



REVIEW | Beyond 2.0: The Future of Music

Steve Collins and Sherman Young

Sheffield and Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2014

ISBN 978-1-84553-938-2

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Much of twenty-first century music industries scholarship has been focused on making sense of the transformation around digital and online technology, from mp3s and file-sharing to streaming services. Scholars, music industry specialists and other commentators have developed a variety of conceptual frameworks (including the “music 2.0” referenced in the book’s title), and have constantly made, and updated, predictions for the “future of music” and its economy. Frequently, however, these accounts have focused on merely identifying new opportunities, at times conflating opportunities with actualities – in other words, with possibilities that are socially and culturally determined, and dependent as much on already existing industry practices as sociologically determined access. The present attempt by Steve Collins and Sherman Young is a thoroughly researched one, its conclusions drawn with necessary caution. Avoiding the potential pitfalls of making bold and attractive statements, *Beyond 2.0* essentially summarises and assesses, through clearly argued points, recent developments in the music industries affecting, as well as arising from, the ways we produce and consume music, and manages to locate these within a broader cultural context.

One of the key merits that distinguish Collins and Young is in their offering a valuable historical depth to their account, framing the current transformation as “merely the latest development in a continuum of change” (11). In this vein, the first three chapters are dedicated to a chronological analysis of the relationship between

technology, culture and industry throughout (and even before) the history of recorded music, up until the latest developments in digital music technology. Beyond providing a historical perspective, the mentioned chapters are informed by a theoretically conscious reflection on the relationship between technology, culture, and society. The authors' theoretical standpoint can be located somewhere between technological determinism and the social construction of technology (SCOT) perspective (two extremes of an imaginary scale), but certainly closer to the latter. They employ the concept of "affordance" throughout the analysis, which also suggests a compromise between the two extremes – close to what is known as the social shaping of technology perspective. While distancing themselves from technological determinism, the authors still occasionally express a sort of technological optimism (for instance, when stating, "it is now possible to discard the traditional vertical integration of production and distribution and decouple content production from distribution", 34) – yet to be fair, this is difficult to avoid. A more systematic and reflective discourse analysis of how the relationship between technology, culture and industry is viewed in the cited debates (for example, those between musicians and representatives of major record labels) may also have been informative, especially since technology in these debates is also often viewed deterministically.

The first three chapters are followed by the identification of new intermediaries in the music industries such as TuneCore, SoundCloud, MySpace or Facebook, which basically have contributed to the emergence of a new structure of intermediation. This is a strong and crucial point, not least because it offers a more nuanced understanding in comparison with the (one-sided, nonetheless still often optimistically invoked) music industry discourse emphasising disintermediation, that is, the disappearance of intermediaries, or "middlemen", from controlling or gatekeeping positions between the producer and the consumer. For some reason, the authors omit a discussion of critics, the press, as well as other new (and old) gatekeepers such as music blogs, playlists and other (partly) "curated" (to employ a current music industry buzzword) platforms such as 22tracks or Rdio from this analysis. While the role of critics is briefly explored later in the book (94-96), these actors nonetheless occupy gatekeeping positions and, therefore, fulfill intermediary functions.

The book proceeds to provide an informative account of the transformation of the star system and to give an empirically based overview of newly emerging strategies for musicians, which continue to exist alongside old models. Finally, the historical perspective of the first three chapters is extended to the subject of copyright and copyright law in a chapter that demonstrates the social, cultural and institutional embeddedness of copyright and discourses around it, while also reflecting on the significance of copyright terminations that have recently become a legal possibility in the US.

I will here identify two points that could be considered as "missed opportunities", not with the aim of criticism, but with the hope that these might serve as an impetus for further discussion. Firstly, the authors' own empirical research was conducted in

Australia – a region that is economically and culturally part of the “Western” world, but still occupying a particular and, in a certain sense, peripheral position in relation to the Anglo-American core of Western popular music. Yet, apart from one reference to the significance of the (lack of) availability of Spotify in Australia (74), there is no serious consideration of the particular geopolitics of the music industries. The authors do not discuss whether the newly emerging intermediaries and the new industry pathways of musicians contribute to the emergence of a network that could challenge existing geography-based centre – periphery economic structures, or the extent that these are being reinforced. Nor do they consider the political implications of becoming embedded into a new network of multinational mega-corporations (this time, computer/entertainment companies such as Apple or Google) even if the involvement of the computer industries is implied (59). Such an analysis, although probably beyond the aim and scope of this book, could also provide a more accurate response to the question of whether the network aesthetic “overwhelm[s] any ideology of centralized control in the evolution of the technical system that is the internet” (42).

Secondly, the cited research involved 200 artists with diverse backgrounds (“bedroom amateurs to professional DJs, pub bands to those with Top Ten success”, 72) – yet the analysis arguably fails to do justice to the richness of this data. The discussion focuses on continuities in order to emphasise that some of the changes seem to affect, and are perceived by, musicians across the board. However, one is left wondering whether there remain any meaningful differences according to the different genres, scenes and music worlds musicians are part of – especially with regard to notions of authenticity, subcultural capital, or the relationship with fans. Overall, the identified new trajectories contribute, first and foremost, to an account of existing possibilities – as opposed to an understanding of the actual social, economic and (geo)political structure of the new music industries. In other words, an analysis of how and to what extent, with what gains and losses to whom, opportunities are realised into actualities is still an ongoing work. Yet the book is a valuable contribution that works as a systematic, in-depth, historically informed, multi-perspective analysis of the music industries as network in the digital era.