine […] Every surface (even the star's faces) must begin the day as an immaculate blank – scrubbed, ageless – then artificially aged when the story required

it: fake cobwebs, dust, smoke, wrinkles. Similarly, the visitor to Disneyland was supposed to get something of a thrill that an actor felt on set. (2004: 313)

For Klein this degree of control links to the 'condensed city' – a term he borrows from Jon Jerde – which 'is urban chiaroscuro, for the community of consumers: a condensed, narratized replacement for what must be left out. It is a designed experience for a world where audiences prefer to eat inside the movie, rather than simply go to the premiere' (2004: 360). Jerde's 'City Walk' project in Los Angeles is a major example for Klein, and this is as neat an example as any of Vegas-style theming leaking out to other cities. Condensation not only means spatial/historical compression, but the narrowing of possibilities within a space. In a similar vein, but in the context of British towns and cities, Anna Minton discusses the use of the planning term 'clean and safe': '[t]his slogan is used repeatedly by politicians and is a perfect fit with the 'decay to renaissance' story. It sounds appealing […] But what it really means for places is a far more controlled, shopping mall environment' (2012: 44). For example, the shopping development 'Liverpool One' has a stated aim of attracting more high-spending customers, through deployment of this ideal. However:

> Clean and Safe is really about far more than safety, it's about creating places which are for certain types of people and certain activities and not others. Exclusion is either covert, by making people feel uncomfortable, or overt, by banning them, with the list of undesirables spanning far more than the usual suspects of beggars and the homeless to include groups of young people, old people, political protestors, photographers, really anyone who is not there to go shopping. (2012: 46)

This approach to maximising the numbers of most profitable users, and excludinging others marries up with Gilmore and Pine's experiences, and take place in postcivil spaces. The monetised consumer experience of a mall such as Liverpool One can only occur through purchased engagement with a script, within a heterotopic time period and space.

Royale de Luxe's 'Sea Odyssey'

Royal de Luxe are another company who, like Cirque du Soleil, specialise in more-or-less traditional forms of live performance. Their work draws the subjects of this chapter (heterotopia, social spectatorship, the Experience and the postcivil) together, within a British, private and consumerist urban space. With their work, we return to performance in a British city, but now within space that is seemingly public and open, but is in fact little different to the ticketed arena. The audience's presence is strictly monitored and controlled, and based upon consumption. The company, who are based in Nantes, make huge puppets that are used in large scale, often city-wide, displays. A poster that I referred to earlier, bearing the tagline 'The Home of Spectacular Cultural Events', uses an image of one of the company's performances in Liverpool, 'Sea Odyssey', which took place in April 2012. Royale de Luxe do not produce 'mega-events', but their shows share qualities with Roche's examples (2000), not least in their direct engagement with industrialisation, urban landscape and public spectacle.

fig. 29 Royale de Luxe's *Sea Odyssey* in Liverpool, 2012

This show involved three giant puppets appearing in various parts of the city over three days. There was a very loose narrative which, as in Cirque du Soleil's shows, is really a way of

linking several spectacles involving a deep-sea diver and a lost letter, and audiences could follow the puppets along a set route that was publicised in the lead-up to the show. 'Sea Odyssey' was ostensibly performed to mark the centennial of the sinking of the Titanic, which was registered in Liverpool, although the ship never docked there. However, the street-spectacle had no discernible connection to the Titanic story, nor Liverpool itself, aside from its vaguely maritime theme. Again like Cirque du Soleil, the cultural and historical references are vague, with the emphasis left upon the incongruous appearance of an element rather than what exactly is being represented.

Like Cirque du Soleil and Global Creatures, Royale de Luxe go to great lengths to emphasise visible labour within their spectacles:

> It's certainly a marvel, but it is not just the extraordinary feats of engineering that hold the attention. These giants may dwarf us and even our great cities, particularly the rows of tiny boarded up terraces in the narrow streets of North Liverpool, but it is human endeavour that animates them […] Tiny figures in wine-coloured coats crawl across the bodies of the little girl and diver like Lilliputians. Each step of the diver takes gargantuan human efforts. The result is inclusive theatre where young and old rub shoulders with the giants. We walk together in their footsteps, and we walk taller because they are with us. (Gardner, 2012)

In this show, we see an extreme, but significant, example of a British city becoming spectacle, and host to communal spectatorship produced within commercial scripted spaces. Provided by city councils like Liverpool and costing large amounts to produce (£1.5 million for 'Sea Odyssey', split between the city's Capital of Culture funding and the city council itself – see Gardner, 2012), such 'spectacular cultural events' are cost-analysed and carried out as a straightforward investment (much like the Olympics). Evidenced 'returns' in tourist spending multiply many times over the initial outlay: '[m]ore than 500,000 people visited the city over three days to watch the show, boosting the local economy by at least £12m, the city council has said' (BBC News, 2012). They also provide massive media exposure for the city (as the

national media coverage cited suggests), which becomes the stage for the show – particularly beneficial to a city like Liverpool, which values its iconic architecture very highly. An event that might seem to highlight importance of public space and of civil gatherings, is actually, like the Olympics, planned in order to boost business. As well as being free 'inclusive theatre', 'spectacular cultural events' like these are arguably used to subsidise a city's leisure and tourism based businesses.

More prominently than in the terraced streets of North Liverpool, Royale de Luxe's shows take place in highly policed and often privately owned city centre locations; the image above shows a 'street' within the open-air mall that is 'Liverpool One'. This is a huge, privately owned segment of the city that has been rebuilt to appear like separate streets and buildings. In fact it is one single, highly controlled development – a 'mall without walls' that remediates the older city into a postcivil alternative. Again, as in Las Vegas, we find 'an apparently varied entertainment landscape that is underpinned by consumerist conformity' (Miles, 2010: 156). This is one of the few types of large public gathering that would be allowed in Liverpool One, where, as Minton writes, private rules can be used to keep out political protesters and even photographers, as well as the homeless and groups of teenagers (Minton, 2012: 46). Augé used the term non-places primarily for places of transport but Minton finds them in the centre of cities:

> These places are everywhere but feel like they're nowhere in particular, devoid of local culture and history and the distinctiveness that brings. Instead they try hard to import their own culture and vitality, but it doesn't work, creating fake themed environments where everything is controlled and far from unplanned and spontaneous. This is an approach to cities which reveals that when the market is given free rein to make places, the result is not the freedom and vitality that people want. (ibid., 186)

Royale de Luxe in Liverpool One, then, like the mega-event, represent an attempt to 'provide resources to counterbalance [...] destructurations of lived space in late modernity' (Roche, 2000: 224) – the roving pageantry and huge crowds are in this sense heterotopic compensation

for not only the boarded-up terraces mentioned above, but also the postcivil urban space of Liverpool One. Like Roche's mega-events, as public commissions funded by local government these shows 'offer possibilities for people to reanimate the sense of their world as involving spatial distances and differences', as well as a chance to boost the profits of city centre businesses during their visit to see the spectacle (Roche, 2000: 224). In this newly postcivil area of Liverpool, we see the transplantation of experiential and heterotopic tactics developed in Las Vegas and elsewhere – and we will find these again in the Olympic opening ceremony. Royale de Luxe allow 'young and old' to 'walk together' in their giants' footsteps as part of an impressive but ultimately socially blank spectacle that does more to naturalise a controversial urban development than it does to articulate anything about a specific place or community.

In conclusion, like Minton, Klein sees a recession of the public realm, leaving our era with:

> intimacy by way of public shopping […] The Electronic Baroque rearranges older codes of intimacy, to fit into a vast global shift (in response to transnational trade/mergers). In that shift, public space, as defined circa 1910, "dissolves." By that I mean: the *social imaginary* called the *public "realm,"* […] is sold off like so much refuse left unpaid at the warehouse. From public utilities to public streets, government is privatised on behalf of transnational shopping and tourism […] Consumer privatisation becomes coordinated enough to replace industrial codes of public life. (Klein, 2004: 404)

If we relate this to Foucault's categories, 'general space' that is now one of both leisure and production (like Liverpool One) is now full of Klein's Electronic Baroque special effects. We might therefore seek a heterotopic, hypermediate 'adaptation' of this to feel some distance or punctuation: an edge to spectacle through exaggeration. We leave the scripted spaces of the computer screen, of the shopping mall, to venture into a scripted social space, perhaps equally restricted via theme and monetised 'experience' of a 'spectacular cultural event', be that the Millennium Experience, the comic con or an arena spectacular. But as the heterotopia is

always still part of the dominant system, these exaggerations and indulgences are still suppressive and exploitative. Klein writes that in scripted spaces 'some tricks are supposed to be noticed; others are supposed to stay hidden' (Klein, 2004: 223). Whilst we see Royale de Luxe's performers working their puppets, we don't necessarily think about the same city council that pays them having sold off the streets on which they perform. In the next chapter the scripted space will be extended into one that implicates the national self-image projected onto a global stage, where both a live audience in the stadium and a television audience encountered, and enjoyed, a post-cinematic, scripted version of nationalism that fully exploits the political potentials of the arena spectacular.

Isles of Wonder as Arena Spectacular

The previous chapters dealt with elements and techniques that are proliferating all over the world, as well as specific companies undertaking global tours. This final case study, which concludes this study, finds many of those elements expressed in the singular example of the London 2012 Olympic Games. I will argue that here Britain became a 'theme' expressed in a post-cinematic work, within a postcivil heterotopic space that existed both physically and in the media. Indeed, as I have established, to classify the opening ceremony as an 'arena spectacular' at all is to call it post-cinematic and to suggest that what might seem to be a rare contemporary 'civil' spectacular is actually postcivil.

