

A methodology for cultural music business research

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Abstract

In the light of the constant, media driven transformations of the music business and culture, the contexts and practices, where and through which music is produced, circulated and used, change constantly. To detect and analyse these new forms and processes related to the music business and to research their meaning for the people involved with them, this article proposes a methodology for cultural music business research. It suggests practice theory as a fruitful starting point to research a transformed music culture as modern practices run across increasingly blurred lines between music producers, businesses, media, brands and prosumers or fans. It then provides insights into the methodology of multi-sited ethnography that fits this kind of cultural music business research and finally proposes a set of methods and tools for interpretation of the data produced through this methodology.

Keywords: music business, music culture, practice theory, cultural studies, methodology, media studies

1 Introduction

Along with the transformation of the music industries since 2000 research on music businesses has also evolved to understand the changes in music production and consumption. Since the 'Digital Music Revolution' (Tschmuck 2012), economists have been developing new models to include the peer to peer networks used to share music (Hummer & Lechner 2001, Tschmuck 2002). Media scholars have offered new views on how prosumers reconfigured the forms of value in a networked music culture (Potts et al. 2008, Winter 2012, Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013) and turned to the practices of music sharing to understand business strategy (Haupt & Grünewald 2014). Cultural sociologists have re-

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searched how non-traditional music businesses joined the music industry to build their brands (Holt 2015). Others have investigated self-management and entrepreneurship approaches outside the established institutions like record labels or orchestras (Engelmann, Grünewald & Heinrich 2012, O'Hara 2014). Essentially the production, circulation and uses of value and meaning in the context of music have become complex, distributed processes. This means we can no longer just concentrate on researching the institutions and markets that were once the centre of the music business and culture. While this concept of blurring boundaries is not new, we still need better methodologies to enable us to switch between foci on (new) actors, markets or networks and the analysis of new music business practices across established fields of research. Furthermore, in a transformed music business, to understand what music business now *means*, both for observers as well as practitioners, we need to re-examine the culture of music business practices.

In the light of these constant transformations, I argue here for a definition of music business practice that is not static and narrow but open to any practice linked to a form of business activity involving music. Such practices might not involve the exchange of money, even indirectly but could involve other forms of exchange, creation of value, self-management and rationalisation etc.

The aims of this paper are:

- To propose practice theory and cultural studies as a fruitful starting point for researching a transformed music culture as practices run across the increasingly blurred lines between music producers, businesses, media, brands and prosumers.
- To provide insights into the methodology of multi-sited-ethnography that fits this kind of cultural music business research.
- Propose a set of methods and tools for interpretation of the data produced through this methodology.

Echoing Diaz-Bone (2006) in what he calls 'methodological holism' I see these elements as an interrelated, coherent methodological trinity,

which is why in this paper I will talk about theory as well as method. Methodological holism implies that, as our theories determine through their terms and concepts the ways in which we grasp 'reality', empirical science *realises* theories much more as it tries to refute or falsify them. As what counts as empirical is then a product of theory, theory also determines the methods and ways of interpretation employed in scientific analyses. Therefore, not every theory can be combined with any method. Rather than developing or describing 'just' methods of a specific discipline or field, developing a methodology means to construct a coherent combination of theory and method that reflects on the ways in which it constructs a specific view of the world (Diaz-Bone 2006: 4, see also Gobo 2008: 15-18).

This paper does not discuss music businesses in economic terms but rather turns to cultural studies to offer a unique approach for researching business *culturally*. Keith Negus was arguably a pioneer of this kind of research and it is worth citing his approach to the cultural analysis of the music industry at length, as he identifies some of the key features of cultural music business research. His work

"is a deliberate attempt to try and steer a course away from the dichotomy between modernist despair at the power and influence of corporate commodity production and postmodernist celebration of the possibilities provided by cultural consumption and appropriation. It is also an attempt to suggest that the politics of culture need not simply be waged on one side or the other, but during a significant series of connections and relational practices which connect production and consumption and the articulations through which the corporate organization and music industry occupations are linked to broader cultural formations" (Negus 1999: 87).

Negus thus concentrates not on the economics of music production but on the questions of how music related *practices* relate to each other and with 'broader cultural formations'. In the following sections I outline the theoretical foundations for doing exactly that, starting with the question of what practices are and why they should offer a non-

essentialist way of researching music business processes (section 2 and 3). After that a short introduction to the research approach for cultural studies follows (4-6). After the section on theory, the methodology of multi-sited-ethnography is then set out (7-8) accompanied by a commentary on suitable methods. Finally, the ideas proposed here will be located within a concrete research context. The article concludes with a critique of the somewhat neglected dimension of media in music business research.

