The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud by Patrik Wikström

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009
(ISBN: 978-0-7456-4390-8). 204pp.

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The aim of Patrik Wikström's first book, *The Music Industry: Music in the Cloud*, is to offer an update on the theoretical discourses surrounding the music industry. Utilising his background in business and management, Wikström has attempted to account for the apparent crisis that the sector has undergone since the internet and new digital audio formats have forced a reorientation of musical production and distribution practices. The book attempts to offer both a contextual overview and a detailed theory–led analysis of the many aspects of the music industry, but at times struggles to find a useful balance between these twin aims.

In the first two chapters, Wikström offers detailed and systematic accounts of different aspects of the music industry: considering the industrial practice of copyrighting, and the sub-industries of recording, publishing and performance. However, much of this reads as if it was included simply to offer a condensed version of some of the existing debates contained in media handbooks. In particular, Wikström's assertions that the music industries' primary creative commodity has become copyright, rather than artists or songs, is a position now familiar in popular music theory. In the third chapter, he relates his theory that the only area of the music industries in any kind of 'crisis' is the recording sector. This espouses another common theme of the work on the creative industries

produced within the last ten years, namely that file sharing and piracy are to blame for decreasing revenues. The fourth chapter relates to the role of creation in the modern music industries, but instead of focusing largely on the interactions between user content, social media and the ways in which major labels have converged on these phenomena, Wikström gives an up-to-date overview of how recording practices and professional artists work in the modern age. In the fifth chapter he moves on, to quite separately discuss the role that creativity plays as the industries interact with, and at times utilise, the fans and followers of music through 'new' channels of distribution such as social media.

Despite a period of intense technological change, the debates in the field of popular music theory have not changed much since matters such as digital piracy and user-generated distribution have come to prominence. For the crux of his analysis, Wikström relates existing discourses – such as those over copyright as a creative commodity – to his main analytical theory that the modern music industry operates in the context of an industrial/cultural 'media cloud'. Within this cloud, the sites of distribution and reception are increasingly online, interactive with user input, and resultantly diffuse. In a nutshell, while a music consumer may have previously bought a record from an approved retailer, now they might download a selection of digital audio files from anonymous internet peers from around the world. Wikström's cultural cloud theory is interesting in that it attempts to draw up terms for an increasingly intricate range of themes relating to media distribution and user interactivity. However, while the basis of this theory is interesting, Wikström rarely engages with what the 'cloud' *is*, and the multifaceted ways in which it might operate. As an example, while

he claims that 'music is no longer something the mainstream audience owns and collects – music is in the cloud' (p.4), he later suggests incredibly specific and creative relationships between users and music, like the Jenkins-esque 'culture-vulture' (Jenkins, 2006). However, Wikström includes little or no discussion of discrimination or taste – implicitly suggesting that these key aspects of cultural practice play no part in consumerism and user generation.

Such problems and inconsistencies within *The Music Industry* stem from Wikström's attempt to create both a catch-all textbook for the modern media student working on the music industries and a theoretical thesis on approaches for analysis in an increasingly complex field. So, while Wikström raises some truly interesting points about the role that multidisciplinary approaches might have in research on copyright – namely organisational theory, social learning theory and the sociology of culture – his cultural cloud theory is better suited to discussions of artist/user convergence. While Wikström frequently alludes to the useful potential of multidisciplinary research in this area, he never really follows up with interesting examples or case studies, and this exposes a tension between his industrial survey and his theories of commoditised creativity. Minor concessions to these oversights are present in the many highlighted pop-up boxes containing key facts and case studies peppered throughout. Unfortunately, these frequently serve to jar the tone into textbook mode, lending the book something of a split personality; half a theoretical exploration into the types of research approaches used in popular music analysis, half a 2009 textbook on the role of the internet in popular music studies.

The greatest strength of Wikström's work comes in his discussion of how the 'cloud' of modern popular music culture brings

about an unprecedented level of interaction between the consumers and fans of popular music and published artists. Wikström notes something of a cultural convergence wherein the fan becomes both an amateur musician and a respondent critic, notably discussing the stylistic borrowings from things like mash-up music videos in the production of mainstream music. Unfortunately, these matters feel rushed, and while Wikström makes many persuasive claims regarding the new positions of the active-user audience, all of this seems highly hypothetical. Despite his discussion of the music fan's place in the music industry constituting the most interesting and engaging sections of the monograph, they are never backed up by the kind of original research that punctuated his earlier discussion of established industrial practices. Wikström does not even engage with fan/user cultures to the extent they have been in the work of theorists less preoccupied with industrial transformations, such as Roy Shuker (2008) and Brian Longhurst (2007). It is glaringly uncommon in studies on popular music culture for the researcher to conduct audience research on actual fans and consumers. Here, Wikström neither offers a satisfying level of depth in his analysis, nor does he offer an interesting cross-analysis between artist and fan cultures. Instead, he chooses to discuss these as separate, while suggesting convergence.

This is something of a shame, as it feels as though Wikström could have written two exceptional books: one, a brilliant textbook for the modern student of popular music studies, and the other, an experimental, research-driven piece on the increasingly active role of fans in the production and dissemination of popular music. Instead, *The Music Industry* is best considered as a useful supplement to an ever-growing canon of work on how cultural industries have been

adapting to the rise of digital technologies, and a 'crisis' in revenue sourcing over the past decade and a half. Hopefully, this book will benefit from future editions (as many in this subject area do – see those cited here) that might address some of its inconsistencies.

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