STARS, ANTI-STARS, ANTI-STAR-STARS: TRANSMEDIA TEXTS AND CONTEXTS OF POPULAR MUSIC AND MEDIA. SOME THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of stars and celebrities in media cultures – and especially in popular music cultures – seems to be omnipresent. At the same time, there is an astounding lack of analysis and research on these media personalities and personas, and international celebrity studies only recently a developing new field. Similarly, these kinds of observations are still very rare especially in German sociology as well as communication, media, culture and popular music studies. In this article, I therefore want to concentrate on the foundations of studying stars and celebrities within the attention economies by undertaking a theoretical transmedia-cultural framing of media personas and suggesting a typology. This ensuing typology of stars, anti-stars, and anti-star stars – especially within popular music cultures – demonstrates how stars and celebrities and their quantities and qualities of success and peer-group specific values coming form programs of (media and music) culture can serve as persona-seismographs of socio-cultural change between tradition and innovation.

KEY WORDS

Stars; Celebrities; Popular Music; Transmedia Culture; Personas

INTRODUCTION

"[There is] no culture that does not live from – and in – the regard of its members." (Franck 2005, p. 12)[1]

It begins on an amateur level and yet it is often highly ritualised in private, interpersonal communication. It is then translated into the professionalised, public social networks and mass communications transmedia and particularly advertising. We are speaking of promotion, regard, vying for attention – captured succinctly in the quotation above by Georg Franck, the Viennese theorist of architecture and spatial planning. But Franck's observation provides far more than just an "eye catcher" for an academic discussion about "eye catching". Apart from the regard for regard, the attention for attention, Franck's words encompass clearly a central link between culture and society: culture operates on the members of a society. At the same time, these individuals are dependent on culture in order to orient themselves in society. This reciprocal connection is increasingly directed by those media and platforms which increasingly control the attention of the public. In addition to issues, priorities and events, the media spotlight always falls back on people or persons or personalities i.e., public personas. Analysing these transmedia protagonists following Auslander (2004; 2021) and Jacke (2018) and in

drawing on the work of Simon Frith (1998), one has to differentiate between real persons, star personas and characters: "I argue that when we see a musician perform, we are not simply seeing the "real person" playing; as with actors, there is an entity that mediates between musicians and the act of performance" (Auslander 2021, p. 88).[2] This complex and dynamic entity, one could add, has been entirely extended by including the different stages of transmedia production, distribution, reception, and re-production (post-processing) what makes adequate analyses being very elaborate.

Whoever opens up a newspaper, checks the latest news and postings online, or turns on the television or radio news, does research on the internet or surfs on the homepage of a music magazine, they will immediately notice that the transmedia coverage of whatever shade (Jenkins 2007; 2020) is oriented to people(s) and faces i.e., public masks in the form of personas. No matter what social domain is being addressed – sports, politics, academia, literature, arts or especially popular music – journalism and (social) communication in general need heads and faces to attach their stories to, and vice versa. Hence, it is all the more astounding that these particular media personalities are still so rarely discussed particularly in German popular music studies[3], media studies, communications studies or musicology, if we disregard the research on news values and its factor of personalisation or the still very few preliminary studies on various characteristics of media personalities. A closer look at some introductions to media and communication studies discloses very few entries or chapters on media people / celebrities / stars – and only recently at that. And even in the realm of international scholarship and the relevant research disciplines, we have only seen the first journals, readers and anthologies published in recent years (see Holmes & Redmond 2006; Marshall 2006a; 2006b; 2021; Redmond & Holmes 2007; Turner 2006; 2010). Despite the ubiquitous media phenomenon, the cultural studies of stardom and celebrity are apparently just gaining more and multiperspectival traction.

On the basis of this assessment of the growing international research, I would like to propose in the present contribution a theory of media culture pointing toward (a future) empirical observation of famous popular music and media culture stars and celebrities as real persons, personas and characters. To begin with, I depict and define the context of various cultural levels and media (section 2). Then, in the main part of my considerations, I will undertake a definition (and explanation) of popular music and media celebrities and stars while also developing a typology of stars using the example of popular music stars as a component of popular culture (section 3). Having proposed a typology and spiral of popular music stars and celebrities, I will make some suggestions in the conclusion (section 4) what kind of research might be able to apply these basic considerations (see Ruth & Jacke in this issue).

Culture – Subculture – Popular Culture as Program

The aforementioned discourses on regard and attention in a media society do not proceed in a purely interpersonal or a purely mass- or social-mediated way. Franck himself coined (the meanwhile much cited) keywords of *attention economy* and *mental capitalism* (see Franck 1998; 2005; and, focusing on popular music stars and celebrities, Marshall 2021). Actants are clearly informed by the media about a society that is in large part inaccessible to them personally and are still very participatory and active parts of the communication process of popular music cultures. Here I will refer to media as the complex and dynamic interconnection between communication instruments (like languages, notations etc.), socio-systematical, professionalised and institutionalised organisations (like publishers, agencies, labels, editorial staff etc.), media technologies (like TV, film, radio, computer, internet, online etc.) and concrete media offers (like articles, features, posts, blogs, broadcastings, reports, contributions etc.) and

to "actants" in order to emphasize their active role in the communication process while attempting to gain some distance from loaded terms such as actor, individual or subject – following Schmidt's proposals (1994; 2007; 2011). Similarly, the media respond to actants and their needs. It ultimately comes down to the actants' regard for something and their readiness to participate in (or purchase) something. For the time being, it does not matter if we are talking about private or public broadcasting, editorial or advertising media.