2 Social practices

The profound transformation of the music business over the past decade or more begs the question as to what constitutes a music business and what this might mean. Culturally informed theories of practice in combination with qualitative methods offer a methodological perspective that determines the boundaries of music business processes from the bottom up. Negus and other scholars researching the music businesses or related fields with respect to culture therefore focus less on the actors or the structures of markets and industries and more on the meaningful practices through which actors create, maintain and change these structures (Du Gay 1997, see also Du Gay & Pryke 2002).

Ever since the cultural studies discourse on the cultural economy several social theories have been developed that deal explicitly with the issue of *practices* (Reckwitz 2002). Practices are events that are observable as "*bodily doings and sayings*" (Schatzki 1996: 22). They are not singular actions but collective patterns of routinized action. Practices interlock and constitute social practice or 'reality'.² Practice is therefore a performative reality in which agency and meaning is continuously created through the re-enactment of practices (Hörning & Reuter 2004, Hillebrandt 2014).

Practice theory thus does not assume a transcendental subject that carries out actions. (Reckwitz 2002: 282, Giddens 2000: 44-45). Subjects

² For example, practices like DJing, dancing or taking a selfie constitute parts of the practice of club culture.

are also not placed by discourse or by some other type of structure e.g. markets or corporate culture as in some types of post-structuralism. They are individually participating in routine practices with their own habitual or embodied dispositions. These dispositions are both a result of the practices that they participated in as well as a source of openness or irritation of practices (Hillebrandt 2014: 72, Schatzki 1996: 68). In comparison to theories of action, intentions or rationality are an effect of practices that routinely apply intentions to recurring actions. But practices are also not a structure that determine action. Giddens' notion of the duality of structure and action is important here, as practices are the 'hinge' between the two (Pentzold 2015: 231). Structural elements, e.g. what can be done or thought, with what resources or competences, are instead contained in the practices themselves and in their interrelations (Shove et al. 2012: 134-136).

Shove et al. (2012) identify three elements or dimensions of practices that one must analyse to understand the constitution and dynamics of practice:

1. **Material:** Building on assumptions from science and technology studies or actor-network theory, practices are always material practices. No one practice is comprehensible without the materiality of bodies, technologies, architectures, tools etc. Contemporary practices related to music might include that of cross-promoting YouTube videos through mimicking or covering existing music videos. Independent artists as well as those contracted to commercial music businesses participate in this practice, leading to an increase in followers and clicks, as YouTube's algorithms channel the viewers from one to another related video.³ This practice is dependent on cameras, instruments, network infrastructures, algorithms and so on, which are material elements that influence how music video is being produced today.

³ This is exemplified by videos for tracks like the 'Harlem Shake' or countless interpretations of 'Somebody I used to know' by Gotye.

2. Competence: Practices are intelligible through shared orders of knowledge or culture. Knowledge here is practical knowledge, located in routinized, embodied and often implicit behaviour; a 'know-how' in a sense of competence (Shove et al. 2012). Practices are not determined through these orders of knowledge. Rather practices express the collective orders of knowledge that structure and are being structured by the meaning of an individual action (Reckwitz 2000: 265, Reckwitz 2002). Cross-promotion practices for example encompass specific capabilities like that of performing music well or knowing how to create a humorous parody. These kinds of knowledge can of course be codified and represented in multiple ways. However, what matters is how it is adopted in actual practice in real contexts.
3. Meaning: Practices at the same time structure and are structured by the meaning of a singular action (Reckwitz 2000: 265, Reckwitz 2002). This is the *cultural* dimension of practice that was central to cultural theories.⁴ Coming back to the example of online video, people, through producing and commenting YouTube videos, negotiate what it means to be an 'authentic' YouTuber and not one making videos solely for commercial reasons (Grünewald & Haupt 2014).

As the example of cross-promotion shows, practice theory offers a starting point for the analysis of music businesses that do not start with economic structures like existing music markets or actors like record labels but rather with music business practices. For example, we can ask what other practices cross-promotion is connected to, such as the practices of signing and licensing musicians that do particularly well in cross-

⁴ The focus on the symbolic has sometimes been criticised for overlooking the material dimension of cultural practice that has been picked up in other theoretical developments like ANT (Wieser 2012: 241-243). Therefore, it is important to note that the focus is not on the symbolic dimension alone but in the ways that the cultural side of practice interrelates and structures other dimensions of practice, most importantly the material configurations of the elements of practice like (media) technologies (Bräuchler & Postill 2010) or physical effects and states like passion (Grossberg 1992: 21, 398).

promotion or formatting a YouTube video for better ad integration (Grünewald & Haupt 2014). These practices are not necessarily located in the traditional institutions of the music industry and YouTubers are not the traditional actors that music business research would look at.

