Chapter 1
Designing the Music Business: Design Culture, Music Video and Virtual Reality

Abstract Design culture can be difficult to explain. My aim in this book is to answer three questions that will help to define it for anyone with a serious interest in the music business and its future. These questions are designed to outline why I use design culture theory rather than other options: Why design culture and not branding? How does design culture relate to organisational culture in the music business? How does design culture relate to deal making in the music business?

Keywords Design culture · Branding · Creativity · Imagination

1.1 Introduction

I first met Jefferton James in 2007 when I was managing quirky Sydney band Cuthbert and the Night Walkers. He was hired by the band to produce the cover and packaging design for their album *Love needs us* (Cuthbert and the Night Walkers 2007). Working out of a share house in the inner-western Sydney suburb of Dulwich Hill on an old PC with cracked software on it, Jefferton was producing an entire children's book-style album cover and packaging design for the band and, to me, it was amazing. He was producing hand-drawn images at an astonishing pace and scanning them into the old computer. He was then using an ancient version of Photoshop to convert them into something remarkable. Years later, in 2010, I was in Toronto, Canada, meeting with the record label EMI on behalf of my then client, Australian band Boy & Bear. Jefferton had designed the single cover for the band's breakthrough triple j[1] hit song 'Mexican Mavis' and I was raving about Jefferton's talent (as well as the band's, obviously) and the A&R person said off the cuff, 'You should manage him'. It wasn't until 2012, when I was somewhat abruptly freed from band

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[1] Triple j is a tax-payer funded radio station in Australia that broadcasts nationally. It is a part of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and is a youth focused station that has a specific remit to facilitate innovation in contemporary music. It has a key taste making role in the development of new local talent through its 'unearthed' platform and international music through its sponsorship of festivals and other live music events in Australia. Its branding policy requires its name to be stylised in lowercase letters (Triple j. 2020).

management commitments, that I approached Jefferton about managing him. We have worked together ever since. It was through helping him to produce album cover designs, gig and tour posters, stage designs, music videos and merchandise designs that I became fascinated by design culture in popular music and the extent to which the production of fundamental, non-musical, visual and multisensory content is—somewhat ironically—invisible in music business research.

Design culture (Julier 2006) can be difficult to explain. My aim in this book is to answer three questions that will help to define it for anyone with a serious interest in the music business and its future. These questions are designed to outline why I use design culture theory rather than other options such as transvisuality (Kristensen et al. 2013; Michelsen and Wiegand 2019) or branding theory.

- **Why design culture and not branding?** Design culture is a process that is broader than a branding process. Just as popular music itself is not a brand, neither is the visual and other sensory art that surrounds it. While design culture within the context of this book does involve seeking coherence between the ethos of a popular musician or band's project and their interactions with their fans—and therefore branding is part of it—design culture is also more than this. Design culture offers a way to understand popular music product milieus and the visual and multisensory storytelling practices that stem from these. Design here does not simply involve creating a form for the purpose of achieving product differentiation and a competitive advantage (Porter 1985); it is a fundamental part of the artform. It is not just something that is tacked onto popular music to market it.
- **How does design culture relate to organisational culture in the music business?** Design culture is a form of organisational culture. Simply put, organisational culture can be defined as 'the way we do things around here' (Bower 1966, as cited in Saintilan and Schreiber 2018, p. 213). Rather than just concerning the outputs of a design culture, such as a piece of music or a visual artefact, the words 'design' and 'culture' are most often used in this book as verbs, rather than nouns. The term 'design culturing' potentially provides clarity here. In biology culturing means to grow, 'to breed and keep particular living things in order to get the substances they produce' (Cambridge 2020). Just as branding processes involve ensuring consistency with a company's ethos, mission and values, so too does the process of 'design culturing'—just in a broader way. It not only concerns commercial value generation but also intrinsic cultural value as well as 'encultured' practices.
- **How does design culture relate to deal making in the music business?** Design culture, as a form of organisational culture, involves a 'way of doing things' and is therefore broader than the form making within design. It extends to the totality of carrying out design; from negotiating with clients, to producing visual and multisensory artefacts and experiences, to the consumption of the outputs of design processes. Given that in this book I argue that the visual and multisensory artefacts featured are a part of popular music as an artform—they are not just tacked onto music to market it—I also argue that the designers and artists featured in this book deserve better and fairer deals; albeit whilst acknowledging that what is best/fairest for certain stakeholders is often at the expense of others (but

not zero-sum). Designers and artists arguably merit deals that enable them to generate capital income from the copyrights they generate as opposed to just labour income, or a combination of both—like the deals many record producers agree with clients.[2]