For a conception of culture and its levels as a part of research on stars, celebrities, or general media and popular music personas and personalities, Siegfried J. Schmidt's socio-cultural, constructivist theory of media culture and histories and discourses lends itself well to subculture and popular culture.[4] In contrast to Critical Theory, this theory is argued less normatively. In contrast to much of Cultural Studies, which often take a case-study approach and are less conceptually grounded, it is more precise theoretically and more differentiated in its construction. And, in contrast to Systems Theory, the actants are themselves specifically considered. The basics of this media-cultural theory that will form the framework for observations on popular music and media personas, celebrities, and stars in societies of media culture will be presented in reasonable brevity in what follows.

According to Schmidt, actants operate on the basis of reality models and cultural programs. At the same time, models of reality form a society's system of options that orient meaning. This system consists of the collective knowledge of a society about itself, which is by no means to be regarded as information assets in thesaurus form. Instead, this knowledge is an operative fiction of mutual assumptions. Therefore following Schmidt, I define culture as a dynamical orientation mode featuring a constant basic mechanism between suppositions and presuppositions. Only on that basis are we cognitively able to act and communicate at all. This collective knowledge is defined by central domains of action and reference in social interactions: how to deal with surroundings, with other actants, with forms of socialisation, or with emotions and moral orientations. These areas are closely intertwined and constitute the identity constructions of actants, groups and even societies. Although models of reality are being constantly re-balanced in society, they are nonetheless relatively stable.

A key aspect in accounting for the concept of culture in these reality models is their function as a static semantic network of possible distinctions. These distinctions have been inscribed into the collective knowledge on establishing culture. They occupy the central categories of reality models and their differences, such as the category "gender" and its inscribed distinction of "female / male", changing to "female / male / diverse / queer", the category "politics" and its options for differentiation "left / middle / right", etc. If we follow Schmidt in observing these reality models as the (almost) essential framework of social perception and orientation, the framings of the respective perceptions are filled with affect, assessed morally and explained as permissible (or not). This individually constructed and socially oriented program of interpretation is labelled "culture" by Schmidt. Culture as an cognitively, morally, and affectively interpretative foil pervades all areas of life (political culture, educational culture, sport culture, etc., all the way to the culture of culture). For one thing, such a concept of culture permits us to better recognize individual problem areas (such as corporate culture) while also juxtaposing those domains (synchronicity). But the concept likewise helps us analyse differences in segmented domains of society (again: a synchronicity) as well as historically. Thus, Schmidt talks about cultural segments such as law, sports, art, etc. If a society's culture is seen as the crucial program that is influenced (culturally as well) by other societal programs, then the other domains identified are segmented programs in which main and sub-levels can be observed (hierarchy). The dynamic dialectic between these "main" and "sub" programs moves and modifies the relevant crucial societal program in a latent and usually

only nuanced manner. At the same time, it is particularly important that a transformation of culture (programs) is occurring only in culture (programs) itself and that there is nothing outside of culture. To take up the example of the category of gender once more: "male / female / diverse / queer" can be filled and evaluated in different (cultural) ways, as we have seen (for instance) in the women's movement or in queer cultures. It is much more difficult to change the possibilities for differentiation within the category "gender" or even place the entire category in question. In general, popular culture is a social field of serious play where variations of these categories – and thus this cultural change – are being tried out very early and playful.

I understand popular (music) culture as the commercialised social domain where themes are industrially produced and conveyed in the mass media. These are used and processed (for pleasure) by numerically predominant populations.[5] Within this popular culture, there are likewise sub- and main levels. Their actants ultimately act and make decisions normatively and decide what good and bad mean for them. The provision of subject matter is largely guaranteed by the media, which are permanently offering proposals for reality models and interpretations. Cultural programs of societies are strongly influenced by media and influence media (transmedia culture) in turn.[6]

The frequent effective character of actions is striking as part of the mass and social communication process of popular culture, i.e. of its production, distribution, reception / usage, and (further) processing. The very "elective" character of popular culture as a kind of compulsory voting leaves options open which themselves take place on the basis of cultural programs. The field of popular culture is particularly dependent on certain trends. And it operates as a veritable "attention-economic" barometer or seismograph for overall societal developments, the reason why the field seems so interesting in research and education. Popular-cultural actants usually know quite well how tentative their own strategies are. Hence, they take into account claims of unending change that Rötzer confirms generally for media societies: "In a free market of attention nothing is permanent. Nothing can be done in the long term that is not constantly subjected to updating" (Rötzer 1999, p. 52). This latent updating is well-known especially to those actants of popular culture who qua position and as professionals have recourse to the market of media attention: popular music and media stars and celebrities. They are particularly important for the production level of the communication process and thus for the production and presentation of popular music and media products. Both these stars and the reporters require that there be change. This cannot be observed better in any media sector than in advertising, where (if necessary) the static becomes transformed. If everything is always in motion and the images only flicker past, a void of sound and image in a commercial spot can generate absolute attention. "Not the truth or the good, law or objectivity, are the standards of ludic culture but what is interesting, the interruption of continuity, the improbable, the divergent, the fatal chain of events, and the novel – as terrible as it might sound" (Rötzer 1998, p. 169). Precisely in the field of popular (music) culture, there is the "primacy of a permanent topicality based on constantly going one better in the present micro-domain – jumping from one attraction to another, from hit to hit – and on economic dependency" (Ullmaier 1995, p. 7). Moreover, this does not seem to be unusual at all within the transmedia and cultural his- and herstories of popular music cultures: "Music history usually is about things that were new in their own time. They were radical, unusual in some sense, breaking with tradition. Most things we think of now as classic were actually innovative in their time." (Reynolds in Reynolds & Jacke 2022, p. 386).

