‘A refreshing, eye-opening insight into gaining, growing and nurturing audiences for contemporary culture. As artists and arts organisations, too often we fall back on tempting people to attend who already know and love our artform. This study has thrown a light on a whole community that thrives on the new, the challenge, the experience of our boundary-breaking work. *Understanding Audience Engagement in the Contemporary Arts* demonstrates if we are bold, responsive and collaborative in our engagement with our cities, we will thrive alongside that community.

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Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, UK*

‘Stretching across disciplines, arts organisations and regions, the qualitative research insights in this book offer valuable new answers to some of the most urgent questions which preoccupy arts makers and their audiences today.’

– **Helen Freshwater**, *Reader in Theatre &
Performance, Newcastle University, UK*

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Enhanced by a new framework for the understanding of audience engagement, the book is relevant to scholars, policymakers and reflective practitioners across the spectrum of arts and cultural industries management.

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Understanding Audience Engagement in the Contemporary Arts

Stephanie E. Pitts
and Sarah M. Price

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Foreword

I'm very proud to have been a member of the *Understanding Audiences for the Contemporary Arts* team. In what follows, you'll read the background, methodology and findings for what we believe to be the largest qualitative study of contemporary arts audiences in the UK to date. Stretching across disciplines, a wide range of arts organisations, and four cities, this study draws out the insights provided by 187 individual interviews and the detail of over 1.5 million words. This scope enables the offering of valuable new answers to some of the most urgent questions which preoccupy arts makers and their audiences today.

As Co-Investigator on this project my role has primarily been advisory. Occasionally I've been up close to some of the key decisions, and in the room with representatives from the arts organisations involved. I've had the pleasure of listening to interview recordings and discussing the transcripts with Sarah and Stephanie. But mostly I've been working at a distance, offering what I hope was a useful sounding board as they negotiated the inevitable challenges that a project of this scope was bound to generate. In the book that follows, much of the time and effort involved in setting up, managing and carrying out a project on this scale will be hidden. The professional and emotional labour put into developing – and maintaining – good relationships with all the arts organisations involved will be only implicit, though it was central to the success of the project. The challenge of recruiting interviewees is in the description of the project's methodology, but not the amount of time Sarah spent on trains between Liverpool, Bristol, Birmingham, Sheffield and London, or the days when one or more of the interviewees lined up cancelled on her. The energy and skill required to get the most out of these interviews when they did take place will also be underplayed: the balance needed between setting someone at their ease and maintaining an appropriately professional distance; the skill of responsive listening which draws out revealing detail whilst also keeping the interview on track and on time.

Listening to the recordings of numerous interviews enabled by this labour brought many of these aspects of the project to the fore. On the page, you lose the texture of the context in which these exchanges took place: the clatter of coffee cups; scraping of chairs; banging doors. Similarly, it's impossible to

capture the specificities of each exchange here: accent, affect and tone drop away as the words lying before you invite you to concentrate upon what is said, rather than how. But listening to some of those recordings, it was easy to feel myself positioned as fascinated eavesdropper upon a meeting between strangers, noting the quality of each hesitation, laugh, and reflective pause as I attended to someone working through their artistic attachments and compulsions, their memories and sense of self. This listener also got a sense of the pleasures involved in these acts of attention and dialogue. Certainly, the interviewees' willingness to contribute their time, experience and insights to the project serves to highlight the satisfaction involved in being asked – and of being told, as a member of the audience, that our opinions matter. The conversations which followed after the microphone was switched off also lie beyond the reach of this book, but Sarah reported that interviewees had numerous questions for her at this point. These questions reflected interviewees' curiosity about the project as a whole, as they asked about the ultimate destination for their thoughts, and the details of their enthusiasms and frustrations with the contemporary arts. Of course, the analysis that follows scrupulously protects the anonymity of the participants, but it also engages with the complexities of their individual responses, and privileges their words.