Multiple creativities drive growth in the music business and design culture theory provides a pathway for understanding how these different forms of creativity are coordinated by musicians' and bands' organisations. The sector is constituted by a cluster of interrelated industries that activate multiple senses; 'music' consumption is often a multisensory experience. This book will benefit practitioners, scholars and students within the music business because it addresses the omission of visual creativities and content, as well as creativities relating to touch (somatosensation) and our kinaesthetic sense (proprioception), and how these are commercialised, in this field.

1.1.1 Outline of the Book

In order to achieve the aims of this book, it is organised in the following way. Chapter 2 outlines the research methods used, including the method of participant observation. I used this method to immerse myself in the production of music videos, album art, gig posters and stage designs by Jefferton James. This chapter also outlines the selection of participants for the semi-structured interviews that were conducted and the rationale for the case studies, as well as the visual method and the digital ethnographic and sensory ethnographic methods that were used.

Chapter 3 concerns album cover design. After an initial discussion of the album covers produced for bands such as The Beatles, Cream, Led Zeppelin, The Cure, Sex Pistols, The Rolling Stones, Kanye West, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and others, I conduct case studies of contemporary British band Bear's Den's approach to album cover design and Australian singer–songwriter Dustin Tebbutt's work with Jefferton James. I argue that album covers are often the starting point for the development of a musician's design culture. While they are initially designed to represent an album of songs, through a process of design culturing, album cover designs also often subsequently operate in three-dimensional space as the key design concept(s) used

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[2]Design culture also includes deal making because it is a context-informed practice (Julier 2006). The collectively held norms of practice in a particular geographical place include deal making. For example, in Chapter 7, the case study of British band Bear's Den's live experience design practice shows that if such a band were to tour a country in Europe that tends to have higher production values in its live music venues than other countries on the tour, then the band has to spend more to produce their shows in order to fit into these contexts. Similarly, according to Deserti and Rizzo (2019) and Wilson (2015), the company Apple attributes a heroic role to design with its former Chief Design Officer, California-based Jony Ive, being considered a superstar, whereas Samsung's equivalent in Korea is comparatively unknown (Deserti and Rizzo 2019, p. 1099).

for gig and tour posters, as (part of) stage designs, merchandise designs, music videos and virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and mixed reality (MR) experience designs (henceforth VR, AR and MR will be collectively referred to as 'extended reality' (XR)).

Chapter 4 addresses gig and tour poster design and identifies two main types of poster. First, stand-alone gig and tour posters are posters that are designed for a specific show or tour, with the design concept often being independent from the primary design culture surrounding the music. The second type involves gig and tour posters that form a part of the overall design aesthetic of a musical project, often because they are derivative of the album cover design. The work of Australian illustrator Ken Taylor is discussed as an example of the first type, a genre of gig poster that stems from the 1960s countercultural movement that started in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, while the work of Australian artist and designer Jonathan Zawada and his contributions to the design cultures of musicians Flume and The Presets provides an example of the second type of gig and tour poster discussed.

Chapter 5 concerns contemporary music video production and outlines how musicians over the last decade perceive changes in the ways in which they produce and use music videos. Through reflections on my involvement in the production of Australian musician Emma Louise's music video for her song 'Mirrors' (2013), as well as a digital ethnographic study of 60 music videos that Jefferton James directed between 2012 and 2018, this chapter builds on the work of Caston and Smith (2017, p. 2). These authors argued that music video production has a hybrid production culture that emerged from the coming together of graphic design, specifically album cover and gig poster design, portrait photography, televised live concert performance and fine art.

Chapter 6 examines music video dissemination. Through an initial discussion of Passenger's video for his song 'Let her go' (2012), a video that has a YouTube viewership in the billions and as such is an outlier in the field, this chapter examines YouTube's role in the music business ecology. Following this, through a case study of Sydney-based musician and videographer Sean Walker's project Breathe, this chapter examines the implications for the music business of capital owners such as musicians creating their own music videos. Musicians who are also visually creative in this way can potentially use their position as copyright/capital owners to shift the deal making pertaining to music video dissemination.

