

- **Chris Hay**  
University of Sydney, Australia
- **Billy Kanafani**  
Canberra Grammar School, Australia

# Boos, Tears, Sweat and Toil: Experiencing the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest Live

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*In this article we consider the live experience of the dual audiences of the Eurovision Song Contest, recently awarded the title of the world's longest running annual music competition. The Contest commands an audience of some two million each year for its broadcast, but there is also a small live audience of between 10 000 and 30 000 spectators. Following recent theoretical debates on liveness, we argue that both audiences can be understood as experiencing the Contest live: despite their lack of spatial co-presence, the temporal connection established by the live broadcast allows both experiences to be understood as live. This argument is supported by thick descriptions gathered on-the-ground (or on-the-dance-floor) at the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest. Chris Hay is an Honorary Associate of the Department of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Sydney, where his teaching and research covers dramaturgy and the history of theatre. He is currently working on a research project examining the spatial dramaturgy of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. Billy Kanafani is the Head of Drama and Film at Canberra Grammar School. His research interests include intracultural performing and casting, as well as boys' education.*

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## ***Prologue: Boos***

Half way through the voting for the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest, it appeared certain that Russia would win. After 20 of the 40 participating countries had reported their votes, Russia was leading with 187 points, followed closely by Sweden with 173 and then Italy with 143. As Mirjam Weichselbraun and Alice Tumler, two of the three hosts of the 2015 Contest, recount these results, cheers can be heard from the live audience – oddly, they get louder for Sweden and then louder still for Italy, but they are cheers

nonetheless. After reassuring the audience that “we have the points of twenty more countries ahead of us, so anything can happen”, Weichselbraun looks away from the camera and out across the live crowd. “Please,” she implores, “let’s give all the artists a big round of applause – they’ve been wonderful tonight”. Tumlér raises her hands, palms upward, as if conducting the audience response, smiling and nodding in encouragement. The broadcast cuts to a wide shot of the standing audience—some 3 000 of the 12 000 total audience members—dutifully clapping, although their enthusiasm is noticeably lower than their earlier cheers.

The broadcast then cuts to the Green Room, which was positioned immediately behind the standing audience for the 2015 Contest. Conchita Wurst, the 2014 winner, had acted as the Green Room host for 2015, where her function was to ask low-impact questions of the artists and engage in mostly innocent flirting.<sup>1</sup> At first, it appears that this will be her function now: sitting holding hands with the Russian entrant, she begins by declaring, “I’m sitting here with the outstanding, talented Polina from Russia”. There is a noticeable hardness to her delivery of those adjectives, but otherwise nothing out of the ordinary in this exchange. Ignoring the camera, Conchita turns to face Polina directly and adds, “You deserve to be in the lead”. Polina, who seems to be trembling slightly, nods in thanks as tears well up in her eyes, caught momentarily in close-up. Still avoiding looking down the camera, Conchita then turns out to the live audience and commands, “Give her a round of applause, everybody!” As the camera focusses in on Polina’s response, Conchita’s face remains in shot. There is no mistaking the determination in her eyes—this is a command, from a leader to her people, and they comply enthusiastically. Once again, the camera pans over the standing audience, who are now whistling, cheering, and waving their flags. Conchita’s voice softens as she turns back to Polina: “it’s such a silly question,” she continues, “but how do you feel?” Back to business as usual.

This moment stands out from the remainder of the live broadcast for two specific reasons. Firstly, although there is a large live audience for the 2015 Contest, it is very rare for that audience to be called out by the hosts, or indeed by the singers. More intriguingly, though, this particular moment stands out because of the effort that all three hosts who feature in it are going to in order to elicit and curate a specific audience response. The effect is noticeable in the broadcast because it appears almost completely unprompted; while the temperature of the audience cheering was lower for Russia than it was for either Sweden or Italy, it is not unusual for a live audience to favour an underdog, or to have different tastes to the tele-voting audience. The plot thickens when the producers of the live broadcast appear to double down by cutting to Conchita’s interview in the middle of the vote count. Conchita, for her part, draws on her considerable capital with the live audience to stridently demand an affirmation from them. This stridency is completely at odds with the remainder of the broadcast, which explicitly attempts to project and embody the feeling of tolerance and togetherness for which Conchita herself is so well known.<sup>2</sup> Conchita’s tone remains mysterious, especially as it is so swiftly dropped while she continues her interview with Polina.

The answer lies in being there: the live audience had begun to boo each time Russia was awarded points. As more nations reported their results, and Russia began to build an incremental lead, their booing was gathering volume and consistency. Except, of course, very little of this visceral sound had made its way into the broadcast, and so to the broadcast viewer, it seems a very heavy-handed intervention. In the run-up to the Contest final, it was suggested in press coverage that the producers had installed anti-booing technology in the venue in an attempt to avoid a reprise of the audience response that greeted Russia's entry to the 2014 Contest, the Tomalchevy Sisters.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, against a background of Russia's continued military presence in Ukraine and the ongoing anti-LGBT legal discrimination, of which Conchita was a very visible reminder, the organisers were wary of the risk of booing in the auditorium making its way into the broadcast.