3 Articulation & formation

Practice theories have been criticised for their small-scale particularism (cf. Schatzki 2016a). This becomes evident, when we look at how music cultures have been conceptualized in cultural studies:

"Rap, Hip-Hop or Rave can be understood as formations of popular music produced within the institutions of record company and advertising agencies. The mode of production of popular music would include the technical means of studio recording and the social relations within which such practices are embedded. Clearly, Hip-Hop or Rave are musical forms that involve the specific organization of sounds, words and images with which particular social groups form identifications." (Barker 2011: 46).

If practices are 'small', routinized and situated bundles of action, exactly how does one manage "keeping track of large phenomena" like an industry or a culture (Schatzki 2016a)? Different practice theories/theorists provide different answers. However, what they all have in common is that they are 'flat ontologies' where there is no micro or macro but only somehow *connected* practices (Schatzki 2016b). The terms employed to describe connected practices to bigger, intelligible forms differ from nexuses and plenums (Schatzki), networks (Latour) or complexes (Reckwitz). In this article, I use the cultural studies' term *articulation* that Hillebrandt (2014) refers to when developing his terms of *praxis forms* and *praxis formations*. For him, a *form* of praxis is a "*nexus of doings and sayings*" (Schatzki 1996: 89) thus an articulation of singular actions. His example is the praxis form that we understand as 'exchange', meaning a combination of giving, taking and returning. Exchange can then be articulated to other forms of practice like contracting or the like. Larger phenomena are described as *praxis formations*

that are "*assemblages of various discursive, symbolic, material and habitual elements that in their specific association unfold a meta-situational effects*" (Hillebrandt 2014: 103, transl. LG). A formation resembles what is commonly understood as a structure in that it affects certain practices, like in Giddens theory of structuration however, formations consist out of articulated practices and are continuously reforming as practices change.

In cultural studies formations are formed from practices through *articulation*, a term conceived by Stuart Hall (1980), but most compellingly defined by Grossberg:

"Articulation is the production of identity on top of differences, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. And these links are themselves articulated into larger structures, etc." (Grossberg 1992: 54).

The term hints at the critical research style of cultural studies. Thinking in articulation manifests on the layer of epistemology, in the critique of processes of power and in interventionism. From an epistemological perspective, the social world is comprehended and analysed as contingent articulations of elements of the social as in praxis formations. This helps cultural studies to research processes of power in their structuration (which will be discussed a little bit further below). Finally, some cultural studies scholars engage in a critical interventionism and are not only interested in analysing articulations but also in revealing alternative ones (Slack 1986).

In the context of music business research, articulation can be used to link the heterogeneous practices of producing, circulating and consuming music and to understand, how they lead to 'bigger' formations, e.g. the culture of the Sony Walkman (Du Gay et al. 2013) a genre (Negus 1999), a digitized music industry (Tschmuck 2012) or an on-demand music culture (Winter 2012). Articulation, like other relational and contextual social theories, also provides the means to show not only that but also how something is connected. The practices of designing the

Sony Walkman for instance were articulated with various ways of using it, through their articulation within various practices of market research or advertising (Du Gay et al. 2013/1997).

Conceiving the world as articulated practices allows us to find and connect new music business practices outside the usual places and concepts that dominate traditional music business research. Practice-based research starts with analysing the *actual* practices of doing something with music and then looking for the other elements of practice that are articulated along with it. The methodological part of this paper therefore discusses how practice oriented research starts with analysing the actual practices of 'doing' music by researching their constitutional elements and how they are articulated to music formations.

4 Cultures of production/production of culture

It is important to note here, that 'culture' is not a term used frequently in the founding work of early practice theorists.⁵ On the contrary: Some practice theories are a critique of cultural studies 'culturalism', trying to extend it through a consideration of the materiality of practice as is shown in the recognition of the three dimensions of practice above. However in my opinion there are two reasons that legitimize a continuous use of the term 'culture'. The first lies in cultural studies understanding of culture as the symbolic dimension of practice (meaning) *as well* as texts, music, products or artefacts. The second reason in the critical re-

However, the development of cultural studies as an interdisciplinary project ran in parallel to and crossed over with other cultural theorists and theories, subsequently reconstructed as theories of social practices. In Germany, this was done most prominently through Reckwitz (2000), who speaks in this regard of 'cultural theories' (Kulturtheorien), stressing the symbolic dimension of all practice and the cultural turn in social theory. Even though Reckwitz does not systematically incorporate cultural studies in this undertaking, under the influence of those like Raymond Williams and the post-structuralist reception of Stuart Hall and other scholars, conducting cultural studies has always been oriented towards cultural or signifying practices (Pentzold 2015, see also Grossberg 1992 who explicitly centres practices as his analytical focus). This meant researching culture as something connected to all human activity as opposed to a superstructure or structure (cf. Williams 2002, Hall 1980). Recently, Hillebrandt (2011, 2014) explicitly used cultural studies to develop his version of practice theory.

search style employed on cultural studies which I will outline a little bit later.