'Ceremony' is only an appropriate term for a section of the 2012 Olympic opening event. A little like watching live administration, the ceremonial entry of the national teams into the stadium has almost no visual interest and lasts well over an hour. Here, however, I'll be focussing on the earlier part of the evening presented as a spectacular show using, I will argue, the format of the arena spectacular. This section was directed by film director Danny Boyle and titled _Isles of Wonder_. Like the Millennium Dome project, I will cast this example in an overtly politicised role. The Millennium Show, performed daily in the Millennium Dome and also a non-commercial project, told an allegorical science-fiction narrative specifically aimed at what Britain might become – _Isles of Wonder_, on the other hand, presented nostalgic narratives around Britain's past achievements. More than simple celebration, the Olympic opening ceremony acts to legitimise the government that delivered it and in this sense acts upon a latent use within the arena spectacular format within neoliberal society. It is also as further evidence of the role of the live spectacular in the current media regime. In this final case study I will draw together my discussions of the arena spectacular and its various precedents and, with this demonstrably popular example, further illustrate the wider cultural relevance, and indeed the dangers, of the arena spectacular format used in this way.

An opening ceremony is an obligatory part of the pomp around the Olympic Games wherever they are held. There is always a space for performance within the mega-event of the games; the performative opening of the games is another pre-existing 'envelope' demanding to be filled with spectacular content. This envelope is usually used as a platform for the host country to express something about itself at the time of the games. Athens in 2004 emphasised its historical connection with the Olympic idea; Beijing in 2008 staged a lavish display of wealth and included ranks of drilled performers in tightly choreographed displays. London 2012 in its turn attempted to say something about Britain. Whereas the opening to the previous Olympic games in Beijing was a more traditional mass-spectacle, the British version had more in common the narrative and post-cinematic arena spectaculars I have discussed already. On the surface there are significant differences, but *Isles of Wonder* shares enough with the arena spectacular to be included in the format. This show was different to the others in that it was televised and was only performed once. It also happened in a brand new purpose built stadium (not the O2 Arena), without a roof, and most significantly it was publicly funded. The formal similarities between this show and the others in this thesis will become obvious, but briefly: it was also formally hybrid, containing songs, dance, pre-recorded video and acted scenes and the design used complex scenery and props, lighting, multi-media elements, but still articulated around a live performance. The format of the show emphasised the importance of presence in the arena and in-situ perception of the action. Finally, it was overtly post-cinematic, perhaps even more so that the other arena spectaculars.

In order to call the ceremony a spectacular, we need to return to the difference between a 'spectacle' and that vague noun 'spectacular'. We have seen that the alteration of the noun into 'spectacular' now suggests visual and aural spectacles used in the service of a loose narrative – in this case, a version of the history of Britain since the start of the industrial revolution. As in other examples I have discussed, features such as music, stunts, impressive props and synchronised routines are here put to a quasi-informative end, as well as displayed in order to dazzle and impress its audience. The reason for regarding it as, to date, the ultimate expression of the arena spectacular is that it realises a latent, neoliberal political use of the format. For all

the humanistic and sensuous language Roche uses, the mega-event is almost always an economic concern, and one particularly important in post-industrial cities, and the London Olympic Games was no exception. The ceremony and the games were not a gift to the people of Britain, they were an investment of capital (indeed, the people's capital, as it was largely state funded) made on their behalf.

I should point out that I was not there at the Olympic opening ceremony – I could not get tickets (although I did attend the opening to the Paralympic Games weeks later, in the same stadium). I first watched it with a Spanish commentary in San Francisco – and it proved to be a very unusual way to see one's own country presented, both back to itself and to the world. In my descriptions, I am therefore referring to the DVD release of the ceremony, which is still available at the time of writing (in 2015). Within *Isles of Wonder* adaptation and remediation, post-cinema, postcivil space and spectatorship as experience were forged together in a highly popular display – a mega-event combining auratic artefacts and performance, mediatized and broadcast images, history, nationalism and non-place. In the Olympic Stadium site in Newham, 2012, the arena spectacular and the postcivil 'spectacular cultural event' met and flourished together; the opening ceremony celebrated the collective and the social, whilst the neoliberal government that staged the spectacle continued to dismantle them. It is in this sense that *Isles of Wonder* acted as a compensatory heterotopia, tailor-made for Britain under a regime of neoliberal 'austerity'.

Post-cinematic Wonder

Isles of Wonder makes many overt references to film and television, and indeed Boyle's achievements in film go a long way towards categorising this piece as post-cinematic. As quoted in my introduction, Danny Boyle framed the experience of watching the ceremony within cinema:

> We're trying to make you feel like you're watching a live film being made […] It
> feels like when you're planning a big sequence in a film. We're trying to make it feel
> like a live recording of a film that all happens on one evening. (Gibson, 2012)

This approach should not be surprising from a famous film director, and given the fact that the majority of the audience were going to watch it on a screen, rather than in the stadium, the ceremony does lend itself to this treatment. There are precedents for this mixture of production and transmission, presence and remoteness, in perhaps the most famous filmic representation of the Olympics, *Olympia* (1938) by Leni Riefenstahl. This Olympic film drew upon Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will* (1935) – a film about the Nazi party conference held in Nuremburg. According to Matthew Wilson Smith, this earlier work, also made during a large-scale live event, was a mixture of documentary and choreographed elements (2007). *Isles of Wonder* is not an adaptation of *Olympia* – rather, my reason for looking at them together is that they both remediate the live spectacle into something that relates more directly to screen culture of the times they were made. Bringing Boyle into critical proximity with Riefenstahl brings highly negative associations, however, Riefenstahl's films are lauded as art regardless of their commissioners' stated aims, as might be the case with Boyle's work in the future. Although they clearly were made within very different political systems I will compare them primarily in order to cast Boyle's ceremony as no less ideologically loaded than Riefenstahl's documentation of the Berlin games. I should make it clear why I will compare Boyle's work to Riefenstahl's rather than the Beijing Olympics immediately preceding the London ones in 2008. That ceremony was noted for its impressive use of mass-coordinated performance (fig. 32 – directed by Zhang Yimou). Riefenstahl and Boyle, both sharing a cinematic training and sensibility, chose to represent and contribute to the Olympic heterotopia in ways that mediate the scale of the Olympic arena event in specifically cinematic ways. At the height of cinema's dominance and drawing upon her experience of the fascist rally-event, Riefenstahl processes the live Olympic event into cinema. Similarly, Boyle alloys the live event and film into an arena spectacular that exploited the specifics of the post-cinematic period. The crucial difference between the Beijing and London ceremonies is the way that Boyle used the post-

cinematic format to depict individuals within the larger spectacle – both within the cast and in the audience.

Isles of Wonder begins with a pre-recorded film, with cameras travelling from the source of the Thames to the stadium. When it reaches the stadium at the end of the sequence, a country scene is being acted out on the arena floor with a cricket ground, farm-work and people hanging out washing. The live performance again grows out of the screen.

fig. 30 Still from television broadcast of *Isles of Wonder*, 2012

In the most dramatic and spectacular passage of the ceremony, this countryside gives way to industrial chimneys and soot-smeared workers, and gangs of top-hatted bosses overseeing it. This scene, which is extremely intricate and confidently executed, ends with one of the five Olympic rings being forged on the arena floor and the other four descending into the arena from above. They meet to create the Olympic logo in a flurry of pyrotechnics, met with huge cheers from both massed performers themselves and the stadium crowd. In this performance the whole process of industrialisation – the labour of which is represented in repeated dance moves – leads up to the moment of the Olympic games arriving in London. Boyle writes in the programme notes that '[a]t some point in their histories, most nations experience a revolution that changes everything about them. The United Kingdom had a revolution that changed the

whole of human existence' (*London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony* programme 2012: 11). He further claims to present:

> the idea of Jerusalem – of the better world, the world of real freedom and true equality, a world that can be built through the prosperity of industry, through the caring nation that built the welfare state, through the joyous energy of popular culture, through the dream of universal communication. (ibid.)

As well as the industrial revolution, the ceremony also depicts the more recent communications revolution. Boyle claims the invention of the internet for Britain via the work of Tim Berners Lee, who was part of the ceremony in the stadium on the night itself. Amongst the many things that the internet affords or improves, it is access to popular music and easy communication between family and friends that is represented and celebrated the most directly:

> Grandma and Granda met in a dance hall where a real live band were playing. Mum and Dad had their first kiss at a disco […] Now that June's a teenager, she can have music wherever she goes […] What if she and Frankie get together forever tonight? How will they listen to 'their song' when they're 64? (*London 2012 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony* programme, 2012: 24)

This section has a suburban house at its centre, that when lifted away from the arena floor reveals Berners Lee, whose rather inactive physical presence is given great importance as a kind of physical totem representing the importance of his immaterial inventions. This might remind us of Philip Auslander's view of live rock music, which supports the authenticity of a recorded product (see chapter 1; Auslander, 1999: 185) – a physical performance that reinforces something immaterial. *Isles of Wonder* thus embodies the arena spectaculars' will to 'have it both ways' – to function as part of a network but also house 'auratic' events, objects and personalities.

