

## **Innovation in Live Music Production**

Trends in a New Economy

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### Author's note

The following paper was presented on June 22, 2009 at the symposium "Creativity and Innovation in Music" at the Open University.

The paper was conceived and written as a manuscript for elaboration in the oral presentation. Though not fully developed into a conventional article manuscript, I believe that the paper gives a sense of key findings in my current research on contemporary live music events.

I would like to preface the paper by providing a bit more context and summarize a few important points that came up in the discussion at the symposium.

While much debated in the media and everyday discourse, academic music studies is still in the process of exploring and structuring the full implications of the digital revolution on musical culture. In the past two decades, the concept of music has broadened due to increasing mobility and mediation through time and space. Much focus is now on understanding music in the context of the two interlocking categories of space and media. This results from the recognition of changes associated with the large-scale processes of globalization and the changing forms and politics of urbanism. New media play a key role in contemporary social change and the ways in which social worlds are constituted ontologically. Media practices are extending the boundaries of the real and the virtual, for instance, with great implications for the notions of citizenship and the relation between public and private. The transformations of public and private clearly illustrates the close relation between media and urban space in both physical and virtual realms, ranging from club parties to Facebook and beyond to reality TV. The growing attention to space in academia is also the result of a development in urban studies and the sociology of the body. In the attempt at understanding the city as more than a physical canvas for human activity, Soja insists in his seminal *Postmetropolis* on 'putting space first' and on the practice of *spatialization* (Soja 2000), drawing on Foucault's writing on the body and on Lefebvre's writing on the *production* of space.

Digital consumer technologies has changed the global cultural and musical landscape in many and complex ways. In a recent article for the European Journal of Cultural Studies, I built an outline of a new economy of music following the crisis in the old media economy. In the new digital media economy, revenue streams come less from "content" (e.g. sound recordings) and more from telecommunication services, hardware (e.g. the iPod), and advertising. But the economy of music has also become more centered around the live event, and es-

pecially concerts and festivals. The present paper might be read as attempt at illustrating the implications of the new economy of music at the level of cultural work in the live music sector.

These broad cultural changes are being examined in many fields, but there is not yet a clear center or strong disciplinary ground. Old disciplines are committed to their historically shaped agendas, and the major trend of New Musicology within musicology offers critical thinking about the politics of theorizing musical experience, but has a focus on the small field of art music and still fails to engage with technology and commerce in everyday life of larger population groups. Communication, cultural studies, and sociology have become more relevant than ever to music studies in the information age but might still need more attention to the particulars of music and musical practices. In this context, the present symposium at Open University represents a very promising direction because of its open-ended collaboration between scholars in three disciplines - musicology, psychology, and sociology - without privileging one of them. The symposium showed that a practice-driven approach to interdisciplinarity - emphasizing on evolving collaborations rather than disciplinary finality - is essential to initiating a long-term process in which new and renewed disciplinarity can emerge.

I therefore wish to thank Jason Toyne, Mark Banks, and Dot Miel very much for organizing a symposium that turned out to be inspiring and productive.

The symposium had a small format that allowed for great discussion, and the organizers had generously reserved time for this. The discussion of my paper brought enough ideas and material for a substantial rewrite, which will I intend to do for another publication, but let me mention the core issues in the discussion. The discussion unfolded around four issues: 1) An important strategy in studying innovation is to locate the social and discursive agents and sites of innovation labor, including of course the live music performance itself. 2) The economy centrality of live music and cultural events featuring music is reflected in the fact that some of the much-debated business models, notably the 360 degree model, are build around the old business models of live performance. 3) My presentation of Beyonce's performance of 'Single Ladies' in the O2 World arena in Berlin raised a great deal of discussion. At the concert, a short film had been produced mainly consisting of private recordings of amateurs performing the famous choreographed dance moves of the video for the song, and this was followed by Beyonce's live performance of the same song. My main points was to show new ways of using visual media in the design of live music shows and how this related to new concepts of media users and the public-private through practices of remediation. The discussion raised important questions about the legitimacy of using private recordings from YouTube in a large commercial show and brought my attention to the built-in referentiality to other media spaces, including CNN. 4) The discussion of the Beyonce show also brought my attention to how audience photography with digital cameras are changing the live music experience, specifically in relation to how the audience experiences and consumes via the camera.