The cycle of paying attention and acquiring regard (see Franck 2005, p. 7) can be substantiated in the interpersonal realm. In the domain of mass and social media and platforms, it is measured para-socially using big audience share (quantity) or credible popularity

(emotional quality). It seems to be part of the cultural program not only of advertising but also of every single media actant – not to speak of non-media actants – in order to enter into this cycle. "Humanity lives with its actor-ego in the permanent staging of the self. Displaying one's ego to others cannot be avoided" (Bianchi 2006, p. 47). For this purpose, art theorist Paolo Bianchi uses the concept of self-culture that can be easily incorporated as well as David P. Marshall's concept of the production of the self within celebrity culture (see Marshall 2010) into the considerations of Schmidt and Jacke. There is an increasing focus on the self apparently, so that it can be depicted impersonally. In this way, the media and social networks are regarded as a way of training attention economies. The commercialisation of this phenomenon has already been impressively achieved, as demonstrated by the container and casting shows on television. In addition to television, the possibilities of the internet and especially its platforms for media technology lend themselves well to increasing self-culturalization in the public sphere:

> Celebrities express in the most extreme form the commodification of the individual; but, as opposed to a representation of the removal of the human subject and their capacity to express, they are its opposite. In all sorts of domains, celebrities articulate activity and agency at a super-individual level. Because of their visibility, celebrities do more than enact agency: they exemplify the exact and valued way that agency operates in contemporary culture. This form of commodified agency that celebrities both embody and express may appear to be abnormal – and it is in terms of its oversize dimensions; but, generally, it is not. What has occurred in our culture is a normalization of the commodification of the individual over more than a century of consumer capitalism. (Marshall 2021, p. 168)

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that even self-culture is carried out in light of established cultural programs. These provide the benchmark data for the reality mode and can be changed by the smallest displacements: "The art of self-representation is not found in the act of provocation and subversion but relies on the (small) deviation, the *abversion*" (Bianchi 2006, p. 47). Let us now go into greater detail concerning the actants of the media and music production side, the celebrities and stars. Let us see how they (constantly attempt to) distinguish themselves qua "abversion", i.e. by a slight variation or homeopathic subversion.

Actants Using Cultural Programs: Celebrities and Stars and Their Persons, Personas and Characters

For the time being, the nevertheless very important side of the recipients have to be neglected for research economical reasons. In the context of reception, usage, participation and (further) processing, they very much play a decisive role in the (re-)construction, communication and consumption of media personalities and popular music cultures in general, e.g. in the form of fan cultures, in social networks, as customers, consumers, produsers etc.: "Consumers become hunters and gatherers moving back across the various narratives trying to stitch together a coherent picture from the dispersed information." (Jenkins 2007). Instead, we will now primarily discuss the production and distribution side of the media and especially popular music persons, personas and characters. Media and popular music celebrities and stars focusing on personas in the dimension of production can be seen as public representatives, markers, and seismographs for styles, scenes and trends in visually dominated cultures. When analysing these kinds of popular music and media protagonists following Auslander (2004; 2021; Holt 2011) one has to differentiate between the real person, the star persona and the character. These protagonists are to some extent the mediatised (and thus broadcast) embodiments of personalised applications of cultural programs on the sub- and main levels: "Persona is a very

mutable concept. Perhaps its mutability is no more prominently displayed than in its intersection and integration into music and musical culture." (Fairchild & Marshall 2019, p. 1). They are therefore particularly well-suited for analysing the levels of the transmedia change between "main" and "sub" in all areas of society, particularly those social experimental practice labs of popular music cultures.

The active domain of popular music and media production culturally includes various roles and job descriptions, such as (in the case of popular music) producers, event managers, A&Rs (artist and repertoire managers), label managers, streaming platform agents, merchandisers, or road crew members. If one filters out of these roles what is primarily observed in the public and social media and is therefore well-known, then one inevitably ends up with renowned popular music personas in the form of celebrities and stars – apart from "the proliferation of online micro-celebrities" (Marshall 2021, p. 174). If one then distinguishes between celebrities and stars, designating celebrities as famous and stars as additionally popular, then *stars* might be designated as the elite of the celebrities. This all begs the question of who decides what is famous or popular and what is micro, meso or macro. In the process, fame is easier to measure since it is a quantitative parameter that can then be transferred to the levels of the communication process. Put differently: it can be asked how many actants are familiar with someone at the level of the production and reception of certain popular music and media products or how many clicks these celebrities and stars receive. This relationship is even described by Frank as cyclical: "One must not only be generally familiar but also known for being familiar to everyone" (Franck 2005, p. 135). The vehicle or (for Franck) the "creditor" of this renown are the mass and social media. In such an instance, there is certainly a qualitative difference between those with regard for opinion leaders and those with regard for normal people, even if they might be regarded as micro-celebrities. That is something known, for example, by every employee of a popular music promotion agency. Compared with fame, popularity is a priori a qualitative criterion that can turn celebrities into stars and that is much more difficult to measure. For instance: A student in the pedestrian zone being asked about her eating habits by a camera crew is a media personality in the moment the interview is being broadcast or posted prominently. She only becomes a celebrity more generally when large parts of the population know her, when she (literally) "stands out" among the surplus of media personalities – same with social networks where it is the quantity, quality, and length of time of the five-minutes-fame that might lead to being an influencer or becoming a celebrity. Yet she is not yet a star because such a personality must stand out from those who stand out already and has to develop a star persona as a quality. Celebrities can become stars (as a mixture of real persons, star personas and characters e.g. in a song, on stage, online), but stars are those who have already been celebrities. Franck doubts the causal direction of this process: "Do we pay attention to what we value, or do we place value on what we pay attention to?" (Franck 2005, p. 11). Yet in terms of perceptual logic, we can only place value on something that we have previously regarded (highly). The gradation between celebrities and stars in this sense appears to be comprehensible. The star persona as the crucial part of stars, following Auslander, can be conceptualized "in music as constructing a chain of signification to and from music/composition to performer/performance" (Fairchild & Marshall 2019, p. 3). This chain nowadays can be understood as transmedia using different media, platforms, formats, roles, and contents (Jenkins 2007; 2020). Even as popular music stars, all their different real persons, especially their personas and their characters in lyrics, on albums, in performances etc. are permanently transmediated – and still full of secrets and gaps to be filled by recipients end especially fans.