Chapter 7 concerns live music experience design and begins with a case study of British band Radiohead and their lead singer Thom Yorke's long-term collaboration with visual artist Stanley Donwood. This case study is useful for understanding how visual design symbolically ties together Radiohead's organisation, and the design objects and experiences this organisation creates, which showcases how design culture is a form of organisational culture. Their design culture/organisational culture has led millions of strangers to cooperate effectively to purchase concert tickets and various items of merchandise from the band's website. This chapter then examines the economics of contemporary live music experience design through case studies of the work of British stage designer Es Devlin and British folk-rock band Bear's Den. Through the Devlin case study, I argue that 2003 was the year that the

field of stage design fundamentally changed due to the widespread use of mobile phones that functioned as cameras. This enables audience members to record the musical and visual experience of a live music performance from many different angles without the consent of the creator(s). This often impacts musicians' moral rights. The chapter concludes with a discussion of merchandise in the live music business.

Chapter 8 concludes the book and addresses XR design. It features a case study of Icelandic musician and visual artist Björk's release of her full VR album *Vulnicura* (Björk 2019). A case study of Florida-based company Magic Leap's work with Icelandic band Sigur Rós is also provided. Sigur Rós (2020) and Magic Leap collaborated to develop an interactive music and mixed reality experience called *Tónandi*. This chapter then traces the declining cost of XR production and the role companies such as Facebook, and platform economics generally, have to play in this. In the conclusion to the book I critically consider blockchain technologies and discuss areas for further research such as whether the design culture process of producing music-related XR artefacts will change the 'way of doing things' in the music business. Design culture has agency here for changing practice norms for the visual creators/designers and artists interviewed for this book, particularly in relation to intellectual property policies, and therefore design culture has an instrumental role to play in changing the deal making around visual representative media in this business; the music business can be changed through a new kind of design culture.

1.2   Defining Design

In an attempt to explain what design is, Mathers (2015) asked the following question:

> How has design, which many still associate largely with style and consumerism, come to be something one might look to for solutions to the most complex and challenging problems facing humanity today; problems requiring not just local fixes using clever design objects, but solutions that reimagine systems themselves? (p. 24)

In order to understand how all of these different applications of 'design' form part of the same discipline, it is useful to link definitions of design to those of imagination, creativity and innovation. The word 'creative' is contested and so it is necessary to define it here within the context of this book and to link it to definitions of imagination and innovation. Robinson (2011) noted that 'imagination is the ability to bring to mind things that are not present to our senses … it is the primary gift of human consciousness' (p. 141). For Robinson, creativity is 'applied imagination' (p. 142). Unlike the process of imagining, creativity involves *doing* something and his definition of it, that it involves generating original ideas that have value, resonates with another commonly iterated definition: that creativity involves making useful, novel products (Csikszentmihalyi 1997, pp. 28, 113; Kilgour 2006, pp. 80–81; Mumford 2003; Weisberg 2006, 2010). Following this, for Robinson (2011), innovation is 'applied creativity' (p. 142); innovation involves putting creative ideas into practice.

So how does design relate to imagination, creativity and innovation? According to Cox (2005), '"Design" is what links creativity and innovation. It shapes ideas to become practical and attractive propositions for users or customers. Design may be described as creativity deployed to a specific end' (p. 2).

The word design is useful in this context because it is both a verb and a noun. As a verb, it is useful for describing the process of creation, of *designing* something, while it is also used as a noun to describe the output of creative processes, as in *the design.* Design contrasts in some instances with notions of artistic creativity because it is defined as involving creativity that is deployed to a specific end, such as solving a problem or obtaining customer satisfaction. In contrast, artistic creativity is frequently defined as being more 'open-ended', with notions of the 'liberal artist' and their 'aesthetic autonomy' often lying at the core of definitions of the workings of an 'artist' (Morrow 2018, p. 86), as opposed to those of a 'designer'. Artistic creativities are 'symbolic' and therefore 'cannot be reduced to set rules or procedures' (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, p. 84) and are therefore not easily deployed to a specific end in the same way designs usually are. This complicates the argument I will put in this book that the visual and multisensory artefacts featured are a part of popular music as an artform and are not just artefacts that are used for marketing purposes.