The *Understanding Audiences for the Contemporary Arts* project has a life beyond and after this book: the project's sector handbook, aimed at arts practitioners and organisations, encapsulates many of its findings in a different form, and can be found on the Sheffield Performer and Audience Centre website. Stephanie and Sarah have shared the project's findings at conferences and symposia over its duration, including a large international conference in Sheffield in July 2019, organised as part of the project. The scholars and practitioners gathered at this event generated further questions for us all, as we contemplated the audience for audience research. How do academics effectively communicate their research insights to policy makers and the sector? How do we get our knowledge and understanding heard and acted upon? Readers of this book – members of the audience for audience research – will probably all have thoughts on the answers to these questions. But the research carried out and analysed here makes me more convinced than ever of the importance and significance of qualitative research. We need to be able to put flesh on the bones of the figures – to be able to describe lives and experiences, to cite individual testimonials and take-downs. We need to hear voices speaking – not only about impacts felt or unfelt; and meanings made or unmade – but also about experiences of inclusion or exclusion, about being an audience for some pieces of art work but not of others, about being made to feel welcome in some places and not in others. This book invites its readers to recognise the challenges of enabling this kind of listening, in order to truly grasp what is involved in understanding audiences.

Helen Freshwater, Newcastle University

"MY 5 YEAR OLD
COULD HAVE DONE THIS"

1 Introduction

Who goes to the contemporary arts?

‘Contemporary art’ is something of a contentious term. In the clichéd response to contemporary visual art, ‘My five-year-old could have done that’, there are connotations of simplicity, lack of perceivable skill and a fear of being taken for a fool. The Turner Prize, an annual award for British contemporary visual art, is a flashpoint for these negative stereotypes and attracts journalistic criticism (e.g. Reynolds, 2001) for works that are perceived to be weird, experimental, pretentious and without skill. A YouGov poll (2016) of 4,099 British adults found that only 28% considered *A Fun Ride to Nowhere*, an artwork in Josephine Pryde’s Turner Prize 2016 Runner-Up exhibition, to be a work of art (see also Smith, 2016). This survey additionally showed that broader, more inclusive definitions of art came from younger participants, those who were middle class, those in London and the South and those who voted to remain in the European Union. Attitudes to the arts are brokered along social divisions and reinforced by newspaper and social media choices to create both awareness and anger about the place of contemporary arts in modern society.

These stereotypes around the contemporary arts have proliferated popular culture as well. In internet culture, memes mocking contemporary arts have also emerged, such as the photo of a squirrel seemingly dancing, with the words ‘People will stop asking you questions if you answer back in interpretive dance’.¹ In a spoof of the old-fashioned Ladybird children’s books, Miriam Elia produced the sell-out *We Go to the Gallery* (2015), a satire of contemporary art galleries, in which a mother enjoys interpreting strange contemporary artworks, while the two children are just confused and unsettled. This story was mirrored in real life by two American teenagers who left glasses on the floor of an art gallery and then documented tourists taking photos of the ‘exhibition’, striking a chord amongst those who enjoyed seeing gallery visitors being fooled such as in this comment below a *Guardian* (Hunt, 2016) article about the story: ‘I wonder how many stood round, viewed them from different angles and then spouted a load of arty farty nonsense in a language only they understand.’ If there was any doubt as to whether these stereotypes persist, in the final stages of writing this book, the piece *Comedian* by Maurizio Cattelan consisting of a fresh banana taped to a wall caused public outrage when it sold for \$120,000 (Ilchi, 2019).

Mockery of contemporary theatre and dance is also found in popular culture, with American sitcoms such as *How I Met Your Mother* and *Community* including

episodes in which characters take part in weird and somewhat self-indulgent community drama and dance performances (Bays, Thomas, Kang, & Kellett, 2007; Harmon, Pomerantz, & Cackowski, 2010). In an episode of US sitcom *Modern Family*, the character Mitchell Pritchett is hoodwinked into attending an immersive theatre performance, which he describes as ‘the worst thing that can happen to a human during peace time’ (Levitan, Lloyd, Richman, & Walls, 2016, 0:04:50). Meanwhile, contemporary music is acknowledged as being something that even most audience members dislike, with Alex Ross (2010, 2007) lamenting the lack of cultural champions who might embrace new music in the same way that modern architecture and visual art are publicly defended.

These stereotypes around the contemporary arts in the UK are part of the context for this book, prompting us to ask how audience experience challenges and is challenged by these negative tropes. How does the public discourse impact on audience members’ willingness to engage with the contemporary and shape their experience of an artwork? How is it that some people find joy in new artworks? What are the routes that take them past stereotypes to meaningful engagement, and are these routes open to everyone? Who is and who is not engaging with the contemporary arts?