Drawing on concrete objects of study from media and popular music culture, we will be evaluating whether the hypothesis applies that there is a generally productive dialectic between "main" and "sub" on an "abstract plateau" for the personalised "area of actants" within popular

music cultures. In other words, we will now be attempting to personalise and specify overall social and pop-cultural mechanisms between "sub" and "main" on the basis of outstanding persons, personas, and characters. Obviously the "stories" that are being produced, distributed, received, and re-produced by and about such stars are operating on all three dimensions, which, in the case of popular music stars, makes a differentiation very hard. On the one hand, all levels have to fit systematically and historically to build up a congruent image (tradition) and, on the other hand, should vary at least slightly, to show permanent change (innovation) to keep attention at a high level. Most famous examples from pop music her- and histories, of course, seem to be David Bowie, Madonna, Lady Gaga, and, most recently, Billie Eilish and Taylor Swift, where a constant change within the images of the "real person", the star persona, and the characters can be seen as a crucial part of the whole image and its different layers and aspects.[7] Within the communication process of popular music cultures and stars in-between production/construction, distribution/re-construction and reception/re-production/post-processing/re-re-construction one can observe multiple ways of mutual sense- and nonsense-makings (see Figure 1 below).

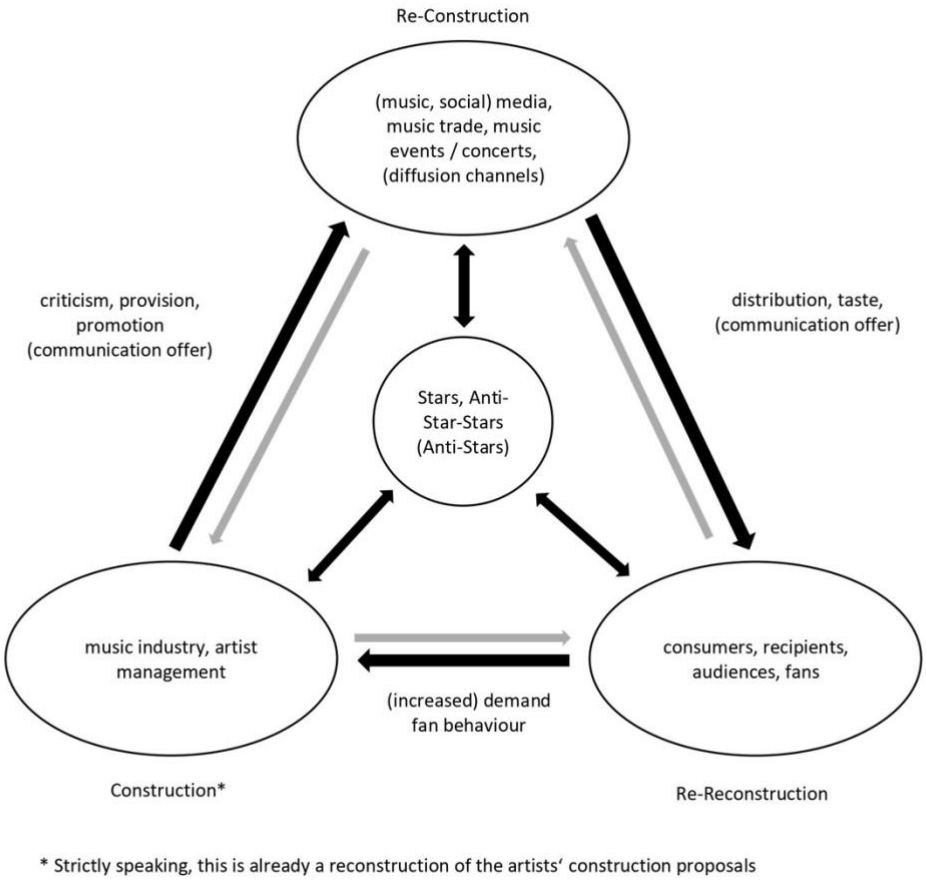

Figure 1. Spiral of transmedia pop music culture stardom.

This figure is not meant to be a proper circle, but more a kind of open spiral showing the ongoing processes of star constructions, re-constructions, re-re-constructions etc. Still, and even in social media, a certain communicative hierarchy can be seen which is here indicated by the

black and grey arrows. The complete and still open (for interpretation) image of a star therefore is constructed on all levels and in all mutual structures of communication within culture.

Stars

Our focus here should be directed to the field of stars in popular music since they can be assessed as seismographs of the zeitgeist within differing social domains and through transmedia. After all: especially popular music is under constant compulsion to innovate, to produce new things and – at least and as mentioned above – ab- und subversions, to process and shape developments in and between the "mains" and "subs" of a variety of program segments.

Within the recent decades, some new developments can be observed within the area of popular music stars. First, the disc jockeys who contributed to the depersonalisation, anonymisation, and white labelling of the music itself, have themselves started becoming stars (Westbam, Marusha, David Guetta etc.). Second – and by comparison – there is a living "classic" pop star scene with all of its associated manifestations between the Rolling Stones and Billy Eilish. Third, there is a tendency toward constructing virtual or (even) self-producible stars or mixtures (Hatsune Miku, Gorillaz). Fourth – and probably the most observable and successful media and music phenomenon – there is the trend to mediatise and commercialise the genesis of stars itself (see Kelly 2007; Tessler 2008). If there is not enough to report in the case of established stars or if their stories are already obsolete, the media companies produce their own and narrate their stories in the form of a kind of perfect star simulations. *Popstars* and *Deutschland sucht den Superstar*, the very successful German equivalent to *Pop Idol*, were only just the beginning of countless talent shows. As if it were a self-fulfilling prophecy, these individuals are becoming successful, genuine stars in a few cases. In the case of the last trend, it should not be ignored that the phenomenon of "celebrity for everyone" incorporates simultaneously spectators in its concept before they can possibly become fans – same with online micro-celebrities. At the same time, people often overlook that it is easier to become a celebrity than a star. If an entire broadcasting or tech company with all its concentrated production and distribution power stands behind the marketing of a person/persona/character, thereby guaranteeing to stimulate attention, then it stands to reason how unproblematic it is to promote the average man or woman. These media companies do not only have at their disposal the necessary money but also all the hardware (technology, people, etc.) and software (broadcast slots) in order to generate sufficient attention through transmedia. Someone who cannot at least become a celebrity under these conditions, thereby fulfilling the prerequisites for possible stardom, has in some sense failed from the perspective of the producers – not just within the talent show itself but also on the public square of programming slots (see Grindstaff 2009).