Sincerely,

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# Innovation in live music production

## Trends in a new economy

### 1. Intro

I recently completed article the place of live music in the new economy of music in the age of digital media. In the decline of an old media economy, a new economy of music has emerged, one in which live music is central. Live music has become an economic driver for the music industry, and it is the main source of income for many musicians. This paper focuses on innovation in production and tries to bring in questions about the music itself in the broader context of the cultural industries.

The paper explores recent changes in live music production. The category of live music is changing in the context of general change in culture, technology, and business. The changes pose new challenges to creative workers in the field.

### 2. Live music as more central domain of creativity in music

It is still a bit speculative to say that live music is becoming a central domain in music production, but let me point to new research and to changes in the sector:

First, Krueger has demonstrated an economic shift among star performers, and Frith has re-theorized live music experience in the context of recent cultural and technological changes. Frith explains the new interest in experiencing and performing live. The emphasis on liveness in reality TV and talk shows is also spreading to news programs and other genres, and I have observed an interest in experimenting with the medium of live performance among younger audiences and some concert promoters and venue managers.

Second, the live music sector has more power and is taking over creative functions from the recording industry. This happens in the form of global corporate domination with Live Nation and in the national subsidized club and festival networks around Europe. Even from the relatively marginal position of Serbia, Dragan Ambrozic, the director of the EXIT festival and Music Export Serbia witnessed change in attitude among musicians. Artists expect more ownership and revenues in concert production. I had the opportunity to discuss some of these ideas in a presentation at the live music association of Denmark in April. There was a sense of momentum for change and growing self-recognition vis-à-vis the auteur status of record producers. The association is also making efforts to create a national center for live music innovation, and some argued for a growing responsibility in developing talent.

Third, a creative development of the live music sector is already reflected in production practices: The theatrical design of shows has grown; arena promoters have brought in new genres such as theatrical shows and recently also DJ parties of EDM music; festivals have developed in many respects; and a few booking agents have said that there is greater competition in finding and keeping artists in the roster.

Innovation is not only occurring in the core elements of conventional thinking about the concert as a product, esp. artist and performance space.

Innovation is also happening in marketing practices, in the development of the concert as a media product (e.g. streaming), and in conceptions of concerts as cultural events.

The transformation of the concert into a more general aesthetics of cultural events, esp. in popular music, is result of a number of related factors:

- mediatization of performance in media entertainment
- massive flows of information in everyday life create pressure for immediate media visibility, and creative concepts and theatrical staging are common strategies for gaining visibility
- generalization of genres of expressive culture as a result of industrialization and the creative industries discourse

A development of special relevance to this paper is the advent of what be called popular event aesthetics. Event aesthetics is draw on a variety of influences, including performance art, street culture, and club culture. Event aesthetics utilize rhetorical elements of drama and theatrical staging going beyond the performance space and aesthetic practice itself and into issues of audience participation and into communication and venue design. This trend can be found in everything from concept restaurants to interactive museum exhibitions and concept programs on TV.

The development of the concert as a cultural event is shaped by dominant business practices. Larger commercial live music productions are generally managed by professionals with a background in business studies, and their methods of innovation are drawn from consumer-centered marketing and design and not so much the music itself. This is reflected in the increasingly common commercial strategy of extending the time-period of customer attention to product and to extend value chain via various product packages. This involves a temporal broadening of product to include the time before, during, and after the show via marketing and sharing of photos after event, already happening between fans in internet communities. This also means that live music events involves more work, and especially communication and marketing work.

### 3. Live music as a product: Particular challenges to innovation

Make a brief excursus: A few points about the conception of live music as a product.

### *1. Music is a specialized aesthetic practice*

It's specialized aesthetic practice with particular expressive capacities

- a particular sensory form and temporality
- a particular emotional and bodily-physical experience
- a particular form of collaboration and interaction with implication for socialization and learning

Some of the particular strengths of an art form such as music might be viewed as constraints in a process of commercial product innovation when compared with other types of commodities. Live music can't be separated from the creative worker and mass-produced as a scalable product. Also, it cannot easily be repeated, tested, and it's generally more difficult to predict long-term sales in popular culture markets than in other markets.