It is impossible to state definitively what motivated this audience reaction, although the connection to Russia's broader political positions is telling in the light of Eurovision's association with LGBT politics, highlighted in this moment by the presence of Conchita. As Catherine Baker argues, "the strength of the reactions, and of the booing inside the arena, which forced the Austrian presenters to discreetly remonstrate with spectators, depended on too many people's motivations to be legible as evidence of one prevailing factor."<sup>4</sup> It is telling for our purposes, though, that in this moment the broadcasters reached out to the very force they were worried they would not be able to control: the live audience. The intervention described above, then, is itself an anti-booing strategy; a direct appeal from a fan favourite, instructing the audience to keep their responses positive. This strategy, of utilising the live audience to the broadcast's advantage at key moments while otherwise ignoring or marginalising their experience, sets up the tension that is at the heart of our argument here. And it worked, to a point—for the remainder of the voting, until Sweden's entrant was declared the winner, the audience played along (in their own way) by cheering any nation who scored higher points than Russia, and refrained from booing.<sup>5</sup>

### *Experiencing Live*

In this article, we consider this moment and others from the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest to argue that an appreciation of the different ways of experiencing the Contest live is missing from the surge in academic interest in the event.<sup>6</sup> As Daniel Michaels writes with wry amusement in a *The Wall Street Journal* article on March 15, 2011, "scholars increasingly see Waterloo as a pivotal event for Europe. The song, that is, not the battle."<sup>7</sup> However, this academic interest is mostly confined to the nation- and identity-building aspects of the Contest, and often concentrates on the affective dimension for the broadcast audience, when audience is explicitly considered at all. By investigating what the live audience are thinking, feeling, and doing, we can enrich our understanding of the Contest as a performative event. These findings have implications for the study of other popular entertainments, especially those recorded or broadcast with a live audience. We advocate here for a *both/and* approach, following what Philip Auslander captures in his foundational study of

liveness the “dependence and imbrication” of the live and mediated experiences of an event.<sup>8</sup> This suggests to us that the Contest and events like it can be best understood through considering *both* the live *and* the broadcast performance. In so doing, we are following a turn in performance analysis more generally, where semiotic observation is increasingly enriched with embodied, phenomenological detail.<sup>9</sup>

Our interest in the Eurovision Song Contest has always been feelingful: that is, we are interested in its affective qualities, and how it makes audiences feel. This interest was reinforced by the 2014 Contest, won as noted above by Austria’s Conchita Wurst. After her victory speech, she performed the traditional reprise of the winning song, “Rise Like a Phoenix”. There were, though, two untraditional elements to this second performance: the audience could be heard on the broadcast very audibly singing along to the song, especially as it reaches the chorus; and Conchita effected a telling word substitution in the latter half of the song. Instead of maintaining the first person singular, she substituted the plural form and sang:

We rise up to the sky. You threw us down, but we’re gonna...fly! And rise like a phoenix out of the ashes, seeking rather than vengeance, retribution. You were warned, once we’re transformed, once we’re reborn, you know I will rise like a phoenix – but you’re my flame.

Questionable grammar aside, it is clear in this moment that Conchita is reaching out to her audience and including them in the address of her song. Indeed, Conchita’s first “we”, as extracted above, was accompanied by an expansive hand gesture that sweeps outwards to include the live audience, and, as she stared down the barrel of the camera, that includes the broadcast audience as well. It was a telling choice in this moment that Conchita’s face was not framed in close up, as it had been earlier in the song, but instead pulled back just enough to show the full scope of her gesture.

Sitting just over 16,000 kilometres away on the other side of the world, throats hoarse from yelling our support at the television for over three hours, we had felt something. Some heady combination of elation, pride, recognition; we had been called out by this mysterious figure on our television screen and we felt unstoppable.<sup>10</sup> Affective response to television broadcast is not necessarily a unique phenomenon; however, as scholars of performance we were particularly interested in the dual audience that had been identified in this moment. As the background singing reminded us, there was a large and enthusiastic audience witnessing this performance live. What was for ‘them’, and what was for ‘us’? Is there a difference between the live experience offered by consuming the television broadcast, and the live experience of being there? From its very first outing in Lugarno, Switzerland, in 1956, even before the focus of the event was televisual, there has been a live audience in attendance.<sup>11</sup> However, the function of these live audiences and the ways in which their embodied experience might enrich or complicate an understanding of the Contest is, as noted above, missing from the majority of scholarship. In order to most effectively address this gap we would need to travel to the Eurovision Song Contest to be part of that audience.

As Matthew Reason and Anje Mølle Lindelof argue in the introduction to their recent edited volume *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, performance studies' engagement with liveness has been characterised by "essentialist positions, whereby live performance is defined as the product of spatio-temporal presence: the spectator and the performer co-present in the same time and place."<sup>12</sup> Following this logic, we might assert that the live audience for the Contest is the audience who are spatially co-present, as opposed to the broadcast audience, whose co-presence is limited to the temporal. However, once again following Reason and Lindelof, discussions of liveness should move "away from locating liveness within performance a priori [...] and instead to careful consideration of the particular and contingent relationships between performance and audience. Away from liveness and towards experiencing live."<sup>13</sup> Their position is supported by Martin Barker, who asserts in his contribution to the same volume that "overwhelmingly lacking is research on the meaning and value of 'liveness' to actual audiences."<sup>14</sup> In order to understand the ambiguities produced by the Eurovision Song Contest, therefore, we needed to understand what its audience was thinking, feeling, and doing, and what specific relationships were established between that audience and the performance throughout the Contest.