Cultural music business research is interested in these dimensions and their interplay with the processes of cultural production and products. One authoritative example of cultural music business research is the work of Keith Negus (1997, 1999) and his attempt to study the production of culture (Peterson 1979, Peterson & Anand 2004) by focusing on the cultures of production. As with scholars who adopt the production of culture approach, cultural music business research focuses "*on the processes by which elements of culture are fabricated in those milieus where symbol-system production is ... the center of activity*" (Peterson 1979: 672).

This approach thus deals more with the processes of symbol production than with the symbols itself. Cultural studies however have a circular and contextual understanding of culture in which texts are produced with certain meanings (encoded) in one context, and consumed (decoded) in another. Therefore, the meanings need not to be the same as in the moment of production. This model leads to an on-going process of encoding and decoding texts where it is never a finished product (Hall 1980, Johnson 1986: 46).⁶ Texts, like a song, therefore never exist on their own but only within the practice of doing something with it.⁷

If we return to Negus' way of researching music businesses, this is a balanced and culturally informed approach to articulate the ways of producing, consuming or using music. Although the cultural studies field is interested in the analysis of cultural artefacts, they understand these

⁶ This model of communication has been rightly criticised for its epistemological roots in Kantian philosophy, presupposing a positive identity of readers and texts before a process of communication begins (Grossberg 1992: 43-44). As the circuit of culture has its roots in Halls (1980) model of encoding/decoding (a critique of linear theories of mass communication), the circuit with its context in production and consumption is suitable for a music culture that is, though only partially, organised through a music industry. Approaches to analysis of music production and consumption beyond the music industry other than in practice theories could include Howard Becker's (2008) concept of Art Worlds (cf. Finnegan 1997).

⁷ Let us turn to the issue of what in the production of culture paradigm is termed cultural products. These, due to the history of cultural studies in literary studies are called 'texts', a term that could mean a YouTube video, a specific dress or a dance (Barker 2011: 10-11, Hesmondhalgh 2013: 4).

as articulated to culture in the broad sense of the symbols, meanings or identities attached to the practices of production or consumption, speaking of the ordinary, 'whole ways of life' (Williams 2002). While the cultural studies approach to music business research does not ignore the economic structures of ownership, it is more interested in questions of how our more common cultural meanings, as in Negus' 'broader cultural formations' influence what and how texts are produced.

Negus (1999) suggested that creative processes in the music industry were neither purely structured by economic interest nor the corporate culture of the record labels. Whilst both are important, Negus showed, that the processes of music production are embedded in a broader cultural environment; what he describes as *genre culture*, where music genres are the outcome of "*a complex interplay of musicians, listeners, and mediating ideologies, and [where] this process is much more confused than the marketing process that follows*" (Frith 1996: 88). Genres are not created by record labels. Only the articulation of the production practices of a label with genre-specific practices in different places produces a genre (e.g. listening, dancing, dressing).

Analysing music businesses through the lens of cultural studies involves using a perspective to determine not only the practices with which music is produced or consumed but also through linking them to other practices through which people make sense of and produce the meanings of their (work) activities and lives.

The analysis of musical texts for example can be articulated with broader formations. During the era of slavery in the USA, blues lyrics often spoke about the collective desire for freedom. Yet in post-slavery blues, both men and women were represented as sexually independent individuals, within the wider context where women could also become recording artists and performers and where black people could buy and listen to records (Davis 1999: 4-5). Thus, the original moments of the cultural formation of blues music and their articulation changed. This example also shows that representations are not just texts to be read or enjoyed but are always linked to certain forms of identity and subjectivity. Again: The broader context, in this case slavery, without which an

analysis of the blues genre would be incomplete, must be articulated with this analysis too.⁸

As culture is reflected in the symbolic dimension of music business practice and in the texts or products that are produced in these practices, it seems appropriate to call this kind of practice-oriented music business research, cultural. More succinctly this means cultural music business research researches the material culture of cultural practices linked to music business.

5 Processes of power

The second characteristic of cultural music business research lies in the critical research style of cultural studies. Cultural music business research therefore not only encompasses the practices itself but also the people involved with them. It aims to know, "*how practices transform groups, individuals and the conditions of their articulation*" (Hobart 2010: 73). This interest in people and power is adopted in cultural studies which, due to an anti-disciplinary self-concept, share a specific, critically motivated research style more than shared theories or methods (Du Gay et al 2013/1997, Johnson 1986: 42, Grossberg 1992: 16-17). In his article "What is Cultural Studies Anyway", Johnson (1986: 42) clarifies that cultural studies are an "*intellectual-political connection*" that *should* analyse the inter-relationship of culture, power and social (im)possibility. According to him, this is achieved by analysing the forms through which human subjectivity is produced and these forms today have a lot to do with capitalism, popular culture and media.

