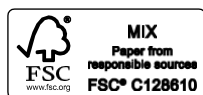


The Affordances Of Repackaged Popular Music From The Past

**De betekenis en waarde van opnieuw aangeboden populaire
muziek uit het verleden**



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The Affordances Of Repackaged Popular Music From The Past

De betekenis en waarde van opnieuw aangeboden populaire muziek uit het verleden

Thesis

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1. Introduction

In the Netherlands, nearly every weekend offers a chance to travel back in time. For one night only, audiences can return to the 1980s, 1990s or the beginning of the millennium. They can dance to music that was popular back when they were teenagers and enjoy the (in)famous TV tunes and visuals from their youth. The popular “WE ALL LOVE ’80s, ’90s, ’00s” parties that are held in different cities across the country are sold out almost each weekend. Likewise, the “Foute Party” (“Guilty Pleasures Party”) events organized by the Dutch commercial radio station Q-Music, which celebrate “qualitatively dubious” music from the 1990s or from 2000 on, are very popular. Former chart-topping acts like boy bands 5ive, East 17, and Blue, girl groups such as Atomic Kitten and All Saints, or singers like Peter Andre, Shaggy, and one-hit wonder Lou Bega are the main headliners at these events.

It is not just in the Netherlands that such parties are thriving. There seems to be an international—or at least European—boom in events that bring back to life popular culture from the past. For example, the music of the British girl band Spice Girls featured in *Viva Forever*, a musical on London’s West End played from 2012 to 2013. In 2016 the twentieth anniversary of the band’s hit single “Wannabe” was commemorated with Spice Girls reunions and “sing-a-long” parties in Copenhagen, Dublin, and London. On the other side of the Atlantic, *N SYNC, one of the biggest US boy bands from the early years of the twenty-first century, reunited on the occasion of the 2013 MTV Video Music Awards in New York, while another pop “hit machine” from the 1990s, the Backstreet Boys, celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a sold-out world tour in 2013 and 2014. Moreover, other kinds of popular culture from the past are “repackaged” in this way for the present. In 2015 the seventh instalment of the *Star Wars* saga was released, along with a remake of the 1979 *Mad Max* movie. In 2016 the TV drama *Gilmore Girls* and the TV comedy *Fuller House* (the revamped Fuller House) both returned with (most of) the original cast members to a global audience via the streaming service Netflix. Furthermore, in the summer of 2016, *Pokémon*, a popular TV show and card game of the previous decade, was repackaged as the highly successful augmented reality game *Pokémon Go*. The repackaging of popular culture from the relatively recent past is thus a pervasive practice across the entertainment realm, and one that appears to be commercially very attractive for the cultural industry. It enables this industry, all at

once, to tap into as well as construct audiences' "desire" to relive specific stages of their own pasts through popular culture from particular eras.

The present dissertation focuses on the audiences of repackaged popular music acts from the 1980s, 1990s, and the decade 2000–2010. Specifically, it investigates the meanings that audiences give to "reunited" pop acts—that is, acts that resulted from festive reunions such as those mentioned so far. Repackaged popular music acts—that is, the forms in which this music is repackaged and returns to the audience—can be extremely diverse, as this thesis will show. They can be reunion concerts, re-releases of old songs or albums, or recordings of new music; but they can also take unexpectedly different formats, for instance of documentary films, of reality TV programs, and even of meet-and-greet trips on international cruise yachts.

A lot has changed in the life course of current audiences of the reunited pop acts since the 1980s, 1990s, or 2000–2010, when the original acts were initially consumed and developed their fandom. In the case of reunion acts of the early years of the new millennium, although no more than a decade has passed, audiences and fans may still have undergone a significant transformation from being a teenager living at home to being a young adult who runs an independent household. But life-course transitions are no doubt even bigger for audience members who were teenage fans of particular musical acts in the 1980s and came to engage, in their forties or fifties, with music from their teenage years, through a wide range of reunion events and formats. This is the reason why the leading question of my thesis concerns what the affordances are of such reunited acts from the past, and how they can be understood through the prism of narratives about the life course of their own members. Specifically, my thesis aims to investigate whether the reunited act features in the biographical narratives of audience members—and, if so, how.

1.1 Retromania

It is a truism that the reunion act or "retromania" is not a new phenomenon. In a book of this title, Simon Reynolds (2011) describes how bands keep on touring, releasing new albums, or doing reunion tours and how current popular acts in hip-hop and rap use samples from their predecessors in the eighties. As he explains, cover bands are popular—and so is vinyl (again). This revival of music and musical acts beyond (re-)releasing an album of greatest hits can be commercially very interesting for the music industry, for example because it enables record companies to increase sales of their (back) catalogues. Indeed, these last few years have seen

an upsurge in initiatives where the industry packages music from the 1980s, 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century by organizing reunions, greatest hits events, parties, and even holidays with acts from those respective eras. The present thesis labels this phenomenon a *repackaging* of mainstream popular music, that is, of music that once dominated the commercial charts.

Critics have remarked on, and problematized, the commercial character of repackaging practices. Typically these critics emphasize or suspect the *synthetic*, “commercially orchestrated” nature both of the original act (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005; Shuker, 2016) and of the initiative behind the repackaging or reunion (Thornton, 1996; Sanders, 2002; Stahl, 2002; Huber, 2007; Seabrook, 2015). Yet the unprecedented popularity of repackaged music suggests that audiences may do more than just enjoy a nice evening out during a reunion concert. That is, the old or the new music of a reunited act may trigger feelings, memories, or emotions that matter to people (DeNora, 1999; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Music that matters might be—or become— even a part of people’s identity or life story, something that serves to connect particular phases and events in one’s life or provide a meaningful narrative for them (Ricoeur, 1991; McLean, 2008). Of course, all music is more or less inspired by, and thus a rearticulation of, music from the past (Sigler, 2004); but, thanks to the Internet and media platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, or Apple Music, previous decades of music become increasingly available to broad audiences. For example, YouTube offers a visual exploration of different music periods in which performances from earlier periods times can be viewed. Never before have societies had such easy and copious access to their musical past (Reynolds, 2011).

This integration of the old with the new is at work in mainstream media platforms, too. For example, in the United Kingdom, BBC Radio 1’s flagship mid-morning show includes a now famous cover-song feature where big contemporary “serious,” “organic” acts give a rendition of a “synthetic” pop act’s hit. This feature, called the “Live Lounge,” was initiated in 2001 by Jo Whiley, the show’s former host. According to Whiley (2015), when the indie rock band Arctic Monkeys covered “Love Machine,” a song of the girl band Girls Aloud, this act “opened the pop gates for [respected, SD] indie bands” to repackage the hits of such highly commercial acts. What followed was, for example, covers of Britney Spears’ “Womanizer” by the All-American Rejects, of Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines” by Vampire Weekend, and of Katy Perry’s “Last Friday Night” by Snow Patrol.

1.2 The value of retromania: The case of *Top 2000*

In the Netherlands, one particular example fits the explosion of repackaged mainstream pop music from the past decades. That is an annual national radio “event” that has been broadcasted since 1999: *Top 2000*. Listeners of Radio 2, the biggest public service radio station in the country, can vote for their favorite songs “of all times” to be included on a list of 2,000 songs, which will then be broadcast between Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve. Media scholar José van Dijck, who studied the cultural meaning of *Top 2000*, argues that connecting personal affect and emotions to recorded music from the past is instrumental to both personal and collective identity formation (Van Dijck, 2006). The *Top 2000* program, according to Van Dijck, builds a collective music heritage for the Dutch, providing millions of people with the “cultural resources to understand their pasts” (p. 371).

This scholarship underlines the possibility that repackaged chart-topping music from the past may have an important symbolic value for its audiences. It evokes or contains meanings that can go beyond the reaches of the commercially driven music industry, even if such achievements and their uses are not necessarily desired or welcomed by its commercial architects.

In order to tentatively probe the symbolic value of music from the past in *Top 2000*, I was given the opportunity, by the project team of *Top 2000*, to include a question of my own in the 2015 survey that voters receive after submitting their entries for *Top 2000*. I asked voters, namely, which song evoked the strongest memories for them and what kind of remembering this entailed. My intention was to investigate what it is that music offers these people, or what enables it to acquire value beyond “mere entertainment.” I received 70,000 responses. They all signaled that music is more than background to the last days of December; it can bring back past experiences and reactivate in people vivid memories of their younger selves. For example, one voter branded Iggy Pop’s “Lust for Life” the most memory-evoking song, because that person heard this song “ever since the parties at our elementary school... but also because of his performance in Top Pop [a famous chart show on Dutch television in the 1970s, SD].” Another participant voted for Pink Floyd’s “Wish You Were Here” because “[I] used to listen to this album secretly, in bed, via my father’s tape recorder, until very late in the night.” A third respondent picked the Backstreet Boys’ *Quit Playing Games* because “in the 6th grade of Elementary school the Backstreet Boys were my first musical crush [...] I shared that love with my sisters and 3 brothers.”

These explanations thus suggest that engaging again with music from people’s pasts enables—or “affords,” as DeNora (1999) puts it (borrowing Gibson’s extension of the concept of “affordance” to music sociology)—these listeners to recall, but also to actively redevelop memories of specific events and emotions of past times and to weave them into a story about their own selves. Listeners can reflect on their first musical affection, which may have been crucial to the development of their musical taste; more importantly, they can reminisce about their younger selves. In describing music as suited to a specific phase in their own lives, listeners, in a sense, describe how, why, and where that music is part of their autobiography (DeNora, 1999).

According to participants in the survey, music allows them especially “to go back to the past.” Remarkably, as appears from Figure 1.1, respondents do not necessarily consider “nostalgia” to belong to “the past” and, conversely, remembering the past does not necessarily feel to them the same as “being nostalgic.” Thus respondents make a distinction between nostalgia and the past. This implies that an interest in music from the past cannot be conceptualized as an interest in the nostalgic quality of music, or in its capacity to evoke feelings of nostalgia.

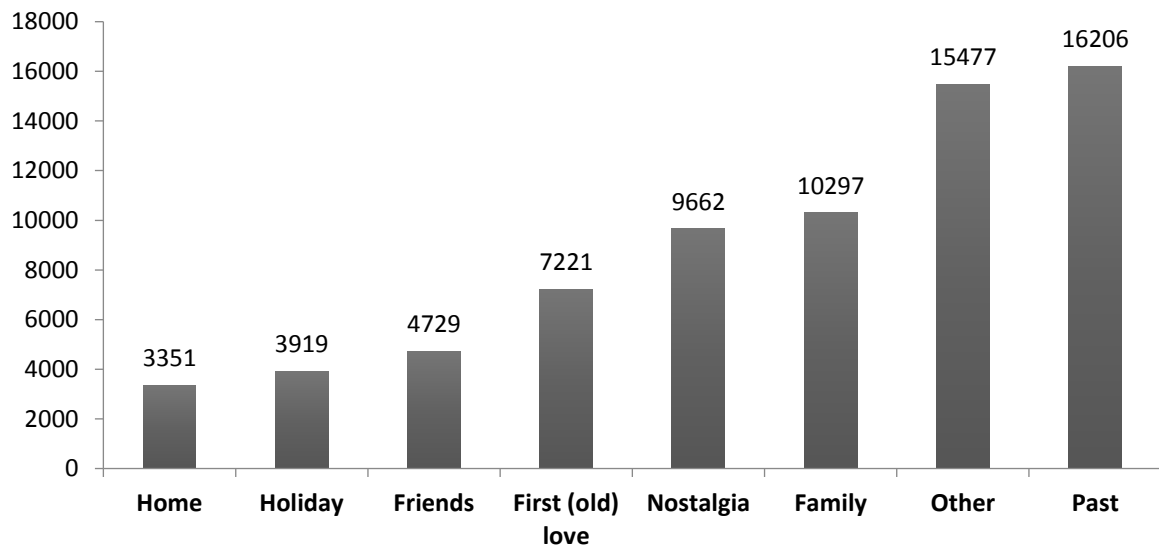


Figure 1.1 Results of a Top 2000 survey questionnaire: votes per category

Consequently nostalgia and the past, two concepts that are often used interchangeably (Barrett et al., 2010; Hart et al., 2011), need much more problematizing and distinction than

they usually receive in popular music scholarship (see also Stevenson, 2009; Van der Hoeven, 2014).

The present dissertation challenges the a priori dismissal of the significance of the more or less synthetic musical acts that reunite audiences. While very few scholars have in fact problematized preconceptions about nostalgia and the cultural industry (Bennett, 2001; Tinker, 2012), my dissertation is the first to explore, both theoretically and empirically, the possibly significant connection between an audience's meaning making around reunited acts on the one hand and the construction of biographical narratives about the lives of members of that audience on the other.

1.3 Aims of the thesis

This thesis is based on the theoretical and methodological premises of cultural studies, which calls for an investigation of the sociocultural and even political significance of both the individual and the collective interpretation of popular culture. It also draws on specific cultural, musical, and sociological concepts, particularly that of music's "affordances," in order to understand how audiences give meaning to and use music in everyday life and with regard to life transitions (DeNora, 1999; 2000). Consequently the affordances of (repackaged) music will be treated here as an opening into the world-building abilities of music in both the personal and the collective sphere, as well as into the cultural context in which it is consumed (Roy & Dowd, 2010; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Clarke, DeNora, & Vuoskoski, 2015).