In Boyle's 'live film' the pro-filmic event and the film are co-existent. Cameras were a big part of the live viewing experience, as many of the shots in the television and DVD versions

are captured from within the action by camera-operators working on the arena floor itself, as can be seen from the stills included here. Rather than shot from the edge of the stadium, or from above, as would be done with sports coverage, Boyle's 'live film' includes roving steadicams, close-ups, and even digitally composited elements, which in film and television would usually be added later in post-production. Fig. 31, below, is taken from a section of the ceremony that focuses on the internet and popular music and follows two young people during a night out:

fig. 31 Still from television broadcast of *Isles of Wonder*, 2012

To represent the superimposition of mobile communications onto everyday experience, Boyle digitally superimposed text bubbles onto the live footage. In devices such as this, Boyle further complicated the relationship between the performance in the arena and a screen image. The arena audience actually couldn't see this particular image, even though it was being performed in front of them, unless they referred to the many video screens around the stadium's roof (visible in fig. 30, above). Although present, reference to pre-existing films and television programmes (for example, it included a skit on *Chariots of Fire* [Hudson, 1981]) was not the primary way in which Boyle situated his show into a post-cinematic, mediatised context. This was primarily done via the foregrounding of the arena as a site of production for

images that are being transmitted all around the world. In this way, Boyle has deftly

acknowledged the anachronism that is the stadium, always already both a symbol of centrality

and networked transmission.

The show has been described as 'supremely humanistic' (Hyde, 2012). Boyle seems to have

found that the best way to make a show about and for 'the people of Britain' is to fill it with

masses of people. In Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community', a nation is made up of

millions of fellow citizens one will never meet, yet one feels an affinity towards them simply

on the grounds of shared nationality (Anderson, 1983). In a step beyond this, here we are

offered a filmed community of others living in our nation. I'll discuss below the large number

of volunteers connected to the NHS, but the industrial revolution section was also performed

by hundreds of ordinary people who volunteered to act within the show. Rather than the

thousands of tightly drilled and synchronised rows of dancers or drummers in Beijing, Boyle

showed us a collection of individuals, who by volunteering their labour also express consent to

the Olympic scheme (reminiscent of the 'cosplay' phenomena mentioned in relation to
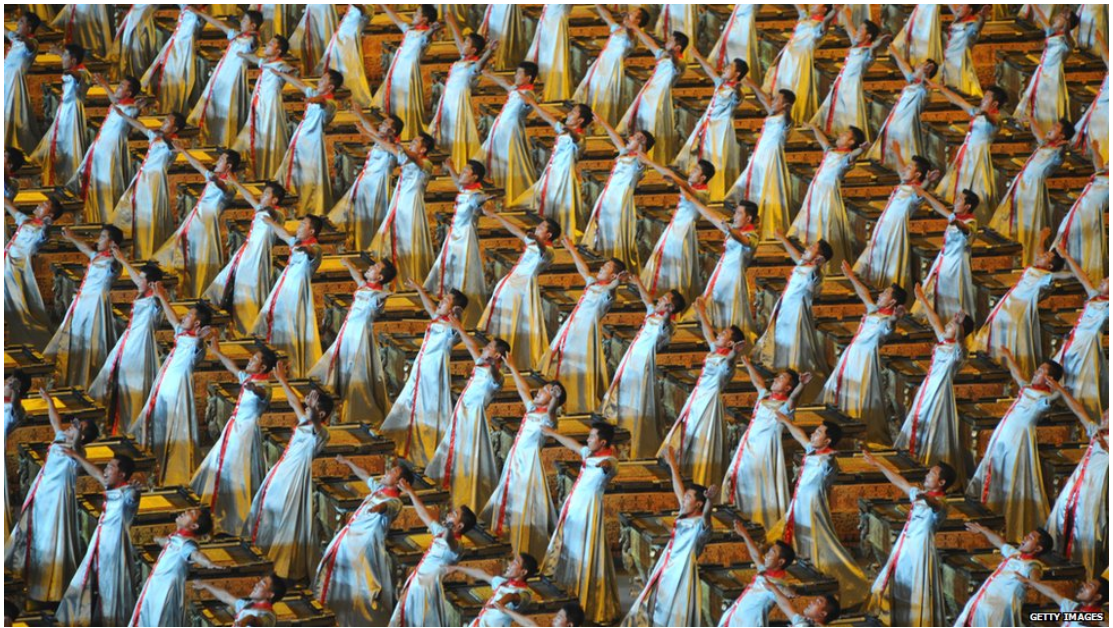
Batman Live).

fig. 32 Photograph of 2010 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony

fig. 33 Still from television broadcast of *Isles of Wonder*, 2012

The logistics of the games themselves also depended upon free labour, in the form of the 'Games Makers' – hundreds of people who worked as guides and assistants all over London and across all the Olympic sites. This was a perfect neoliberal tactic, in which the organisers not only got free labour but also benefitted from the proud cheerfulness of those volunteers, something not usually associated with low-paid security guards and event stewards. The 'human-face' of the ceremony was again emphasised in the music performed as part of the

proceedings. The raising of industrial chimneys was accompanied by hundreds of marching drummers – not in the manner of a military band, but in the African and punk influenced style of child-friendly stage shows like *STOMP* (by the physical theatre company of the same name and performed in London's West End since 2002). Boyle worked with dance music producers Underworld on the score for the ceremony (as for some of his films, including *Trainspotting*, 1996, and *Trance*, 2013), known for their rave influenced music largely made with synthesisers and computer software. Employing the double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy, music made by performers carrying portable single drums was used to offset digitally produced sounds. In addition to this, one major musical motif was whistled rather than played on an instrument – these elements gave the proceedings a tactile, human scale within the gigantic stadium.

Riefenstahl also used the recording of the event as a narrative part of her films. Wilson Smith contests claims made by Riefenstahl that her film of the Nazi party rallies in Nuremburg simply 'document' the events. Here, aesthetic arguments mix with political ones, with Riefenstahl wanting to distance herself from the politics of her then employers and claim 'creative independence' (Wilson Smith, 2007: 94). Wilson Smith argues that the manner in which *Triumph of the Will* was evidently shot – with carefully planned shots taken from trucks and from within the action – that 'the rally and the film cannot be separated' (2007: 96). Riefenstahl must therefore have been deeply involved in the planning of the whole event. Despite Riefenstahl having disguised some of her crew in army uniforms (2007: 96), the making of the film must have been a visible part of the proceedings, as it was in Boyle's ceremony. Riefenstahl's documentary film of the 1936 Olympics continued some of what the director started in *Triumph of the Will*. Although her film could not be broadcast to the world live as Boyle's ceremony was, the two works bear comparison, beyond their shared role of communicating the proceedings to people watching outside the stadium.

Both works begin with film sequences describing a journey to the stadium as an introduction (and both sequences start with their respective titles cut into stone). Whereas Boyle's begins at

the source of the Thames, Riefenstahl's begins in an Aryan-ised ancient Greece complete with heroic statuary and muscular young bodies. A torchbearer leaves this classical setting and we see an animated fly-over of modern Eastern Europe (countries Germany was soon to invade); through Austria, and into Berlin, where we arrive at the then brand new Olympic stadium. In *Olympia* Riefenstahl attempts to incorporate both the idea of live broadcast and presence in the stadium, for the audiences watching the film at least two years after the event, when the film was eventually released. The still below shows one of a series of staged radio 'broadcasts', using various languages and national stereotypes to show that the world's media were indeed assembled in Berlin. The actor performs with a 'French' beret and a rear projection of a crowd.

fig. 34 Still from *Olympia*, 1938

Like the broadcast and DVD of the 2012 ceremony, footage of the crowd features heavily. This imaging of crowds within a totalitarian regime might seem to have a different function than simply to demonstrate an audience's enjoyment – for Riefenstahl and the Nazi party it disseminated an image of adulation for the regime, with shots of the crowd saluting Hitler. This imaging of spectatorship exists for the live audience in the stadium as well. In these two

Olympic events the visibility of the mediation of the events (i.e. the cameras capturing images for transmission and/or recording) was part of the event. This mediation built in the idea of the absent other watching at geographical or temporal remove.

fig. 35 Still from *Olympia*, 1938

In the 2012 ceremony we were told that the Olympic flame entering the stadium is 'witnessed' by 500 of the people who built it. The gigantic structure and by extension the whole Olympic project, is again given a human scale by showing some of the workers crowded into the mouth of the entrance tunnel to the stadium; as I suggested with *Batman Live* our spectatorship at this point is constructed as watching someone else watching. Many of the athletes themselves carried cameras and phones, many of them taking images of the crowd as they walked through the stadium and were filmed and photographed themselves. The capturing of audio-visual material is also shown as testament to the importance of the event – in 2012, the affective value of the event is displayed and proven by the participants' need to record it. Whilst their images were filmed and transmitted around the world, and seen by the crowd in the arena (on the arena floor and on the arena's giant video screens), the athletes also produced their own footage. The crowd, therefore, can see both the roving steadicams of the production team and the bristling of flashes and illuminated screens of the athletes' own electronic devices.

fig. 36 Still from television broadcast of *Isles of Wonder*, 2012

In a live event, the audience form part of the auratic experience, they help produce the image

of the show and are included in transmissions and recordings (and I will return to the stadium

audience themselves at the end of this chapter). For audiences in Britain and elsewhere

Boyle's ceremony attempts to show that the 'people of Britain' had collectively made the

show. Whereas the Beijing ceremony relied on mechanistic and tightly synchronised

movement of bodies, which were that ceremony's 'real', Boyle relies upon the visible

emotions and individual personalities of volunteering participants to come through the design,

and for this to be 'real' of the piece. Absolute deference to a design is replaced with the

performance of self, which is made even more visible and explicit by Boyle's 'live-film'

format. His use of live video feeds as an integral part the show allows close-ups of performers

and athletes, as in fig. 36. These various performances by individuals in the show, and the

emphasis placed upon workers within the project, is how the show works as a heterotopic

mirror; this is how we can say "that's us", which, as I will show below, in Britain makes it

actually more ideologically potent than a highly choreographed, overtly disciplined

performance. At the height of cinema's dominance Riefenstahl adjusted the events of the

Nuremberg rally and Berlin Olympics to suit cinema. In our post-cinematic era, Boyle has

merged the event and the film into a hybrid in which one is indistinguishable from the other.