Two particular dimensions of our fandom are worth mentioning here, especially in the context of the body of scholarship around the Contest. Firstly, as part of a younger generation of fans, we have only known the Contest as the televisual mega-event it has become since the early 2000s; the Contest of tuxedoed, seated audiences and live orchestras in theatres is almost unimaginable (more's the pity, some might say). This predisposes us to read the Contest in certain ways, particularly in terms of the audience experience that it offers. Secondly, as Australians, we are less likely to invest in the Contest in nationalist terms, or indeed in pan-European terms. This enforces a certain distance on our appreciation of the Contest, and more strongly links our fandom to non-national networks, such as those linked by gender, sexuality, and social class—Karen Fricker, Elena Moreo and Brian Singleton note that "the national competes with other categories of affiliation in the Eurovision setting."<sup>15</sup> Finally, it is significant to this account that after many years of participating in the armchair audience, 2015 was the first year that we travelled to experience the Contest live.

Coincidentally, after we had made arrangements to attend and study the 2015 Contest, Australia was invited to participate as a competing nation for the first time, having provided an interval act for the 2014 Contest.<sup>16</sup> Although this might have produced unusual nationalistic fervour, the relatively short lead time between the announcement of Australia's participation and the Contest itself—not to mention the scarcity of tickets—meant that there was not a dedicated Australian fan network in the same manner as European nations. Nonetheless, a significant Australian contingent had travelled to Vienna, and many were not shy about making their presence felt. We Australians were regarded by the hardcore, European fans with a mixture of skepticism and hostility: the majority of European fans we spoke with during the Contest tried to engage us in serious discussion about how Australia just did not belong in the Contest, and told us

that we were taking the places away from genuine fans. We therefore learnt quickly to sidestep questions of national identity, and blend back into the mass of fans— though we did, of course, buy the scarves.

### ***Methodology***

We are striving here to investigate an area where, to borrow a phrase from Marilena Zaroulia, “the boundaries between performer and spectator become porous.”<sup>17</sup> Fans at the Contest have, since 1998, been positioned as “a wild, participatory spectacle, in which fans performed their fandom for cameras projecting the spectacle worldwide.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, “advances in camera technologies have permitted fans’ presence to have even greater agency in the overall performance and its meaning.”<sup>19</sup> This formulation points to the central role fans play in the meanings that the Contest makes available, and implicitly suggests that the live audience provides a set of signifiers for the broadcast audience. The most importance of these has been enthusiasm and positivity: “directors have increasingly formulated new filming strategies to capture [live fans’] excitement *within the televisual frame*.”<sup>20</sup> While audience research is notoriously difficult, the first step in this project was being there and being part of the live audience. By making ourselves into our test subjects, we could produce at some results that could be supported by future, larger-scale research. In this article, we report on the findings of our pilot project, which was driven by participant-observation ethnography of the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest and enriched by a variety of informal data collection methods.

One methodology that has proved popular in studies of Eurovision across disciplinary lines is participant-observation ethnography, which empowers researchers to “experience the culture from within”, and has been used in accounts as diverse as Fricker, Moreo and Singleton (2007), Zaroulia (2013) and Baker (2017).<sup>21</sup> Building on the work of Clifford Geertz and fellow anthropologists, this practice of embedding oneself within the subject of the research has allowed researchers to understand “who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it.”<sup>22</sup> James Clifford describes the double vision this requires of the researcher:

The ‘method’ of participant-observation has enacted a delicate balance of subjectivity and objectivity. The ethnographer’s personal experiences [...] are recognised as central to the research process, but they are firmly restrained by the impersonal standards of observation and ‘objective’ distance.<sup>23</sup>

In being there at the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest, hanging out with and being a part of the audience whose experience we are investigating, we are seeking to understand the event from both within and without. In placing the emphasis on the researcher’s account of the experience, Helen Freshwater notes, though, that this and similar approaches are open to the criticism that “it replaces rigorous research with self-indulgent soul-searching, and that it ultimately tells us more about the writer than the work being commented upon.”<sup>24</sup> As Clifford noted in the extract above, the restraint offered by the methodology speaks back to such a

concern, however, this is also an inevitability of the process; Clifford notes elsewhere that not only does it offer “new angles of vision and depths of understanding”, but also these “accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways.”<sup>25</sup>

Dwight Conquergood suggests a refinement of terminology that is useful to us here, suggesting “the ethnographer must be a co-performer in order to understand these embodied meanings.”<sup>26</sup> Instead of participant-observation, we might therefore speak of co-performance, given “the power dynamic of the research situation changes when the ethnographer moves from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer to the intimate involvement and engagement of ‘coactivity’ or co-performance.”<sup>27</sup> This description is particularly apposite for our work, especially as the audience we were a part of was itself performing a particular role in the Contest. We conducted our research by attending two different performances during the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest, including informal conversations with the audience members we met there. We then wrote detailed field notes, as soon as possible after each performance. In addition to our recollections, informants’ words and field notes, we also had access to the broadcast of the Contest, which is available both online and on DVD. While we did not alter any of our data in response to viewing the broadcast, we did use the recording to draw out potential similarities and differences between the live, embodied experience of the Contest, and the live televisual experience.

The remainder of this article is divided into three sections, broadly following this division between the broadcast audience and the live audience. (In order to avoid inverted commas throughout, we have preferred to distinguish between the two in these categories, and although we argue below that the broadcast audience is also having a live experience, the live audience is those physically present in the performance space for the purposes of this account). In the first, we consider moments from the 2015 Contest in which the broadcast audience is privileged over the live audience, and argue that the live audience functions as part of the *mise-en-scène* of the performance for the broadcast audience. The second section then offers a selection of moments in which the live audience was addressed by the performers or the performance, although we characterise these moments as anomalous rather than intentional. The final section uses contemporary writing on liveness to summarise our findings, and reflects on the wider implications of this study for research on mediated popular entertainments.