My thesis seeks to make contributions to three areas of (popular) music scholarship. First, it attempts to shed light on the broader phenomenon of industry-driven celebrations and commemorations of popular music from a relatively recent past—the 1980s, 1990s, and the first decade of the new millennium. Contemporary scholarship often characterizes such "retromaniac" celebrations as nostalgic or commercial ploys; it even questions the capacity for progress in a society that so vividly celebrates its past (Reynolds, 2011; Pickering & Keightley, 2006; Lizardi, 2015). By studying "dedicated audiences" (Duffett, 2013b: 5) of musical revivals or reunions, this thesis aims to give an empirical account of whether repackaged music matters to its audiences and, if it does, how (Hesmondhalgh, 2013).

Second, by highlighting highly commercialized "synthetic" mainstream pop music, this thesis aims to uncover a territory that has often been overlooked in studies on popular culture (for an exception, see Baker, Bennett, & Taylor, 2013). Studies on the consumption

of (popular) music typically tend to focus on specific subcultures and scenes. Let me illustrate this assertion briefly, just by referring to some of the key works on the consumption of popular music: Hebdige's (1991) study on punk's subcultural style and meaning, Thornton's (1996) work on club cultures and subcultural capital, Bennett and Peterson's (2004) edited volume on local, translocal, and virtual music scenes, Kahn-Harris' (2007) global perspective on the extreme metal scene(s), and Bennett's (2006b; 2013b) monograph about aging punks and their changing subcultural style. It would appear that the mainstream is often perceived as that which is dominant, or as a mode oriented against subcultures and music scenes (Hebdige, 1991; Thornton, 1996; Huber, 2013).

Third, understanding how audiences use music (and in fact the media) at a later stage in life is another element that is often overlooked in popular music studies and fan scholarship. As Harrington and Bielby (2010b) argue, many studies focusing on the hedonic consumption of popular culture lack "*explicit* consideration of life-course perspectives that can help clarify and deepen our understanding of fans' sustained engagement with media object over time and the transformations of fandom in later life" (p. 434). This argument calls for the study of audiences from a broader, social-cultural perspective on their engagement with a media object. Thus re-formations of music from the past such as the ones studied here allow us to explore a particular period of time, and also a particular generation in terms of audiences. The audience members who were pre-teens or teens in the 1980s, in the 1990s, or at the beginning of the millennium are now (young) adults or what Bennett and Hodkinson (2012) call "post-youth." They form a diverse group of people, who have reached a stage in life where they have to deal with new (adult) responsibilities and duties—such as working full-time jobs, starting a family, buying a house. Clearly not much research has considered this specific (albeit broad) age group.

The cohorts that feature in this dissertation—people born between 1965 and 2000—are children of the "baby boomers" (the generation born between 1946 and 1964). Those born between 1960 and 1985 are colloquially known as Generation X or Gen X; those born between 1980 and 2000, as Generation Y or Millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2009). According to Howe and Strauss (2009), Generation X, the so-called Latchkey children, were supposed to take care of themselves at a very young age. A great level of independence also characterizes the Millennials, as they allegedly switch jobs with ease, postpone the start of family life, and are team players in the workplace. This makes them appear as more flexible, yet also as struggling with insecurities. My thesis will certainly rely on such typologies and

problematize them; but in the first place it sets out to investigate the affordances of reunited popular music acts for people and for the way they make sense of this generational life course (Coomes, 2004; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a).

1.4 Research questions and case studies

This dissertation investigates whether the consumption of repackaged popular music from the past can be considered a “technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one is” (DeNora, 2000: 63)—and, if so, how. In other words, consuming reunion acts is considered to be an identity tool for people to reflect on, present, construct, but also update the story of who they are, how they came to be where and who they are now, and where this life might take them (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Therefore the leading research question of my thesis is:

What are the affordances of repackaged popular music from the past, and how do they feature in audiences’ reflections on different stages and transitions in their life course?

To understand the consumption of commercially repackaged mainstream music from the past as an international, although exclusively western, phenomenon that focuses nonetheless on audiences that are specific in terms of locality and age, this thesis presents three different case studies. Each case highlights a specific type of reunion or survival, which in turn targets a specific audience. Shuker (2016) would classify these acts either as “revival or reunion bands,” which aim to exploit the nostalgia market, or as “surviving performers,” who stood the test of time and aged along with their former fan bands. The cases are (1) a “one-off” reunion event, the Big Reunion, captured in a documentary series accompanied by a concert series (United Kingdom); (2) the reunion of the boy band Backstreet Boys, which claims that it never split (United States); and (3) the recurring reunions of the Dutch band Doe Maar (the Netherlands). These dedicated audiences are (former) fans (Jenkins, 1992; Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Duffett, 2013b) of musical acts that gained or held their peak in popularity in the 1980s, 1990s, or the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The chosen repackaging events and the music acts conducting these events can be regarded as examples of what Negus (1992) defines as “synthetic” or “organic” approaches to creativity. Synthetic creativity refers to artists and bands that have also been branded as fabricated, inauthentic, fake, or low in music quality (see Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor,

2007; Shuker, 2016). The synthetic aspect is also deemed to be a characteristic of the so-called dance pop that topped the charts in the late 1990s and at the turn of the century. A manager or music label executive brought many of these acts together after their individual members had auditioned for a predefined “role” (e.g., Take That, New Kids on the Block, the Backstreet Boys, the Spice Girls, *NSYNC, Atomic Kitten). The acts had to be able to sing and dance (or learn to do it), following the popularity and rise of Eurodance (Seabrook, 2015). The band members did not need to play instruments, nor did they write their own songs, which often prompted critiques of their music as not being authentic but merely constructed or fabricated by and for the industry (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor, 2007). Besides, band members were often chosen to “perform” a certain identity within the group (e.g., the tough one, the romantic one, the cute one, or the musical one) in order to appeal to a teenage audience and its consumption patterns (Sanders, 2002; Stahl, 2002; Duffett, 2012).

In contrast to this synthetic, fabricated, inauthentic ideology, there is an organic approach to creativity (Negus, 1992). Organic mainstream bands, those that play and write their own music, might also temporarily dominate the music landscape (e.g., Coldplay, or Twenty One Pilots); but they are not brought together by the industry. The organic band is a group that is already doing well and is further nurtured by the record company to achieve major success (Negus, 1992). As a result, the organic bands are more authentic than the synthetic bands, which allegedly have a more commercial orientation than the organic groups. In chapter 2.2 I will further discuss these distinctive elements of mainstream popular music.

The different case studies in my research explore music events that exemplify the repackaging of both synthetic and organic mainstream music acts (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005). The first case study features a commercially driven reunion in the United Kingdom that contains acts that were popular there, but also in other European countries (e.g., the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway, and Italy). These music acts, for example the bands 5ive, Atomic Kitten, B*Witched, 911, Blue, and Liberty X, were very successful in their heyday in the late 1990s and beyond. The second case also focuses on the repackaging of synthetic music, but it does so by scrutinizing a specific pop act from the United States: the Backstreet Boys, which also dominated the music charts at the end of the 1990s and in the first years of the new millennium. Being at first more popular in Europe than in the United States, the band

scored number-one hit singles in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany (among other countries).

My third case study concerns an organic music act (Negus, 1992), a band that got together on its own but was pushed by a record company to gain more success. Here I consider the repackaging of Doe Maar (freely translated as Go Ahead), otherwise known as the “Dutch Beatles” (Van Elderen, 1984: 115). Doe Maar dominated the Dutch music landscape of the early 1980s, but split in 1984. Sixteen years after their break-up, the members regrouped for a reunion in 2000, then came back again in 2008. They have said farewell and reunited multiple times ever since.

Although a one-off reunion concert is often the first manifestation of the repackaging of music from the past, this dissertation explores different forms of such manifestations by looking at a one-off reunion of acts from the past that constituted the climax of a reality TV series (*The Big Reunion*), the reunion of a boy band that claims to have never split (The Backstreet Boys), and a band whose reunion has been ongoing since 2000 (Doe Maar).

The different case studies also call for a different inquiry into these forms of repackaging and their target audiences. Therefore scrutinizing these examples, which cover synthetic or organic music acts that temporarily dominated the mainstream, will help enhance our understanding of whether such formations are remembered differently—and how. Furthermore, focusing on these different aspects will help elucidate different dimensions and modes of the consumption of repackaged popular music.

Accordingly, each study aims to offer a preliminary answer to a subquestion related to the main research question. The subquestions of my three case studies are as follows (and they will be addressed in this order):

1. What are the affordances of the Big Reunion phenomenon for its audiences, and how do they relate to their current life-course position?
2. What are the affordances of surviving act the Backstreet Boys, and how are they connected to life-course transitions of its fans?
3. What are the affordances of the recurrent reunions of Doe Maar for its audiences, and what role do these events play in developments in their life course?

1.5 Thesis structure

So far, this introductory chapter argued that it is vital to explore the phenomenon of

repackaged popular music and presented reasons why we should pay attention to audiences' meaning-making process in relation to it. In particular, it adduced a few examples of retromania—a recent trend that heightens the presence and visibility of “the past” in forms of popular culture. The chapter also explained the aims of this dissertation and the leading questions of the research that produced it. It will end with a very brief outline of the upcoming chapters, which gives a first idea of how I organized my material.

Chapter 2 is the backbone: it explains the theoretical scaffolding on which the dissertation builds. There I explore the literature on mainstream popular music and audiences. I look in particular at studies that connected music with life-course narratives. Further, the chapter sheds light on the scarcely defined notion of *repackaged* mainstream popular music, describes its forms, and attempts to show why this topic is important for popular music and fan studies and needs to be explored.

Chapter 3 completes this picture and complements it from the practical side, by describing the methodology I followed in my research. I explain there why I have chosen the three empirical case studies I did and why I opted for a qualitative approach, thematic content analysis, and interviews and observations as data-gathering methods. I also explain how the research sites and the participants were selected and how the data were analyzed. The chapter concludes with a statement on my position vis-à-vis being an aca-fan or fan-aca, which is intended to clarify my role as a researcher in the wider landscape of popular music studies.

Chapter 4 addresses the first case study: the one-off reunion and cross-media phenomenon known as the Big Reunion. The Big Reunion reassembled former chart-topping UK bands from the 1990s and early years of the new millennium, asking them to perform their greatest hits at a reunion concert. This chapter discusses three modes in which audiences read the Big Reunion, or three readings: a nostalgic reading, an ironic reading, and a critical reading that challenges the very formula of the reunion. These readings are also situated in relation to the current position or stage reached by members of these audiences in their life course.

After this one-off reunion with multiple acts, chapter 5 investigates the affordances of “surviving” act the American boy band Backstreet Boys for its Dutch fans, and how these affordances are connected to their life-course transitions. This fandom attends and consumes a wide range of events and products distributed as part of the reunion (or continuation) of the band. The chapter explains how and why the fans continued their involvement with the Backstreet Boys across the life course or ended it. The fans' narratives give us an insight into

how their engagement with the band and with other fans changed and developed over time. An element of particular interest here is that the fans' autobiographical reasoning demonstrates why being able to age along with the band is vital for maintaining a long-term connection to its music.

If chapters 4 and 5 examined synthetic bands—the pop acts that reunited in the Big Reunion or the surviving Backstreet Boys—chapter 6 studies the affordances of a band that follows an organic or natural creative ideology: the Dutch pop band Doe Maar, whose members split in 1984. However, since 2000, the band has reunited several times. The chapter explains how, for some of the interviewees in my study, these recurring reunions evoke the feelings of reliving the 1980s, while to others they give a means of reflecting on their teenage selves. Doe Maar's music in particular functions as an anchor for moral support across the life course.

The final chapter, 7, sums up the main findings of my dissertation. Additionally, it offers a discussion of limitations and makes suggestions for future research. The chapter then concludes with some practical recommendations concerning the implementation of repackaged popular music from the past in the music industry and media industry.

2. Theoretical Framework

My dissertation explores what the affordances are of repackaged popular music from the past, and how these affordances feature in audiences' reflections on different stages and transitions in their life course. But before I take up this question and follow it in the three case studies that constitute the bulk of this dissertation, a theoretical mapping and review of previous research on the topic is needed. This chapter is such a review: it outlines the existing literature on the social meanings and uses of popular music, on the increasingly pervasive "repackaging" of popular music acts from the 1980s, 1990s, and the decade 2000–2010, and on the significance of both past and current popular music in the changing life course of "dedicated audiences" (Duffett, 2013b).

As mentioned before, this study locates itself at the crossroads of the fields of media studies, cultural studies, cultural and music sociology, and audience and reception studies, more specifically fan studies. In order to develop an interdisciplinary perspective, this chapter first discusses existing scholarship on the personal and social significance of popular music for audiences. It then explains the different types and formats through which pop music acts from the past are reunited or repackaged. Finally it reviews scholarship on popular music in the everyday life of its aging audiences and how the theme of the life course features in this kind of research, both theoretically and empirically.

2.1 Taking the mainstream music audience seriously

The general rise of mass culture from the 1920s onward is a key focus in the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School. In line with their Marxist approach to culture and society, scholars like Marcuse, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno considered the audience to be passively duped through the consumption of popular culture. Horkheimer and Adorno, the most vocal critics of the cultural industry, claimed that "to be entertained means to be in agreement" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 116). They argued that the cultural industry aimed at standardization and mass production at the expense of authenticity and spontaneity. This meant that culture, more specifically the pleasures offered by popular culture, had become so readily available for consumption that audiences were transformed into passive consumers: they were made up of "cultural dupes" (Fiske, 1989; Jenson, 1992; Grossberg, 1992a, 1992b). In music, this situation was well illustrated by the availability of sheet music

for the amateur musician. Music was no longer confined to professional songwriters such as Tin Pan Alley (Seabrook, 2015); anyone could compose it, let alone play it. The amateur piano player, through affordable copies of sheet music, was now able to learn the same music pieces as a professional, at home. Adorno (1976) was particularly concerned about the mass consumption of Tin Pan Alley music and jazz, on the grounds that this commercial aspect would annihilate the artistic value of music. Nowadays sheet music and even complete songs are available in one click on the Internet. As a result, media audiences have been able to effortlessly create an archive of their own past (Lizardi, 2015). Maybe this is why the cultural pessimist view on popular culture has not completely disappeared.