<u>Danny Boyle's Ceremony as Postcivil Spectacular Cultural Event</u>

Rather than the impressive industrial scenes, it is the green fields with which the ceremony begins which have become emblematic of it. This particular theatrical element permeated even the official functions of the ceremony; the illustration below shows Lord Sebastian Coe standing on Boyle's green hillside in order to officially open the games:

fig. 37 Still from television broadcast of *Isles of Wonder*, 2012

As well as fulfilling visual clichés about Britain as a 'green and pleasant land', this choice of lush greenery within the urban space of the arena is a bold and arresting one. Writing about the plans for the ceremony before they had been carried out, Patrick Wright commented:

> Announced as "a traditional and idyllic view of the British countryside," this is certainly a provocative vision to land on East London. An archaic myth of origins, served up in a place that has long been defined by mobility, mixture and migration. A pastoral bomb dropped on an area that has actually proved full of toxic and polluted land, and where the Olympics juggernaut has already flattened various forms of community land use – football pitches, allotments and other more or less traditional amenities. (Wright, 2012)

The ceremony's producers had immediately proclaimed their investment in Britain as 'theme' and set the foundations that allowed British commentators to 'embrace the obvious' (Hyde, 2012). However, as Wright says, these choices are not neutral; 'almost everybody in the British Isles declares themselves proud of the countryside […] it remains a meaningless statistic unless you quickly move on to consider other questions. Which people, and, indeed, which countryside?' (Wright, ibid.). Just as the position of visible, artisanal labour in the arena spectacular tells us something about labour in general, these choices within the Olympic neoliberal heterotopia tell us things about the state of general space outside of it. There is no denying the wit or irony of Boyle's work (the illustration above showing the Olympic luminaries stood on a fake hillside clearly shows Boyle's sense of humour). Rather, my aim is to place *Isles of Wonder* in a critical context where it can be seen to inevitably reinforce the political and economic *status quo* of neoliberal labour relations, government and urban development, as a heterotopia.

On the face of it, the Olympic mega-event *is civil* – like Royal de Luxe's 'Sea Odyssey' it was a public event that spoke to a presumed community; this time the whole of Britain. However, I want to demonstrate that the ceremony should not be read as a defence of British institutions such as the welfare state, despite the positive reception it received along these lines. Owen Hatherley cites Boyle's ceremony as a rare example of leftist 'austerity nostalgia', seeing Boyle as explicitly drawing upon documentary film practices to defend elements of the welfare state (Hatherley, 2016: 44). But the ceremony can equally, and perhaps more accurately, be read as an elegy (especially watched as a recording, after the Olympic games and connected festivities are over). In fact it is a heterotopia that upholds the postcivil neoliberal norm. Writing about Boyle's plans, Rachael Jolley wrote that:

> What's brilliant about Boyle's vision is that he is not trying to emulate something another country might do with flags, fireworks and dancing pompoms. He has taken two rather brilliantly British concepts – our rather bizarre sense of humour and our rambling countryside – to put together an idea that should make us think "yes, that's

us". It's not fake American-ness, or a feeble attempt to copy the big budget Chinese show. (Jolley, 2012)

Indeed, many commentators celebrated Boyle's irony and eccentricity, for example, within a scene which is presented as a celebration of the NHS, performed in part by patients of Great Ormond Street Hospital and NHS staff. An elaborate dance routine is followed by a variety of 'bad dreams' in which the sleeping children are haunted by villains of British children's literature. Zoe Williams wrote '[t]his is it. This is Britain. Any idiot can industrialise. It takes a giant of a nation to make its healthcare provision free at point of need' (Zoe Williams, 2012). Perhaps there were two prospective audiences for this 'celebration' – a predominantly international one that is aware of the NHS as an unusual and laudable state institution that is truly a great British achievement, and a national one that should have been aware of the incremental degradation and dismantling of it by successive neoliberal governments. For anyone thinking of the plight of the NHS at the time of the Olympic ceremony, this display can only be a short-lived, nostalgic heterotopia. Britain is indeed the 'caring nation' that built the welfare state, but by 2012 it was also the nation that had allowed large parts of it to be dismantled. Isabel Sutton has written that:

> When the Great Exhibition opened its doors in 1851, Britain's reputation as the workshop of the world was on the wane. Few visitors would have known it at the time, but the exhibition signified the high watermark of British manufacturing. French design and Prussian engineering were already edging ahead. In 2012, London hosted another event designed to present Britain to the world – one which referenced the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution by featuring towering smoke stacks and beating drums […] Danny Boyle's Olympic opening ceremony represented British history as a creative blossoming that started in the nineteenth century but seemed to reach its zenith in the twentieth century when fashion, film and pop music boomed. And yet it seems to me that Boyle's Olympic opener – just like the Great Exhibition – was telling a story about Britain that had already ceased to be true. (Sutton, 2014)

Here, Sutton argues that rather than resist neoliberal predation of the welfare state the show historicises such state institutions as if they were already things of the past. This risks making them subjects of nostalgia, rather than a motivating anger that might spur people to protect them.

The context is one in which any element is automatically regarded as a valued part of a national self; the inclusion of any element calcifies it into positivised cultural vibrancy and youthful energy. An obvious example is the place of punk – in the late 1970's, a genre that came about through anger and disaffection with the state of Britain; its principle performers and fans alike known for ranting, spitting, drug and alcohol fuelled rage. Here, the music of The Sex Pistols and The Clash plays out whilst performers wearing giant foam heads and stilts 'pogo' on the arena floor. Who could have expected in the 1970's and '80's that The Sex Pistols' song 'God Save The Queen' could feature in a live show that actually includes the Queen herself? Whilst I disagree with Owen Hatherley's opinion of the ceremony itself, his points about the disabling effects of nostalgic aestheticisation of past struggles are useful here. He argues that such nostalgia almost inevitably portray their protagonists 'defused and defanged' (as he refers to a posthumous documentary about Tony Benn, 2016: 54). In *Isles of Wonder* American boxer Mohamed Ali, punk, rap, the NHS, the suffragette movement are all blankly celebrated as if representing battles fought and won; as if industrialisation was a process that has been gone through and successfully completed; as if the social and political problems spoken about in rap and punk music, or the racial tensions that were such a large part of Ali's career, are over. These elements are all present as part of a scripted, themed Britain.

Slavoj Žižek has used the German metal band Rammstein as an illustration of an emptying out of Nazi ideology. The band are famous for their elaborate stage shows which use similar tropes to those found within fascist iconography:

> minimal elements of Nazi ideology enacted by Rammstein are something like pure elements of libidinal investment. Enjoyment has to be, as it were, condensed in some minimal tics – gestures which do not have any precise ideological meaning. What

Rammstein does is it liberates these elements from their Nazi articulation. It allows us to enjoy them in their pre-ideological state. The way to fight Nazism is to enjoy these elements, ridiculous as they may appear, by suspending the Nazi horizon of meaning. This way you undermine Nazism from within. (Fiennes, 2013)

Žižek regards this as a positive process that dispenses with the political 'content' of Nazism whilst leaving the attractive aesthetic elements. Although I have also made reference to Nazi aesthetics, it is not these that I believe Boyle to be emptying out for his own use. Here it is Britain's colonial-industrial past that has been de-ideologised – but also the history and aesthetics of British *dissent*. In this way, both the monarchy and punk, for example, can appear together – *and this de-ideologisation was part of the ideological content of the show*. By way of heterotopic representation, it allowed people to 'stop worrying about being British' and enjoy the reified *history* of radical social, cultural change that Britain has experienced and originated, thereby 'telling a story about Britain that had already ceased to be true' (Sutton, 2014). At best, this reinforces, for example, the NHS brand as part of a British 'theme' whilst ignoring the threat the actual organization is under; at worst it historicises an actually ongoing struggle and thus neutralises that struggle. *Isles of Wonder* is a work that, sitting within the Olympic Mega-event, works to naturalise the neoliberal context from which it is commissioned.