### ***The Broadcast Audience dominates***

The broadcast audience of the Contest is exponentially larger than the live audience; for recent Contests, it has approached 200 million viewers. It will therefore come as little surprise that we argue that the televised experience of the contest is privileged above that of the live audience—however, we further suggest that this comes at times to the latter’s detriment. It is a Eurovision cliché that performers spend their stage time staring down the barrel of the camera, and much of the live experience of the Contest is watching performers follow a Steadicam operator across the stage. Performers deliberately play up to the

cameras, and the staging of their performances is predominantly orientated towards the cameras, rather than towards the live audience. This can lend Contest performances an intimate feeling for the broadcast audience despite the large scale of the venues, which ordinarily hold between 10 000 and 30 000 live spectators. Indeed, the rules of the Contest stipulate that a performance may feature no more than six performers on stage, which often necessitates performers bunching together on stage in order that the broadcast version does not look sparse or static.<sup>28</sup> In both cases, there is a visual intimacy that is often created on screen that is inaccessible to the live audience, who necessarily see the performance in the broader context of the large stage and cavernous venue. In this section, we look at specific examples from the 2015 Contest where the live experience of the performance is compromised for the broadcast, and the ways that this can affect the experience of the live audience.

Måns Zelmerlöv won the 2015 Contest with the song "Heroes", an upbeat Europop ballad staged almost entirely on and around a small projection surface placed on the vast stage. In the broadcast, Zelmerlöv's song opens on a long shot of him brooding, sitting in front of a blank, black surface.<sup>29</sup> He begins to sing, and at the end of his second line, clicks his fingers in the air to his left. A white puff appears, and transfigures into a hand drawn cartoon of a young boy, slightly smaller than Zelmerlöv in stature. They begin to interact as the first verse continues, with the cartoon figure mimicking the actions of the live singer. When the chorus of "Heroes" arrives, the projections become more complex, including Zelmerlöv holding hands with the animated character, manipulating balls of light, in the middle of a rain shower, and with butterfly wings. The performance is shot mostly using long shots, a device that allows the television audience to best experience the effect of these projections.

For the live audience, though, this effect is made possible through a small black, oval shaped surface that sits centre stage, onto which the images are projected. However, the projection surface is a mere fraction of the size of the staging, and in the auditorium the stunning visual effect of the broadcast is lost on a crowd unable to clearly make out the images that have been projected. The size of the projection surface relative to the stage makes the performance less theatrical for the live audience, who have to rely only on the lyrics of the song, Zelmerlöv's delivery of them and his basic choreography to make meaning of the performance. During the bridge of the song, Zelmerlöv even performs to a camera situated behind the projection screen, ensuring that the live audience do not see him at all, although this creates an intimate moment for the television audience as he sings down the barrel of a camera, starkly lit by a fixed light on top of the camera filming him. As if to reiterate the mediated nature of this performance, this footage is shown live to the audience on small screens situated either side of the stage (about which more below). For the purposes of our argument here, it is telling that the winning song in 2015 featured technical effects that were almost inaccessible and invisible to the live audience.

The stage backdrop and floor of the stage for the 2015 Contest were made up of LED displays that are able to project images. While these were not a new addition, the floor in particular was used in a way that again privileged the

experience of the television audience. Many performers were shown in the broadcast through crane shots taken from directly above the stage, showing them interacting with images and designs on the floor of the performance space. Because the stage floor was almost completely invisible to the live audience—except for those seated in the very back rows, which were elevated high above the stage—these moments were lost to the live audience’s view, although they provided striking footage for the television audience. The most extreme example was in Belgium’s entry “Rhythm Inside”, during which performer Loïc Nottet spent the majority of the second verse lying on his back on the stage floor, while his backup singer/dancers remained standing.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, in the final moment of the performance, all five of the supporting performers lie down on stage in formation only made meaningful when shot from above. In both instances, the performers lying on the stage disappear completely from the live audience’s view, making it near impossible for them to view the performance.

This difficulty of interpretation was particularly notable in the entrants representing Armenia in 2015. Their song, “Face the Shadow”, was performed by the supergroup Genealogy, made up of six performers from different continents who are each members of the Armenian diaspora.<sup>31</sup> The song had already provoked controversy before the 2015 Contest, and its title had been changed from the original “Don’t Deny” in order to address concerns that it was overtly political and therefore in breach of the Contest rules.<sup>32</sup> Almost at the end of “Face the Shadow”, in fact accompanying the lyric “don’t deny” in the final chorus, the performers break their previous circle formation and spread across the stage. In the broadcast, it is clear that they are standing on top of a projection of a map of the Earth, with each performer standing on or near their home country. This movement, coupled with the projections, tell the story of the groups’ shared Armenian heritage, despite their geographic isolation. Of course, this particular image was lost on the live audience, most of whom were unable to see the floor. To the live audience, it appeared as unmotivated movement across a stage, and lacked the meaning that the performers had intended in using this device.