In fact, according to contemporary cultural pessimists like Reynolds (2011) or Lizardi (2015), contemporary practices of “consuming nostalgia”—for example by visiting festivals with music “legends,” by watching movie remakes, or by collecting vinyl—suggest that audiences are still duped by the commercial cultural industry. However, this negative perspective neglects the important contributions of scholarship from the 1970s onward on the significance, political and otherwise, of consuming popular culture. Through the rise and academic institutionalization of cultural studies, audiences of popular culture came to be considered, increasingly, active agents who do not just consume a media text but also give it a meaning. Emblematic work by cultural studies scholars—most notably Stuart Hall (1973), David Morley (1980), Ien Ang (1985), Janice Radway (1990), Dick Hebdige (1991), Lisa Lewis (1992), John Fiske (1992a, 1992b) and Henry Jenkins (1992)—places a central emphasis on the active audience. Such work examines and describes audiences’ creation of meaning out of popular culture and mass consumption—precisely the kinds of texts that were hitherto marginalized or dismissed: romance novels (Radway, 1990), soap operas (Ang, 1985), animated TV series (Fiske, 1992a), and working-class culture in general (Williams, 1983).

2.1.1 The meaning of mass culture in everyday life

In his pioneering essay “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” Stuart Hall (1973) explores how audiences are actually empowered through their media engagement. His encoding–decoding model still represents a turning point in relation to the academic hegemony of the Frankfurt School. Hall describes how audiences can “decode” messages differently, in ways that are mediated by their members’ cultural background, social position, and personal experiences (see Brunsdon & Morley, 1999). His research illustrates how

individuals, in their attempt to make the new messages they receive resonate with what they hold familiar and what they understand, can interpret these messages in various ways. Hall (1973) developed a model in which he outlined how a message is produced or encoded, circulated, consumed or interpreted, and reproduced. With regard to consuming or interpreting a message, this model distinguishes three possible positions. First, audiences can provide a preferred or hegemonic reading, which agrees with the encoded meaning. Alternatively, they may take up a negotiated reading position, in which they agree with some aspects of the message but reject others. The third reading position is one of opposition, in which readers or audiences draw on an alternative frame of reference in their meaning making.

The influence of Hall's model, as further operationalized by the groundbreaking work of Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley (1999), can be seen in Ien Ang's (1985) study of the pleasures that women get from watching *Dallas*. Ang described how, after a call for respondents in a Dutch women's magazine, viewers trusted her enough to describe to her their pleasure in watching this soap series of low cultural status; for some of them watching *Dallas* was a very serious occupation, for others, more of an ironic act. However, in the early days of cultural studies, the "text" itself—the cultural or media product—was the main topic of discussion. Ang's (1985) work on *Dallas* focuses heavily on how, according to the letters these women wrote to her, the soap's storyline and the characters elicited the "melodramatic imagination."

In similar fashion, Hebdige (1991) examines the members of the punk scene as active agents, and Radway (1990) unfolds how women read romance novels and fit them into their everyday life. Both these authors focus not on the structural features of the music or of the books but rather, like Ang, on the significance of the act of reading or watching. Consequently Hebdige can show how, through style and clothing, punks resisted and opposed the dominant ideology and found their not place in society. Radway (1990) pays particular attention to the act of reading—and not to how the women readers in her study interpreted the storylines of romance novels. This method enables her to uncover how these women made sense of what they read and related it to their own everyday life. Reading a romance novel made it possible for these white middle-class American women to temporarily escape their duties as homemakers or mothers. It gave them a means of escaping these duties and responsibilities for a brief interval and of finding pleasure and enjoyment in something else. In other words, both Hebdige and Radway discovered the importance of the everyday social

context in which these acts of consumption were—individually, socially, and politically—meaningful.

This discovery of the value of everyday interpretive practices such as listening to music, watching television and films, or reading books allowed for the subsequent exploration of a diverse range of popular culture products or texts and media forms in particular contexts. For example, Lawrence Grossberg argues, like Hall (1973) and Morley (1980), that people have different “interpretive resources,” which mediate mainly between audiences’ social position and the meanings that these different audiences assign to a text. Such resources, together with a positive affect for and great investment in a text, turn that text into a “mattering map” (Grossberg, 1992a; 1992b) that constitutes a potential template for identity construction. Popular culture is thus a key site where audiences construct maps of this kind, which can then act as tools that help people navigate their life (see Grossberg, 1992b; Tsai, 2007; Harrington & Bielby, 2010b; Chow, 2011).

My thesis aims to explore what reunited and surviving pop acts from the past afford their audiences, and how these affordances are related to various stages and developments in the life course. To examine this meaning-making process, to see whether music, as a form of popular culture, can be a mattering map, and to understand how, it is vital to look at audiences that have (or still are) closely engaged with these pop acts. And where can one find this intense sort of investment, which gives meaning to popular culture by strongly connecting it to one’s identity? First and foremost among the most active of audiences: fans.

2.1.2 The active music audience

It is well accepted now, after Hall’s seminal work on encoding and decoding, that an audience can take an active position in its consumption of media products. So, from the 1970s onward, the broad field of audience and reception studies tried to map how the levels of investment in popular culture differed across various audience groups (Jenkins, 1992; McQuail, 1997; Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998; Cavicchi, 1998). Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) define various levels of attachment, which range from mere consumers to fans, cultists, and enthusiasts, and from there to petty producers. These categories are supposed to designate the level of investment and attachment of the corresponding groups. For example, in Abercrombie and Longhurst’s (1998) taxonomy, Ang’s *Dallas* viewers would fall in the class of more invested fans; Hebdige’s expressive punks may qualify as enthusiasts or as petty producers, since they actually designed their own clothing or styling elements; and Radway’s

readers could be considered fans or enthusiasts, because the books are central to their making sense of everyday life.

However, the different typologies are not exclusive categories, and pinpointing where they end or begin is challenging. Hence many of the studies focusing on active audiences tend to not use such a taxonomy; rather they describe the various groups and audiences of active consumers more generically, as “fans” (see Jenkins, 1992; Jenson, 1992; Hills, 2002; Duffett, 2013b).

The word “fan,” an abbreviation of “fanatic,” comes from the Latin adjective *fanaticus* (itself a derivative of the noun *fanum*, “temple,” “shrine” dedicated to a god). It is best captured by Jenkins’ (1992) pioneering notion of the fan as a “textual poacher.” The fan is someone who picks and chooses elements of a popular culture in order to use them for the benefit of his or her everyday life. This kind of poaching comes with great intensity of affect and in various stages in which fans can express their emotions (Fiske, 1992b; Grossberg, 1992b; Lamerichs, 2014). Moreover, a fan is a “self-identified enthusiast, devotee or follower of a particular media genre, text, person or activity” (Duffett, 2013b: 293). Being involved in fandom is “a way of *identifying* oneself on a deep level as being a fan and enacting that role” (p. 293, emphasis added).

These definitions, just like Grossberg’s mattering maps, focus on the significance of identification and emotional attachment in everyday life. Yet to focus solely on the level of emotions can be problematic, because a high level of investment in a particular media text may signify the beginning of one’s fandom, but one’s affective relationship with a text may change over time (Grossberg, 1992b; Hills, 2002; Sandvoss, 2005; Harrington & Bielby, 2010b). Hills (2002) specifically refers to this when he makes the point that fandoms become relevant at specific times in life and irrelevant at other times. As a child or a teenager, one may well have been invested in a particular fandom that one no longer cares about in later life. Moreover, the affective identity of an audience is constantly renegotiated and redefined in everyday life (Grossberg, 1992a; Cavicchi, 1998; Lamerichs, 2014). Accordingly, it is the “act” of consuming (Radway, 1990) that should be focused upon if we want to understand fan audiences.

Fan scholars argue that fans’ identities consist of more than just emotions and that research in this area should be extended to the practices or performances of fans, or the communities that fans are involved in (Fiske, 1992b; Hills, 2002; Duffett, 2013b). Relatedly, Sandvoss (2005) maintained that fandom is not so much about possession as it is about

identity: about the fan's use of his or her object of veneration as a mirror in which that person can recognize him- or herself and consequently develop a sense of self. According to this author, "the object of fandom ... is intrinsically interwoven with our sense of self, with who we are, would like to be, and think we are" (Sandvoss, 2005: 96). What is more, this role of the object of fandom resonates with the transformative powers that DeNora attributes to music (DeNora, 1999; 2000). If music features as an object of affection or fandom, it can also help one make sense of who one is.

Remarkably, research on popular music fandoms or dedicated audiences of popular music is scarce (Duffett, 2013a, 2014; Zwaan & Duffett, 2016). Traditionally, popular music studies have focused on subcultures, scenes, or taste. Zwaan and Duffett (2016) call for more work that actually focuses on what people *do* with music, moving beyond descriptions of subcultural involvement or expressions. Although from a fan studies perspective participants in a scene or in a subculture are active audience members too, (popular) music studies, a field with strong roots in cultural studies, is often genre-oriented. In music studies, the subculture only fosters a participatory community for those who like a certain genre of music, such as punk, heavy metal, or hip-hop. On the other hand, fandom related to popular culture is a much more open phenomenon, within which distinctions based on taste or scene cannot be drawn. Instead, music fandom is often associated with an image of hysterical teen girls who scream at their idols (Ehrenreich, Hess, & Jacobs, 1992). At a later age, the type of music that one liked during childhood or youth—which is frequently commercial mainstream music aimed at teenagers—is often downplayed as "silly and immature" (Brabazon, 2002). Besides, the music that was popular during one's teen years or adolescence often does not stay in the limelight long enough to remain part of that person's adult life. In order to last, music needs to remain interesting to a specific target audience; but music, and especially pop music, does not age with its audience (Negus, 1992; Seabrook, 2015; Shuker, 2016).

In conclusion, music fandom offers an interesting, albeit not often considered, empirical site where one could gain a better understanding of the ways in which popular music is meaningful to people in their everyday lives. More specifically, this phenomenon is key to exploring themes and questions around the main object of my research: how dedicated audiences give meaning to pop acts, why reunions or certain reunited pop acts have survived the test of time, and how the music of the past features in these fans' narratives about their life course. Let me enter this uncharted territory by considering how mainstream popular music has previously been defined.

2.2 Mainstream music defined

Although a vast body of scholarship has investigated popular music and looked at members of subcultures or scenes, only a few studies have discussed mainstream popular music and its audiences in any depth. Moreover, accounts of popular music reunions referred to as “revivals,” as well as the wide variety of practices in this area, are typically considered to be part of a certain genre rather than a phenomenon in its own right (Livingston, 1999). Livingston’s (1999: 68) broader conceptualization of the music revival as a “social movement with the goal of restoring and preserving a musical tradition” might also be limiting. Although this definition helps in that it presents the revival as a comeback, namely the return of a popular music act, it also implies that this musical tradition should be preserved or restored. Preservation or restoration may not be the primary goal of a revival as far as the music industry is concerned; yet it might be a goal for an audience or fans. Therefore it is necessary to start by examining the role of authenticity and historical fidelity in the revival or “reliving” of mainstream popular music.

2.2.1 Synthetic and organic mainstream music

To scrutinize the notion of cultural mainstream and its position in society, one needs to review and understand previous definitions of the mainstream. In his book *The Song Machine inside the Hit Factory*, journalist John Seabrook describes mainstream pop songs he hears on his car-radio as follows:

The songs in the car weren’t soulful ballads played by the singer-songwriter. They were industrial-strength products, made for malls, stadiums, airports, casinos, gyms, and the Super Bowl half-time show. The music reminded me a little of the bubble-gum pop of my pre-teen years, but it was vodka-flavoured and laced with MDMA; it doesn’t taste like “Sugar Sugar.” (Seabrook, 2015: 5)

Seabrook’s description may sound mocking or tongue-in-cheek, but it does point to a few characteristics that are generally attributed to mainstream pop songs: their lack of soul, their lack of artistic skill or creativity, their commoditized status, and their focus on selling and (sexually) seducing audiences into buying. However, defining the mainstream is a more complex process and requires more nuance (Toynbee, 2002; Huber, 2007).

The mainstream has often been overlooked in scholarship on popular music. It mostly serves as the unspecified alternative to music scenes or subcultures and is often understood

as their opposite (Hebdige, 1991; Thornton, 1996). This has prompted the formation of a negative academic view on the mainstream. If subcultures are typically authentic and show musical quality and uniqueness, then the mainstream will acquire all the opposite properties (Thornton, 1996; Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor, 2007).

According to Peterson (2005), the debate over authenticity in music has been going on since the days of the “battle” between the Beatles, who wrote and sang their own songs, and the Monkees, who performed professionally composed and produced songs. Interestingly, this debate on authenticity took place about the mainstream, which reveals that, even within the mainstream music landscape of the 1960s, a particular hierarchy already existed in music. The mainstream pop (rock) of the Beatles was acceptable, whereas the Monkees were perceived as a “fabricated band” with fabricated songs and were attributed a lower status.