1.1 What is the ‘contemporary’ and who engages with it?

To explore this question of who forms the audience for the contemporary arts, we first had to grapple with what was meant by ‘contemporary’. This word was adopted for the project by default since it appears in the name of our first collaborating arts organisation, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (see Section 2.2.1), but has been problematised throughout. In the broadest sense, any art made today could be termed ‘contemporary’, but this did not seem like a meaningful definition, since it put highly commercial and popular artists in the same category as experimental and underground artists, so blurring the distinctions between the radically different funding structures, media prominence and venues that are part of the varied audience experience across recently made artworks. We therefore provisionally defined ‘contemporary’ as artworks which were both new and, in some way, innovative or challenging. This definition is, of course, highly subjective, and the personal way in which the contemporary is felt and experienced will be a running theme of this book. Indeed, while systems such as the Audience Agency’s art form coding call on arts organisations to ‘tag’ their events as contemporary, modern or other such categories within each art form, this does not necessarily map onto how the work is experienced by its audiences.²

Contemporary arts audiences are generally assumed to be small in number, well-educated and highly engaged arts consumers. However, the available audience attendance data gives a more complex picture. Audience Agency’s (Bradley, 2017) analysis of classical music subgenres suggests that contemporary classical music averages 111 attenders per concert, which is middle of the range between orchestral concerts (average 336) and community events (average

68). Their analysis points to these contemporary attenders being younger and more urban but does not suggest a particularly small audience for these events. Taking Part Survey (2016) data on dance audiences suggests that a slightly smaller proportion of the UK population attends contemporary dance (3.1% had attended in the past 12 months) than ballet (4.2%) and that contemporary dance attenders were also younger; however, Hanquinet, O'Brien, and Taylor's (2019) analysis found contemporary dance to be less socially stratified than ballet. Furthermore, the UK bastion of contemporary art, the Tate Modern, is the country's most visited attraction, with almost 6 million visits in 2018 (Visit England, 2019). The scarcity of audience attendance data that is broken down into contemporary and classical means it is difficult to conclude beyond observations and hunches that the contemporary arts attracts a smaller and more affluent audience, and these data often do not capture grassroots or DIY (from 'do it yourself') events, leaving many smaller events undocumented.

This project comes at a time of intense debate about the future of governmental arts funding in the UK and abroad. Recent policy developments have seen an increased focus on funding being used to broaden access to the arts, with the diversification of artists, arts workers and audiences being a key requirement for public funds. Furthermore, with recent initiatives such as 64 Million Artists,³ Fun Palaces,⁴ Creative People and Places⁵ and ongoing research into everyday participation⁶ and cultural democracy (Wilson, Gross, & Bull, 2017), the trend is very much towards work that is produced and programmed by local communities, in which diverse voices are heard and the right to creative practice is shared beyond professional artists. Attempts to open up access to the arts are to be lauded, though researchers have rightfully problematised the co-opting of arts to achieve social policy goals (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). However, against this changing funding climate, it is becoming harder to justify the use of funding for events which are believed to attract an affluent and niche audience and are assumed to overlook the needs of the wider population.

The contemporary arts therefore act as a microcosm in which to investigate the arts sector today, raising challenging questions about the value of certain artworks over others and questioning the future direction of arts production in the UK. The contemporary arts organisations that we have collaborated with in this project (see Section 2.2.1) have often reluctantly been the 'small fry' in their city's arts scene, with audience numbers, size of organisation or proportion of programming meaning that their role in the arts ecosystem is frequently overlooked, despite representing the cutting edge and, in theory, the future of each art form. Working collectively, across art forms and cities, has helped to identify the common challenges facing small arts organisations and so to articulate the contribution of contemporary arts to the provision of diverse and inclusive arts experiences.

This book aims to shine a spotlight on the contemporary arts in the UK today through the eyes of its audiences. We wrestle with the difficult questions around stereotypes of the contemporary, exclusion and access and the ways in which people feel shut out of the arts. However, we also reflect on the ways in which audiences find meaning in new work, considering how they find a

way to engage with it, what kinds of attitudes they take to their arts events and the value they find in work that others may see as unskilled or alienating. In considering the idea of the contemporary in multiple art forms, we explore the ways in which audiences navigate the cultural ecology of their local area, and whether or not there is such a thing as a ‘contemporary audience’.