Because of the need for specialization, artists have limited resources for the overall production, and professional live music productions thus require collaboration between artists, promoters, and designers. Understanding the need for more in-depth collaboration and cross-disciplinary expertise is necessary, and promoters play a critical role in defining the conditions for experimentation and innovation.

### *2. Live music involves different types of creative work; product is assemblage of practices*

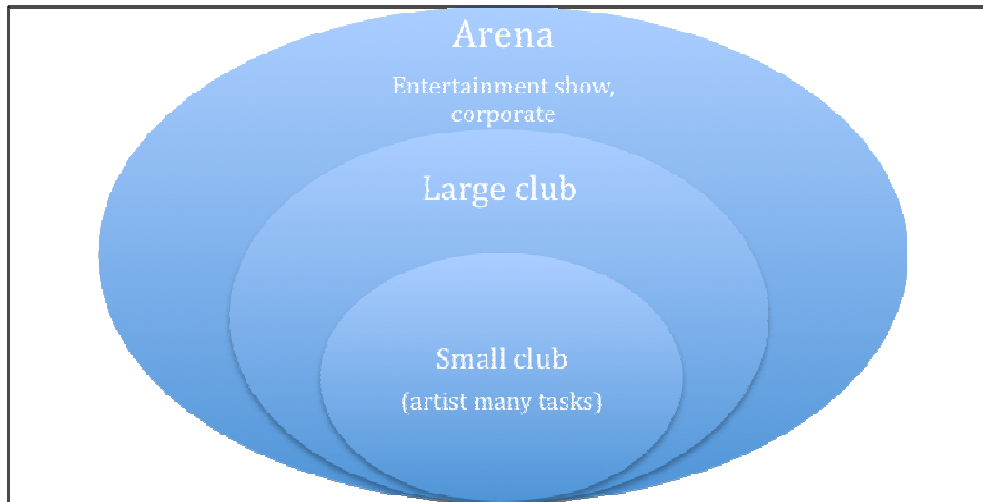
The performance alone involves different types of creative work, from music-making to stage design. But audience experience is also shaped by the design of the performance space and by the communication or PR work on the venue and the artist.

As mentioned, closer and creative collaborations between the different workers would be productive. To some extent, workers in the live music sector are stuck in roles that were defined in the album era of the old media economy. Collaborations are managed professionally in super star concert tours, but could develop more in smaller productions as well. There's a need for more knowledge on different types of creative teams and the relation between management and artistic innovation in both short- and long-term perspectives.

In the following, I'd like to illustrate different settings of innovation in live music performance in different context of production, with an overall systematic partition into different types of concert venues because they have not only different productions of scale but also different labor practices and relatively distinct social networks production.

### 4. Spaces of innovation

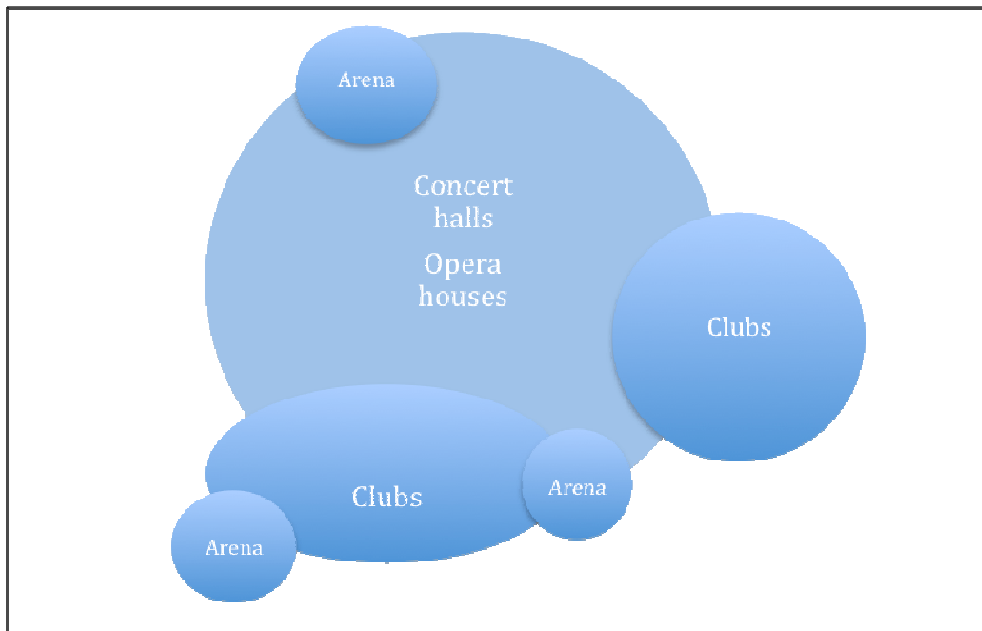
Concert production is to a great extent organized in relation to different types of venues. There is an obvious relation between the size of the venue and the scope of the production on the material and organizational levels. From a practical perspective, the artist is doing a large part of the production herself in small-scale productions, including the booking.