The notion of authenticity continued to play a central role in mainstream pop music over the years (Negus, 1992), down to the 1990s. While in music this decade is often remembered as the era of Nirvana and other grunge acts, it was also the era of the “boy band” and of dance pop (Seabrook, 2015). Peterson (2005) explains that many of the boy bands of the 1990s were created by managers, but had to give an impression of being “real” in the eyes of their young audiences, in order to gain commercial success. Acts like the Backstreet Boys, *N SYNC, the Spice Girls, and 5ive were brought together through auditions, often without the members’ previous knowledge of one another. In this regard, Negus (1992) makes a distinction between a synthetic (fabricated) or an organic approach to music; the latter would be illustrative of a record company that nurtures already existing talented bands. The bands’ audiences also vary greatly, specifically because the fabricated band is aimed at an audience (still) young enough to not challenge the band’s constructed story. Consequently such bands are marketed for young (pre-)teen audiences (Sanders, 2002; Duffett, 2012). But this does not imply that only the synthetic, fabricated act can top the charts and be mainstream. The organic band can also, temporarily, dominate the music market. At times, pop rock acts lead the charts, featuring bands that were not compiled by a record company, such as The Police in the 1980s, No Doubt and Greenday in the 1990s, or the currently successful Coldplay and Twenty One Pilots. Nirvana, for example, is just such an organic band, which reached mainstream commercial success in the 1990s and made grunge popular among the masses, despite its punk and grunge ideology of not wanting to be successful on a large scale (Barker & Taylor, 2007; Strong, 2013).

2.2.2 Contextualizing mainstream popular music

The mainstream can also be considered a metaphor that indicates the flow of certain dominant aspects of culture (Williams, 2003; Huber, 2013). We can compare the metaphorical mainstream with the main stream of a river, whose bends and brooks can deviate at points, but in the end the river will reach the sea. Yet this vision of the mainstream as a process of overtaking the brooks has conjured negative associations (Toynbee, 2002; Huber, 2013). After all, the brooks lose their authenticity and identity once introduced into the main stream. In the same way music, upon entering the commercial or the mainstream, may lose its unique, authentic value and be transformed into a fabricated, fake, low, and unsophisticated commercial sound (Negus, 1992; Barker & Taylor, 2007; Huber, 2013). The mainstream is a type of music “that brings together large numbers of people from social groups and across large geographical areas in common affiliation to a musical style” (Toynbee, 2002: 150). This also suggests why “the mainstream” is primarily a construct that defines certain processes and practices (Huber, 2013). Apart from the dominant music, which is flagged as “mainstream,” the most common media in a country—that is, the bestselling newspaper or the most watched TV news programs—are often labeled “mainstream” media as well (see Williams, 2003). Moreover, the mainstream plays a role in practices like clothing, for example: in order to fit in, many people will dress at work according to the dominant fashion trends instead of wearing eccentric outfits. Alternatively, if people listen to a radio station at work, they will probably pick a more mainstream station than one that plays a specific subgenre (Huber, 2013; Michael, 2017).

Toynbee (2002) distinguishes three particular elements that keep the mainstream flowing: holding a hegemonic position, being aesthetically appealing to a large audience, and occupying an economically interesting market for the music industry. To ensure that it brings together a large number of people and is able to travel across large geographical areas, music needs to have a certain appeal and market value. Toynbee’s three elements can be traced back to the American musicians of the so-called Tin Pan Alley at the start of the twentieth century, who wrote and produced music for others. Later on sheet music became available, so people could reproduce music at home (Toynbee, 2002; Seabrook, 2015). However, due to the growing importance of radio (and, later, TV music stations such as MTV), the practice of replaying the music at home became redundant; one could enjoy and have access to music anyway. On the other hand, the craft of producing and writing songs never disappeared. Many

singers still use (or co-write) their songs with a record producer (Huber, 2007; Seabrook, 2015).

Returning to Toynbee, his understanding of the mainstream as a process is further refined through Huber's (2013) approach to the mainstream. She defines the mainstream as a type of music culture that is dominant at a specific time and in a specific location. However, according to Huber, a *revival* of the mainstream does not necessarily mean that the music will be dominant again at a specific time or in a specific place, and that it will thus appeal to a large audience.

My thesis questions the alleged inability of revivals to become mainstream, because it is often the music industry that aims to re-create this temporary dominance of the music acts and tries to exploit former audiences' passion for the music. Nevertheless, a song's popularity would disappear after a while, and the song would lose its position in the Top 40 or Billboard list, which are instruments for measuring a song's popularity (Dowd, 2013). Even so, the song in question is still part of popular music's history and of people's memories and current lives. Although a band often becomes less successful over time, during its heydays it may have collected a loyal group of followers, its fans, who stick with the band after its glory has passed. For example, the Backstreet Boys have a large (global) following that followed them after their zenith in the mainstream. What is more, their music is still aimed at a large audience and at extensive geographic distribution.

2.3 Repackaged popular music

As mentioned earlier, Shuker (2016) identifies a current trend: bands from the past that "reunite" or that have "survived" over the years. The three case studies that this thesis focuses on are part of this trend. They highlight, respectively, the reunion act (chapters 4 and 6) and the survival aspect (chapter 5). These modes of bringing music "back" create instances of what I call *repackaged* mainstream popular music. On the one hand, the act of repackaging can be interpreted literally, following Negus' (1992) notion of creative synthetic ideology, as a means to "package" or compile a band. On the other hand, it is a metaphor for referring to the particular role that the industry plays in creating these events—such as concerts, TV series, meet-and-greets—for contemporary audiences (Shuker, 2016).

While the particular formats of contemporary repackaging might be typical of the Internet generation, the packaging of mainstream popular music has been around for much longer.

In 1966, the US band the Monkees was founded. After an audition, four boys were selected to become the Monkees. They played aspiring rock-and-roll artists in a sitcom (NBC, 1966–1968) of the same name. The Monkees were designed to be similar to their popular contemporary peers, the Beatles. Although their fabricated image was quickly assessed as fake, their “bubblegum” pop was liked by many teenage girls (Barker & Taylor, 2007; Seabrook, 2015). The Monkees were packaged after the Beatles: the template of four boys (a cute one, a funny one, a serious one, and a naïve one), who were friends and made music together, reproduced the perception of the Beatles at the time (Stahl, 2002; Duffett, 2012). The TV industry and the music industry had created another “singing machine” (Sanders, 2002). This formula, created in the 1960s, of putting together a group of singers, creating an image for them, and having their songs written by a professional song-writing and production team became a standard for later bands (Sanders, 2002; Shuker, 2016); one finds it in bands such as New Edition, Boyz II Men, New Kids on the Block, and the Backstreet Boys in the United States, and also in European equivalents like Take That, Boyzone, 5ive, Westlife, and One Direction.¹ However, because these bands were not playing their own instruments or writing or producing their own songs, their music would never come to be valued like the music of authentic folk and rock musicians, who did write, play, and produce it themselves. The singing machines hold a high commercial value but always struggle for artistic legitimacy (Sanders, 2002). Yet the way these bands were packaged by the industry was successful and, even though they were thought of as fake, synthetic, inauthentic, and “low,” they reached high positions on mainstream music charts (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor, 2007; Huber, 2013; Shuker, 2016).

This reproduction of a band’s format by looking at an original band and trying to imitate its distinctive characteristics is one way of packaging. A second way of packaging is present in music industry’s practices of selling or distributing this already heavy stylized or packaged music.

Hesmondhalgh’s (1998) description of the independent position of the British dance music industry further helps us understand packaging as a process or a practice. According to Hesmondhalgh, the core business of the dance music industry is “*compilation albums*” (p.

¹ New Edition: 1978–90; reunited from 1996/7; Boyz II Men: 1985–present; New Kids on the Block: 1984–94; reunited in 2008–present; the Backstreet Boys: 1993–present; Take That: 1990–6; 2005–present; Boyzone: 1993–2000; 2008–present; 5ive: 1997–2001; 2012–present; Westlife: 1998–2012; and One Direction: 2010–currently on hiatus.

241), series of tracks by one or more record labels, all united under a common theme. Hesmondhalgh tells us that “compiling and *packaging* compilation albums sees the record company moving away from its traditional function as an originator and developer of sounds and musical talent” (p. 241; emphasis added). The record company now takes up the role of trend curator and concept developer. Moreover, the “compilation market acts as the commercial lifeblood of the independent dance sector” (p. 242). Most important here is the fact that the compilation album affords a return to the spotlight for the tracks and singles that are included in the compilation. That this compilation market is, according to Hesmondhalgh, the lifeblood of the dance sector underscores the significance (for the music industry) of circulating and reintroducing to the market already existing music. Packaging is, then, not just what happens to the constructed boy band; it also acts as a process of legitimizing music and justifying why it is or should still be around.

The dance sector appears to have increasingly moved toward a market logic by favoring compiled albums over separate track releases and by adopting this logic when producing compilations albums (Altheide, 2013). The influence of this market orientation is reminiscent of a phenomenon that mediatization scholarship presents as the loss of autonomy of social institutions in favor of a “logic” of the media (Hjarvard, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008; Hepp, 2012). The dance sector, when adapting itself to the market logic of the music industry, may sell more compilations and may be commercially more successful. Thus, commercially, this market orientation and this type of repackaging could have a beneficial aspect. At the same time, producers of dance music lose some of their independence: they can no longer pick and select the artists they would like to work with or record a full album with. One needs to be aware of this negative side of repackaging too, since the increased market orientation of the music industry impacts the artistic freedom of artists and producers in more than one way: new releases have to fit the mold of the music business and appeal to consumers (Hjarvard, 2008; Krämer, 2011). However, this should not mean that a repackaged act cannot move on to making new music (see Löbert, 2012).

The music industry is a very competitive market, where only those who play by the rules score really big hits and can survive long as musicians (Seabrook, 2015). A case in point is Britney Spears, who first scored a hit single with “... Baby One More Time.” She was a former Disney star, an “all-American teenager” who quickly rose to fame (Seabrook, 2015). Yet, when she grew tired of the pressures of the industry, sold less music than expected, and suffered a personal breakdown, Spears no longer complied with the rules—the

market logic—of the mainstream music industry. Then her carefully packaged image was heavily challenged; she was no longer booked for tours or media appearances. This led to her disappearance from the mainstream stage and caused a decline in her big audiences. However, as of 2016, Spears thrives in a Vegas residency show in which she mainly performs her old hits.

The two modes of packaging discussed thus far, compiling the (boy) band and compiling the music, follow the history of the packaging of music and demonstrate its particular “fit” with the logic and rules of the commercial music industry. But there is also a third mode of packaging, in which the media “shape representations” (Fürsich, 2002: 205) or produce and reproduce certain images.² Fürsich (2002) explains how travel shows on television shape our image and perception of the countries and cultures visited in those shows and how the pictures shown in the program contribute to this packaging. Her understanding of packaging, then, referred to a kind of shaping: the creation of a certain image of a country of culture. Another example of this kind packaging comes from Schilt (2003), who studies the appropriation and packaging of “riot grrrl” (female punks) politics by mainstream female musicians such as Alanis Morissette, Fiona Apple, Tracy Bonham, Meredith Brooks, and the Spice Girls. Schilt’s aim was to reveal how this riot grrrl ideology was reworked into the media’s reporting on these more mainstream female artists and how their particular feminist and resistance discourses were covered. The packaging of these artists made them differ strongly from the original model: the riot grrrls were portrayed as very ideological and opinionated, whereas the mainstream musicians were depicted as angry young women (Schilt, 2003). Packaging, as these two studies highlight, can thus involve a change of narrative and a change of depiction.

This dissertation focuses particularly on practices where the packaged music returns to its original audiences (and to potential new audiences), years after its original release. A first case of this kind of packaging is that of the Big Reunion. The reunion, constructed as the climax of a reality TV series, features members of different British pop acts. In the TV series, the band members get a chance to repackage the story of the band, and thus reshape their representation. Similarly, the Backstreet Boys, the second case study, has a very loyal fan base that visits the concerts and buys the band’s music. After the climax of its success at

² This may evoke associations with framing.

the beginning of the millennium, the band had a break. Some of the band members used this time to release solo work, but the Backstreet Boys as a five piece disappears from the limelight. Yet, from 2005 onwards, the Boys went on tour again and released new albums. The titles of these albums, *Never Gone* and *Unbreakable*, seem to suggest an intention to enforce the narrative that the band has never left the stage. However, the story of the band was repackaged in a documentary released in 2014, which produced the members' side of the story: the story of the 20-year survival of the Backstreet Boys.

My third case study focuses on the recurrent reunion concerts of a very popular Dutch band from the 1980s, Doe Maar. The band had a successful return to the stage in 2000, 2008, 2012, 2013, and 2016. It served as inspiration for a musical (*Doe Maar! De Popmusical*) in 2007, was given the opportunity to perform in the prestigious Symphonica in Rosso concerts (in which pop artists play together with, and in the style of, a symphonic orchestra), and featured in 2013 in a documentary (*Dit is Alles*) about its past and revivals.

The first two case studies are examples of synthetic, fabricated bands. The third case features a band whose artists got together organically, on their own (see Negus, 1992; Shuker, 2016); yet this third band to struggle with its perception of being fabricated, due to its immense popularity among (teenage) girls and women. The three cases will offer a comparative ground for exploring how audiences give meaning to reunited bands from their past and how such meanings feature in the stories that these audiences construct and present about their lives. The comparison between different types of repackaged music acts from the past will provide insights into how the alleged synthetic or organic nature of these acts matters to the audiences (if it does).