Consuming London

As remediating spectacle, the ceremony cannot actively defend residual elements of the welfare state, such as the hacked-at bones of the NHS, it instead provides an emotive heterotopia where such archaisms are presented as part of a British-themed experience, for the entertainment and 'wonder' of ourselves and the rest of the world. The arena floor is not political space; it is postcivil non-place; it is a part of the city that remediates what the city

once was. This might seem extreme, however we have already seen how apparently unusual cities like Las Vegas – built on entertainment and economics that favour tourism – have become the new norm. I have already shown how the seemingly exceptional arena spectacular embodies elements central to contemporary labour and the attention economy, similarly *Isles of Wonder* helps to show how British politics work today. Like Las Vegas, in many ways London is in fact trailblazing the new urban neoliberal norm – as Joe Kerr has commented:

> Other cities may have experienced the consequences of this resurgence of unfettered and unashamed capitalism in more dramatic fashion – Berlin, Moscow, Shanghai – but it is hard to think of anywhere else that has been reshaped more comprehensively than London in response to this new ideological vision. On the one hand deregulation of the City's financial markets has elevated London to the elite status of World City and concentrated untold wealth in the hands of a privileged few, and on the other wholesale privatisation has altered every aspect of daily life for its ordinary citizens, leaving in its wake social distress and inequality that the proponents of the Welfare State had once mistakenly thought it possible to eradicate. (Kerr & Gibson, 2003: 12)

Minton has written on the relationship between the delivery of the Olympic games and the connected regeneration projects in London in relation to contemporaneous changes in urban space. She writes that the Olympics belies its own nostalgic rhetoric; '[t]he Great Exhibition and the Festival of Britain are often held up as the inspiration for London 2012' (2012: i); Minton also cites the legacy of public spaces that succeeded these events, such as the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Royal Festival Hall (ibid., xi). However, she writes that in the twenty-first century:

> Britain has been rocked by a series of crises, in parliament with the expenses scandal, in the media and police with phone hacking and in the social fabric with riots of 2011. Each crisis has exposed profound weaknesses in democracy with commentators highlighting the corrosion of the public realm. Sadly, the legacy of the Games is more

closely linked to our own time than the public spirit of the Victorians, or the post-war

Britons. (ibid., xi)

Despite being most definitely a global media event, it is the most 'emplaced' production I

have analysed here, definitely sited in London, in the summer of 2012. In its warm

reception, this work proves the legibility and success of the arena spectacular genre. It is also

the most directly politicised of my examples; an extravagant investment of public money made

by a Conservative-led coalition government at a time of recession and economic gloom:

> What is marked about the Olympic regeneration is that despite the financial crisis
>
> there has been no pause for thought in a changed economic climate of the debt-fuelled
>
> approach to property finance, which privatizes the public realm in its wake, and which
>
> is at the heart of the Olympic project. (Minton, ibid., xiii)

Douglas Kellner, (quoted in Miles) writes that Olympic mega-events 'merge sports into media

spectacle, collapse boundaries between professional achievement and commercialisation, and

attest to the commodification of all aspects of life in the media and consumer society' (Miles,

2010: 66). This links Minton's concerns about public space, consumerism and spectacle with

material I explored in connection to the post-cinematic in chapter 1, particularly elements

concerning spectatorship and contemporary labour. If we agree with Beller's diagnosis of total

'attention economy', then the mega-event is another example of the provision of an illusion of

temporal and spatial distinction. It is a way for governments and corporations to allow a

carnivalesque, heterotopic pressure-outlet within neoliberal, privatised space.

As mega-event, the Olympics is a consummate neoliberal project. It is as a 'boosterist'

'spectacle of expenditure' (and one that is tactically in contrast to the Beijing ceremony), that

Isles of Wonder really reveals itself as a neoliberal work. *Isles of Wonder* has since been used

to advocate the economic benefit of the arts, as Lord Putnam did in the House of Lords in June

2013:

> Few would argue that the opening ceremony of last year's London Olympics was
>
> anything other than a wonderful showcase for the energy and creativity of this country

> […] other countries are investing considerable sums of money in their own cultural activity and they realise the impact it has on their reputations and their economic growth. Unless we are determined dramatically to raise our own game, we are likely to be condemning ourselves to the status of one of the global also rans. (Hansard, UK Parliament, 2013)

Here we find a function of the ceremony that is not heterotopic, but rather one of productive advertising. The ceremony is constructed here as a shop window for British innovation and creativity, presenting Britain as open for creative business, but also for property and construction investment. For Steven Miles, the mega-event 'is a spectacular event self-consciously deployed in a deliberate attempt to portray a city in a particular fashion and to maximise economic advantage on a global stage whilst fostering civic pride in the process' (2010: 122), and we can see this characteristic quite clearly in the London Olympics. In the programme for the opening ceremony, London Mayor Boris Johnson writes:

> for those athletes, officials and spectators who can tear themselves away from the sport for even a moment, London offers a mouth-watering selection of things to see and do – and we've pulled out all the stops to make this summer's menu even richer and spicier than usual […] [t]he Stadium in which you sit is at the centre of a transformational renaissance for east London (2012: 7)

Presence at the mega-event is here very openly elided with consumption (spectatorship as eating) – thus, we see that they are indeed always part of what Miles calls the 'commodification of the city' (2010: 122).

Although economic success might well be cause for national pride, private economic gain is a very different kind of success than the creation of the welfare state, and it is the nature of neoliberalised urban space that makes it so easy to confuse the two. Culture Secretary Maria Miller said:

We sat squarely on the centre of the world stage and last summer allowed us to showcase our incredible country, resulting in more growth, investment and a boost for tourism. However this is just the start, we have a 10 year legacy plan and we must continue to make the very most of the opportunities the Games gave us. (UK Government, 2012)

Like the 'world's biggest sign' advertising the1959 *Ben-Hur*, the ceremony and the Olympics as a whole is pure 'boosterism' for 'brand Britain'. This line of justification for the expense of the games might remind us of John Prescott's words on the Millennium Dome project, that as the O2, and as private property the site was to become 'the most successful entertainment venue in the world'. Under AEG 'the true vision is coming. It is becoming the best entertainment centre in Europe' (Mathew Tempest, 2005). Its legacy included selling off much of the Olympic Park to the highest bidder – an action that is typical of the politics of present-day Britain. It is this kind of governmental policy that allowed Boyle's ceremony to be produced, even if the ceremony nostalgically celebrated Britain's past.

Neoliberal Nationalism

Michael Billig has proposed that 'banal nationalism' is an important and under-acknowledged element of how nations function. Rather than the extreme nationalisms of, for example, the English far-right, it is the everyday banal nationalism of Britons that hold the nation together – everyday flags, ceremonies, anthems, etc. (Billig, 1995). Like my characterisation of some 'tamed' elements of fandom that contrast the cultish marginality of others, banal nationalism offers a more easily palatable version of nationalism. However, Billig also points out that the banal is by no means harmless; 'it is reproducing institutions which possess vast armaments' and via banal nationalism 'forces can be mobilized without lengthy campaigns of political preparation […] the national populations appear also to be primed, ready to support the use of those armaments' (ibid., 7). As the neoliberal state draws closer to business interests, we see

that the drastic actions banal nationalism prepares us for can include not only military action but also internal austerity and radical restructuring.

In my introduction, I explained that neoliberalism can be regarded as an inherently contradictory ideology, functioning as 'common sense' whilst incorporating great schisms within its own approach to nation, state and power. One of these contradictions is its frequent recourse to nationalism. David Harvey writes that:

> On the one hand the neoliberal state is expected to take a back seat and simply set the stage for market functions, but on the other it is supposed to be activist in creating a good business climate and to behave as a competitive entity in global politics. In its latter role it has to work as a collective corporation, and this poses the problem of how to ensure citizen loyalty. Nationalism is an obvious answer, but this is profoundly antagonistic to the neoliberal agenda (2005: 79)

In theory it is anti-nationalistic, but in practice governments such as Thatcher's choice to turn to tradition-based nationalism in order to survive the consequences of neoliberal shock-tactics brought to bear on state institutions. Harvey cites Thatcher's war in the Falklands, and Britain's place in Europe, which were deployed nationalistically in order to secure re-election and bring yet more changes at home. Patrick Wright, writing during the nineteen-eighties on ideas of heritage under Thatcher's governments commented that:

> this upsurge of public nationalism reflects the crisis of a social system which, while its development is leading directly to the destruction of traditions and customs (many of them locally based), at the same time demands an ever deepening source of cultural meaning to legitimate itself. In this situation tradition appears as artifice, articulated not in particular or essential connection to people's experience, but at the generalised and diffuse level of an overriding 'national' identity (2009: 127)

Whereas the Millennium Show largely eschewed the specifics of Britain as a nation in favour of vague 'zones', the competitive nature of the Olympics seemed to encourage an instrumentalised national pride in the proceedings. Comedian Hugh Dennis said:

> I watched the Olympic opening ceremony and I enjoyed that great feeling [that] you no longer had to think about what it meant to be British; everybody sort of suddenly understood, somehow, in that hour of watching television and we began to celebrate everything and all that sort-of angst about should we be proud of it or shouldn't we be proud of it seemed to disappear […] it seemed to get rid of all those old images of Britain and we got this sort of new, gleaming Britain. (BBC Radio 4, 2013)

Norman M. Klein writes that '[m]ost monuments were designed to hide the corruptions of the age' (2004: 343), and we can see a similar pattern in *Isles of Wonder* – note that the ceremony glorifies British workers during the period of industrialisation, but not that of exploited slaves and colonised workers overseas at the same point in history. Wright has written that '[i]n its primary perspective the national past postulates a collective subject: it presents the 'nation' as the place and state in which 'we' live' (2009: 132). Boyle's ceremony attempts exactly this, and if we put any store in the opinions of contemporary commentators I have already quoted, then it seems to have succeeded; 'we' stop worrying about being British and simply enjoy 'our' national past. We enjoy a heterotopic nationalism that allows us to be temporally unburdened with the realities of the actual British state, past and present.