The Design Council in the UK atomises design into the following roles: '"framing", "problem solving", "form and function" and "style"' (Mathers 2015, p. 24). Mathers noted that, while 'form and function' and 'problem solving' are arguably the core roles, the relevance of these varying roles changes depending upon their location within the design disciplines. For him therefore, it is problematic to buy into the stereotype that design is primarily concerned with style. Following on from Mathers' taxonomy, the Danish Design Centre's 'Design Ladder' is useful for understanding the different levels of design.

Step 1 of the design ladder is entitled 'Non-Design', whereby design is simply not applied systematically (Dansk Design Center 2015). Step 2 is entitled 'Design as Form-Giving'. This involves styling new products or services. Step 3 is entitled 'Design as Process', whereby design becomes an integrated element in processes. Finally Step 4 is entitled 'Design as Strategy' where design is understood to be a key strategic element in a business model (Dansk Design Center 2015).

Therefore, at the lower rungs of the ladder, design is either neglected or is only used for styling, while at the top rung, design is understood to be a key strategic means of facilitating innovation that affects the entire structure of an organisation and its culture, or even an entire industry and its culture or 'way of doing things'. This book will examine design within the music business on these multiple levels, from design as form giving, involving style and therefore the shaping of new products, through to design as strategy, whereby arguments for designing the music business for the benefit of all creatives who contribute to it will be made.

This latter use of the word design resonates with a body of literature that links management to design. Boland and Collopy (2004) argued that managers are designers as well as being decision makers, and in an earlier work (Morrow 2009) I argued that, with the release of their *In rainbows* album, Radiohead (2007) brought

their own artistic sensibility to the organisation of their commodification. Therefore, the notion of designing the music business does not solely concern the ways in which artists, their management and labels engage in 'interaction design'. It also prompts reflection on how systems of remuneration within this business need to be designed to reflect the growing importance of these changing modes of interaction.

1.3 Design Culture

In their attempt to define design culture, Julier and Munch (2019) noted that 'we have moved beyond solely regarding design as concerned with singularities, be these spatial, material or visual or the serial reproduction of objects. Design, these days, also includes the orchestration of networks of multiple things, people and actions' (p. 2).

In the context of music business, this network of 'things' includes recorded and live music, album cover designs, gig and tour posters, stage and lighting designs, music videos, online presences such as artist websites, merchandise and XR experiences. The 'people' whose 'actions' orchestrate the network of the music business are designers, video producers and directors, musicians, artist managers and other creative labourers who work together to make business decisions concerning the overall design of this network.

In an earlier work, Julier (2013) defined design culture as an attempt to trace the interactions and tensions between material culture studies, art history and design history. He asked the questions: 'How do design objects, their producers and designers, conspire to script experience? What tensions and discontinuities exist between this aspiration and how these "experiences" are actually encountered?' (p. xiii).

While visual culture studies challenged and widened the field of investigation which was previously the sole focus of art historians by including design alongside fine art, photography, film, television and advertising, the concept of design culture in turn broadens the focus of study from a two-dimensional to a three-dimensional understanding of design. For Lash (2002), 'Culture is now three-dimensional, as much tactile as visual or textual, all around us and inhabited, lived in rather than encountered in a separate realm as a representation' (p. 149, as cited in Julier 2013, p. 11). Rather than interpreting visual content such as album covers and gig posters as merely forms of pure representation or as narratives that visually convey messages, this book uses the concept of design culture and the understanding that:

> Culture formulates, formats, channels, circulates, contains and retrieves information. Design, therefore, is more than just the creation of visual artefacts to be used or 'read'. It is also about the structuring of systems of encounter within the visual and material world. (Julier 2013, p. 11)

Design culture involves 'networks of interaction between design, production and consumption and beyond this, the relationships of value, circulation and creation and
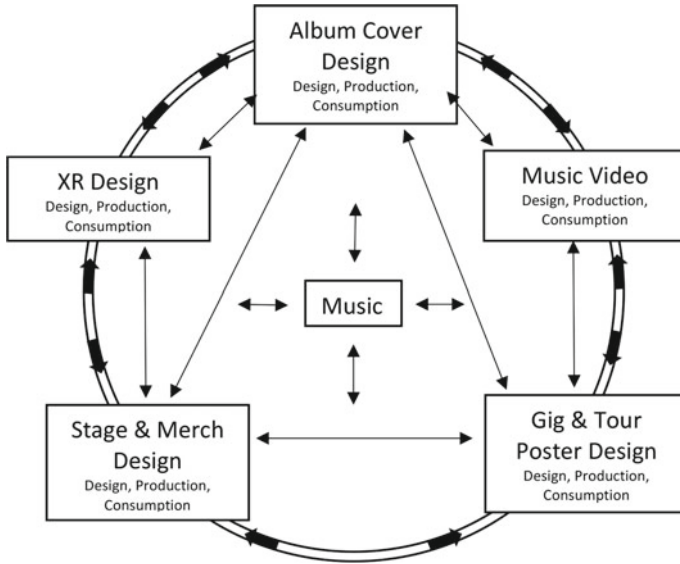
Fig. 1.1 Circuit of music business design culture