This focus is still important. Music business practices are located at sites within and outside the cultural industries, often articulated today through various forms of digital media (Potts 2008, Winter 2012). As such they are also articulated with various capitalist practices that influence and re-articulate the cultural and business practices that produce music. Music business practices are thus not just immersed with culture

⁸ That the organization of music businesses are essentially linked to such cultural dimensions is shown tellingly in Tschmuck's (2012) historical account on innovation in the music industry.

(as all practices bear a symbolic side), they are also the practices that produce culture as texts. Texts, such as music, are themselves a specific form of media and representation that matter for people and their identity practices or, in Johnson's words, their subjectivities (Hesmondhalgh 2013: 4).⁹ Therefore, music is connected to processes of power in all the contexts of its production, distribution or use.

In cultural studies, power is often understood in the ways agency is enabled or hindered (Barker 2011: 10). It can be researched as the ability to participate in certain practices in a meaningful way. This might be from an economic stance such as the question of who has the resources to record and distribute a record or whether the new means of production (e.g. Napster, YouTube etc.) enable the development of new forms of practice (cf. Negus 1999: 29, Winter 2012). As practices are always in articulation with other practices each one can influence the other in enabling or constraining ways (Shove et al. 2012: 134-136).

Ismail-Wendt's (2015) article about the regulation of sampling practices for example shows how the critique of sampling is rooted in specific ideas about value in creative practice, and making use of specific representational strategies such as presenting sampling as 'stealing'. Finally, power can relate to symbols and identities and thus representations such as whether a performer is 'black enough' to be marketed as a rapper.

All these dimensions cross over each other. Negus again provides a music business example where institutional power is legitimised culturally. He explains the formation of the rap genre by tracing the organisation of separate label divisions to not just encompass the economic or management considerations but also the associated cultural and politi-

⁹ This focus on people and their subjectivities or identities should be clarified, because practice theories de-centre actors and subjects in favour of tacit knowledge and competence, meaning and materials (Shove et al. 2012). As shown above the notion of accountants as 'boring' relates to the analysis of processes of power negotiated through culture. Organizations like music businesses are often in a sense multiple cultural sites, where different ways of life and approaches are situated, often in conflict with each other (Negus 1997: 92, cf. Thompson 1961). Although cultural studies understand human identities as performative articulations of practice, they also see them as somewhat stable and embodied features with real, experienced consequences that are often subject to processes of power (Hall 1996).

cal issues. He explains how the articulation of black identities, racist practices, political organisations and attempts by the industry majors to keep black music labels and its staff at a distance played a significant role in the historical formation of the 'race music' genre. Negus then links this to similar practices encountered during his research that led to a structural disadvantage for black rap music artists and staff who (in accordance with the 'myth of the street') were not represented in the boardrooms of major labels and accordingly suffered the most from uneven resource allocation and staff layoffs (Negus 1999: 88-97).

In my opinion this critical style of research is the second feature that justifies the term cultural music business research even though practice theories have helped to overcome the culturalism of cultural studies.

6 Methodology

Following the theoretical part of the methodological trinity, it is now appropriate to examine the research style for use in cultural music business research. One of the methodologies most prominently associated with the research of practices are ethno-methodological methods (Pink et al. 2015: 41-43, Hillebrandt 2014, Reckwitz 2008) and there are two reasons for this; the first based on the notion, that practices are sets of routinised, implicit actions articulated out of meanings, materials and competences. If this is true, then the physical part of a practice can be observed while its implicit social meanings and competences can only be researched indirectly. The second reason for using ethnographic methods is the research style of ethnography, which follows a circular approach of empirical research and reflexive episodes, thus mediating the tension between building theoretical arguments and the observation of practices. "*[T]heories of social practices gain their concepts from the tensions between theory and practice*" (Lengersdorf 2015: 183-184, translation LG).

However, it must be made clear that ethno-methodological research, undertaken 'at home' in our contemporary societies or cultures involves sociological not anthropological ethnographies (Knoblauch

2005). There are challenges requiring (and allowing) a divergence from classic ethno-methodologies. Firstly, in sociological ethnographies it is difficult to articulate what it means to live "*as the 'natives' do*" (Falzon 2009). How am I, the researcher, 'different' or 'other' from the 'native'? Is music not an omnipresent feature of the contemporary society that I live in? Yes and no. It is especially the case, when ethnographic research moves from cultures or societies to practices that some of us participate in every day. For example, one feature of today's mediated music businesses is the involvement of practices like 'liking' or 'sharing' music through digital networked media. Practices that for most of us are not 'alien' at all and thus run risk of falling out of the analytical agenda. This is less the case in the cultures of production, that most of us do not participate in on a regular basis.