### **Urban location (Berlin)**

Such typology only identifies overall contexts, and the principle of scale has to be supplemented by thinking about music, artists, and audiences when turning to questions of innovation in artistic practices and their assemblage in commodity form. A simple mapping of these types of venues on an urban map shows a concentration in different urban zones; different cultural spaces, music genres, and networks of producers and audiences: *Clubs* in new cultural neighborhoods (neighborhood audience); *arenas* more spread out (draws audience from far away, also sport events); *concert halls* and operas (historical city center)





Musicians work under different conditions in these domains.

Case of club and arena, with to specific examples of concerts in Berlin April in 2009:

*1. Clubs // PJ Harvey in Astra*

Musical performance central, audience close enough to have detailed sense of bodily expressions. PJ Harvey masters the genre of the rock club performance and has gained recognition among fans and critics. At this stage in her career, a key aspect of innovation is the continued development of personal style in song-writing, singing, and the sound of the band that results from collaborations with other musicians.

*2. Arenas // Beyonce in O2 World*

Beyonce performing mythical superstar persona in large stage show to fill the 17.000 capacity arena; never direct eye-contact with audience; concert somewhat like a series of music videos (each song with a different dress, choreographed show, and virtual location, frequently with video on big screens behind the band). Innovation in this field is

- conditioned by decisions of business executives. Executives decide to invest in large-scale production around a particular type of artist (criteria for looks and skills in acting, dancing, and singing)
- to a large extent the work of stage show designers. These workers are as important as the musical artists. The Beyonce show on this "I am ..." tour was a sophisticated audiovisual, multimedia and choreographed production, with fascinating effects and imaginative use of new technologies

Following my claim about the importance of designing creative teams, I would say that the Beyonce show illustrates the point in that the many components of the show were generally professionally produced and organ-

ized, but that the song-writing was a significant weak aspect. Many of the songs were not strong enough to keep maintain audience intensity, and the show lasted roughly two hours. The overall impression left by the show was a long time-flow characterized by many brief moments of spectacular effects and a handful of great songs (mostly the ones that had become hits). It would have helped if Beyonce had a more personal voice and style of expression, but she sings remarkably well and has a very pretty voice, so the overall show director could have raised the quality of the show by paying more attention to the quality of the songwriting.

#### 5. Conclusion: Methods of innovation

In conclusion, I'd like to turn to the question of methods of production and innovation. Artists have always had different methods of disciplining their practice; techniques and principles. Historical musicology has investigated compositional and performance practices, but more work can be done on the practices of contemporary popular music artists and how they are changing in the new economy. Such research could broaden the field of inquiry in music studies and in production studies within in cultural and media studies.

In my paper, I have pointed to fundamental aspects of live music that might be obvious to musicologists, but need further investigation in the context of contemporary capitalism and technology and other fields of cultural production.

Musical practices are generally overlooked in methods of innovation derived from the fields of engineering, management, and industrial product design. These methods are being used for a wide variety of practices, including the development of IT-systems and creative concepts of TV shows. The dissemination of design methods is sustained by creative industry policies and their generalization of creative work. They are useful for many purposes but their focus on discursive and visual tools need to be supplemented by sonic tools and specialized aesthetic knowledge, for instance. Specificity of creative practices continues to be a challenge to innovation methods.

Thanks for your attention.