If one examines more closely the charisma of the stars and consults Roland Barthes' reflections on myth (1972), it can be explained why particular star simulations can never be myths of everyday life. Anyone who professes stardom so obviously and predictably, even though he or she is only participating in a "star" game show, is destroying that myth yet again (from Barthes' standpoint). Star simulations would therefore be without mythic content, mostly without secrets, gaps, open ends – which is what makes them so rapidly unattractive as subject material for the mass and social media. However, it should be noted once more that these star simulations lead to very few successes in the attention (or general) economy.

Nevertheless, even within these shows and concepts, in the meantime, producers have started to artificially construct and tell stories which show these characteristics of myth or star cult: "The current configuration of the entertainment industry makes transmedia expansion an

economic imperative, yet the most gifted transmedia artists also surf these marketplace pressures to create a more expansive and immersive story than would have been possible otherwise" (Jenkins 2007).

Evidently, the concept of the star operates under many names as a media character on the level of the main cultural program. The important thing: stars cannot be viewed in isolation but are always the focus of different highly complex transmedia systems of reference, texts, contexts and universal societal conditions. As pointed out by the Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni more than sixty years ago: "[S]tardom appears as a phenomenon appropriate to a certain moment in the development of industrial societies, in which it fulfils certain variable functions which depend on the socio-political configuration of the society. stardom carries a time dimension, which enables us to make a dynamic study of it" (Alberoni 1962, p. 95).

In addition to this relational dimension, stardom has a functional level. The expression "relational" means that different things were (and are) understood by the term "star", at different times by different individuals in divergent segments of systems. The terms idol, icon, hero, role model or advertising medium can be understood as functions, for instance. As noted already, basically anyone can become an online micro-celebrity (at least temporarily). A real star, however, never stops being one (see Turner 2006). Even popular music stars, of course, achieve different degrees of publicity concerning real person, star persona and character, each of them different in length and intensity – even and very often especially posthumously when becoming immortal. Publicity is here understood as the publishing and (social) media coverage of aspects of the stars and as a crucial criterion for stars (see Table 1 below in the summary); concerning aspects of produced, distributed, sold, consumed, clicked, read offers and editions, global, glocal, local, peer-group range, reputation (within music and media industries, social media, fan groups, opinion leader groups, algorithms). "As media such as newspapers or television are less adept at garnering audiences, celebrities migrate into online spaces as points of visible recognition – the element that legacy media continues to try to sustain even as these celebrities are no longer dependent on the legacy media to sustain their value" (Marshall 2021, p. 167). Their transmedia compatibility makes especially stars being an ideal person, persona, and character mediator between different spheres, scenes, fields, and times. "This capacity of celebrities to move across fields and to be deployed strategically in these various platforms and domains of contemporary life and society points to their convertible value. Businesses and industries attempt to quantify that value and use it for specific purposes" (Marshall 2021, p. 167).

At the same time, such musicians become celebrities or stars both by the fame and the popularity bestowed on them. The degree of their renown and success is measured by publicity and economic breakthrough, specifically and thus synchronously (quantity) as well as diachronically (continuity).

An academic analysis of the star cult phenomenon is made more difficult by the mystification produced by restricting personal contact between star and audience in the case of most stars. Erving Goffman (1959), whose observations on (self-)presentation as part of studying the cult of celebrity still receive far too little attention, denotes this limitation – the maintaining of social distance – as a method for stars to enhance the audience's regard for them. Since fans are usually anonymous in relation to the stars, even online, thus making interpersonal interaction highly unlikely, the recipients have to rely either on media coverage for (para-social) contact with "their stars" – or on gossip and rumour, at least stories, in social networks – or both ("Did I text with Taylor Swift or with one of her agents or bots?"). What is undeniable is the role of stars and fans in sustaining the mystification and the cult of celebrity

through different levels of persona, modifying Auslander's (2004; 2021) differentiation between character, persona and real person: the public person on different stages like playing live, in music video clips, at interviews, in TV shows, on their websites, in blogs etc., in films, in games; the public private person when being focussed as a private person publicly, and, of course, the most important level for mystification and constructions of authenticity as a constant criterion of pop music evolution (see Jacke 2018), the "private-private" person and all his or her secrets as a blank space within the complex transcultural contextual and textual (images, sounds, lyrics, performances etc.) constructions and narratives. The latter being kind of the creative engine of star constructions (production), re-constructions (distribution), and re-re-constructions (reception and re-production) through myths (see Figure 1). The fundamental dichotomy between stars and fans is the basis for any kind of myth or cult. Having constructed personal myths, *ergo* "stars", the fans are now able to interact with the star and to identify with their cult. In the end, "pop-communication is [...] always a mixture of myths, myth-construction and deconstruction" (Diederichsen 1993, p. 277) and seems to be transmedia in a wider and in a narrow sense. In this mixture – no matter how confused and transmediated – the fans seem to be constantly seeking plausibility, wanting to constantly verify their stars and thus constitute what is a very dubious notion (in the domain of the popular): a myth of authenticity in sense of credibility (see Moore 2002).