In the remainder of this chapter, I review various modes of contemporary repackaging of mainstream music.

2.3.1 The rockumentary and nostalgia TV shows

Repackaging is visible through the many shows that are dedicated to remembering particular music events or musicians. Examples of music documentaries, such as the genre-specific “rockumentary,” are plenty. *Rock City Sound*, for example, was produced by former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl in 2015 and documents the famous grunge musicians who recorded at the studio in Seattle of the same name. *The Other One: The Long Strange Trip of Bob Weir* was exclusively produced for the streaming service Netflix, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Grateful Dead. The well-known 1970 documentary about the Rolling

Stones, *Gimme Shelter*, Metallica's *Some Kind of Monster* of 2004, and the famous *Woodstock* rockumentary in 1970 are just a few other examples. Often these documentaries are aired on television near the date of a specific artist's concert, being intended to commemorate musicians on the day of their passing or to remember an event that took place in a country. However, this documentation designed to recall artists or events might also contribute negatively to remembering or understanding a certain music period, as the rockumentary about Woodstock did (Bennett, 2004). Moreover, its negative effect can fuel incorrect or untrue recollections of the events or underestimate their importance for a particular generation or period.

Another example of repackaging is Tinker's (2012) study of *Âge tendre et têtes de bois*, which was originally a TV show but has grown into a French popular music nostalgia phenomenon. The program was aired in 1961–4 and revived in a concert tour (in 2006) and a cruise (in 2008). The events are sponsored by a commercial radio station and are still taking place today, almost a decade later. At both events people can buy spin-off albums of the program and DVDs and are asked to fill out lists to select the next artists to star in the show. Such spin-offs, which intend to celebrate music from the past through a DVD, another greatest hits album, or a cruise, are not exclusively bound to this show. Whereas pop music used to be the domain of the young, Shuker (2016) argues that the older consumers are the ones who account for the dominance of “classic rock” and “classic hits” radio formats. These baby boomers have grown older and now constitute a new market; they consumed this kind of music since their youth (Bennett, 2001). Consequently, the music industry keeps releasing greatest hits albums and allows aging fans to go on a cruise with KISS or on a trip with rock legends such as Thin Lizzy, or relive the 1980s with Cheap Trick and Survivor while touring Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, and the Bahamas.

According to Tinker (2012), *Âge tendre*'s nostalgic value fulfills certain roles for its French audiences. First, it offers emotion, especially joy, escapism, and elation—a mode of looking at the past unquestioningly or uncritically and enjoying it. Second, it promotes cross-generational social cohesion (Van Dijck, 2006), and, finally, the show defines popular music related nostalgia as a commercial force in the musical landscape.

2.3.2 The tribute band

A more literal mode of repackaging music from the past can be found in tribute bands. Different from a revival or reunion band, the tribute band does not intend to bring an original

artist back; it is interested in keeping the music and its own commercial value alive (Homan, 2006). Tribute bands try to copy (or represent) the original band to perfection, musically and visually, and often are highly appreciated by music audiences, even though according to most music experts and scholars the music, the looks, the stage setting, and even the comments in between songs are imitated (Geary, 2005; Bennett, 2006a). The many imitators of the Swedish pop group ABBA, which was still highly popular when it split as a band, are illustrative of the popularity and potential success a tribute band can have. Due to the fact that the original band members were not getting along anymore, the band announced that it did not plan to reconcile and revive ABBA (Gregory, 2012a, 2012b). Strikingly, ABBA and its music were kept “alive” through other bands’ coverage of their songs, and in most cases also through outfits and composition (of two men and two women).

The tribute band, then, is an opportunity, for the now adult audience, to see its former idols live again, albeit only through a representation of those idols. Gregory (2012b) argues that tribute bands fulfill the important aspect of giving this live dimension, particularly by embodying the same youthful band that the audience would have experienced in the past. Thus the tributes enable audiences to uphold an emotional connection with a band that is not actually returning. Bennett (2006a: 19–20) claims that “tribute bands respond to a range of mundane, everyday desires exhibited by audiences: to relive a particular moment in their youth; to experience again their personal icons in a live setting (and perhaps take their children along too).” Whereas the rockumentary might reactivate the memory of a particular moment in music history, the tribute act actually performs this moment in a live setting. However, while providing an alternative for those who did not have an opportunity to see certain idols live because these idols have died or split up, or just because people do not have the financial means to buy a tour ticket (Geary, 2005; Gregory, 2012b), tribute bands are also criticized for being only a simulacrum of the original (Bennett, 2006a; Homan, 2006).

2.3.3 The popular music reunion

Reunions seem to be an ideal road for a band’s return. However, they should not be taken for granted, and not all bands are successful at making an actual return to their once dominant position in the music industry. After the death of Kurt Cobain, the remaining members could have continued with a new lead singer, but never reunited to their original, iconic three piece. Still, the Grateful Dead, Queen, and INXS—all three bands that also lost their iconic leads (Jerry Garcia, Freddy Mercury, and Michael Hutchence respectively)—decided after a

lengthy period of absence to return to the stage with new front men. Reynolds attributes this trend of touring with a new front member to the “consumer-entertainment complex” (Reynolds, 2011: xixx), a phenomenon in which consumers feel an itch for products of the past that were novelties and distractions in their youth. This itch for the past is already present in “rock reunions and nostalgia tours” (p. 31). The Grateful Dead and Queen + Paul Rodgers (or + Adam Lambert) might seem successful rock revival initiatives. The organic ideology of creativity might be at stake here too. These were bands that started out as groups of friends; thus by losing their singers they lost a friend. In their continuing or returning to play music together, the audience might also see a group of friends coming together again. However, for a band that was constructed by a record company, this might be different. The band members were targeted at a very specific audience, namely teenagers, and often fulfilled special roles in the band in order to appeal to this group (Duffett, 2012). These portrayals might work for a young group of fans, but what happens if such a group returns? Moreover, the former audience now knows about these constructed identities and might be able to reflect more explicitly on the lower status or quality that is typically associated with such music.

So why do these former audiences sometimes continue in their attachment, other times abandon the band in later life? Nolte’s (2012) psychoanalytic perspective on the breakup and reunion of Take That helps us unpack this question. In a nutshell, he argues that fans’ behavior can be traced back to what has been labeled in psychoanalysis the Oedipus complex: the prototypal child’s unconscious desires to establish sexual relations with the parent of the opposite sex while being animated by feelings of rivalry toward the parent of the same sex. Furthermore, Nolte emphasizes that the process of becoming a fan usually happens in early adolescence, which is a period when unconscious drives and fantasies are highly active and when the child breaks away from her caregivers and turns to the outside world. Thanks to this timing, the boy band may fulfill the role of being the new caregiver or object of affection in youngsters’ lives.

As a consequence, the boy band becomes an idealized phantasy object and an ideal version of a relationship (Nolte, 2012). To simplify, because the child fan has all these internationalized feelings and is maturing and positioning him- or herself to and in the external world, the boy band might be the object that evokes feelings of goodness and protection (such as those that the parents offered the child at an earlier stage). The fan projects these feelings of goodness and safety onto the boy band. When the band breaks up, the fan loses these positive feelings for the band. S/he will mourn and have feelings of melancholia

related to the loss of the fan object. After this loss, several things can happen. The fan may continue loving the object (which is internalized, so that being the object is part of him or her); s/he may hate the object; or s/he may feel guilt on the grounds that her negative attitude (destructive impulses) might have caused damage, perhaps even caused the band to break up. Consequently the reunion would help the fan overcome these feelings of grief, hate, or guilt. Nolte attributes great potential to the reunion; he states that it might help fans convalesce and get over the original loss of the band. Moreover, this process of recovery may also help the fan to overcome similar situations and feelings she has dealt with in real life (Nolte, 2012).

Nolte's psychoanalytical approach to the idea of reunion also resonates with the renegotiation discourse of Williams (2015) and with Hills' (2005) cyclical understanding of fandom. However, in order to achieve such effects, the reunion needs to be successful. Löbert (2012) analyzed a variety of reunions and concluded that a band's reentry in the market is either *assumptive* or *explorative*. A reentry of the first type assumes that the audience has remained interested and will return to the band; one of the second type is a return with a more tentative approach, which explores whether the former audience is indeed still there and interested. To compare the effect of the two types, Löbert assessed the assumptive (and failed) reunion of East 17 and the explorative reunion of Take That. The latter were successful, according to Löbert, because they tested the waters first by releasing a greatest hits album and a documentary, and waited to see how that was perceived. This strategic repackaging behavior explains why Take That was able to comply with the current logic of the music industry, while East 17 was not.

Moreover, to succeed in the current music industry, which is very competitive, Löbert (2012) argues that there should also be a shift in the band's authenticity, toward its critically and ironically distancing itself from the former boy band image. Examples of such shifts are adopting a more serious style of dress by comparison to past outfits (the members' clothes are now more traditional instead of sexy) or having a band member play an instrument (which reinforces not just the facade but also the band's actual musical competence). Thus the shift should not only project a new image but also show that there is internal unity in the band. The band should stand together as a strong formation with a shared goal, which needs to be present in all its performances and interviews—and in the lyrics too (Hilbert, 2012; Löbert, 2012).

As mentioned before, mainstream popular music is often negatively evaluated because of its packaged nature. Before I explore further whether the consumption or

appreciation of packaged music enables audiences to update stories about their own life courses and, if it does, how, I must discuss the fact that the mass appeal and widespread reach of mainstream popular culture has sparked both a pessimist debate about the consumption of culture and a positive approach that seeks to take popular culture seriously. Understanding how this happened is a necessary part of the background to my research.

2.4 Affordances of repackaged music in everyday life

Traces of the “cultural turn” (Gray, Harrington, & Sandvoss, 2007) in social sciences can also be found in popular music studies. Since the rise of cultural studies and its acknowledgment of audiences as active meaning makers of popular culture, more emphasis was put on the meaning of music and on the role of music in everyday life (Hebdige, 1991; Frith, 1988, 1996). Popular music was becoming a serious topic in academic research (Tagg, 1982; Frith, 2007). A key contribution to the significance of music is DeNora’s (1999) *Music in Everyday Life*. This work explores how a group of women in the United States and in the United Kingdom appropriate music to everyday events, settings, and moments. Drawing on ethnographic accounts and in-depth interviews with these women, DeNora elucidates how the latter used music as a structuring device in their everyday life. Memories of music, she argues, form a soundtrack to their lives, in the sense that, upon rehearing a piece of music, they could relieve a specific event. DeNora (1999: 40) describes this feature and the potential of music as an “affordance,” and explains: “Music can be invoked as an ally for a variety of world-making activities, it is a workspace for semiotic activity, a resource for doing, being and naming aspects of social reality.” Consequently, this affordance of music makes it possible to considering music as a resource for giving meaning to the world. As DeNora argues, “music serves as a template against which feeling, perception, representation and social situation are created and sustained” (p. 44).

DeNora concludes that music “is a key resource for the production of autobiography and the narrative thread of self” (p. 158). This implies that repackaged music might also be able to play a significant role in the lives of its audiences. That is, repackaged music could have the potential to serve as a template for its audiences and to help them give meaning to any world-building activities—be they feelings, perceptions, representations, or social situations—that they are or were involved in (Eastman, 2012).

The next sections reviews previous scholarship that discusses how audiences give meaning to music, in particular in relation to the development of, and transitions in, their life

course. To clarify, I consider the life course as the system of socially defined roles and life events that a person experiences over time (see Giele & Elder, 1998; McAdams and McLean, 2013).

2.4.1 Mapping the field: Music and the life course

When talking about giving meaning to music in everyday life, most scholarship in popular music studies focuses on a specific group of fans, a particular music scene, or a subculture. This has led to insightful accounts of how different genres—ranging from dance music (Thornton, 1996), Bruce Springsteen (Cavicchi, 1998), goth(ic) (Hodkinson, 2011), punk (Bennett, 2006b; 2013b), and David Bowie (Stevenson, 2009) to Duran Duran (Anderson, 2012) and dance music from the 1990s (Van der Hoeven, 2014)—have fulfilled or still fulfill meaningful positions in these audiences' everyday lives. However, Harrington and Bielby (2010b) argue that most works that deal with the consumption of popular culture lack a focus on life-course perspectives. In their view, this lack should be compensated by an emphasis on sustained media engagement in later life; there should be more studies of audiences and of their media consumption over time.

The work of Harrington and Brothers (2010) can be considered as answering this call: their empirical study on actors that play long-term characters in daytime soap operas (e.g., *As the World Turns*) and on the viewers of these shows emphasizes how the aging of the actors and characters in the series offers both actors and audiences a cultural resource for negotiating aging in their lives. Through the characters, the actors and the viewers make sense of their aging process and of situations that come along with that transformation. The actors appreciated the payment and other material benefits (getting your hair done, or getting new clothes), but playing the characters also offered them a philosophical resource in the form of a different lens, which helped them shape their own perspective on aging and on transitions in the life course. Besides, it offered the actors a way to look upon their characters' and their own cognitive and physical aging process too. Hence, according to Harrington and Brothers (2010), this close engagement with the media text illustrates and explores the affordances of the soap opera for its viewers and characters. The soap opera thus affords both viewers and actors negotiating aging (mentally and physically), and philosophizing on life from the perspective of an aging person (economically and philosophically).