1.2 Origins

This project began as the unexpected outcome of a research seminar given in Birmingham in 2013 by Stephanie Pitts. After hearing her account of previous studies with audiences for classical music, Tim Rushby, then the marketing manager at Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG), posed the challenge of understanding how audiences for contemporary music might be different. Specifically, Tim wanted to know whether there was crossover in audiences for contemporary arts: might visitors to the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, just down the road from where BCMG gives its concerts, also be potential audience members? Likewise, might the audiences for the BE Festival, an international contemporary theatre programme in the city, also be attending BCMG concerts, without either organisation being aware of the intersecting cultural lives of their regular attenders? From these questions about attendance patterns came deeper provocations: did audiences seek comparable experiences of new work in multiple art forms, and could there possibly be a ‘contemporary arts audience’, a group of people who sought out the new in art regardless of form or style?

Faced with these intriguing questions, the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre (SPARC) team conducted a pilot study in Birmingham (2014–15), supported by the University of Sheffield’s Innovation, Impact and Knowledge Exchange fund. Led by Stephanie Pitts, Tim Rushby and research associate Jonathan Gross, a group of organisations who present contemporary art in the city were brought together to discuss the most pertinent themes for their organisation. This fledgling meeting of what later became Birmingham Contemporary Arts Network (BCAN) discussed the ways in which their challenge of ‘selling’ contemporary arts to audiences was considerably different to that of organisations producing classical or mainstream events, since the general public was often taught by the media that contemporary arts were pretentious and ‘rubbish’. They had also found that audiences tended to dismiss contemporary arts after one bad experience in a way that does not happen with film, for example, where one disappointing night out is quickly superseded by other more satisfying cinema experiences. Organisations were looking to learn more about what draws people to the contemporary and what puts people off in order to grow and diversify their current audiences.

The pilot study therefore focused on the following questions:

- Who is coming to the contemporary arts – and what experiences are they having of this work?

- What value do the contemporary arts have for audiences?
- What strategies are contemporary arts organisations currently employing to develop relationships with audiences – and what strategies might they employ in the future?

Qualitative research methods were employed in the pilot study for a number of reasons (outlined in full in Chapter 2). From the outset, we were seeking to understand engagement in contemporary arts from the audience's point of view, embracing the ideas of challenge and difficulty identified in the public discourse and the experience of our partner organisations but then investigating how these were overcome or even enjoyed by highly engaged attendees. Our partner organisations, selected to reflect a range of organisation size, venue use and programming, helped us to recruit 57 audience members who were interviewed about their current arts engagement and the life histories that had shaped their cultural activities and perspectives.

The pilot study data generated new insights on the facilitative conditions and attitudes that encourage audiences to take risks on untried and untested works: these were reported in interim publications from the study (Gross & Pitts, 2015, 2016) and fed back to our partner organisations in Birmingham. Inevitably, the process of analysing those rich, qualitative accounts served to further complicate Tim Rushby's initially straightforward questions, so increasing our appetite for a national phase of research that would set our pilot study findings in a broader context through some more ambitious questions:

- Are the strong civic pride and identity expressed in Birmingham (and in Sheffield in previous studies) similar in other cities?
- Are routes into contemporary arts similar across art forms? What are the expectations and experiences that audiences bring to their contemporary arts engagement?
- How can arts organisations work together to implement and respond to our findings? How do the in-depth audience views we have gathered chime with or challenge institutional perspectives?
- What do we learn about arts education, arts marketing, arts consumption and arts engagement from rich, qualitative data?

Following a successful funding application to the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), a 30-month national project titled 'Understanding Audiences for the Contemporary Arts' was launched in May 2017, taking these insights and unanswered questions to three new UK cities: Bristol, Liverpool and London.

The decision was taken to base the project in large metropolitan areas because the pilot study had highlighted how much the decision to attend is influenced by the amount and diversity of arts events on offer, and we were interested to explore this in additional cities to strengthen those conclusions. Exploring the experience of rural arts attendees would undoubtedly be different, and while these differences surfaced in some interviews with participants who had

previously lived outside the cities where we did our research, this remains a topic for future investigation (see Kawashima, 2000).