The representation of a person, seemingly paradoxically even the persona and character of a popular music star, through the media is largely a form that is perceived as "real" – which makes the popular music star differ from fictional film, games or literature stars (see Moore 2002). The recognised and interpreted characteristics develop into supports of an individual construction of relevant wishes and ideas of a corresponding fantasy image through the star persona. Thus, the interaction between a fan and a star using media and music products is rather a kind of para-social interaction of the recipient with characteristics attributed to the media character or to the construction of stars. The cult serves as an orientation for the individual to structure his/her/their value system. The stars therefore (co-)structure the applications of the fans' cultural programs. Often this can result in the fan internalising socially desirable or undesirable values by means of identification. These values are then frequently negotiated in communicative fashion at real as well as (nowadays) virtual sites. Still, the fans are not naïve with respect to the cultural program but link their decisions for certain cults of celebrity to their own social experiences and expectations. The mass and social media at the same time weaken (traditionally) firmly imprinted distinctions between high and low culture, essential and superficial, good and bad taste. "Depending on their 'cultural capital' [...] groups enjoy media products based on their perception of meanings, with each one expressing and promoting its own interests" (Schmidt 1994, p. 308). Ritual and symbolic processes thus constitute systems of meaning, able to form the scaffolding of collective and individual knowledge on which individuals might orient themselves, a scaffolding consisting of reality models and cultural programs.

The cult surrounding the stars is a guarantee for economic success. The expression of uniqueness, the originality of this personality, must be produced in any form and transmedia – e.g. through extraordinary achievements that are system-specific. Such accomplishments are certainly more measurable in sports than in popular music. Whoever throws a discus sixty meters is more highly regarded than someone who throws it forty-five meters. To a certain extent, the popular music charts and media have been functioning as generators of attention – moreover awards, lists, fan clubs, websites, blogs and clicks. Yet the criteria for getting into them are far more complex than "simple" range in the discus throw. It is particularly problematic when these areas are now coupled with the (social) media since that shifts the criteria once more. To stick with our example: while one does not receive any special

recognition for poor performances in sports / the discus throw, the media would be very aware of an actant throwing the discus forty-five meters if this person were prominent according to media rules and had thrown the discus in the wrong direction or injured spectators. This aspect plays, to my mind, an important role in the formats of the star simulations. In *Popstars* or *Pop Idol*, having a good voice is not as important as the media suitability of the actants. The most striking characters are sometimes eliminated in the semi-finals in as much as they operate according to the terms of the economy of attention: even the second-place finisher can become famous and possibly popular and marketable anyway, this tournament seems to mostly be a media and not only a popular music competition.

Regardless of whether the media focuses on popular music or an entirely different social subsystem, stars serve on the public stage as representatives, markers, seismographs and especially suppliers of quite specific applications of cultural programs. These applications are generally responsive to large numbers of recipients but do not violate the rules of cultural programs – these aspects are mutually conditioning. They also carry out system-specific services – even if it is only in order to achieve a quota in the popular music and/or media system and thus be able to proceed on the "main" program level. These aspects are mutually conditioning.

Anti-Stars

Although the term "anti-star" is often used in the media and popular music industries to refer to defiant, confrontational stars (such as especially in popular music, e.g., Kurt Cobain), precisely this term appears semantically insufficient and contradictory. There cannot be anti-stars, particularly in the mainstream music and media or (in that connection) as a topic in large public spheres. When discussing popular heroes already in 1948, economist Orrin E. Klapp interestingly spoke of anti-heroic roles and features – such as weakness, betrayal, or persecution – or of possessing the character traits of a clown or of fools. Consequently, the term "anti-star" often is used to designate those anonymous musicians or other artists who do not make it into the media in the first place because they are completely resistant or only appear in face-to-face groups (family, relatives, friends, neighbourhood, peer group, etc.), possibly experiencing the least publicity in the smallest segments of the public or special media (fanzines, niche or underground shows, etc.), without getting any attention in the "main" media and major music industries.

Or the anti-star is to be viewed conceptually as a temporary measure for distinguishing between a main-level star – someone who is well-established and upholds the values of a social system (and thus the parameters of a cultural program) – and the rebellious (anti-star-)star who switches from the sub- to the main level. Accordingly, anti-star designates the stage of the resistant, (progressively or regressively) protesting musicians in the application of a subcultural program, i.e. before they become economically very successful and – irrevocably linked to that – experience increased publicity in the media and music industries. Musicians who play in front of a quantitatively small audience are therefore anti-stars on the sub-level. Musicians playing before a large audience, who do not interfere with the established value system but also garner economic success and (social) media publicity, are stars on the main level. And those musicians can be designated as "anti-star-stars" who perform in front of large audiences and who likewise defy, provoke, or protest in some way while also garnering economic success and media publicity through their transmediated real persons, star personas, and characters (see section "Anti-star-stars" below).

The relatively variable and flexible expectations of the audiences and media are central to the category of the anti-star. This structure of relationships has by and large become evident

in the form of mutual, pre-communicative expectations and expectations of expectations (mutual expectations) in the case of the anti-star-star (who is successful and entirely part of the marketing process). In such cases, the audience and the media are already expecting there to be a breach of expectations on the part of the anti-star-star. He / she in turn can no longer avoid this process, whereas the "anti-star" is faced with less stable attitudes of expectation and is therefore not yet integrated into a compact structure of expectation-expectations: "There are only "the masses", on the one hand, and the outsider as hero, on the other – the outsider who merely by standing outside becomes a hero. For the ability not to be tempted to integrate oneself requires the greatest power in a mass (media) compliant society" (Früchtl 2004, p. 112).

