

Guy Morrow (2020): Designing the Music Business: Design Culture, Music Video and Virtual Reality, Springer Music Business Research book series

Book Review

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Guy Morrow's monograph 'Designing the Music Business: Design Culture, Music Video and Virtual Reality' is a comprehensive guide to *design*, not only in terms of parts of the music 'product' but also of the music business and its culture in the digital age.

Based on scientific studies and experience in artist management, his book is aimed at two target groups. First, like other volumes in Springer's 'Music Business Research' series, it is aimed at music business researchers. By reading this book, such scholars will gain a better empirical and conceptual understanding of the diversity and complexity of music-related practices and value processes. They will also learn how to conceptually separate these practices and processes, which are primarily media elements of design processes, and how to think them together.

Second, all creative people can benefit from the book, especially musicians who for the sake of their music career, want or have to work with more and more other creative people and don't want to lose track of the available possibilities to design their own music businesses. However, this target group is not talked about in this review, but instead this review is aimed at music business researchers.

The book is clearly structured and is easy to understand. In the beginning, Morrow names the three questions that the book answers: 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? He defines 'design culture' in the context of a discussion of imagination, creativity and innovation and clearly illustrates how he uses his understanding of design culture to purposefully think through music-related practices and processes together and make them plannable: '[To] get everything done under the same umbrella' (p. 15).

Chapter 2 explains his research methods and how he designed his scientific work ethically and responsibly. In doing so, he reflects on the normative orientation of the book with 'reciprocity' between researcher and participants at its core. Chapter 3 concerns album cover design and the argument that the process of '*design* culturing' often starts with album cover design (cf. the illustration on p. 34). The idea of a sequence of design processes from album cover design, to vinyl cover design, to gig and tour poster design, to music video production and then to set and stage design allows for a good understanding of design processes and their extension into the space of augmented and virtual reality (Chapter 8). He further argues that it is long overdue to think about the status and modes of cooperation of all those involved in the creation of values in the music economy, including designers and videographers.

This becomes very clear in Chapter 4 which concerns gig and tour poster design (pp. 55–84) and that contains many visually impressive value examples from the visual artists involved and, above all, Jonathan Zawada's contribution from both the art and the design worlds. In this chapter, Morrow's conclusions on the complexity and peculiarity of this field are particularly nuanced (see p. 76). This chapter helps one to understand that the economy of music now more than ever is fluid, one that appears to be becoming more and more creative and multifaceted, and which seems to be less and less of an 'industry'.

Contrary to what one might expect from the title 'Designing the Music Business', Guy Morrow does not interpret this as a design challenge for a more reciprocal music economy in the future, but above all as a way to avoid the risk of exploitation. The new, more open complexity is not interpreted as an opportunity from and for the future, but with old categories from old times and the danger of continued exploitation. There is a danger of artists being crushed between commercial, industrial processes and artistically creative motives, and artists and designers in the field are exploited and often self-exploited. This issue is being exacerbated by the exhaustion caused by the fact that for these practitioners an increase in the volume of output is often the only way to increase revenue in their attempts to make a living. This is the heart of the issue that Morrow's book was designed to address. Morrow argues that as we move further into the digital realm, there is a need to redesign the business for the betterment of the artists and designers on whom the music business relies (p. 83).

Chapter 5 concerns music video production and in it Morrow shows that, in addition to contracts, prices, etc., there are also completely different 'currencies' that are obviously becoming more important. 'Reputation' is key! In this chapter, reputation is cited as being a currency that plays a new and increasingly important role in global virtually networked times. But it is not only personal relationships that are becoming more important due to the opportunities that new global corporations such as Facebook or Google/YouTube are opening up for us, as Chapter 6 'Music Video Dissemination' explains. In the so-called post-MTV video era, completely new structures dominate the distribution of music, and Morrow more precisely describes their associated processes using the word 'dissemination' rather than 'distribution' (p. 123).

Just as the private domestic and mobile use of music has changed structurally, as Chapter 7 shows, the live experience is also being designed more and more precisely in a wide variety of dimensions. Morrow explains this instructively, for example, about the design successes of Radiohead and concerning tactile, visual and other experiences that involve the role of merchandise. Here also is a fascinating discussion of new companies such as Music Glue, a company that is providing a new, and much needed, holistic e-commerce solution for the business. Chapter 8 'Conclusions: Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality and Mixed Reality' takes his consistently readable and enlightening examples of design processes into the future. New possibilities are becoming clear and Morrow argues that there is a risk that these opportunities will primarily be harnessed by Big Tech players such as Facebook at the expense of the music business. But here too, as in all the chapters described in the book, people play important roles in design processes that should become more visible and be described precisely.

Morrow's book fills a long overdue gap. It makes a meritorious contribution to making processes in the music business that are constitutive and valuable more visible and understandable, for both music business researchers and for all creative people involved as artists and 'musicpreneurs'. But it is also of importance and value because it addresses inequality both in terms of old and new forms, which in a new edition could become a more productive topic if it were to also concern design thinking. This would do justice to the music business in its role as a future laboratory, which in some ways it has arguably been for the economy and society generally due to its many new social forms and cycles, such as music networks, new music cities and new agency music festivals. It is becoming increasingly clear that those responsible for the music activities of more and more small-scale networked participants now need to 'design' more transparently, more personally and, above all, more reciprocally.