While some practices therefore must be 'alienated' during ethnographic research (Reuter & Berli 2016), another challenge arises for music business research, which is its multi-sitedness, meaning that, as practices run across contexts, the researcher must encounter them at different sites and links these together. A central challenge for contemporary music business research is the heterogeneous sites where music related practices exist (e.g. where it is produced and where it is used). These can be remote from each other both in space and time. Researching the contexts of music business involves researching several sites that have to be both determined and connected/articulated.¹⁰ A formation such as branded music culture, that forms around the music business practices employed by commercial brands like Red Bull (Holt 2015) is not an anthropological field where a culture and a locus converge, if that ever existed.¹¹ It is instead a 'fuzzy field' (Nadei & Maeder 2005) to be constructed through the strategies, decisions and movements of the researcher (Wittel 2000). These challenges can be met through multi-sited-ethnography (Marcus 1995).

¹⁰ For example, practices of producing amateur lip-synch videos can be articulated with licencing practices in YouTube networks and to big-data practices of advertising businesses.

¹¹ Although this was never true for classical Malinowskian ethnology, today, and especially in sociological ethnographies that are undertaken in a field at home, there are no particular connections between a group or society and time/space (Appadurai 1990).

7 Multi-sited ethnography

Multi-sited-ethnography "*moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects, and identities in diffuse time-space*" (Marcus 1995: 96). This has considerable effects on what can be asked from ethnographies. Usually the strategy considered most suitable to reconstruct the practices of a culture would be participant observation, with either long stays and deep immersion *or* focused ethnographies of field interactions leading to thick descriptions (Geertz 1994, Knoblauch 2005). Multi-sitedness restricts the possibilities of being present at a site for a long time. In the example of music and branding, one usually cannot work at a branding agency for six months when also researching the practices employed by brand manager, a music fan, a copywriter or a music journalist (cf. Nadai & Maeder 2005: 20). At the same time, many situations like meetings between management and agencies are too restricted and too spontaneous to conduct focused ethnographies or videographies (Knoblauch 2005). Cultural music business research involving multi-sited research is unlikely to aim for lengthy descriptions of single sites. It is interested in the articulations of practices across different contexts and it is exactly here, where this method meets the demands of distributed music business processes that were laid out as the central challenge for contemporary cultural music business research.

Multi-sited-ethnography meets this demand of cultural music business research as the most common way of structuring a multi-sited field is the 'following approach', undertaken by the researcher (Marcus 1995). The analyst can follow certain objects as they move through and are articulated in different practices across several contexts (Appadurai 1988, Lash & Lury 2007). To follow an object means to stay with the manifestations of an object to trace "*the shifting status of things ... in their circulations through different context*" (Marcus 1995: 107). In the case of objects, it might therefore be conceivable to follow blockchain algorithms through their heterogeneous interactions: How are they being developed? What political ideas and agendas are transcribed into the

algorithms, how is the blockchain being picked up and by whom? How does its meaning change? Who and what practices does this blockchain favour and which practices and identities does it disadvantage etc. We can then start to articulate these practices and its contextual elements into a cultural formation that forms around the blockchain, some of which will be relevant to the music business and some not. Other following strategies are connected to actors (Latour 2005, for music related practices see DeNora 2003: 156), products like the Sony Walkman (Du Gay et al. 2013/1997) or events like the Monterey Pop Festival (Daniel & Schöfer 2015). Different strategies of following will be articulated with other research questions.

8 Methods

After outlining the theory and methodology of practice based cultural music business research the final element of the trinity of theory, methodology and method can be outlined (Diaz-Bone 2006). Cultural studies have never focused on one methodological paradigm as the sites and topics researched demand a variety of methods (Johnson et al. 2004: 41). At the same time ethnology has employed methodologies within which a variety of methods and data can be used. These are a "*situational combination of field techniques (note taking, audio-/visual recording, interviews, examination of indigenous literature, observation, and such)*" (Falzon 2009: 1). In his attempt to articulate insights from music production and consumption, Negus draws not only on his own experiences as a songwriter, but also heavily on interviews with music business staff, music fans, artists as well as on the discursive patterns in music and music business magazines that play a part in describing and thus constructing 'social facts' like corporate cultures or genres (Negus 1999: 3, 85). Thus, in accordance with Grounded Theory 'everything is data' (see also: Gobo 2008: 239-241). The integration of such diverse types of data however is not without certain challenges (Glaser 2007). Firstly, data collected through multi-sited ethnography must be conceptualized and interpreted to reveal the practices of a formation and an analyst

always must consider, that talking about a practice is not the same as the practice itself. That does not mean, that interviews or field protocols are not a legitimate method to draw conclusions about practices. However, the interview, the observation, the magazine has itself to be conceptualized as part of a practice that reports about practices. The analyst must therefore *interpret* from it the knowledges of the practices talked about (Reckwitz 2008: 196-197). In this sense, data is not a representation of 'reality' but it is reality itself, it