The sociologist Rolf Schwendter (see 1993, pp. 185–191) within his theory of subculture of the early 1970s concludes that the complete social de-integration of public actants is not possible. If someone is not integrated, then they have done so at the cost of becoming isolated such that it is as good as impossible that they will effect fundamental change in the overall society. The total resister is not suited for changing society. There are numerous small stars or just anti-stars operating progressively or regressively on the basis of sub-levels of cultural programs. They are famous and popular in their specific scenes and domains, and they are thus successful in their own way there, principally by re-coding basic social differences. Some of these anti-stars come into the public eye at their particular main level (e.g. popular music).

Anti-Star-Stars

So, what happens when representative or seismographic users of cultural programs among the "subs" (anti-stars) step into the limelight of the "main" media themselves, as media and music productions? If we take up Barthes' concept of myth once more, it is clear that program change drivers (the willingness to learn) are highly suspicious of myth on the basis of already operative programs (unwillingness to learn). Barthes (1972) ascribes to myth the power of being able to achieve as well as corrupt anything – even when it is fleeing from itself. Even the greatest resistance is integrated into it, according to Barthes.

Consequently: if users, e.g. those in popular music, re-code program segments out of a "sub" and publish or represent the results of their usage in smaller segments of the public, they will sooner or later be able to attract the attention of the main media and music industries. If these program users then act as (social) media or music opinion leaders, the former anti-stars can certainly become those "pivot personalities" – as Schwendter labels them (see 1993, pp. 62–63 and 193–194) – who "stand" at the threshold between "main" and "sub". One could label them within popular music cultures as pivot stars. At the same time, what is particularly interesting is the moment of displacement in media and social network coverage. Well known examples of such pivot stars, "anti-star-stars" or "meta-rock stars" are Kurt Cobain of Nirvana (see Jacke 1998), Shane MacGowan, Patti Smith, Peaches, Chilly Ganozales and Nick Cave of The Boys Next Door, The Birthday Party, The Bad Seeds, Grinderman and most of all solo. Together with his band Grinderman, Cave, some years ago, seemed to be seeking a path back into the niche while playing with his own image on the level of real person, star persona, and character, moreover (see Jones 2009). In the tension between "main" and "sub", these pivot persons are behaving in a (veritable and credible) state of cognitive and communicative dissonance. As surfers between program levels, they are potential "losers" but can be successful in one respect: they can succeed synthetically, making interpretations and applications of sub programs credibly popular and thereby contributing to the transformation of the cultural programs.

In the following, let us examine once more – and more closely – this group of stars of the anti-stars who are popular in the "main" since they are specific instances of the dialectics of cultural program levels in media society. At the same time, we should focus again on popular

music, for the aforementioned reasons concerning indicators. The anti-star-stars who are successful musicians in the "main" are those who use subcultural programs and which meet four conditions: evidence of an audience (renown and popularity), resistant behaviour (change of the cultural program), economic success and continual (social) media and network publicity. In this way, those generally designated "losers" – or better, "resisters" – do not only become credible ("authentic")[8] and renowned in the subcultural music scene but also in sports, the cinema or politics. Accordingly, the difference between star and anti-star-star is constituted using the criterion of "resistant behaviour" – be it progressively or regressively. It entails more of a re-coding, change or even questioning of categories based on the foregoing considerations about the concept of culture. Resistant behaviour implies a violation of the existing societal system of values and norms. In making the transition into the "main" level from the other users of a subprogram, anti-star-stars are therefore both eminent (acknowledged as being established) and controversial (alleged to have "sold out" or betrayed themselves). From the environmental perspective of the "main" program segment, anti-star-stars are often appreciated little or not at all compared to stars.

Anti-star-stars and stars alike are subject to constant pressure once in the "main". They have to deliver subject matter to the media and especially to the attention (online) economies, so they do not disappear from their reporting agenda and become unsuccessful (in media and social network terms). By contrast, however, to those stars who fulfil more traditional newsworthiness criteria and conduct active image-maintenance in the form of constant media presence and self-expression, a particularly significant role (consciously or unconsciously) is played by negativity (scandals), surprise and norm violations when dealing with rebellious musicians (anti-star-stars). Furthermore, such musicians, seem to wish to escape media and audience expectations although doing so is practically impossible once they have become anti-star-stars.[9] Topics as attitudes toward life, particularly of the young, create a subcultural (music) scene. It is then (as the case may be) addressed, tagged, and promoted by certain media as well as marketed by the music industry – e.g., the slacker, the loser or the Gen x type of person/persona/character.

In this way, diverging interpretations and applications of program on the part of (anti-) stars provoke journalistic and social media reporting. The diverging events are evaluated on the expectations formed from the "main"; they are also visible as a disruption, provoking a reaction. Deviation from the norm is surprising: it attracts attention and stays in one's memory, especially in popular retro cultures (see Reynolds & Jacke 2022). Producers, distributors, and consumers – of popular music, for instance – all introduce and assume expectations. Consequently, expectation-expectations can be formed along with structures suspicious of communication as deviations from what is expected, breakthroughs in expectations and surprises are – in being registered – an initial spark for entire chains of linked thoughts.

In the form of differences or surprises, these unexpected changes stand out in the everyday life of the recipient. Hence, they must initially be recognised by (social) media editors. The strategy of "distraction via attention" in public relations – live performances, press conferences and media coverage work this way for a band or solo artist of popular music – can be applied or even reversed to the strategy of "attention via distraction" in the case of anti-star-stars. Many behaviours and claims of anti-star-stars in a subculture certainly distract us (out the outset) from the fact that they are also situated in the marketing mechanism of the music industry. Yet it can happen that they become even more interesting for media and fans through distraction or distancing. One can see the following as manifestations of such violations in the cultural movements especially of young adults: the repudiation of established rituals and a migration to speechlessness, provocation and dismantling of basic rules. In the end, these

represent all the uses of distinction in cultural programs that involve re-coding, re-editing or re-evaluating. This dismantling can counter not only the so-called dominant culture ("main") in the case of sub-cultural phenomena but also lead to a recontextualization or reorganisation in the form of bricolage. Likewise, it should not be ignored that even subcultural deconstructions are themselves constructions. This, too, demonstrates the impossibility of escaping these media and music market mechanisms.