Even performances that adopted a more traditional stage-audience relationship were able to privilege the television audience. Indeed, some performances co-opted the live audience to produce special effects that were only visible on the broadcast and not appreciated by those in the auditorium. When Cyprus’s entrant John Karayiannis took the stage for his performance of “One Thing I Should Have Done” in the 2015 Contest, small screens in the auditorium asked the live audience to turn on their mobile phone lights, and shine them toward the stage. For the live audience, who were not able to see the lights they had produced, the experience of this song was vastly different to the broadcast. Although the television audience were greeted by a black and white images of the performer in a single solitary spotlight, there was no sense of this effect presented in the auditorium—in fact, it was only when we later watched the broadcast that we realised this effect had been employed. After the first chorus, the images on screen move back into colour, and Karayiannis is at times shot from behind, with audience members following a directive to “turn on [their] cell phone lights” making it appear as if he was singing with an immense star curtain of lights, all of which effectively faded the audience into blackout.<sup>33</sup>

The audience are mostly unseen; there is only Karayiannis on stage, heartbroken, facing a giant star curtain. In this moment, the live audience have been asked to participate in the performance in a way that does not improve their own live experience. We were merely given the opportunity to become moving, thinking props for the broadcast.

This seeming disregard of the live audience is crucial to the argument we will develop in the final section of this paper, for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that the live audience is functioning as a kind of authenticating device for the broadcast audience, offering a guarantee of sorts that the performance is happening in a real, if distant, place and time. As we have implied in each of the above examples, the live audience is continually if subtly disconnected from the performance. This creates a distance between the audience and the performance that is unfolding in front of them. In the following section, we consider some examples of moments where the live audience is offered a live experience of the Contest that is not available to the broadcast audience.

### ***The Live Audience asserts itself***

The previous section ended with a cynical reading of the role of the audience, as mere *mise-en-scène* for the spectacle. The weight of examples from the 2015 Contest appear to confirm that the performances exist for the television audience, and that the live audience's role is limited to supporting and enhancing that televisual experience, even at the expense of their own live experience. This correlates with Auslander's description, where he asserts "the spectator [...] is present at a live performance, but hardly participates in it as such."<sup>34</sup> However, there were moments of resistance in the 2015 Contest where the live experience reclaimed its affective power, and had an experience that was more than "roughly the experience of watching a small, noisy TV set in a large, crowded field."<sup>35</sup> Although these were relatively few, they afforded the live audience unique experiences that were denied to the televised audience. While we run the risk of indulging in binary thinking here, we offer these as a corrective to analyses of the Contest driven solely by observations of the televised broadcast, as examples of where something more is going on, something that can only be captured by being there.

In the 2015 Contest, Poland was represented by Monika Kuszyńska, a well-known figure at home from her earlier work with pop band Varius Manx.<sup>36</sup> On tour in 2006, the band was involved in a serious car accident, as a result of which Kuszyńska remains paralysed from the waist down. Her condition was awkwardly highlighted by the opening moments of the 2015 Contest, which required all contestants to proceed from the open artists' green room area, down a set of stairs, continue through the standing audience, and then up another set of stairs to the stage. Kuszyńska, presumably unable to navigate the stairs in her wheelchair, was presented to the audience from the bottom of the stairs, and then appeared later on stage without passing through the standing section.<sup>37</sup> Both audiences, though, have an appreciation of her condition from the first time she is shown in the Contest. This is confirmed in the opening minutes of her entry, "In the Name of Love". For the audience present at the Contest, her

wheelchair is visible as soon as the lights come up. On the broadcast, Poland's entry begins unusually with a wide shot, before panning across a seated piano player and a standing back-up singer, before alighting on Kuszyńska centre stage. While she is wearing a flowing white dress, it is arranged to expose both her legs and the mechanics of the wheelchair in which she sits. During the first minute of the song, the broadcast moves between a panning shot, which shows Kuszyńska seated with her co-performers arranged behind her, and a close up of her head and torso, into which her knees occasionally protrude.

One minute and 25 seconds into the broadcast, just after Kuszyńska sings "I wanna tell you / it's gonna be better / you've got the greatness within you", another piece of footage appears. On the following line, "beyond the fear", this footage shows a female singer moving quickly through an audience, and then standing, singing on a stage. Although the footage is in black and white, it is clear the woman is a young Kuszyńska. Almost before this registers, the camera zooms out, and it becomes clear that this footage is being projected on a screen flanking the stage where the older, paralysed Kuszyńska is singing. All up, this intrusion lasts less than ten seconds, and from the broadcast it is difficult to understand what its intention is. The older footage returns before the end of the song, although not in close up, although this time the broadcast audience can see the stage is flanked on either side by screens showing the young Kuszyńska. What the broadcast audience cannot see is that this footage has been looping in the auditorium throughout the performance, and for the vast majority of the live audience their view of the performance has necessarily included both Kuszyńskas, the younger, mobile dancer twinkling above the older, stationary singer. The experience offered by this production choice—unique to Poland's entry, as no other act in the 2015 Contest incorporated non-live footage—is not subtle, but it is one that is available and reinforced to the live audience, while a broadcast viewer would have to work much harder to produce the same interpretation.

As part of the tourism drive that accompanies hosting the Eurovision Song Contest, each host nation produces visual 'postcards' to be broadcast between each of the entries during the broadcast. In 2015, these began with each entrant receiving a package in their host country, before being welcomed to a particular region of Austria to participate in a tourist activity.<sup>38</sup> In the auditorium, as noted above, the live audience was shown these postcards on screens in the gaps between the performers. Each postcard is approximately 48 seconds long, and in the majority of cases, this is the entire time that the stage crew has to strike the previous act, and prepare the stage for the coming performers.<sup>39</sup> During this time, the stage was often backlit, so that while the live audience could see that there was some stage business taking place, the specifics were unclear. The forthcoming performers would often have to congregate at the back of the stage while they waited; each gave a brief wave to the camera from the side of the stage, broadcast immediately before their postcard, and then moved into position. Taking into account the backstage wave, the postcard, and the lighting reset (signified by a blackout on stage) that preceded each new song, performers had a maximum of one minute to prepare themselves to sing. As a

result, each performer is coming on to stage relatively ‘cold’, not only in terms of their vocal preparation, but also in terms of their audience engagement.