practice' (Julier 2013, p. 3). A musical artist is surrounded by a complex system of exchange, or in other words a 'culture of design', that is constituted by a dense coexistence of designers, producers and consumers who are responding to, and informing, the musician's work. This 'circuit of culture' is itself designed to generate economic, social and cultural value for a musical artist and the entities with which they are collaborating such as record labels. These design cultures stemming from music are therefore important for generating these forms of value, despite the fact that the designers who service this circuit of culture operate in a secondary business-to-business (B2B) market[3] within which many of them are often arguably exploited and/or they 'self-exploit'[4] (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2011, p. 6) (Fig. 1.1).

The dearth of literature relating to design culture and the music business is significant given that the production of meaning and value within this sector occurs across a number of textual sites. Popular music is a multisensory, multimedia, discursive, fluid and expansive cultural form that, in addition to the music itself, includes album

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[3]In other words, visual creatives in the music business do not typically have a direct relationship with consumers/audiences (i.e. business to consumer, B2C). They instead provide their services to musicians, bands, record labels, etc. (other businesses) and therefore they most commonly operate in a business-to-business (B2B) secondary market.

[4]Designers who create album covers are engaged in what is known as 'creative labour'. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011) argued that a key critique of creative labour is 'self-exploitation', whereby creative labourers 'become so enamoured with their jobs that they push themselves to the limits of their physical and emotional endurance' (p. 6). As is evidenced by the example in Chapter 3 of the work of British typographer John Pasche who originally designed The Rolling Stones' Tongue and Lip image for 50 British pounds (Walker 2008), they are often self-exploiting to produce work for which they are not paid very much.

covers, gig and tour posters, music videos, stage and lighting designs, live concert experiences, websites, XR experiences, merchandise and other forms of non-musical content. The implication of this for music business studies is that it is impossible to understand the meaning and value of popular music without considering its relation to these non-musical components, and to the interrelationships between these components. For Straw (2012), music's materiality is paradoxical, 'long considered one of the most ethereal and abstract of cultural forms, music is arguably the one most embedded in the material infrastructures of our daily lives' (p. 228).[5] This paradox is arguably the reason why there is a dearth of literature relating to design culture and the music business.

Design culture is a useful lens for examining this paradox and for understanding how music comes to be embedded within the material infrastructures of the music business, and through this, our daily lives. Design cultures 'come into being through the agency of their objects and people … this also takes us from linear flows of meaning to complex, multi-linear ecologies that involve ongoing interactions between design and its human and other participants' (Julier and Munch 2019, p. 3). This research-based book uses participant observation, interviews, case studies, textual analysis, visual methodology, and digital and sensory ethnography to examine these multilinear ecologies, because, as Julier and Munch (2019) noted:

> A design culture requires a more extended and, perhaps, embedded mode of investigation. It is something to be inhabited, to move within, following the connections and flows through it so that its existence isn't just understood as the sum of its individual nodes but, in addition, the movements and translations that take place between them. The researcher thus becomes the curious traveller, engaged in multi-linear micro-journeys, with or without maps. (p. 3)

We can be creative in, and can design for, all of the different ways in which we can sense the world. And, to understand the ecology of design cultures that stem from and interact with music, it is necessary to be embedded within them. To write this book I therefore inhabited design cultures in the music industries and followed the flows and connections and moved within these industries as a curious traveller. In doing so, I have attempted to provide a more extended and embedded understanding of the music business.

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[5] See also Bartmanski and Woodward (2014). Bartmanski and Woodward used insights from material culture studies to explore the question of why the seemingly obsolete medium of vinyl became one of the fastest-growing format in music sales.

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