Returning to the focus of this thesis—how the meanings that audience members give to repackaged pop acts from their past feature in life-course narratives—the case studies

discussed next are emblematic of how audience engagement with a specific artist receives meaning over time. First, Cavicchi's (1998) study on Springsteen fans is a richly detailed ethnographic account drawing on observations and interviews with fans. Second, Stevenson's (2009) work on Bowie, which draws on in-depth interviews with male fans at their homes, gives an insight into their fandom, fan practices, and their general stance in life. Stevenson and Cavicchi asked similar questions to the fans they interviewed, such as: "When did you become a fan?"; "What do you like/Why do you like artist x?"; "What kind of practices do you engage in?"; "What does this music mean to you?" In both studies, the participants indicated how the artist formed a significant part of the interviewees' biography. Both authors revealed through their studies that the musician featured as a cultural resource for the fans and formed an important part of their biographies, against which they measured achievements in life and with whom they compared their own development and transitions in life.

Additionally, when the interviewees were interviewed at home, Cavicchi and Stevenson observed what a room looked like, or pointed to specific items in a fan's collection that helped them discuss and focus on the role of the artist in that person's life. These elements revealed additional insights: for example, Stevenson (2009) explains that a fan had multiple photographs of Bowie in his house, which enabled him to ask about why the fan had these photos on display. Bowie was more than an icon to this fan; he was an icon to be worshipped, someone whom the fan considered a very important man and a male example in his life. Consequently, apart from reviewing Bowie's appeal as an artist, Stevenson was also able to assess ideas of masculinity and masculine ideals in his all-male group of interviewees with regard to the influence that idols like Bowie had on them.

The Springsteen fans in Cavicchi's study often wore scarves or shirts of previous concerts to indicate their lengthy fandom of the artist, or they knew when to make specific hand gestures at a concert while a certain song was played (Cavicchi, 1998). Furthermore, by talking to these fans about their fan practices, Cavicchi also learned about their political stances, which were often influenced by Springsteen's working-class ethic songs and performance. Again, the fans considered Springsteen not just as a musical idol; because of his lyrics and interviews they valued him as a person, and were influenced by this attitude. Cavicchi and Stevenson's studies illustrate how fandom constitutes a practice that is of importance *in everyday life*. Fans appreciate both the music and the person behind the music. Bowie made the fans think about their masculinity; Springsteen was read as a political text

by his fans. This places the fandom in a broader social context, well beyond the appreciation of the lyrics or musical talents of an artist.

While these examples illustrate the involvement with one particular artist over time, other works discuss the evolvement of a particular music genre and how that trajectory features in narratives about the life course. To highlight the difference between these two kinds of (continued) engagements with music, I will now discuss Van der Hoeven's study on Dutch audiences visiting decade and early-decade parties (Van der Hoeven, 2014) and Bennett's work on aging punks (Bennett, 2006b, 2013b).

Van der Hoeven (2014), drawing on interviews with these partygoers, makes a distinction between two types of contexts in which the audience engages with the revival of music. First, there is the so-called early-decade party, which is attended by the "original" and "authentic" ravers, the "gabbers" (in local dialect)—those who had been present at the scene since the beginning. Second, there is the decade party, which is the commercial initiative to commemorate the music of the 1990s, including the dance and mainstream music of that era (these are often considered "guilty pleasures"). A broader audience, which has not always participated in the early years of the dance scene, attends the latter. Van der Hoeven maps these developments in the Dutch dance scene by interviewing attendees and (former) DJs of these parties. Music from the past, whether meant as a serious reliving or as a commercial initiative, has the potential to bring people together. This vivid remembrance and celebration also reveals the importance of the music for the Dutch generation of people who grew up with it. Besides the dance parties with early rave music, there have been exhibitions about "gabbers" and several books on renowned Dutch DJs of the early rave period,³ which makes all these manifestations into a significant component of the Dutch music culture.

Bennett (2006b; 2013b) surveys various changes in the punk scene over time, particularly how punk featured in interviewees' narratives about their life course. He asked these aging punks what changed in the scene and what this change meant to them. In their "early days," the punks expressed their lifestyle visually, through clothing and haircuts. Having grown older, they toned down their appearances as well as their physical activities

³ There were two exhibitions on early rave, namely "GABBERS!" in Rotterdam in 2013 and "Holland op zijn Hardst" in Amsterdam in 2015. Gert van Veen and Arne van Terphoven wrote about the 25-year existence of the Dutch dance scene in *Mary Go Wild* (published in 2013), Rutger Geerling photographed the Dutch hardcore scene and collected these images in *This Is My Church* (published in 2015), and Arne Van Terphoven wrote about hardcore DJ Dano in *Wat de fok ouwe!* (2016).

(Bennett, 2013b). Instead of performing slamdancing in front of the stage, they now rather stood at the back of the venue. Nevertheless, punk still inspired their political stance and outlook. Clothing and toning down were visible elements to observe, like the scarfs and shirts of the Springsteen fans. But the political views were a finding Bennett could not have made without interviewing the punks.

These studies illustrate that, by interviewing participants, one can bring to the surface latent processes of meaning making. The ravers organize reunion parties in order to preserve their scene and style of music, and this contributes to the formation of their generation's cultural memory. The visitors of the decade parties join in the act of remembering their collectively shared youth, and possibly bring in new generations too (Van Dijck, 2006; Tinker, 2012). Similarly, the older punks function as gatekeepers to the youth scene. That is, the aging punks pass on their knowledge and contribute to feelings of cross-generational cohesion (Van Dijck, 2006; Tinker, 2012), but also show how aging should not be a factor that hinders participation in the scene.

Next to these examples, which highlight how the collective sharing of music from the past might feature in narratives about the life course, the studies by Cavicchi and Stevenson demonstrate how the meanings of a music act feature in one's personal life story. When music from the past was shared in a collective setting, it promoted generational and cross-generational cohesion and constituted a resource for the instruction of new music aficionados about that kind of music and its legacy. When the music was admired at a personal level, it allowed audience members to reflect on their own life—on how this life has developed and how particular songs or concerts acted as milestones for memories about significant events. If, for example, an artist went through a particular transition, like divorce, the fan might take inspiration from the way the artist dealt with that situation.

Thus these previous studies illustrate the audiences' active engagement with music over time. They do so by interviewing or observing members of these audiences. They demonstrate how certain practices help identify (and possibly reinforce) the audiences' connection with music over time, both at a collective and at a personal level. And here is the interesting part: although this method gives an insight into what audiences do with music and into the kinds of meanings they assign to it, the acts and genres discussed are still active performers and genres. This indicates that a reunion or a survival event can be meaningful both as a popular music act and as an event of personal and social dimensions, reflected in the construction of life-course narratives.

2.4.2 Making sense of the self through repackaged music

Research that combines popular music and aging fandom is scarce. Moreover, studies on the life course and on the consumption of popular culture have made a plea for more in-depths accounts of particular kinds of media consumption in people's later life (Harrington & Bielby, 2010a, 2010b; Givskov & Deuze, 2016). Consequently, these studies also argue for the value of a symbolic resource, which could be a media text that is subjected to age-graded life transitions (Zittoun, Duveen, Gillespie, Iverson & Psaltis, 2003; Harrington & Bielby, 2010b). Engaging closely with a media text, for example by watching a soap series, can turn it into an "appropriate developmental resource to call upon" (Harrington & Bielby, 2010a: 6.2). This is why consuming a media text over a longer period of time can play a key role in one's life, no matter whether one's peers deem it age-appropriate or not (Radway, 1990; Jennings & Gardner, 2012). The media "text"—that is, for the purposes of this dissertation, popular music—can offer a means to reflect upon one's life, and also to make sense of certain events in it. These two aspects need stressing here. As previously argued, such a text offers a template and functions as a "mattering map" (Grossberg, 1992b) for identity construction. The fictional lives of characters in a book or in a soap series function as an educational resource; one can use them to compare, recognize, or negotiate events in one's own life (see Harrington & Brothers, 2010). On the other hand, the media text acts as a reflexive resource that could play a part in one's thinking about who one is, or who one is becoming (Stevenson, 2009; Lavin, 2015). For example, people compare their own practices and attitudes to those of the artists or actors in front of them—how they age, how they manage particular situations—or develop the outlook of these artists and fictional characters over time.

This dissertation focuses particularly on a life-course phase that Hodkinson and Bennett (2012) labeled "post-youth." Individuals in this phase are emerging into adulthood, but still want to participate somehow in the youth culture they were part of; and they may encounter constraints or divergent expectations due to the changes they are going through, for instance in socioeconomic status. Hodkinson and Bennett conclude: "therefore it is critical to understand how the identities and lifestyles post-youth construct may often need to include the accommodation of new demands, expectations and compromises created by e.g. work or family commitments that accompany this transition from early to middle adulthood" (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012: 4). These changes are accompanied by new responsibilities and commitments and emotions. Think about age-graded life-transitions

(Harrington & Bielby, 2010b) such as graduating from university, getting a fulltime job, or becoming a parent.

As a study by Harrington, Bielby, and Bardo (2011) shows, active participation in the phenomenon of fandom is difficult in late life: adult fans put themselves and others under the obligation to abide by norms and restraints that come with age (e.g., norms that regulate one's dress or one's proper behavior at a concert). Baby boomers are a generation that is frequently targeted by the music industry (Bennett, 2001); in spite of this, one is expected to grow out of fandom as one gets older (Harrington et al., 2011; Jennings & Gardner, 2012). Besides, fan pleasures are often difficult to experience after youth, and this might attract stigma and shame around attempts to prolong them (Harrington et al., 2011: 584).

In this thesis I take inspiration from studies that address or theorize such negotiations when I attempt to explore how meanings of music from the past may feature in later, life-course narratives. Although sparse, these studies have illustrated what Harrington and Bielby (2010a: 2.2) called the autobiographical reasoning: a type of narrative that “helps us appreciate how the transformational event of entering fandom becomes situated in individual life histories.” As this dissertation goes beyond reviewing how one enters a fandom, autobiographical reasoning is particularly useful to my approach: it will help illuminate the mechanism or the formation of “transformative self-narratives” (Hills, 2014: 18)—for example, how reentering fandom is placed in one's life story.

Lavin's (2015) description of her “relationship” with singer Patti Smith is exemplary in this regard. It demonstrates how Smith featured in her autobiographic reasoning, and especially in narratives that deal with aging. In her ethnographic account of her own Smith fandom, Lavin argues that sometimes she used Smith's image as a vehicle to either confirm the changes she underwent or the steadfastness of her position at the time. Moreover, Lavin describes her fandom of Smith in terms of looking up to an older sister. Lavin is a 60-year-old woman herself, just like Smith, and admires Smith for her agency and open display of libido. Lavin (2015: 3.3) declares: “I want her [Smith] to have a lover or lovers at 68 too [...] at my current age of 60, I love sex, and I want Patti as my self-appointed older sister/ego ideal to lead the way.” Here Lavin makes sense of her own life (being able to enjoy sex at a later age) through Smith's conduct, actions, and lifestyle (still having lovers and allegedly dating a younger man at 68). Smith features in Lavin's narrative in a way that recalls and resonates with the work of Cavicchi (1998) and Stevenson (2009). Moreover, Lavin makes

no secret that she finds Smith's practices empowering and lets herself guided by her as by a role model ("older sister to lead the way").

In making sense of the self, music can act as a "cultural resource, which can be reinterpreted in the context of their changing life situations" (Stevenson, 2009: 85). The David Bowie fans whom Stevenson interviewed indicated how Bowie represented for them a stable force in times of trouble and uncertainty, a spiritual guide, and an example of change, while providing "comfort from the maelstrom" (Stevenson, 2009: 88) of a globalized world. Bowie and his music thus fulfilled a particular and *continuing* role for these fans with regard to their changing position(s) in society and changes in their private life.

Although somewhat different, Hodkinson's (2013) argument as to why people wish to stay involved in youth culture and its music after they have "outgrown" it in age is appropriate here. He states that such long-term involvements offer these participants a means to navigate through different phases of their lives. Their attachment has to be placed in a context that fits their other commitments, such as family, career, or work. The adult member of a youth culture might have a full-time job that requires him/her to be productive at work during the day, and this leaves him or her less flexibility for visiting a concert or going to an all-night rave party. Bennett's (2013b) work on aging punks has made a similar argument on this long-term subcultural involvement. As we have seen, the punks have toned down their looks, now that they earned a certain position in their local habitat; they have become conveyors of the genre, critical overseers. As a result, they consider themselves forefathers of the new generation of punks. Their aging and long-term involvement has enabled them to take up a new type of identity in the subculture, but it also asks them to reflect on their current position, and on how all these elements fit into the larger picture of their life course.

All these are examples of long-term attachment to or involvement with an artist or a specific music genre. But the main subject to be investigated in these pages is the reunion—a situation whose premise is that the artist has seemingly been absent for his or her fans, or at least less available (Hills, 2005). The focus here is on the resumption or reignition of a past connection with an artist or music genre; and this may well lead to different findings. Hence I investigate here the question whether repackaged music has a similar potential for being a cultural resource or a reflexive instrument for its audiences. My aim is to study how the meanings that audiences give to reunited and surviving pop acts from their youth feature in life-course narratives.

2.5 Conclusion

Research on mainstream popular music is scarce. True, there is a small (albeit growing) body of works that discuss how audiences give meaning to and engage with popular music over time. But my dissertation has a very specific angle: it is interested in the affordances of reunited or surviving pop acts from peoples' past and how they feature in their' life-course reflections.