These particular three cities were chosen to offer contrast with our Birmingham findings and with previous research in Sheffield (Pitts, 2005, 2016; Pitts & Spencer, 2008): we looked for locations that were geographically distinctive from those two inland, post-industrial cities and that offered diversity in the demographics and transience of the population. These factors were relevant to our participants' experiences and our analysis: both Birmingham and Bristol have high levels of incoming population from London (Bristol City Council, 2019, p. 15; Jones, 2019), for example, and our participants in Bristol showed strong connections with the capital city in their arts attendance and expectations (see Section 4.3). The size of the Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population was markedly different across the cities, with over 40% BAME population in Birmingham and London, 16% in Bristol and only 14% in Liverpool (Birmingham City Council, 2013, p. 15; Bristol City Council, 2019, p. 25; Liverpool City Council, 2013; Gov.uk, 2018), meaning that discussions of diversity and inclusion were often shaped by experiences of standing out in a majority white audience (see Section 9.1.2). All four cities had large student populations, but Bristol was notable for its underrepresentation of over-65s (12.9% compared to 18.5% in England and Wales; Bristol City Council, 2019, p. 5), which could be one driver for the youth-oriented festival culture noted by many residents (see Section 4.1.2).

We were also guided by the suitability of available partners, seeking a strong contemporary arts provider in each city to be our lead partner organisation and to provide us with a spread of art forms across the project: Spike Island in Bristol, Bluecoat in Liverpool and Bush Theatre in London. The decision to include London was a consciously problematic one: London is undoubtedly different to all other UK cities in its size, the density and diversity of its population and the extent of its arts provision. We knew that we would not be able to gain the citywide perspective that we sought in the three other sites of research but felt that understanding those differences was important to the project and that not to include London would be too obvious an omission. As the research unfolded, investigating how London was different gave a valuable framework for contrasting the provision in other cities and for highlighting the place-specificity of audience experience (see Section 4.2).

From simple beginnings, therefore, our project *Understanding Audiences for the Contemporary Arts* (UACA) became a multi-location, multi-art form investigation – to our knowledge, the largest qualitative study of contemporary arts audiences in the UK. This book is heavily rooted in the data from the study, since gathering audience perspectives in that depth and on that scale has been a rare opportunity, worthy of thorough analysis and detailed presentation in order to be of the greatest use to the kinds of organisations and audiences that we encountered. In the same way that Tim Rushby's initially simple question led us to increasingly provocative debates, we have found that understanding audiences for the contemporary arts is a route into tackling some of the most pressing and challenging questions in culture and society today: who gets to make art, who is it for, and what is its purpose?

1.3 Overview

Following a detailed account of our methods in Chapter 2, this book is structured thematically into eight chapters. In Chapter 3, we begin our analysis and discussion as we began the project, by exploring definitions, boundaries and crossovers in the contemporary arts. We demonstrate the ways in which the term ‘contemporary’ is understood by different participants and explore how it is used and what it signifies in relation to the arts and their consumption. Drawing on the responses of nonattenders, which are often neglected in the research literature, we expose some of the stereotypes of different art forms and the ways that they play into risk aversion in potential audiences: the fear of being expected to join in at contemporary theatre, for example, or the sense that modern art and music are pretentious, can lead people to avoid an unfamiliar art form or dismiss it after one experience. We analyse the various contemporary arts stereotypes that are still present amongst even the most engaged attenders to draw out common themes that provoke hostile reactions in audiences and in public discourse.

Having briefly introduced our research locations earlier, Chapter 4 considers the way in which cities shape and dictate audience members’ engagement. The rare opportunity to compare audience decision-making and attendance habits in four UK cities enables our research to explore the sense of civic engagement which had emerged in our pilot study as a strong factor in supporting local arts venues (Gross & Pitts, 2016). Each of the regional cities had a sense of its own uniqueness: for Liverpool, this was founded on the legacy of the City of Culture 2008; for Bristol, a sense of ‘the Bristol experience’ of young professionals; and for Birmingham, a desire to support arts organisations’ resilience in the face of declining funding. The question ‘How is your city as a place for the arts?’ was met with detailed and sometimes defensive responses everywhere except London, where the sense of being theoretically able to do anything (but practically limited in making those choices) was stronger. Through our analysis of how people navigate the arts differently in London, we pose a challenge to audience research that assumes all attendance to be place neutral and argue for a stronger consideration of civic engagement and local pride in audience development. Additional light is shed on the importance of locality through a consideration of tourism and mobility in each city, exploring the ‘hometown’, ‘newcomer’ and ‘visitor’ mindsets and the ways in which organisations address each of those. In order that the research approaches we have taken could be applied in other cities to further understand the place-specificity of audience experience, our two interview schedules and national survey are provided as appendices.