The ceremony does include cultural elements worthy of celebration but its abbreviated and automatically positive tone means that the nation was present as scripted 'experience'; as theme. *Isles of Wonder* represents Britain little better than *Ben Hur Live* shows imperial Rome; than the Las Vegas casino resort 'New York, New York' represents its namesake. As Norman M. Klein writes of Las Vegas, '[i]t is urban chiaroscuro, for the community of consumers: a condensed, narratized replacement for what must be left out' (2004: 360). Under Thatcher's neoliberal government, historically inspired ceremonies become all the more important. Wright continues:

History becomes, more urgently, the object of ceremonies of resonance and continuity

when it seems actively to be threatened and opposed by an inferior present epoch –

when, to put this differently, society is developing (or 'receding') in a way that cuts

across the grain of traditional forms of security and self understanding. (2009, 150)

He is referring here to institutions such as the National Trust, which reify history in a way that

to him unfairly privileges buildings that housed wealthy people and neglects other histories, in

a way that served Conservative politics in particular. Wendy Brown surmises that:

Neoliberalism looks forward to a global order contoured by a universalized market

rationality in which cultural difference is at most a commodity, and nation-state

boundaries are but markers of culinary differences and provincial legal arrangements

[…] neoliberalism confidently identifies itself with the future, and in producing itself

as normal rather than adversarial does not acknowledge any alternative futures. (2006:

700)

The Olympic games itself, with its global audience and rewards for apparently meritocratic

achievement, is a perfect neoliberal mega-event. Steven Miles writes of mega-events that:

the focus on global consumers as opposed to local publics implies a shift of public

funds into private interests […] Such events actively naturalise social inequalities by

the way in which, for example, undesirables are removed from the host venue or

through the reassertions of global power relationships through medal tables […]

'sports spectacle' therefore celebrates and reproduces dominant societal values in an

'unholy alliance' between sports, commercialism and the media (2010: 129)

Miles's description of the Beijing opening ceremony as 'an event that cannot be consumed and

yet was defined by the fact that it could be and would be the world over' (ibid., 136) can be

applied to the London games as well. Miles marries this incomprehensible event happening in

front of him with the contradictions of how the games were funded in Beijing. The event is

locally financed and itself emphasises its geographical location in its media presentation, but

the live audience in the stadium – as Miles finds in the stadium in Beijing – is largely made up of the international wealthy rather than people from the immediate local. Nothing changed for the London games. Costs and disruption fall on local taxpayers, but profits (through advertising and sponsorship opportunities, as well as construction services, etc.) are extracted by international companies. This encompasses one of the great contradictions of London 2012 (and neoliberal doctrine more generally): that the private funding it was supposed to attract disappeared and it was in fact mostly state funded through the lottery: '[a]s the government prepared its £50 billion bailout and nationalization of the banks the Olympic project was also bailed out, with public funding increasing by £5.9 billion – almost three times the original budget' (Minton, 2012: xvii).

It might be tempting to root the expense of the Olympics within a tradition of 'bread and circuses' style offerings to the people – the ruling class (politicians, royalty, celebrities and corporations) bestowing gifts upon the people in the form of games and spectacle, in the manner of Roman emperors. However, as ordinary taxpayers ended up paying for the mistakes of super-rich bankers in the financial crisis, so the Olympics was to a large extent paid for with taxpayer's money and via the National Lottery. In a typical neoliberal manner, assets produced were sold off immediately, in order to unencumber the state from the task of running them. When Sebastian Coe says in the ceremony 'one day we will tell our children and grandchildren that when our time came we did it right', he is offering a justification of the money spent. In a manner similar to that used to introduce recent 'austerity' policies, he is saying 'this will yield a financial dividend in the future'.

The way it was paid for marks this arena spectacular as exceptional within this study of mostly privately financed productions. However, this final case study illustrates the underlying neoliberal politics of the post-cinematic arena space, as also demonstrated with the Dome-come-O2. It further illustrates the heterotopic function of 'spectacular cultural events' as separate from the general 'screen/society' that has become the all encompassing site of both production and consumption in the global West. The Olympic opening ceremony wins in two

ways – internally it provides a semblance of national identity, a 'collective subject', as Wright puts it, and on the other it presents to the world an array of British commodities – music, film and history. Britain is cast as 'isles of wonder' for those inside and out. As we have seen, the Dome was introduced as 'a comment and it's asking you to engage and complete that circle' (Wilhilde, 1999: 156). The visitor's looking and experiencing is presented as integral, as completing. But if this is the Britain we are recognising – "yes, that's us" – there are political and social implications to this particular national mirror.

Pixels in the Screen/Society

Before concluding, I want to offer analysis of one final post-cinematic element developed specially for *Isles of Wonder* – one that both builds upon and restricts the potentials of live arena spectatorship. As I have described, rather than trying to hide stage mechanisms, Boyle made them visible in the arena – he tempered technology with human bodies in un-synchronised, amateur performance, with the presence on the arena floor of the builders of the stadium, and celebrity appearances including Tim Berners-Lee, actor Daniel Craig and others. The arena spectacular's audience members are also encouraged to be aware of their own physical presence simply because fellow audience members are so much more visible there. The Olympic stadium took this a few steps further in the use of so-called 'pixels' – the term borrowing the name of the individual light-emitting elements that make up digital screens. In the Olympic stadium each seat had a small plastic box over the occupier's shoulder containing a set of LED lights. Together, these 'pixels' turned the stadium seating into a low definition screen, of 80,000 'pixels', used to display sweeps of colour, occasionally even images and text.

figs. 38 and 39 Video still from television broadcast of *Isles of Wonder*, 2012

The pixels also act as a sort of crowd control. Banners and even standing up are not allowed

and spectators were informed in a pre-show announcement to not hang their coats on the

pixels or otherwise interfere with them to prevent disruption of the effect. They also mean that

spontaneous collective acts such as 'Mexican waves' are pre-empted and rendered obsolete by

controlled, digital waves of graphics. The paralympic ceremony's text included a strange

mixture of statements of basic human rights and theoretical physics. Words appeared on the

screens; 'We are light', 'No one will be deprived of life…Light!' With the advent of small

handheld flash cameras, and now even more so with camera phones, spectators at any event are always emitters of light – a tendency that is referenced and absorbed by the 'pixel' system. This system at once acknowledges the diffused kind of productivity and authorship of the 'web 2.0' of social media (such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram), and nullifies potential interference of the audience in the performance. The Olympic stadium audience member is absolutely fixed; spectators are part of an orderly array. The audience are pixels inside the stadium, before they are filmed and transmitted to the pixels of electronic screens all over the world.

In the 2012 Olympic stadium, we see a 'scripted space' of 'attention economy' production – a 'screen/society' in which citizens become pixels. The pixels light up the faces of spectators, making them a kind of screen themselves, like workers in front of computer screens. What we see here is a convergence of visible image production and society; the public imaged inside the stadium as producers of video material, much of which will presumably be available online via YouTube, as the official ceremony 'film' is available after the fact. In this post-cinematic work, production, the filmic and the pro-filmic and spectatorship are all fused, into a single event. Whilst volunteers both add value to the proceedings as performers, and cut costs as volunteer service workers, spectators and participants shore up the value of the event by visibly producing their own images. In the television and DVD versions, the ceremony's importance is demonstrated through the attempts at capturing it that we see happen within it – the transmitted or recorded views of the *production of images*.

There are significant technical and aesthetic achievements within *Isles of Wonder*. Compared to any of the other arena spectaculars; even Cirque du Soleil's show *KÂ* and the works of Royal de Luxe, Boyle's ceremony is slick, imaginative and highly entertaining – it is arguably the most technically accomplished arena spectacular. It could be argued that *Isles of Wonder* was a frivolous confection that captured the absurdity of the Olympics and lifted the nation at a challenging time (of recession, cuts, etc). If so, why would anyone bother to undermine something that was so enjoyable to so many? However, this is part of the reason for me

comparing it to Riefenstahl's work. Her films are in many ways great artworks and they are certainly enjoyable as such, but no one would suggest that a viewer could 'forget' the political context in which they were made.

Whilst creating an apparently eccentric microcosm of Britain, the Olympic neoliberal heterotopia also made Britain a green-grassed non-place and made the nation's view of itself a 'scripted space' – despite the recession and controversy around the expense of the games, apparently 'everybody sort of suddenly understood […] and we began to celebrate everything and all that sort-of angst about should we be proud of it or shouldn't we be proud of it seemed to disappear' (BBC Radio 4, 2013). It was a national, 'one off' event that was presented as vital for Britons to support – financially (and in fact we had no choice in how public money was spent upon it) and affectively. In the manner of the arena spectaculars, *Isles of Wonder* translates the city and nation into a fictional hypertext, with an artificial and temporary home in the non-place of the arena.

The Olympics brings idea of the nation into a context that uses heterotopic events as part of a system, a post-cinematic 'electronic baroque', that denies its true political nature. It enforces a nostalgic nationalism that requires us to become tourists in our own cities. When one is a tourist, one has a certain level of engagement, and that is as a consumer – this ceremony has asked us to become consumers and spectators of political struggles that are not over.

