



## Playing to the crowd: Musicians, audiences, and the intimate work of connection

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free-to-air television and mobile phone and multimedia services, radio is also, since its very origins, one of the occupants of this invisible and very expensive spectrum.

The second is also one of the classic topics as it analyses communication policies in the digital era: music piracy. Specifically, the José Eduardo Ribeiro de Paiva describes the complex interaction between piracy, MP3 and music subscription systems, placing the focus on the new relationship between artists and the market. The chapter begins with a reminder for supporters of certain kind of “Adamism”: “the relationship between piracy and the music industry is old; the music industry and the artists have always fought intensely about it” (p. 289). The historical review of piracy highlights the relationship between music and physical support, content and form, which enables the author to state at the end that “it is a paradox, but technology pushes the artist back to the stage because it takes control over the circulation of his or her work”.

*Trends in Radio Research. Diversity, Innovation and Policies* begins with an explanatory chapter, which maps out the path for the following 21 texts and ends with an epilogue that leaves the reader with a good impression. Madalena Oliveira talks to us about acoustemology and sonic studies. It is a brief but intense review of the very nature of two matrices (image and sound) and the differences of interpretation of both. “In this sense, what separates the description of an image or a sequence of images and the description of a sound stream is in part the way in which we conceive space and the way in which we feel time” (p. 343). The author continues revealing the essential characteristics of the “visual culture” and the “deaf culture”, names that hint at the scientific status these two matrices deserve, as well as sonic epistemology and the debate on methodologies applied to the study of sound. Both the chapter and the book could not have a better ending, a nice reminder from the author warning that, although some editing software serve to overcome the problem of the immaterial nature of sound, “it would be misleading to ignore the fact that the fundamental method of examining sound meaning is based on listening – listening to sounds first and then listening to the way in which people talk about what they hear” (p. 352).

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**Baym, N. (2018). *Playing to the crowd: Musicians, audiences, and the intimate work of connection*. New York: NYU Press, 280 pages**

In *Playing to the Crowd: Musicians, Audiences, and the Intimate Work of Connection*, Nancy Baym explores the ways in which musicians are connecting with audiences in the era of digital media. Social media practices take center stage in Baym’s examination, as they have changed many of the norms of interaction between musicians and their audiences. Focusing on three dialectics of

communication/commodity control/participation and distance/closeness, Baym interrogates the pressures audiences place on musicians to connect authentically and intimately.

The book's biggest contribution lies in Baym's explanation of artists' negotiation of these dialectics as *relational labor* or the "ongoing, interactive, affective, material, and cognitive work of communicating with people over time to create structures that can support continued work" (19) which she connects to the cultural feminization of work that occurred in the 1970s (Adkins). However, Baym recognizes two other shifts from the mid-1900s as equally important to the current demand for relational labor: the commodification of intimacy and its repositioning as morally superior to distance and formality. The book is premised on the idea that these three cultural shifts, in combination with the affordances offered by social media, the devices on which they are accessed, and the emerging norms around their use have shifted audiences' preferences away from the "high-in-the-sky" rock stars to more authentic, everyday presentations afforded (and pressured) through social media. From this premise, the book goes on to explore artist-fan interactions in three parts: music, participation, and relationships. In each section, Baym offers two chapters that look at the larger topic from different perspectives, addressing the three dialectics the book centers around.

In part one, chapter one defines music and musicians as communicators who hope to provide meaning to audiences while chapter two traces the history of music as a commodity back to the 1600s and the introduction of sheet music. Here, the first of Baym's three major dialectics is "sussed" out: music as communication/commodity. I found the claim that digital media democratized music production while also fragmenting audiences, leading to the need for relationships between musicians and their fans particularly compelling and I appreciated Baym's thorough historical research.

Part two delves further into the audience by exploring the dialectic of control/participation. Chapter three looks at fan practices from the 1980s through today, drawing largely on Baym's own experiences as an indie rock fan. Here, the focus is on audiences' inclination to turn to one another when cut-off from social participation in music rituals, the analysis of which greatly benefited from the inclusion of Baym's personal experiences. Chapter four flips perspectives to explore the ways musicians react to fan participation. Baym finds both strategies of control and participation in the ways artists have handled online fan discourse and production, each presenting their own benefits and challenges. Thus, "The lived experience of the participation/control dialectic is ... one of ambivalence" (135).

Part three examines relationships, beginning with the environments in which these relationships are formed. Starting with the concert hall and moving forward chronologically to social media platforms, chapter five asserts that environments shape the social relations that occur within them. The discussion of social media as built environments which offer different norms of interaction than the concert hall or merchandise table make Baym's argument about the changing relational

dynamics between musicians and audiences persuasive. Chapter six finishes part three with a discussion of shifting relational boundaries, exploring the last dialectic of distance/closeness and the ways musicians are (or aren't) negotiating the lines between the two. The data here, and throughout the book, was quite strong; however, I felt that this chapter in particular could have benefited from a deeper discussion of the gendering of relational labor within the musician/audience relationship.

Baym ends the book with eight goals moving forward, focused on ways to help artists and audiences get what they want and need out of relational labor. While these goals are somewhat idealistic, two were intriguing:

1. "The environments in which relational labor is enacted must be safe and, ideally, should be validating." (199)
2. "The benefits of relational labor should accrue first and foremost to those relating, and only secondarily to the platforms through which they communicate or the organizations that bring them together." (199)

These goals are targeted specifically towards platform owners and designers, which Baym explicitly calls upon to be more open and conscious about the ways they design their environments. Because of her position with Microsoft Research, this call might have a greater impact than other scholars', though I am not optimistic that we will see platforms make drastic changes to meet these goals anytime soon.

*Playing to the Crowd* offers much towards a better understanding of how musicians are finding, making, and connecting with their audiences. Much of the theory in this book is applicable to most, if not all, of the creative industries as they operate today, broadening this book's appeal beyond music scholars and fans. As Baym herself acknowledges, this book does not cover all of music as it exists today, and I feel that parts could have benefited from a deeper discussion of gender. Regardless, the book covers an astounding amount of ground with nuance and finesse. For those interested in the ways artists or other creative industry personnel are interacting and connecting with audiences, this book is a must.

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**Hoar, P. (2018). *The World's Din: Listening to Records, Radio and Films in New Zealand, 1880-1940*. Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 288 pages.**

Some monographs that develop from doctoral dissertations can feel, well, *dissertation-y*. Peter Hoar's excellent *The World's Din* is indeed as meticulously researched as any really good Ph.D., but crucially it is also engagingly written and leads the reader on