Chapter 5 dwells on one of the unique aspects of this project – that is, the rich, qualitative descriptions of how audiences interact with multiple art forms. We explore the distinctiveness of audience decision-making and experiences in music, dance, drama and visual arts and consider the presentational rituals that make some art forms less accessible than others, comparing the ease of dropping into a gallery with the assumption that prior knowledge is needed to enjoy a contemporary music concert. We then move on to discuss the ways in which

venue shapes experience, opening up or closing off events to different types of audiences. Several of our venue-based partners offer an accessible space to the public – a garden, cafe or bar that has its own loyal clientele who are made welcome in the venue without necessarily connecting with the art that is made or presented there (e.g. Bluecoat, Liverpool; The Albany, London). We have come to think of these as liminal social spaces, which draw people into some venues and risk keeping them away from others. We use these findings to propose a new framework for understanding how venues can enhance or detract from an arts event and the privilege at play in moments where they go unnoticed.

While research with classical music audiences regularly reports concerns about how concert attendance habits are no longer being formed in schools and homes (Kolb, 2001; Johnson, 2002), in Chapter 6 we show that routes into contemporary arts appear to be more flexible and serendipitous. We will examine the open-mindedness that brings people to contemporary arts through interest in the subject matter, support for a venue or shared interests with friends but also the limits of that open-mindedness, which causes even the most ardently experimental audience member to ‘try anything, but not that’. The multi-arts nature of our project means that we can explore patterns across art forms: what does ‘being a contemporary theatre person’, for example, mean to those who embrace that identity – and to those who do not? We look at how audience members characterise their own behaviour as being sociable or self-sufficient, frequent or occasional, fully engaged or on the periphery, eclectic or specialist and consider what those behaviours and beliefs mean for the promotion of contemporary arts events.

Having examined routes into contemporary arts attendance, the focus in Chapter 7 is on the experiences of attenders, and the ways in which they approach unfamiliar and sometimes challenging works and events. Whereas the idea of a ‘guaranteed good night out’ has been strong in other audience research (e.g. Pitts, 2016), contemporary arts audiences were able to find pleasure in the process of grappling with works they had not enjoyed or understood. They articulated a broader cultural responsibility to support the creation of new art and the survival of under-funded, niche organisations, sometimes demonstrating this support through offering volunteer help and financial support. Even the most die-hard enthusiasts had their limits, however, and were alert to perceived cynicism or inauthenticity on the part of audiences or promoters. There were also facilitative conditions that increased the likelihood of repeat, open-minded attendance, including promotion of free events; recommendations from trusted sources; and access to backstage, ‘work in progress’ insights.

A strong feature of our audience interviews was the struggle that respondents had to describe both the arts that they love and those that would habitually avoid. Their answers were heavily laden with moral and aesthetic judgements about things that they ‘should’ do as well as reflections on the difficulty of explaining their pleasure in contemporary arts to friends who do not attend. Chapter 8 draws upon our interviews and the responses to our national survey, and here we explore the language that is meaningful to a wide range of arts audience and the ways that marketing images and text speak to them (or not). Our conversations with arts marketers have also explored the challenges

of describing an as yet unknown (or unmade) work in ways that will attract an audience and of supporting events and exhibitions with commentary that enhances rather than disrupts the experience. We found that conversations about contemporary arts can be part of the sense-making for audiences, and in many ways liberating, since everyone can be assumed to be equally unfamiliar with the work and therefore able to make a personal response. This discovery offers a new way in to supporting the arts talk (Conner, 2013), audience exchange (Pitts & Gross, 2017) and post-show discussions (Dobson & Sloboda, 2014) that have become a growing feature of arts presentation, by creating conditions in which prior knowledge is articulated but not assumed and emotional responses are valued as a form of understanding.