Conclusion

Consumerist capitalism has always promised endless novelty and newness. The Radio City Music Hall is another space built for performance of various kinds that was opened in New York in 1932, at the base of the huge Rockefeller Centre. This spectacular theatre and its programme was supposed to revive the vaudeville tradition, in spite of Hollywood and the cinemas having long since replaced it as a popular and cheap form of entertainment. It was a failure, and within two months the venue was refitted as an enormous cinema. However, the theatre had been equipped with everything it might need for spectacular vaudeville; Rem Koolhaas, writing in the 1970's, tells us that after the failed opening night and rapid refit:

> behind Radio City's screen still exists another realm […] [i]ts elaborate facilities include dormitories, a small hospital, rehearsal rooms, a gymnasium, an art department, costume workshops. There is the Radio City Symphony and a permanent troupe of 64 female dancers – the Roxyettes, all between 5'4" and 5'7" – a scriptless chorus line without any action to sustain […] there is a menagerie – horses, cows, goats and other animals. (Koolhaas 1978: 213)

Koolhaas envisages this theatre as a kind of Noah's arc, with not only useless inhabitants trapped on-board, but a highly advanced set of stage mechanisms 'painfully inactive' (ibid., 213). 'The waste of this mechanical potential behind the movie screen is unacceptable', he continues, and creates 'multiple pressures for a new stage show that exploited in the shortest possible time the maximum capacities of this top-heavy infrastructure' (ibid., 214). The Roxyettes became the Rockettes and stars of stage shows that were to run for decades alongside the cinema programme at the Radio City Music Hall. The Rockettes' show is, an example of product suggested by an available 'envelope' – something coming about due to available space and equipment. That equipment, according to Koolhaas, leads to the overtly mechanistic movements used by the Rockettes (famous for their synchronised kicks) – their show only occasionally departing from pure abstraction (ibid., 214) – 'variations on the theme of "no content," founded on a *process*, a display of inhuman coordination that relies on a frenzied synchronisation' (ibid., 214, emphasis in original).

The Rockettes were also an expedient business solution to a very particular situation – a way to make 'lemonade' from the 'lemons' left by a failed business venture. This thesis has been about a new entertainment format in the late-capitalist, neoliberalised city; how that format responds to niches and unfilled gaps in a market that has become post-cinematic. The Rockettes were new in a way that could not have been expected, reusing forms from the nineteenth century, but for all the extravagance of their shows (and their lodgings, the machinery – the menagerie), they were an expedient and rapid response to a business question – so too, the arena spectacular in the early twenty-first century. Within a mainstream entertainment system setup predominantly for cinema, both the arena spectacular and the Rockettes offer the live, physical presence of living performers in the same space as the audience as a novel extension of the cinema experience.

Most of the work here has been to find an appropriate literature and an aesthetic and theoretical paradigm for the arena spectacular. Hopefully I have achieved something like a mapping of the arena spectacular and its context. My aim has been to demonstrate the contiguity of the apparently unusual and anachronistic arena spectacular – to normalise it in terms of media and economics, and to therefore illuminate some features of our contemporary culture and society. The initial subject could have taken the research in many directions (some of which I will detail below). In order to explain their relatively wide appeal, I have mostly ignored theatre in order to concentrate upon the arguably more accessible and widespread cinema and to a lesser extent the commercial urban. This approach explains some of most obvious omissions in terms of contextualising the shows. As I stated at in my introduction, I have written of the spectator rather than viewer – the viewer being an actual, living person, whom I have not attempted to survey or record, beyond my own experiences as a viewer and some reviews and online comments by others. As well as addressing the hypothetical spectator, the analysis of the shows has often been affective and spectral; the show's 'offer', not always the show as artefact – its publicity as much as its event.

My list of case studies is not exhaustive, I have chosen shows that I could experience first-hand by attending (apart from the Olympics) and ones that have allowed my particular route through the coming of digital cinema and its consumption as fan-text. Since the 2012 Olympics there have been other arena spectaculars, such as Global Creatures' *How to Train Your Dragon Live* (Jamieson 2012), another example of a show that makes physical versions of digitally produced original images.

fig. 40 *How to Train Your Dragon* and *How to Train Your Dragon Live*

I have devoted a lot of space to analysing the claims of the PR and marketing around the arena spectaculars – the reason for this has been to find the logic behind offering precisely those very suggestive and emotive claims. Further to this, unpacking the claims made in relation to the Olympics seems important because they are more obviously married to Britain's current governmental system – and also that they have been taken so seriously by the country.

What the Arena Spectacular offers

The arena spectacular almost always offers a further adaptation in a string of adaptations of a given hypertext, and this has its own appeal for anyone affectively involved in that hypertext, for example, my own interest in the various Ben-Hurs. Tackling the obvious problems of staging what amounts to a 'live-film' (as Boyle called the Olympic opening ceremony) in an arena is appealing – as expressions of expertise and ingenuity often are. This expectation of the seemingly absurd – 'how can dinosaurs appear in the O2, exactly?' – is powerful. We are assured that any incredulity will give way to childlike wonder at the 'magic' achieved during

the show itself. They also inherently offer membership to a live audience (as in the trailer for *Ben Hur Live*), which is presented as importantly different to, for example, a cinema audience, or solitary viewing and pre-visualised as such. In line with contemporary advertising for music festivals and sport, being part of a crowd is presented as valuable; an enriching experience that is rare and precious in post-cinematic and postcivil society.

This has been an historical project, albeit one concerned with the very recent past, namely the first decade of the twenty-first century. Through identifying and contextualising some of the qualities of the arena spectacular, I have found that this genre is indeed timely. From the beginning there were some crucial paradoxes in the 'offer' of the shows that made them interesting to me. Their producers and advertisers made potential viewers aware of their staging and the techniques that are used to produce images and effects. At the same time the promotion of the shows insist upon their increased 'realness' in comparison to the images from which they were derived – in this way, the arena spectacular is both 'immediate' and 'hypermediate'. Likewise, they are proposed as both already-known, in their source material and many of their formal tropes, and dazzlingly new. I have sought a specifically contemporary context for the new arena spectacular and its contradictions and I have attached further attractions to them, in an attempt to explain not only their appeal to audiences but how they fit into a contemporary neoliberal 'media regime' (Shaviro, 2010: 2).

The post-cinematic is a way of categorising the very varied and unstable media regime of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Like 'post-industrial' and 'post-modern', it is a term formed from retrospect, in which a difficult and complex situation is defined in contrast to a preceding one. As I have argued, although the post-cinematic is most often thought of in terms of the digital, the arena spectacular is in fact just as much a product of post-cinema as YouTube, or Facebook, or Netflix. Using Philip Auslander and DN Rodowick's work, I have arrived at the understanding that 'live' arena spectaculars can only come about via, or more accurately, after, cinema. The context that this study focuses on, 2000-2012 in Britain, is one in which exposure to screens of various kinds has massively increased in recent decades.

Using Benjamin's idea of aura, and Cavell's 'screen barrier' I have described how, by the late twentieth-century, the real (but not necessarily the Real) is perceived as that which lies beyond the screen. Through using recognisable narratives and hypertexts, but avoiding screens, arena spectaculars reinstate an aura, but one that exists as controlled 'experience' and is therefore totally exploitable. Cinema presented a recorded pro-filmic event that 'was' – in the context of new digital cinema that presents what 'wasn't' the arena spectacular offers what 'is'. Demonstrative, material labour is highlighted as a way to match digital technology. The concept of post-cinema as a context prefigures a resilient cinematic subjectivity, rather than any altered kind of subjectivity yet to appear (although this is no doubt inevitable in the future). The cinematic subject is still the one that Stanley Cavell describes in *The World Viewed*. The cinematic subject is automatically disengaged from the world behind the screen, a relation that for Cavell informs our basic relation to our world as a whole. By the time of post-cinema, this stance can be seen to have inflected much of our relations in the world, not least because we encounter screens in far more situations now. This is one explanation for the appeal of 'experience economy' offerings that prefigure and script ways to 'engage' or 'relate' to objects, places and people. This 'scripted' relation to objects and events might even be extended to gallery attendance, education and sports spectatorship.

The 'postcivil' is what we are left with as citizen-consumers when government no longer concerns itself with communities or ideas of a public good. Trade is neoliberalised and business interests are given precedence over the welfare and even the basic rights of individuals. Richard Seymour has written that under neoliberal ideology, it is not the rights of the individual that are preserved, as in traditional Liberalism, but rather the rights of capitalist entrepreneurship (2014: 135). I have analysed how capitalist and neoliberal power is manifested through forms such as the arena spectacular, the Olympic opening ceremony and Las Vegas architecture, all acting as heterotopia. The arena is an appendage of the twenty-first century city, just as the arena was to the ancient city. However, our post-industrial cities are now ones increasingly made up of privately owned leisure spaces, based on experiential kinds of tourism and entertainment, such as Royal de Luxe's shows. This post-civic city configures

people (either visitors or residents) as consumers rather than citizens. These tendencies are what lead Bruce Bégout to call Las Vegas 'zeropolis' – the urban blueprint for consumerist, entertainment-centred cities everywhere. Further to this claim, I have suggested that the centre of Las Vegas is a 'remediated' version of a city; a post-civic business project which we as consumers understand and read with our prior experiences of traditional cities.

The arena spectaculars are entertainment. However, the study of leisure in any given period of history will illuminate the nature of work in that same period. After first acknowledging that today we do not divide work from leisure in a traditional way, I have used Jonathan Beller's work on the 'attention economy' to argue that time watching is time spent working. The arena spectacular seems to offer time away from this media-continuum – crucially, within a demarcated space and portion of time, much like a holiday. Implicit in the novelty of the live show – images without screens – is 'time off' from the screen. In the attention economy, 'time off' thus becomes significant as a residual element. Of course, this is an illusion, as the ticketed show is often profiting exactly the same people as the screen materials of the original hypertext – Warner Brothers, MGM, etc. Labour is present as a feature of the arena spectacular's proposed 'authenticity' as well – in which visible, 'craft' and performance labour is fore-grounded within a society increasingly engaged in immaterial labour. Just as we might look at medieval carnival as both an outlet for the frustrations of medieval life and as a form of governance (through the designation of a safe space for the release of those tensions), so the arena spectacular can be defined on the basis of the desires it gives expression to – desires that are frustrated elsewhere in the post-cinematic and the postcivil. But like the heterotopic carnival, the arena spectacular does not resolve these frustrations – it merely gives temporary release sanctioned by those in power. This is made all the more obvious in a production such as *Isles of Wonder*; collectivity is repeatedly imaged and evoked, but in a highly restrictive way, that prefigures national approval. This neoliberal arena spectacular celebrates the collective and the social, whilst outside the spheres of entertainment and consumption, the power that stages the spectacle continues to dismantle them.