"is what is occurring, it is socially produced and it is up to the [...] researcher to figure it out, BECAUSE the participants are doing it, talking it, using it, think it, are it, respond to it, offer it and so forth. It is going on right in front of the ... researcher! For example, treating talk (an interview) as data comprises not just what was said, but that the talk was given, in a certain way, in a certain context, with a certain endurance, in a culture, with talk story attached etc." (Glaser 2007: para. 7, emphasis in original).

As businesses often rely on *not* being transparent about their situation, we often must rely on secondary material to make conclusions on their practices e.g. through news reports, interviews with journalists etc. Data, both secondary and primary, therefore also must be contextualized for increased validity e.g. through thoroughly researching its origin, intended purpose, the situation where it was supposed to be used by its creators etc. (Ralph et al. 2014). The data can be analysed through constant comparison and by building categories and concepts that relate to practices (for the analytical process of Grounded Theory see Strauss & Corbin 1998). The categories and concepts should answer questions about the practices and the ways they are articulated with each other. For instance, we must find out, what it means to produce a certain sound of music (and not another) for a certain individual and we must find out, how a music marketing manager conceives marketing something to a certain target group (and not another). And we would have to find out, how this music and the meanings attached to it occurs in or is articulated with the practices of music fans consuming or sharing it. Cul-

tural analysis switches between the practices, the meanings, the materials and the people participating in them. How, for example might it become important, that music is listened to in a certain way while commuting and how are certain technologies or media enabling certain music listening practices and not others. It is through constantly questioning and comparing the available data that insights can be gained and that practices and their elements can be articulated.

9 Application of the research design

As stated earlier, a developed methodology can never be fully abstracted from the research contexts in which they have been developed (cf. Diaz-Bone 2006). Therefore, the aim of this section is to highlight the context from where it has been developed. The project from which these considerations originated is based in a field not yet fully identified within the music business namely that of brands taking over and re-designing established practices usually employed by actors from the music industry (Meier 2017). As an example, Holt (2015) discusses the 'evolution of sponsorship' looking at the case of the *Red Bull Music Academy (RBMA)*. The RBMA started with a DJ-workshop and evolved into an event where now over 60 musicians are flown in from all over the world to 'cosmopolitan' places like New York, Sao Paulo or Tokyo. There they engage in workshops, studio sessions, concerts and lectures for a period of six weeks. The workshops are extended by an ongoing series of branded concerts and festivals in various regions of the world. There is also an *RBMA Radio* archiving concerts and DJ-sets, a blog curated with content written by professional music journalists et al. Besides Red Bull, the number of brands participating in music business practices beyond sponsorship is increasing.

Here there is a formation where branding practices are related to music and articulated with existing elements of other music formations that span less across the labels, publishers or distributors and increasingly across marketing and brand management, branding agencies, agents, artists and brand consumers. As Leslie Meier (2017) shows, in this new

paradigm music business practices are transformed in a way that music is no longer valued and produced as a marketable commodity but for the sake of its ability to promote another commodity, typically a branded consumer good. Her work describes (through the re-articulation of practices typical of music businesses with practices undertaken by brands) how new cultural forms like branded entertainment clips, branded concerts and jingles are being produced. This is due to an articulation of marketing practices with new forms of subjectivities for artists that need to employ branding-practices themselves to produce value for another brand.

Meier's analytical framework is one from political economy therefore she is culturally sensitive and provides highly critical work on the political effects of these processes. However, the main reason she provides for the convergence of branding and music is an economic one: In the digital transformation of the music industries, business models, driven by recorded music products are no longer viable so the music industries are working towards new, license-driven models that brands can link to. Brands on the other side see music as a means to link meaning and affect to their products.

Building on her work, the research project, from which the methodology proposed here is sourced, asks how we can describe and explain the formation of branded music culture with respect to the meanings and politics connected to these new practices. As a first step, the project asks what practices are important when brands meet music and how these practices are articulated together. How, for example, are new forms of mediated data collection embedded in organisations that own brands and what kinds of meaning are connected? In a second step, analysis turns towards the question of identity and power and what kind of identities are produced through these new practices? Who can, based on what identity, participate in this formation and who is allowed or not allowed the resources to engage in certain practices? Finally, the project looks at the effects and affects produced through the formation of branded music culture: How do the artists, managers and fans experience their participation in branded music?