This thesis aims to contribute to extending and enriching the relatively slim field of popular music studies and fandom (Duffett, 2013a; Zwaan & Duffett, 2016). Through the lens of mainstream popular music, it is assumed that the music discussed here could be consumed by anyone during that period in time in which the acts were popular. A distinction can be made between two types of "creativity" that may be said to dominate the mainstream (Negus, 1992). First, there is the organic band: a band that preexists and is further nurtured to fame by a record company. Second, there is the synthetic, fake, and fabricated band, which is put together through auditions and whose members are strangers to one another up to that point. The organic and the synthetic band can both serve as examples of reuniting or surviving acts (Shuker, 2016). This chapter defined the reunited and surviving pop acts from the past as "repackaged popular music," that is, music that is brought back into the lives of its former fans. Documenting music from the past and keeping it alive is done most commonly via a rockumentary or a tribute concert; but at times there are acts that attempt to make a "live" comeback to their audience. These take the form of explorative or assumptive reunions (Löbert, 2012) or of musical "survivals"; and they offer an emblematic ground for the study of the meanings of repackaged music. Therefore this thesis covers a one-off reunion, a surviving act, and a recurring reunion. In all three case studies, either a synthetic or an organic act is the subject of the repackaging.

Because my thesis builds on the paradigms of cultural, popular music, and fan studies, it considers audiences as active and participatory (Fiske, 1992b; Jenkins, 1992), made up of agents who are able to give meaning to text of popular culture. Previous studies that discussed the meaning of particular musicians, bands, or genres for their respective audiences have demonstrated that music can promote a feeling of cross-generational cohesion and acts as a preservation tool for teaching new audiences about particular musical traditions. When an audience has a long-term connection with such a tradition, the music can become a cultural resource or a reflexive instrument. These affordances of music have been examined in the case of audiences with a long-term connections, but not in the case of repackaged music—

the reunited pop act or the “surviving” (Shuker, 2016) act. This is the gap that my thesis aims to fill; and in finding my own method I relied on and drew inspiration from the previous studies that investigated the affordances of popular music over time.

To summarize: this thesis explores what affordances of reunited or surviving acts of popular music feature in audiences’ life-course narratives by way of investigating the meaning-making practices of various audiences. The next chapter will present the research design and methods used in this dissertation.

3. Research Design and Method

This chapter starts off with a few general considerations of method whose main purpose is to explain why I chose a qualitative approach in my research. The chapter then goes on to present the specific methodologies followed in the three case studies that make up the bulk of this research. Here I discuss the different modes of data collection I used, then I describe how the sampling and recruitment of participants were conducted in each case and, next, how the data collected were analyzed. Finally the chapter reaches a conclusion, but not before I elucidate my own academic-fan and fan-academic position with regard to my three case studies.

3.1 Methodological considerations

Over the past decade, popular music has been the object of both quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative studies often have their roots in cultural sociology and typically cover a vast range of topics. For example, they discuss music as a domestic product (Meuleman & Savage, 2013) or highlight that music has been evaluated as nostalgic or regarded as a guilty pleasure—particularly music from the past (Barrett et al., 2010; Loveland, Smeesters, & Mandel, 2010; Hart et al., 2011; van den Tol & Giner-Sorolla, 2016). Quantitative research that looks specifically at the relationship between music and the story of someone's life often studies music as a genre. It examines, say, music's position in consumption patterns and its relation to taste (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Bryson, 1996; Van Eijck, 2001; Van Eijck & Lievens, 2008). Further, quantitative studies explore continuities in musical taste, such as between parents and adolescents (Ter Bogt, Delsing, van Zalk, Christenson, & Meeus, 2011), or investigate a theme, for instance how the genre of popular music fits a particular moment in life (Krumhansl & Zupnik, 2013).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is driven by an interest in the “how” and “why” of such patterns and relationships: it aims to get closer to the audiences or consumers of popular music and understand them. This is why qualitative methods seemed to suit my own purposes best. In particular, I am interested in the meanings that these audiences give their own consumption patterns—an aspect that falls in the province of qualitative research, but also one that has not been extensively examined so far, either by qualitative or by quantitative methods. This brings me to the central aim of this thesis, which is to explore

what affordances audiences attribute to repackaged popular music from the past and how such affordances are related to various phases and developments in their lives. And, when I work toward this aim, I am particularly interested in occasions or instances in people's past when music shaped their narrative identity (see Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991)—and also in how this identity-shaping process continues in later life. In Chapter 2 I introduced the notion of a “mattering map” around the claim, made by some scholars, that audiences might use music as a template for identity construction—an entity or presence that helps them to “construct a lived coherence” (Grossberg, 1992a: 60). My thesis aims to investigate whether a similar claim also applies to *repackaged music*, which I define here as music from the past that either *returns* to the public through a reunited pop act or *survives* through a pop act that stood the test of time.

Research on the long-term engagement of audiences with a particular kind of music illustrates how the method of interviewing and observing fans and their practices—for example, the fans of Bruce Springsteen (Cavicchi, 1998), Kate Bush (Vroomen, 2004), David Bowie (Stevenson, 2009), Duran Duran (Anderson, 2012), or Patti Smith (Lavin, 2015)—helps identify their connection with music over time. These studies demonstrate how an artist, a band, or just music in general enable these fans to construct a coherent biography and have a unified sense of their person (DeNora, 1999; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a; Hodgkinson, 2013). However, thus far scholars have not explored whether these affordances exist when it comes to repackaged popular music.

Thus I set out to examine in detail how the affordances of repackaged popular music also feature in their transformational self-narratives (Hills, 2014)—that is, in the narratives they construct about the significant events and transitions in their own lives. The data on which this examination is based are collected from forum messages, observations, and two types of interviews: so-called “on-the-spot” interviews (see Rapp, 2005; Wood, Duffy, & Smith, 2007; Reijnders, 2011) and semi-structured interviews. These kinds of sources provide insights into people's meaning-making practices because the data they yield contain personal narratives (Riessman, 2001). The personal narratives, then, are (re)presentations or constructions of people's lives. By documenting these self-constructed narratives, whether in spoken or written form, one makes it possible to explore the reality behind them and also to examine in greater depth both the meanings and meaning-making practices they embody.

I adopt here a social constructionist approach (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966), which focuses on “how people perceive their worlds and how they interpret experiences” (Rubin &

Rubin, 2011: 3). Implicit in social constructionism is the researcher's interest in the activities people are continuously involved in, which s/he studies by looking at "the activities through which everyday actors produce the orderly, recognizable, meaningful features of their social worlds" (Silverman, 2013: 107). The social constructionist considers conversation, interaction, and discourse as constructive of a person's social reality (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This action orientation is congenial to my subject of research.

Through an examination of what people say or do in forum messages, at a concert, or in research interviews, I aim to reconstruct how repackaged music plays a role in shaping people's narrative about important moments in their lives. The leading research question of my dissertation is:

What are the affordances of repackaged popular music from the past, and how do they feature in audiences' reflections on different stages and transitions in their life course?

Accordingly, as each of my three case studies focuses on a different repackaged music act, the leading question gives way to the following three subquestions:

1. What are the affordances of the Big Reunion phenomenon for its audiences, and how do they relate to their current life-course position?
2. What are the affordances of surviving act the Backstreet Boys, and how are they connected to life-course transitions of its fans?
3. What are the affordances of the recurrent reunions of Doe Maar for its audiences, and what role do these events play in developments in their life course?

The specific research design and methodological considerations related to each case study are addressed in the corresponding chapter. The present chapter discusses the research design of the whole dissertation. It outlines what qualitative methods were used and why, describes the sampling and recruiting part of the process for the different case studies, and specifies how the data were analyzed. And, at the end, it also offers a reflection on the researcher's own position on the topic.

3.2 Collecting meanings on repackaged music in life-course narratives

For its audiences, music often serves as a personal and collective cultural resource. Previous studies on music and the life course, discussed in chapter 2, show how fans can use an artist as a source of inspiration and support during periods of change or tumult in their own lives (Stevenson, 2009; Lavin, 2015). The music of these same artists can also offer audiences a vehicle to reflect upon past times and events and on the kind of person they were in their teens, when they first became fans or were listening very actively to that music (Vroomen, 2004; Anderson, 2012; Bennett, 2013b). For some of the fans discussed in these studies, the music or the artist remains an important authority in adult life (Cavicchi, 1998; Vroomen, 2004; Lavin, 2015). These findings underscore that a music act or music itself functions as a reflexive tool in one's narrative identity (Ricoeur, 1991; Giddens, 1991), which in turn helps people give meaning to particular situations or events in their life. Music in this capacity to connect to the self and stimulate autobiographical reasoning has been characterized as an educational resource (Harrington and Bielby, 2010a).

To date, however, no research of this sort has been carried out in the field of repackaged music, to investigate whether this variety fulfills any similar role and offers its audiences such an important resource. We do not know how repackaged music from the past features in audiences' autobiographical reasoning. Filling in this gap is, I repeat, the main goal of my dissertation. And, as I tried to point out, exploring the meanings of repackaged music calls for a qualitative inquiry.

Some aspects of meaning making are present in informally observable, mundane, everyday activities. Ordinary conversations and gestures form the "fabric of meaning making and meaning sharing" (Langlois, 2014: 2). They can be observed at a concert site, but also articulated during a research interview.

But, in order to get a proper understanding of how meanings that arise from repackaged popular music feature in narratives about their life course, it is necessary to let the audiences share or produce their personal narratives. This is because personal narratives are a means by which participants share what they feel is important (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). And these narratives are best collected via interviews, since interviews render the respondents' experiences and ideas in their own words. As Riessman puts it, "[p]ersonal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse" (2001: 342).

What is more, when interviewees talk about themselves, they are sharing a story about their lives and at the same time reflecting on events in their lives (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur,

1991). Meaning-making units of discourse with this double function are present in *spoken* discourse during an interview; but they can also surface in *writing*. For this reason, apart from using interviews, I also collected written statements about the meaning of repackaged popular music. These statements occur in narratives about the life course stored on two popular culture forums. I explain this in greater detail later in this chapter. Below I present my different modes of data collecting: interviewing (on-the-spot interviews and semi-structured interviews) and conducting a qualitative content analysis.

3.2.1 Interviews

In order to examine what repackaged popular music from the past affords its audiences, and how these affordances are reflected upon in their life-course narratives, I am using in this thesis two kinds of interviews—semi-structured in-depth interviews and on-the-spot interviews—and observations.

The research interview is an interactive practice, which requires that the interviewer listen and empathize (Riessman, 2001; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Personal narratives can then be perceived as interviewees' "narrative biographies," to use Giddens' (1991) terminology. These are the stories that individuals construct and maintain in order to make sense of who they are, of their biographies and identities. In Giddens' words, the self or "self-identity is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography" (p. 53). A person, according to Giddens, must put the interaction with others "in line with events in the external world, in order to sort them into the continuous 'story' about the self" (p. 54). This continuous, reflexive story or narrative about the self can be perceived as the person's biography—what Giddens' (1991) calls one's "narrative biography." In narrative biographies people present themselves, reflect, modify, communicate, trust, adjust, and express their interaction with others and the world. This "autobiographical reasoning" (Harrington & Bielby, 2010a) locates the person's reflections, modifications, and changes in his or her life history. Hence the various developments and changes in one's narrative biography may feature in that person's narrative identity, and may also help to construct it (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991; McAdams & McLean, 2013). This means that, out of the particular events or developments one has experienced, "a person may construct and internalize an evolving and integrative story for life" (McAdams & McLean, 2013: 233). And, by the same token, this reconstruction of one's biography—this life story—gives a coherent account of personal identity. According to McAdams and McLean (2013: 233),

“[t]hrough narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to other who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.”

Moving on from here, this unitary reconstruction and recollection of events in life contributes to people’s “transformational self-narratives” (Hills, 2014: 18). These narratives are the outcome of reflections on episodes in life that mark important transitions and changes; for example, one may identify as a pinnacle the moment in which s/he became overtly enthusiastic about a particular music. Autobiographical reasoning may also elicit how one makes sense of particular, age-graded transitions in life (Harrington & Bielby, 2010b)—such as becoming a parent, buying a house, or other transformational events.

In this way the research interview provides an important platform for the researcher to prompt and gain an intimate understanding of a person and his or her world. This makes it an apt method for exploring the participants’ sense of transitions in the course of their life (Hermanowicz, 2006). My first case study, about the Big Reunion, draws on data from on-the-spot interviews (together with a content analysis, on which see next section). The second and third, about the Backstreet Boys and Doe Maar respectively, build on in-depth semi-structured interviews. These different kinds of research interviews are discussed in the subsections below.

3.2.1.1 On-the-spot interviews and observations

On-the-spot interviews were conducted for the first case study, the Big Reunion, during visits to two concert sites, in Birmingham and London, where the Big Reunion Christmas Party took place. These short interviews provided insights in addition to the forum messages, and served to clarify observations made at the concert (for the use of these methods, see Van Maanen, 2006; Van Bohemen, 2015).