The resolution of the paradox of success and total resistance is ultimately one of the reasons for social change. Although subcultural phenomena – such as punk, techno, hip-hop or grunge – are often trying at first to destroy the myth of popular culture, they are nonetheless an ultimately undeniable theme of cultural program applications. As a result, there is no difference between a cult of stardom and cult of anti-stardom in their processual aspects. The process is the same. That is, the cult of celebrity is just a creation of myths, and the anti-star cult of celebrity forms myths about anti-star-stars who (incidentally) seem to be particularly well-suited to being the subject of myths regardless of whether they take part in pop music or sports.

Star categories and their traits	Star	Anti-star	Anti-star-star
economic success	+	–	+
large audiences	+	–	+
Media/social network publicity	+	–	+
value violations / resistance	–	+	+
system-related achievement	+	+/–	+
popularity/fans	+	+	+

+ = criterion fulfilled +/–= undecided – = criterion not fulfilled

Table 1. Star categories and their criteria.

Conclusion

Consequently, the observational grid of the different levels of cultural programs, media and communication can also be transferred to the research area of media and popular music persona, personas, characters and especially celebrities and (particularly) stars. These public actants operate on the basis of their own cultural programs embedded in cultural programs of the media societies and music industries. These actants can be divided into three subgroups titled "star", "anti-star", and "anti-star-star", thereby illustrating (as it were) the dialectics of (popular) culture (see Table 1).

Using the introduced typology and spiral of transmedia pop music culture stardom and its underlying observational grid of culture as a program comprising various dialectically-operating segments of domains and programs, the few theoretical reflections (to date) about stars, celebrities and especially personas (not neglecting the roles of real persons and

characters) can be made productive through a broad concept of culture, one with the potential for observations of (especially) popular music and multiple transmedia cultural phenomena (see Figure 1): in-between the dimensions of stars, in-between different communication instruments, socio-systemic organisations and institutions, media and music technologies, and music and media offers and in-between cultural programs. In addition, such an approach lets us tie together previous analyses in sociology, (media) cultural studies, communication studies, and musicology in transdisciplinary projects like in popular music studies (see all contributions in Flath, Jacke & Troike 2022). Auslander (2004, pp. 6–7; 2021) has introduced the already mentioned (see above) distinction between real person, star persona and character in the case of stars and celebrities, i.e. public media characters. Particularly in the case of popular musicians, this distinction seems to be matching with my analytical suggestion of private-private (which is very important to keep the mysteries and histories running), public-private, and public person and clarifies the (concurrently operative) levels of the character, from her allegedly private role to her public one, all the way to her role in her lyrics, thus making the complex, multilevel character of the phenomenon even more apparent, even in credible transmedia and transcultural storytelling in a wider sense. All communication offers by popular music stars and celebrities are constructed by themselves, the music industries and artists' managements and agencies, then re-constructed by the music (social) media in a transmedia way through trade, events, awards etc. and then re-re-constructed by the audiences in social and analogue media and direct contact at shows, concerts etc. This (still very reductionistic) spiral of different layers of "construction" shows how complex, dynamic, and ambiguous the communicative process of popular music cultures and its stars and celebrities is. In this sense, we have now arrived at the beginnings of something like the "cultural, media and popular music studies of stardom or celebrity" in all its transcultural and transmedia complexity and dynamics as presented in Figure 1 (see above).[10] On a meta-level this model allows to integrate the (self-)reflexivity of analyses and cultures: As the analyses of cultures are dependent on the cultures of analyses (see Schmidt 2007).

In addition, my observations hopefully demonstrate how difficult it is for the stars themselves to escape the media and social networks' searchlights once they have been captured in them. on the one hand. Therefore, on the other hand, popular music personas will never be analysed completely neither by researchers nor by fans, as those important operational voids of mystery and secret are the basic impetus of all of the media, business, fan, and, of course, research (re-)constructions of star cult. Even those who destroy idols, an extreme form of stars, can in fact become the role models whom they once rejected. Or as the French Situationist and theorist Guy Debord and his colleagues at information bulletin *Lettrist International* already put it more than seventy years ago (2002, p. 22): "We believe that the most urgent exercise of freedom consists in the destruction of the idols, especially when they themselves appeal to freedom."

END NOTES

[1] All translations from German to English by myself.

[2] Auslander is using the plural term "personae".

[3] For overviews on German Popular Music Studies, see Ahlers & Jacke 2017; Jacke 2013.

[4] See Schmidt 1994; 2007; 2011 with some modifications especially focusing on popular music and culture, see Jacke 2004; 2018.

[5] See also Jacke 2004, pp. 19–26; 2018.

[6] See Schmidt 2011; Jacke 2004; for aspects of transformations of and in popular music culture see all contributions in Flath, Jacke & Troike 2022; for aspects of transmedia see Jenkins 2007, 2020.

[7] Here, a further analysis and case studies of gender aspects concerning the range of change (innovation) or constancy (tradition) would be very inspiring as a first impression when looking at superstars hints at the fact that maybe male stars tend to not vary their images as much (see Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, John Lennon, Michael Jackson, Kurt Cobain, Robbie Williams, Till Lindemann, Ed Sheeran) as female superstars which might have to do with the specific degrees of the transmedia, contexts and genres where these stars take place.

[8] For a discussion of different modes of authenticity and authentification within media and popular music cultures see Moore 2002.

[9] This topic could be empirically shown very clearly in my own content and discourse analysis of the media coverage of Nirvana and Kurt Cobain (Jacke 1998).

[10] Further research should concentrate on multiperspectival, phenomenolgical and empirical case studies (see Ruth & Jacke in this issue).

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