Yngvar Kjus

*Live and Recorded: Musical Experience in the Digital Millennium*

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What is a good book? Indeed, what is a good academic book in a day and age when editors no longer edit and authors spend the best of their energies writing project proposals and funding applications? *Live and Recorded* by Yngvar Kjus is a good academic book, despite ignoring some wise rules of conduct for academic publications. To avoid frustration, skip directly to your main chapter of interest: to Chapter 3 for the practices of musical artists, to Chapter 4 for those of music fans, and to Chapter 5 for the strategies and practices of their intermediaries. The chapters read very well independently and are based on extensive and solid qualitative research. They consistently and thoroughly map the recent and ongoing changes in the relationship between live and recorded music in the age of portable devices and social media. As is often the case in studies that aspire to gain new insight through producing an overview, each observation in isolation may often seem self-evident. This does at times test the reader’s patience, but the book’s strength lies in the totality of the picture presented. The author has made an illuminating selection of artists’ approaches for Chapter 3 and wisely chosen to include practices of fans of various genres (jazz, metal, EDM) in chapter 4. Finally, by focusing on the interaction between streaming services and music festivals in Chapter 5, the author produces an extraordinarily vivid picture of complex ongoing changes across the full range of popular music practices. Clearly, *Live and Recorded* has something to offer all academic disciplines involved in the study of contemporary popular music.

Complementing some unfortunate compositional choices in the book’s remaining parts (preface and chapters 1, 2 and 6) the author waits until the final page before positioning *Live and Recorded* between studies examining musical objects and studies of the experience(s) of musical subjects (p. 164). The key to achieve this middle position is the psychological concept of “mentalization”, i.e. “interpreting human behaviour in terms of intentional mental states” (Fonagy in Kjus 2018: 31). This “mental leap of imagining the other’s mind” (ibid.) proves itself as a well-suited perspective for the study’s investigation of changing popular music practices. Without stretching the perspective too far, the author applies the concept of “mentalization” to the practices of artists, fans, and industry. It is rare –and a pleasure– to
see a single theoretic concept used to its full potential, well-integrated, and never appearing forced or out of place. The successful introduction of “mentalization” to the study of popular musical practices might well prove another major asset of this book. It is therefore somewhat unfortunate that the concept is introduced, defined, and discussed in bits and bobs here and there throughout the book’s introductory chapters. A thorough comparison of the concept of “mentalization” to other analytical concepts for the understanding of human communication from all relevant disciplines is missing. This is, quite possibly, caused by a larger structural problem related to the book’s disposition and composition.

The organisation of an academic text around the principles of the dialectic spiral can be most exciting and inspiring. A form that demands a lot from the reader, it pays its dues by engaging her or him over time with a wider complex of ideas. The reader is brought back to the same observations, but each time the metaphorical screw turns deeper into the matter at hand, simultaneously expanding the picture and adding momentum and direction to the discussion. This, however, demands a degree of progress lacking in the introductory parts of Live and Recorded. The result is a circular motion where the degree of repetition and splitting-up of discussion achieves little more than frustrating the reader. One telling example is how the account of the current state of research in the field is split between the introductory part and the conclusion (where the current book is finally related to the most recent research). By accommodating the reader better, the author could have prevented countless critical (and ultimately unnecessary) questions from being asked. If reader well-being, trust, and confidence were given more priority, this would have become not only a good academic book, but an excellent one, and an engaging read from cover to cover. All it would take is a little mentalisation.