Capitalism has an extraordinary capacity to absorb any critique of itself and assimilate that critique into a commodity (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). As well as addressing Beller's screen-labour, the arena spectacular claims to offer access to something 'real' in a society that worries about having lost 'the real' within the digital. The arena spectacular's offer to audiences actually reproduces Adorno and Horkheimer's argument, that (contra Benjamin) the reproducible *is* inferior, the arena spectacular offers a live antidote to a total media regime that 'has made the technology of the culture industry no more than the achievement of standardisation and mass production' (121: 1997). In this fashion, businesses can develop a hypertext into what Bolter and Grusin call a *gesamtkunstwerk* of remediation. This capacity extends to the 'grand projects' such as the Millennium Experience and the 2012 London Olympics carried out by the 'shrinking state' of neoliberal governments. With the opening ceremony to the London Olympics, we have a state event carried out under a Tory-majority coalition government criticised for attacking the NHS and the roots of the welfare state, in a time when anxieties about the cohesion of British society were high. From my analysis of comments on the ceremony, it seemed to temporarily allay these fears, whilst actually doing nothing to act upon the problems provoking them.

The arena spectacular, made up of familiar elements (characters, stories and tropes such as circus tricks or a staged fight) functions in contradistinction to other forms. It is oppositional rather than complementary – 'live' not recorded, 'sited' not networked; it defines itself as 'not film'; 'not comic book'. But of course it also reinforces the significance of other media – *Walking with Dinosaurs Live* both exposes and reinforces the use of computer-generated imagery in the original screen version. It is in this way that they form part of Bolter and Grusin's remediatory *gesamtkunstwerk* and rather seems to take a position of respect *and* rivalry with existing products, all helping to stoke a fan debate that can only be helpful for publicity.

As proposed entry into a narrative 'world', an immersive spectatorial experience (such as we have seen with the O2's temporary transformation into Gotham city), the arena spectacular

illustrates the continued attraction of the 'scripted space'. However, I have shown that this is made palatable in its deployment *as heterotopia*. Owen Hatherley, discussing the resurgence of war-era slogans and graphic design: 'It is *a nostalgia for the state of being repressed* – solid, stoic, public-spirited, as opposed to the depoliticsed, hysterical and privatised reality of Britain over the last thirty years' (2016: 21). This *nostalgic* repression is not the inescapable, horrific world of totalitarian politics, because it occurs within demarcated times and spaces. This allows the viewer or visitor to enjoy the aesthetics of totality. *Isles of Wonder* offered what Norman M. Klein calls a 'scripted space' (2004) in which viewers enjoyed 'embracing the obvious' signifiers of Britishness and a permission to 'stop worrying' about British post-colonial and postcivil identity (Hyde, 2012; Hugh Dennis on BBC Radio 4 'Midweek', R4, 2013). At the same time, the truth of our political and economic situation is in fact one of an arguably totalitarian neoliberal global state, run by international business in its own interests and administered through ubiquitous networked technology that we willingly submit to. Here in the arena, perhaps we find comfort in an identifiable totality, rather than the digital and networked one we actually live within. Norman M. Klein's work on 'scripted spaces' is useful in this regard – he identifies that we enjoy feeling 'a little bit trapped' by determining architecture and scripted experiences. However, his work distinguishes between scripted spaces in which we can see the 'workings' and the more dangerous scripted spaces of contemporary politics – in Klein's own example, the highly managed media spectacle of the second Iraq war. Whilst we see the workings of the Olympic spectacle, these might help to occlude the workings of the state that produces them.

Neoliberalism is an ideology that denies itself as such – it still proclaims western, liberal, market-driven democracy to be the 'natural' form of government for the whole world. David Harvey has argued against this, explaining that whilst neoliberalism claims to be anti-interventionist and committed to a shrinking state, it is actually only ever sustainable through violent force and market subsidies, such as we have seen in the wars of this century and the bank bail-outs following the financial crisis of 2008. The arena spectacular, particularly Danny Boyle's *Isles of Wonder*, brings some useful analogies into proximity with the exercise of

neoliberal power that can be used to analyse that power.

Where the work could continue

I have chosen to leave the arena itself for a portion of my study, looking at urban space more generally. Alternatively, one could productively stay within it and instead widen the boundaries geographically and historically, and contextualise the 'spectacular' in this way, with more attention paid to sport, live music and comedy performances. An obvious companion to this study would be one of 'arena spectacles'. This would include fascist rallies, the 1936 Berlin Olympic games, North Korean mass games and the Beijing Olympic opening ceremony of 2008. My notion of the 'spectacle of expenditure' could be extended with Georges Bataille's work on excessive expenditure, and the level of competition between various (neoliberal) governments in spectacles such as the Olympics could provide examples of the 'sacrificial expenditure' that Bataille (following Marcel Mauss's work on the potlatch economy) writes of (Bataille, 1985). This would illustrate a further contradiction in neoliberal politics, one of governmental competition within a supposedly neoliberalised international free-market. Austerity was a relatively new narrative at the time of the Olympics, one that has developed since and could be explored in more detail in relation to the heterotopic spectacle of expenditure. The subsequent election result in 2015 would seem to disprove claims that *Isles of Wonder* worked as 'a £27m party political broadcast for the Labour party', as Labour MP Toby Young tweeted at the time (Williams, 2012). Heterotopic exuberance within a regime of austerity might actually compound austerity by winning votes for a Conservative government, as well as providing respite from it.

There are many examples from video, performance and relational art practice – even the educational methods of universities in response to online learning – that could be viewed as responding to the same changes in spectatorship, consumerism and society. Nicolas Bourriaud has argued for what he calls 'relational aesthetics' art practice as 'micro utopias' that offer communality and generosity in a fragmented and market-driven society (*Relational Aesthetics*,

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1998); Claire Bishop has argued that these works are exclusive and only serve to preserve a societal status quo based on class and racial discrimination (Bishop, 2004). These debates are couched within a discussion of culture within neoliberalism and are obviously pertinent to my subject matter as well. Artist and writer Hito Steyerl has proposed the stolen, ripped video files that circulate in the legal grey areas of online copyright law as 'poor images'; the 'wretched of the screen' (2012). Her arresting argument could offer another context for the super-expensive, prestigious 'flagship image' (as she calls the HD cinema image) of the arena spectacular, so spectacularly gilded by capital it has transcended the screen. It is often said that musicians and their record companies don't make anything from their recordings; they need to tour to make money (e.g. Knopper, 2012). The recorded product yields little profit because of the falling price of recorded music, due to the free or illegal ways of accessing it on the internet. The live adaptation might represent a way for film and television companies to exploit a similar market for unstealable products. Perhaps as media companies try to 'boosterise' more of their offerings via experience economy devices, the 'wretched' 'poor image' will be all that is left on the computer screen. Virtual Reality is a technology that may soon change the nature of spectatorship much more than recent trends in cinema presentation. Google Glass, Oculus Rift and Playstation VR headsets isolate a viewer/participant even further than the dark space of the cinema and possibly complicate questions of networked spectatorship and the aura even further. The ideas of Richard Wagner have been mentioned in this thesis, but might become increasingly relevant if the research was continued in this direction.

Finally, much more work could be done on the position of remediation in politics – how new, even radical politics makes itself acceptable and legible through adapting older already understood ideas. An extension to this argument is that neoliberal governments in the West now effectively remediate our ideas of what government is, whilst actually they have become something different: caretakers for the interests of globalised business.

An 'Emergent' Antidote?

Cavell writes that '[f]ilm takes our very distance and powerlessness over the world as the condition of the world's natural appearance' (Rodowick 2007: 54). Thirty years on, in our present neoliberal age, this sceptical powerlessness is now widely felt in relation to politics too, particularly with regard to issues of labour and public space. Raymond Williams' ideas about how cultures change offer a way to identify useful, and perhaps more hopeful alternatives to the dominant. He writes that 'certain experiences, meanings, and values which cannot be expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue' (Williams, 1977, 122). I have said that the arena spectacular is only what he calls a 'manifestation of the residual […] which has been wholly or largely incorporated into the dominant culture', and therefore doesn't challenge it. The truly residual or emergent element 'may have an alternative or even oppositional relation to the dominant culture' – it is here that we should look for an antidote to the arena spectacular and the rest of our dominant, commercial attention economy (ibid.).

The postcivil city of the capitalist and private neoliberal dream-world is inherently unsustainable – environmentally, psychologically, even legally. Those places named as such by Davis and Monk in *Evil Paradises* 'map terminal, not anticipatory, stages in the history of late modernity' and such paradises 'represent that ruse of reason by which the neoliberal order both acknowledges and dismisses the fact that the current trajectory of human existence is unsustainable' (2007: xvi). Politicians prefer culture as spectacular 'showcase' (Hansard, 2013), but visual spectacle in Britain cannot continue as boosterist advertising for Britain's commercial availability, repeatedly attempting to erect the 'worlds biggest sign'. Instead, we need culture that addresses the same needs that the arena spectacular does; addresses the same gaps in current culture, but without reinforcing dominant neoliberal politics – culture that works to a different 'script', to use Norman M. Klein's term. We need something that takes the 'lemons' we have, and makes something *other* than lemonade.

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