At various stages in this project, we have encountered the challenges and criticisms that routinely face arts organisations: what is the place of the contemporary arts in society, does it make sense to support art forms that routinely reach only a small and privileged section of the population and to what (arguably limited) extent do the production of and audiences for contemporary arts reflect the diversity of today's society? We took care to gather the views of engaged arts attenders who would not choose the contemporary as part of their cultural diet and to examine the strength of feeling expressed in antagonism to the funding of contemporary arts in the popular press. We consider where the contemporary arts sits within a climate of declining funding for large venues and for arts education and what lessons there are to be learned from the open-mindedness of enthusiasts for the contemporary arts, who seek to be challenged rather than comforted by their encounters with live performance.

In Chapter 9, we grapple with the difficult questions of inequality and quality in the contemporary arts, highlighting the privilege at work in being able to both present and engage with experimental work. Equipped with in-depth analysis of how audiences approach (or avoid) the contemporary arts, we conclude the book with a discussion in Chapter 10 of what this insight means for artists, organisations and audiences of the future. We reflect on audience members' resistance to being 'developed', with many being perfectly content with the frequency and nature of their arts engagement. We also propose that the ways in which contemporary arts audiences find their satisfaction and pleasure have valuable messages for all kinds of arts engagement: understanding that a response to live art can be uncertain, changing and personal is an attitude often lost in the presentation of established repertoire and becomes a source of frustration or alienation for new attenders. Finally, we reflect on the networks of arts organisations that have built up in our four fieldwork cities and on the benefits and challenges of collaborative working in a sector which has more to gain from sharing audiences than competing for them.

Notes

1 <https://me.me/i/people-will-stop-asking-you-questions-if-you-answer-back-2498153>

2 'All you need to know to complete your Artform Coding', www.theaudienceagency.org/resources/artform-coding

- 3 <https://64millionartists.com/>
- 4 <http://funpalaces.co.uk/>
- 5 www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/
- 6 www.everydayparticipation.org/

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How would I describe the kinds
of arts events I go to?

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- 1 General Certificate of Secondary Education: school examinations taken by students aged 16 in the UK in which dance is an optional subject choice taken by around 8,000 people each year.
- 1 www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum/metroculturals
- 1 www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey
- 2 Stan's Cafe's *It's Your Film*.
- 3 A late-night radio programme on BBC Radio 3, which prides itself on playing eclectic music, with the current tagline: 'Experimental music for adventurous listeners'.
- 4 www.culturefeast.org/
- 5 Anonymous evaluation surveys (coded CFES) were conducted after each Culture Feast and four 'feasters' (coded CF1–4) were interviewed about their experiences. In addition, Sarah attended almost all the Culture Feast events for the first two iterations and spoke to the ticket-holders at length about their experiences.
- 1 The Audience Agency's Audience spectrum pen portraits: Explore the profile. Retrieved from: www.theaudienceagency.org/off-the-shelf/audience-spectrum/profiles
- 2 Percentages have been rounded up, and exclude the six interviews in which the question was not asked due to time spent on other topics, and so no assumptions were made about whether the arts were the main interest for those participants.
- 1 www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum/experience-seekers
 - 1 14.8% 'agreed' and 2.7% 'strongly agreed' ($n = 2,468$).
 - 2 21.9% 'agreed' and 2.5% 'strongly agreed'.
- 3 This participant is alluding to the British stereotype of unfriendly rural pubs, in which regulars, occupying the same chair every evening, are unwelcoming towards outsiders who are instantly recognised as not being from their community.
- 4 www.everydayparticipation.org/
- 5 <https://64millionartists.com/>
- 6 <http://funpalaces.co.uk/>
- 7 www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/
- 8 www.bespectactive.eu/
- 9 Open Space Technology is a method of structuring free discussion around a central topic, in which participants choose the themes that are most important to them, and a series of parallel debates occur within the same space, with participants encouraged to move between conversations when they feel they are not contributing to, or learning from, their current situation (Owen, 2008).
- 10 See report on the SPARC website: Open Space: 'We're all participants now – so what's the future for presentational arts?', www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/open-space-2018/
- 11 www.artybollocks.com/
- 1 www.artscouncil.org.uk/case-studies/new-rules
- 2 www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/uaca/handbook/
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