

Review

Karen Burland & Stephanie Pitts (eds.), *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. 203. £50.00 hbk. ISBN: 978-1-409-46981-0.

This excellent, thought-provoking collection is part of the SEMPRES series of Studies in the Psychology of Music, and investigates what it means to be a spectator at a live performance event. Even from the title, *Coughing and Clapping* places the physically embodied experience of audience members at the centre of the study. The editors, Karen Burland and Stephanie Pitts, emphasise the importance of individual experience: ‘live listening is made distinctive by its listeners, as each person’s connection with the event is shaped by expectations, prior experiences, mood and concentration’ (1). To this extent, the collection is a strong argument for the giving of agency/attention to actual audience members’ views and experiences. Many chapters in the book work from primary sources, either from interviews or other means of primary data collection: at no point is there any theorising about a hypothetical mass of homogenous spectators. The book also takes a broad definition of what is meant by audience, and what it means to be in an audience: by texting and tweeting (Lucy Bennett), blogging (Paul Long), and archiving and mapping memories (Sara Cohen), audience members might ‘find a voice in the concert hall’ (2) both during the event and afterwards – and there are many more modes of response available than applause.

The book is divided into chronological sections: *Before the Event* focuses on preparing and anticipating, while the lengthier *During the Event* considers the experience of being an audience member and the ways of communicating or responding beyond the moment of encounter. The editors offer ‘interludes’ throughout, introducing the chapters that consider *before*, *during*, and lasting memories of *after*, with a final interlude that situates audience members as active reviewers and researchers. Structuring the collection around these categories allows for the phenomenon of spectatorship to be considered in many different ways, and a real strength of the collection is its range of methodologies. Chapters are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and approaches, so there are technology-led chapters as well as more discursive chapters, and primary data-led studies alongside theoretical discussions. The varying methodologies mean that there are sometimes leaps in the book – graphs and diagrams of real-time measurements of emotional responses and

cognitive data sit alongside quotation from interviews or the results of small-sample audience questionnaires, or a Facebook forum post with fifty respondents. If it is sometimes jarring to have such different approaches sitting together, the overall effect is one of opening up possibilities.

Themes run through the book across these chapters. The relationship between live and mediated experiences is one such. Jennifer Radbourne, Katya Johanson and Hilary Glow's study of the phenomenon of 'being there' contains interviews with classical music listeners in order to consider how we might quantify audience experience. They suggest that there is further work to be done on the distinction between live and mediated experience. Are technological developments blurring the boundaries between the two, or do assessments of live experience work towards maintaining the distinction? Another focus throughout the book is the relationship between individual audience members and a wider community. Lucy Bennett on fans, Sidsel Karlsen on festivals, Sara Cohen on memory and personal experience, and Paul Long on recording, all consider the relationship between individual experience and the idea of a broader audience. A keen user of Twitter myself, I was interested to read Bennett's discussion of audience members who use their phones during live music concerts. In such spaces fans face a negotiation between maintaining their own psychological 'flow' – their immersion in the experience – and keeping their fellow fans who are not at the concert in the loop. This absent presence means there is a whole other audience to consider: *Coughing and Clapping* offers a wide definition of *audience* to include people who are not physically at the event. This opens up space for enquiry into the nature of audience experience: spectators who are not actually 'there', who potentially trouble the very concept of 'being there', allow for studies of audiences or communities and their relationship to liveness, particularly interesting in the context of new technologies in performance.

A fundamental assertion of the book is that audiences contribute to the live performance experience in various ways, placing this collection within a wider body of work about audiences that challenges assumptions of spectator passivity. Defining audience to include people absent from the event itself is also a means to consider what it means to remember live experiences. The relationship between the individual spectator and their wider community is also an important dynamic: 'the most meaningful experiences for audience members relate to a combination of social, personal and situational factors, but [...] the latter have a more powerful impact on an individual's engagement and response during a performance' (Burland and Pitts: 176). This is what separates a live performance experience from solo private listening. The book recognises that a challenge for further research is adopting an approach to live audience studies which considers these social, personal, and situational factors as intertwined.

A key strength of this book is its broad definition of the performance event, including anticipation before and the sharing of memories long afterwards. Its variety of methodologies and approaches to studying the live encounter is also a valuable contribution, and there are many methods of enquiry here which would transfer well to the

study of theatre audiences. There is a political strain here too, although it is not brought to the fore until the book's conclusion, which argues for the strength of live art performance to be remembered in the current climate of austerity and arts cuts. This is a trajectory of enquiry and activism it is vital to follow further, and in more than music – in the wider arena of the arts as a whole.

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