Each act, therefore, would have to rely on the goodwill the audience already bore toward them; goodwill potentially honed both by nationalistic fervour and their previous performances inside and outside the Contest.<sup>40</sup> At least in part because of the compressed timeline onto stage, very few acts made any positive effort to engage the audience before they began their performance, relying instead on generating energy across their song. The exception in the 2015 Contest was the Lithuanian entry “This Time”, performed by Monika Linkytė and Vaidas Baumila.<sup>41</sup> As the stage was prepared for their performance, Baumila began to clap from the rear of the stage. Bringing his hands together high above his head, backlit by the large screen behind him, he was a striking figure, and the standing audience began to clap along. The momentum built from the front of the audience and flowed backwards, and by the time the lighting reset took place to signify the beginning of the song, the audience were clapping loudly and in time. This lent the beginning of “This Time” immediacy and vibrancy that it does not possess musically—the song opens with Linkytė singing solo while advancing downstage with light instrumental backing. These qualities are evident in the broadcast as well: as soon as the lights come up on Linkytė, the audience are very audible in the background, and both the performers are noticeably more animated from the beginning of the performance. Some of the difference is doubtless down to presence and charisma; however, the audience engagement and interaction has further elevated this performance.

### ***Conclusion: Tears***

As we noted in the prologue, for a long while in the middle section of the vote count, it appeared certain that Russia would win the 2015 Contest. The audience, who had in general enthusiastically received Polina Gagarina’s paean to universal love and tolerance—a traditional Eurovision standard in many ways, spoofed by the 2016 Contest hosts with an interval act song called “Love Love Peace Peace”<sup>42</sup>—were becoming restless. This not only had macro-scale consequences, as discussed, but also created significant affect amongst the audience. As the boos began and audience sentiment towards the Russian entry soured further, we found ourselves standing next to two young men, both with Russian flags painted on their faces, and one wearing a Russian flag as a cape. (Incidentally, we had spoken to them earlier in the evening, to offer some technical support with a malfunctioning iPhone app, and had confirmed they were supporting Russia—unfortunately by first incorrectly guessing Serbia). At the first signs of booing, these young men looked around disbelievingly, as if in disbelief that they were being turned on. As it continued, one silently began to cry; not with the faux-joyful tears that characterise Eurovision, but instead in what seemed like genuine hurt. Our attempts to reach out to him were rebuffed by his companion, and they soon moved away from us.

It was a small but telling moment that revealed some of the negative affect that the Contest can provoke, perhaps repeated for others across the audience, and one that does not make its way into the broadcast. Furthermore,

this moment offers an illustration of the individual experience of the Contest, as opposed to the *en masse* audience experience, which is always framed as both positive and universal. Indeed, every moment in which the live audience featured is one of unabashed joy: flags waving, fans screaming and mugging for the camera. This audience enthusiasm is a near-constant feature of the broadcast, with the standing members of the audience bouncing and waving their flags across the bottom of the screen whenever the broadcasts move to a mid-shot of the stage. This living set-dressing also features in the innumerable shots that zoom over the heads of the audience to alight on the stage. That audience, though, are thinking, feeling, and doing all sorts of things that can only be captured through a consideration of their live experience of the Contest, one which can be contrasted with the live experience of the broadcast audience. In returning these experiences to our analysis, we are following Marilena Zaroulia's argument that "the [Contest's] affective and ideological dimensions should not be perceived as polar terms of a binary opposition but as complementary perspectives for a comprehensive reading of the Contest and its audiences."<sup>43</sup>

While other considerations, such as political ideology and efficacy, or the performativity of gender and sexuality, have lurked around the edges of this account, our focus in this paper has been on utilising the 2015 Eurovision Song Contest as a case study of the role hybrid performances featuring both a live and a broadcast audience. "In these cases, the traditional privileging of the original, live performance over its elaborations and adaptation is undermined and reversed."<sup>44</sup> Without necessarily creating a hierarchy of experience, we have argued here that the broadcast audience and the live audience are offered distinctive experiences, with each experiencing aspects of the Contest unavailable to the other. The key theoretical development we offer, though, is that both of these experiences can be considered 'live'; that is, in each case, the audience is offered a distinct experience of liveness. This goes some way to explaining the affective power that the Contest holds for both audiences; recall our yelling at the television and feeling of address while watching the broadcast of Conchita's 2014 winner's performance, and compare it to the young Russians we encountered in 2015. Despite the differences between what they see, feel, and do, both audiences are experiencing the Contest live. This finding goes some way to explaining the fanatical devotion the Contest inspires in audience members who may only have experienced it as a television broadcast, given that experience can be understood as live, with all of the cultural value that category implies.