The method employed is a multi-sited-ethnography that uses one of the approaches described above, namely to follow brands like Deutsche Telekom, Red Bull, Seat or Audi in their interactions with music. These interactions can be concerts organised by the brand, festivals sponsored by the brand, the development and implementation of music marketing strategies by brand managers, music fans taking and sharing pictures at branded events, or music journalists writing content for a branded music magazine. This strategy leads to several places where research can be undertaken, e.g. strategy meetings, branding agencies, festivals and concerts, the backstage rooms where artists will be present after a branded concert. To gather data the project relies on in-depth interviews with brand managers, agents, artists and fans as well as observations and short ethnographic interviews at concerts or record studies. Where possible there should be an effort to connect participant observations with follow-up interviews to let the informants provide context for the activities observed. The collected material is then analysed using the coding strategies developed within grounded theory and its advancement, the situational analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1998, Clarke 2005).

As this is an ongoing project it is still in flux. First impressions suggest that extensive tracking of consumers' media activities is at the core of contemporary music marketing. However, rather than believing, that consumer tracking produces an accurate representation of the world, brand agents and marketing managers rely on these practices more to legitimise their own cultural practice of curating music events than using the data just to make decisions for further managerial activities. As their management positions are increasingly precarious, the development of tracking methods and research practices offers a way to secure their working positions and activities through translating qualities of meaning and affect into communicable quantities. Looking at questions of identity, these practices are subject to negotiation of goal-orientation and aesthetics, as some of the managers both as cultural and managerial actors, are often in conflict with other departments and actors from their organisations and networks.

Regarding the power relations embedded in this formation, the artist perspective provides some early insight. For musicians, it is questionable to associate themselves with a brand as cultural questions of authenticity and autonomy are of high importance in their field. Here, discursive practices are emerging where brands and artists build narratives that produce a cultural 'fit' between the two. However, the conditions of a legitimate fit produce new forms of inclusion and exclusion, where certain artist-identities are more likely to become part of a brand partnership than others.

Practices of branding through music therefore at times produce conflicts and contradictions. This is also reflected in the experiences and affects. The contradictions that are negotiated through questions of authenticity and 'fit' while participating in the formation of branded music culture produce feelings of ambivalence that are expressed by almost all the participants, including some, though not all, of the music fans.

10 Conclusion

As shown above, carrying out cultural music business research cannot necessarily inform the economics of these new practices, nor should it. However, it can provide insight on the new boundaries of carrying out music business and the cultural and social dimensions of the music business. In conclusion, it can be said that there is no *one* methodology for practice-based cultural research. Other ways of researching the specific formations of music businesses and cultures will certainly need to be developed and adapted to the specific research context.¹²

One feature that could not be developed and discussed in depth in this article is a perspective that also must be included in contemporary music business research. This relates to the spaces we create through our digitally networked media practices (Wittel 2000) and I have only

¹² This has in fact always been a feature of Cultural Studies which means the methodology presented here must also be critically adapted and advanced for different appropriations (Grossberg 1992: 16-17).

mentioned these implicitly until now, as neither the streams of cultural studies nor the material presented on practice theory and multi-sited-ethnography provide a coherent framework for the recognition of media and media practices. However, every aspect of our lives and especially of those working within and with the cultural industries are involved beyond recognition with (digital) media. Moreover, as music and its production, promotion, and consumption circulates through mediated networks of co-creation, we also need to create more knowledge of how media make possible, influence, afford or transform music business practices and the formations that exist around music.

These methods cannot solely be about researching communities formed online, as in early forms of netnography (Kozinets 2010) or singular analyses of media technologies or content. All these features need to be absorbed into and articulated with other practices that make up a music related formation. Such methods are certainly being developed for example in anthropology, where everyday interactions (practices) with media are researched through various ethnographic methods (Pink et al. 2015). Another strain of methods is being developed in media studies. Burgess & Greens' (2009) book on YouTube might stand as an example where economic figures are being linked to quantitative and qualitative analyses of YouTube content and the identity practices articulated to producing and watching online video.¹³ However, as Nick Couldry states, we should understand media as articulated practice and not as something that is just material or symbolic (Couldry 2004). If we see media as something that is produced in our everyday routines and contexts we can better de-essentialise contemporary media studies from looking only at either media texts or the material capabilities of media. This is certainly the way to go as media belong to the most important forms of practice with which music businesses and cultures, in fact all aspects of our societies and the ways they are lived and experienced are being reconfigured at the moment (Winter 2012, Couldry

¹³ Since then, the digital methods that can be employed here have grown and diversified tremendously. See for example <http://mappingonlinepublics.net/category/culture/> for one strain of digital methods that is currently being developed.

2012). Cultural music business research needs to think about how media as practice can become a part of their practice.

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