The Eurovision Song Contest therefore provides an illuminating example of how co-presence is not a necessary condition for liveness. In his recent contribution to an edited volume on liveness in contemporary performance, Auslander explains:

The idea that we can appreciate a performance as live without being in the place where it is occurring is fundamental, for I believe the power of liveness is in fact a function not of proximity but of distance, or more precisely, the power of the live resides in the tension between having the

sense of being connected experientially to something while it is happening while also remaining at a distance from it.<sup>45</sup>

This formulation sheds light on our perception that we were equally as connected to the event itself when we were distant from it—being in the presence of the performers established a live connection, but not the same connection as watching the broadcast itself had. As well, this helps explain one of the core questions with which this paper began: what is the function of the live audience in the television broadcast, or what are we doing here? Following Auslander, this could be seen as an attempt to establish the connection to the event “while it is happening” while also ensuring that the broadcast audience is able to remain “at a distance from it”. The audience that are shown along the bottom of the frame on the broadcast, who are clearly experiencing the event live with the performers, confirm temporal co-presence while reinforcing spatial distance. Once again, this supports Auslander’s findings:

Broadcasting clearly effected a significant shift in our understanding of liveness and the experiences we are willing to count as live by suggesting that temporal co-presence, which it could produce, is essential to the experience of liveness, whereas spatial co-presence, which it could not produce, is non-essential.<sup>46</sup>

This research project began with an assumption that something different would be gained from experiencing the event in the presence of the performers, and to an extent it was predicated on an assumption of “cultural value, in which the live is automatically considered to be superior or have more cachet than the non-live.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, that experience *was* different: but in many important ways, it was less live than watching the television broadcast had been in our previous encounters with the Contest, and the live audience’s capacity for meaningful interaction with the event was minimal. As we have noted throughout this account, performers were much more likely to engage with the (implied) broadcast audience than they were with the live audience in front of them, and various important element of the performance space and the *mise-en-scène* of the event were designed to privilege the broadcast audience. As Auslander notes, “physical co-presence does not obviate distance”<sup>48</sup>; the live audience often found themselves watching screens showing the broadcast stream, rather than the actual performers in front of them. This experience therefore offers an exemplary illustration of the revision definition of liveness that Auslander posited in his 2016 book chapter:

Liveness is the experience of having an active connection to an event taking place now, but somewhere else, whether that somewhere else is miles away or only inches away.<sup>49</sup>

Reflecting this logic, Australia’s host broadcaster the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) showed the Contest’s television broadcast live for the first time in 2016.<sup>50</sup> Firmly ensconced back in front of our television for the 2016 Contest, we yelled ourselves hoarse once more experiencing the Contest live.

We end this article with a consideration of the broader applicability of the Contest as a case study. Firstly, it speaks to the contemporary interest in explicitly mediated performance, including “the rise of the phenomenon of simulcasting of theatre, opera and other events into cinemas—events that stress their ‘liveness’, but are clearly not live in many of the traditional senses.”<sup>51</sup> Instead than fetishising spatial co-presence, events like the Contest allow us to expand our consideration of the experience of liveness to include audiences who are temporally co-present but spatially distant. As well, investigating the Contest has revealed two further findings. First, that each audience can be understood as distinct, and that both have a distinctive experience of liveness. Secondly, that the presence of a live audience can function as an element of the *mise-en-scène* that enhances the experience of liveness for the broadcast audience by reinforcing not only their distance from the live event, but also their temporal connection to it. As more popular entertainments take on this hybrid approach with the rise of reality television, or the cinematic broadcast of live theatre and opera, we believe these considerations will enhance future performance analysis. The model that we have followed here also offers an important corrective where events have been understood solely through one dimension at the expense of another. Live audiences are messy, many-headed beasts, and any consideration of their live experiences is necessarily partial and incomplete. As liveness becomes a more fractured category, and being there a more diffuse experience, the role of the audience is shifting. By taking seriously these different live experiences and including them in our analyses of performances, we can deepen and enrich our understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> There is something fascinating going on here in relation to Conchita’s image. As a drag act, her stage name is unabashedly sexual – Conchita is Spanish slang for a vagina, and Wurst the German for sausage. Since winning the 2014 Contest, though, her image has been rehabilitated as almost entirely sex-less. She is now marketed as simply “Conchita”, which although it still carries the sexual connotation is certainly a less threatening moniker. The flirting, which was limited to the anodyne, strapping young men in which Eurovision seems to specialise, is perhaps counter-intuitively linked to this image make-over. It is as if by retreating as far as possible into the female side of her persona – though still with her signature beard – Conchita becomes less of a sexual contradiction, and less dangerous.

<sup>2</sup> Upon winning the 2014 Contest in Copenhagen, Conchita declared, “This night is dedicated to everyone who believes in a future of peace and freedom. You know who you are. We are unity – and we are...unstoppable”, as she thrust the trophy aloft.

<sup>3</sup> Corey Charlton, “Eurovision Song Contest installs anti-booming technology for first time to hide jeers aimed towards Russia’s singer over the country’s military aggression in Ukraine”, *Daily Mail*, May 21, 2015, accessed July 17, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3089648/Eurovision-song-contest-installs-anti-booming-technology-time-hide-jeers-aimed-Russia-s-singer-country-s-military-aggression-Ukraine.html>. These articles were published in the week of the Contest, and it was not subsequently confirmed whether the technology was used.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Baker, “The ‘gay Olympics’? The Eurovision Song Contest and the politics of LGBT/European belonging”, *European Journal of International Relations* 23(1) (2017): 112.

<sup>5</sup> For the 2015 Contest, each nation reported their votes by verbally delivering their third place (eight points), second place (ten points), and first place (twelve points). The remaining points, from eight to one, were displayed on screen.

<sup>6</sup> For British viewers, this academic interest is emphasised by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) broadcast commentary, featuring Paul Jordan billed as “Dr Eurovision”, or the man who “knows so much about Eurovision, they gave him a PhD [...] one of a small but growing number of fans who have parlayed their obsession with the glitzy competition into solid academic achievement”. See <http://www.rferl.org/content/doctor-eurovision-paul-jordan/25377779.html>.

<sup>7</sup> “Scholars Sing the Praises of Eurovision; Kitschy Song Contest Wows Academia; ‘Rampant Snobbism’”, *Wall-Street Journal* (15 March 2011): 33, available at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703561604576150210586432164> [Accessed 6 March 2017]

<sup>8</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London and New York: Routledge: 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Peter M. Boenish, *Directing Scenes and Senses: The Thinking of Regie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 9.

<sup>10</sup> Another friend, watching the broadcast from her own couch, sent a message in this moment saying she’d “never felt more gay”.

<sup>11</sup> The Eurovision History offered on the European Broadcasting Union’s website notes that the Contest was “primarily a radio show, although some cameras were taping the contest for the few Europeans who had a television set at that time”. See <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/history/by-year/contest?event=273>.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof, “Introduction” in *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance* (London: Routledge, 2016), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Reason and Lindelof, “Introduction”, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Barker, “Coming a(live): A Prolegomenon to any Future Research on ‘Liveness’” in *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof (London: Routledge, 2016), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Karen Fricker, Elena Moreo and Brian Singleton, “Part of the Show: The global networking of Irish Eurovision Song Contest fans” in Karen Fricker and Ronit Lentin (eds), *Performing Global Networks* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 157.

<sup>16</sup> Australia’s participation as a competing nation in the 2015 Contest was announced on 10 February 2015, just three months before the Contest. At the 2014 Contest, Australian singer Jessica Mauboy had performed “Sea of Flags” as the interval act in the second semi-final, which at the time had been marketed as a reward for Australian loyalty and enthusiasm in supporting the Contest.

<sup>17</sup> Marilena Zaroulia, “Sharing the Moment: Europe, Affect, and the Utopian Performatives” in *Performing the ‘New’ Europe: Identities, Feelings, and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic (London: Palgrave: 2013), 40.

<sup>18</sup> Brian Singleton, Karen Fricker and Elena Moreno, “Performing the Queer Network: Fans and families at the Eurovision Song Contest”, *SQS: Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* 2: 19.

<sup>19</sup> Fricker, Moreno and Singleton, “Part of the Show”, 152.

<sup>20</sup> Fricker, Moreno and Singleton, “Part of the Show”, 152. Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> Georgina Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC* (London, Secker and Warburg: 2004), 16.

<sup>22</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2000), 16.

<sup>23</sup> James Clifford, “Partial Truths” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 13.

<sup>24</sup> Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (London: Palgrave, 2009) 25.

<sup>25</sup> Clifford, “Partial Truths”, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Dwight Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a critical cultural politics” in D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications: 2006), 351.

<sup>27</sup> Conquergood, “Rethinking Ethnography”, 351.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.eurovision.tv/page/about/rules> [Accessed 7 March 2016]

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sGOWFVUU0I>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G48p8eNhnd8>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z608pr7HH94>

<sup>32</sup> The song explicitly made reference to the Armenian genocide, the centenary of which was marked in 2015. The extent to which the title substitution had any effect is highly debatable, as “don’t deny” remains the main lyric around which the chorus of “Face the Shadow” is built.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUNEOmBLGc8>

<sup>34</sup> Auslander, *Liveness*, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Goodwin, “Sample and Hold: Pop Music in the Digital Age of Reproducing”, in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), 269.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TReYIZYloSg>

<sup>37</sup> The broadcast is able to ‘hide’ this moment better than the live event; however footage does linger on other artists passing through the audience on their way to the stage.

<sup>38</sup> By way of example, Australia’s entrant in the 2015 Contest, Guy Sebastian, received his package at a typical beachside cottage (although the package bears the street address of SBS, Australia’s host broadcaster), before being shown surfing down a canal in Salzburg.

<sup>39</sup> There were occasional exceptions in the 2015 Contest, where the hosts would add some commentary between acts. These interventions were rare though; in the 27 acts for the 2015 Contest, there were three breaks to commentary.

<sup>40</sup> During the Contest, performers will often visit the official Eurovision Village, or fan clubs, and perform their song along with other material. This not only endears them to fans in advance of their Contest performances, but also can allow performers from smaller nations to garner more widespread support. The authors were fortunate to see Serbia’s entrant, Bojana Stamenov, perform at the Eurovision Village, and subsequently offered their loud support during the Final.

<sup>41</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtB\\_sIM63JA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtB_sIM63JA)

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMgW54HBOS0>

<sup>43</sup> Marilena Zaroulia, “Sharing the Moment: Europe, Affect, and the Utopian Performatives” in *Performing the ‘New’ Europe: Identities, Feelings, and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Karen Fricker and Milija Gluhovic (London: Palgrave: 2013), 33.

<sup>44</sup> Auslander, *Liveness*, 35.

<sup>45</sup> Philip Auslander, “Afterword: So Close and Yet So Far Away – The Proxemics of Liveness” in *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance*, ed. Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof (London: Routledge, 2016), 296.

<sup>46</sup> Auslander, “Afterword”, 296.

<sup>47</sup> Reason and Lindelof, “Introduction”, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Auslander, “Afterword”, 297.

<sup>49</sup> Auslander, “Afterword”, 298.

<sup>50</sup> More prosaically, 2016 was also the first year that Australian viewers could participate in the live voting, an element of the Contest not otherwise touched on in this account. In order to vote, viewers had to be watching the Contest live.

<sup>51</sup> Barker, “Coming (a)live”, 23.