Wood et al. (2007: 879), in their study on musical methodologies that capture music as an emotion, coin the term “participatory tactic” for this style of interviewing and define it as “interviews conducted during or immediately after the performance.” They consider this aspect of proximity to the performance beneficial because immediate reactions “capture the ‘raw’ emotions that people experienced during the performance” (p. 879). This kind of interview would thus be able to cover the affective qualities of the event. Moreover, its aim would be not only to apprehend the emotional experience of the concert, but also to “expand on or clarify observations made” (Rapp, 2005: 300). There is, however, a limitation: due to their social nature, these interviews are shorter and rather informal, and hence less suitable

for complicated questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The participatory, informal, and short nature of on-the-spot interviews is the reason why they were not recorded; nonetheless, the participants' answers were noted during the interview or immediately thereafter (Rapp, 2005). Thus the on-the-spot interviews offered a chance to elicit from audiences more discourse about the Big Reunion, about visitors' preferences for specific reunion acts, about how they learned about the event, and about why they attended.

Documenting these interviews and the concert observations was carried out according to the principles of thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick descriptions take the context and the surroundings into account. Geertz explains this technique in his own approach through the example of a wink, which can mean multiple things. A wink can be just a wink, a rapid eye movement to combat dry eyes or fatigue; but it can also be a burlesque gesture intended to mock a certain situation or person. The latter is something we cannot recognize without knowing the full context. Maybe someone is trying to fool another person and wishes to reinforce this scorn with this particular sign. For example, at a concert, someone may have been waving glow sticks around, which would not make sense outside this concert setting, but which could be a special practice to engage in during a song. Van Maanen (2011) claims that ethnography in particular holds a sort of claim to documenting or being informative, as the observations made by the researcher chart everyday life (see also Geertz, 1973; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). However, the Christmas Party Tour offered only a temporary setting to immerse oneself in; moreover, I visited three of these concerts, whereas there were more concerts and more tours. This limited sample, then, indeed offers an insight into people's behavior at the concert sites, but it does not allow me to give an extensive ethnographic account of the concerts or of the Big Reunion audience. Therefore I included elaborate descriptions of people's behavior alongside the on-the-spot interviews. With the help of these thick descriptions, I was able to capture better the affective component in people's way of acting at the events that featured music from the past and talking about them.

Before taking the interviews, I introduced myself to the participants as a researcher from a Dutch university. To let these interviews occur in a natural setting, I approached people who were standing in line or waiting for friends and then tried to strike up a conversation about something they had bought or carried with them (for example a T-shirt, or a drink); I did not interrupt conversations. Then I would introduce myself and ask them whether they had time to answer a few questions. If they consented, I would continue my interview. The on-the-spot interviews were short, about five to fifteen minutes, but they gave

me an insight into how people learned about the event, why they attended it, and with whom. I conducted a total of 42 on-the-spot interviews, spread out over three concert settings (one concert in Birmingham and two shows in London). I asked all participants whether I could follow up with them via email, but only five of the interviewees answered my follow-up email. In the follow-up I asked them how they felt about the event a few days after it had taken place and thanked them for talking to me on site.

3.2.1.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

The second and third case study, presented here in chapters 5 and 6, on audiences of the Backstreet Boys and Doe Maar, use the technique of semi-structured in-depth interviews (on this type of interview, see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). These interviews were conducted in person, via Skype, or by telephone. I used a semi-structured topic guide (see Edwards & Holland, 2013) in all my interviews. The semi-structured in-depth interview has the aim of yielding information about a specific topic and builds on questions that are prepared in advance for the most part (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). While this technique does not exclude the possibility of asking follow-up questions during the interview, it allows the interviewer to control the situation and to stay focused on the topics related to the research question. The style of my interviews was characterized by responsiveness. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011) the responsive interview is about building up a relationship founded on (mutual) trust; the interviewer takes a supportive and friendly tone, and the interview is a meaningful exchange. The responsive character of the interview requires the researcher to be aware of his or her own position and prejudices (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013). There will be more on this, particularly with regard to my being an “academic fan” or a “fan academic” (see section 3.4 of this chapter).

All in-depth interviews followed the same procedure. Before the interview, every participant was asked for consent and informed about the study and the procedure of the interview. I explained to them that I recorded the interview and would use these recordings to transcribe the interview, after which I would analyze the written version of the interview. I also asked them whether they wished to be anonymized and would prefer a specific name in that case. Typically an interview would start with a few minutes of general talk about the participant’s occupation, place of residence, and background.

After these preliminaries I started asking questions from my semi-structured interview guide, which had been designed for each study. In general, the topics remained the

same across the different case studies. I discussed the respondents' taste in music (How did band X fit their general taste in music?), their fandom (How long had they been fans? Why and how did they break with fandom or return to it?), and their fan practices (Why did they visit the reunion concerts? What else did they do?). In particular, I asked them to compare their current practices and involvement with the music to their past ways of engaging with that music. I did so by eliciting stories about their (pre-)teen or young adult life, particularly in comparison to their current life. Due to the different nature of the bands that feature in my case studies, this line of inquiry sometimes raised questions and sparked memories about these bands' backgrounds or other specifics. For example, Doe Maar sings in Dutch. This foregrounded some new topics, which I then added to the topic guide. Often the interviews followed a model that Rubin and Rubin (2011: 123) describe as opening the floodgates: upon asking a question I would receive a response that naturally led to a follow-up topic in the semi-structured guide.

Interviews were conducted in person, at someone's home or in a place where participants said they felt comfortable (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013), via Skype, or by telephone. The difference between the Skype interviews and the phone interviews is that the former offer a video connection through which it is still possible for the two parties to see each other's facial expressions, whereas with the latter this aspect of communication is lost. For this reason, conducting interviews by telephone is generally considered somewhat challenging (Block & Erskine, 2012). Moreover, it is argued that it is more difficult to build up trust between interviewer and participant over the phone, so that the answers may be less open or more socially desirable (Block & Erskine, 2012). In spite of such limitations, conducting interviews over the telephone proved to be in fact a method appropriate for this study. Most interviewees found the flexibility of arrangements by telephone quite convenient, due to their jobs or family obligations; they could schedule the interview early in the morning, before work, or late in the evening, after work.

Moreover, the anonymity of telephone interviews encourages a more open attitude to sensitive topics when they came up (Block & Erskine, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). For example, some of my questions dealt with how fans financed their fan practices. In such cases I explained that I was not interested in what they earned, I only wanted to get an idea of how they felt investments in their fan practices compared to their other investments and financial obligations. Some found that talking about their former passion for a boy band was too intimate for a conversation to a stranger. For example, there were interviewees for whom a

singer in the band was or had been an object of (sexual) obsession. This is not something one would immediately admit to a stranger and be open about. Here it helped if I talked about my own former obsession with boy band Boyzone, or if I probed their feelings for the act, for example by telling them that I read about a particular singer being considered attractive in the past and asking the interviewee whether s/he found that too. If the participant was uncomfortable, I steered the interview toward music in general, recent news about the band, or a photo or visible object related to it. This gave me an insight into the person's general taste in music, but also a latent impression of the kind of role that the repackaged music played in his or her everyday life. And, of course, it created a space in which I could build a mutual connection and establish a feeling of trust (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013).

All interviewees gave consent for their contributions to be used in published academic research. I encouraged them all to be open and speak their mind about the questions asked.

The on-the-spot interviews were held in English and the in-depth interviews in Dutch. In other words, they fell in the class of “cross-language interviews” (Rubin & Rubin, 2011: 186). I use both English and Dutch in my everyday interactions, thus both are familiar languages to conduct interviews in. However, I am not a native speaker in English. This could lead to difficulties or challenges when the interviews had taken longer, and sometimes I had to ask for more clarification on the matters addressed (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Certain expressions, phrasal verbs for instance, can be relatively difficult for a non-native speaker to pick up. Conducting in-depth interviews in Dutch, my native language, did not cause problems of this sort.

3.2.2 Qualitative content analysis

As mentioned above, meaning-making units of discourse (Riessman, 2001) occur not only in spoken form; they can be found in writing, too. Therefore, in the Big Reunion case study, the interviews on the spot were supplemented by qualitative content analyses of texts scraped by me from two forums where fans discussed *The Big Reunion* TV series. Additionally, a qualitative content analysis was also applied to the transcripts of the interviews (this is further explicated in section 3.3).

Although a content analysis can be a first step in quantifying the data (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), it was not my aim to quantify the results of my research, since this dissertation seeks first and foremost to unravel the meanings of repackaged music. A

qualitative content analysis requires a systematic reading of the texts (Krippendorff, 2012) or a close, in-depth reading of selected material. This kind of reading should disclose meanings that are latent in the texts and lead us to new interpretations (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2012). Krippendorff explains that “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use” (2012: 24). This is why a unit of analysis should always be interpreted in its original context. For example, in the Big Reunion study, a declaration, written or spoken, made by someone who is very passionate about the boy band 5ive should be understood as coming from a research interview about the meaning of repackaged music instead of merely being interpreted as an illustration of what it is to be a 5ive fan.

This focus on written or spoken accounts might imply that the researcher is looking specifically at language and at how language constructs social reality (Schreier, 2012), which is a premise of critical discourse analysis. So I should make it clear that discourse analysis is not among the approaches adopted in this dissertation. Discourse analysis is mainly intent on criticizing (mis)representations (Krippendorff, 2012); but this is not my aim. Besides, in performing a qualitative content analysis, one does not make assumptions about the nature of language or its relation to social reality, as discourse analysis does (Schreier, 2012). Content analysis is more descriptive in its focus on the interview material—the data to be analyzed—while discourse analysis is more critical in nature. This explains why the latter is strongly invested in the usage of language—especially its use in the construction of social reality (Schreier, 2012) and in related issues of power and ideology.

Although I am interested in how people give meaning to objects in relation to specific narratives in their lives, I pursue this line in order to discover how the meaning-making process connects to the reconstruction of lived experiences. Therefore, from the broad range of types and modes of qualitative data analysis, I picked up thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rivas, 2012; Vaismoradi et al., 2013), which is most suitable on account of its reflexive character. This type of analysis examines people’s responses and looks for patterns in their (re)constructions of events and experiences; hence it invites reflecting on reality and unravelling it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Rivas (2012: 367), a thematic content analysis often focuses on individuals’ lived experience(s), on “what a phenomenon, event or social interaction ‘looks like’ to the individual of interest.” These two characteristics—focusing on one’s lived experience and offering a reflection on reality—are in line with the social constructionist perspective, on which (as I explained earlier) my research is premised.

Another important characteristic, which explains my choice of a content analysis with a thematic orientation, is that this type of method examines not only *what* happens in a text, but also *how* it happens (Seale & Tonkiss, 2012). A thematic analysis brings to the surface those themes in the data that are dominant, recurring themes. It can do this because it looks for patterns in interviewees' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Previous studies that combine popular music, long-term or resumed fandom, and the theme of the life course (see Giele & Elder, 1998) have scarcely used forum discourse as a source of data. Typically, studies drawing on data from music forums have discussed the development of fan communities (see Baym, 2007) or highlighted, through qualitative content analysis, fans' discourses or musical practices related to a band. In the latter category, Bennett (2011) makes insightful comments on how a small group of R.E.M. fans aims to reproduce the ultimate "first listen" of an album. Similarly, by mapping interactions between the online fan and antifan communities of Twilight and Muse, Williams (2013) illustrates how fans from one franchise moved to a related franchise or dropped a franchise because new fans had taken it up, while Brett (2014), drawing on fan forums of the electronic music band Autechre, discovers that fans responded in two modes to the band's music: they expressed their passion musically, by engaging with technique and sounds, or discursively, by sharing stories. The discursive mode is also found in Hills' (2007) analysis of a Michael Jackson forum where fans contested the way they were represented in a documentary about the singer. Additionally, this reflection on the object of fandom is also present in Van den Bulck and Gorp's (2011) work, which draws on interviews taken at a concert and on an online guestbook of the Belgian schlager singer Jo Vally. In particular, the researchers analyzed how a documentary about Jo Vally's divorce works as a mirror in his fans' processes of self-reflection (see Sandvoss, 2005).

All these studies have inspired my own use of forum data. Each in its own way—by analyzing a forum, and sometimes by completing the forum's data with interviews or observations—features written reflections of the fans themselves. Moreover, the forum posts are reconstructions of fan practices or discourses that enable the researcher to further elucidate the role that a particular pop act or music brand plays in these fans' lives. Forum messages are clear comments made by the members spontaneously, and not elicited via responsive questioning. Such self-constructed narratives are sometimes forthright and pay little heed to social desirability.

The practical process of “coding” (see Rivas, 2012; Saldaña, 2013) or producing a coding frame, which lies at the core of qualitative content analysis, is explained in the next section.

3.3 Sample and participant selection in the different cases

Before discussing the sampling and selection of participants for the different case studies, I wish to explain the methodological reasons for using different case studies in this dissertation. Different cases generate a “collective case study,” where several smaller cases are used to study a general phenomenon (Silverman, 2013: 143).

To map the affordances of repackaged popular music and their role in audiences’ reflections on their life course, my research has pursued the same themes in three different cases. They are different primarily in terms of following a “synthetic” or an “organic” ideology of creativity (Negus, 1992)—where, as already explained, “synthetic” means that they were manufactured by a manager (Negus, 1992), self-compiled, and pushed to fame by a record company. Next, each case highlights a different form of repackaging, which I discuss below in relation to the reason why they were selected. Each of the bands discussed was mainstream in a particular era (the 1980s, late 1990s, or the early years of the new century) and was different in its reach of market domination, which was global (chapters 4 and 5) or local (chapter 6). Each case highlights a particular aspect of the studied phenomenon, with a view to contributing to its “wholeness” (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Suri, 2011; Silverman 2013). Taken together, the case studies are aimed at reconstructing the respondents’ meaning-making practices through interviews and observations (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The rationale for a multiple case study is that this design would ensure that my research can extend the current theories to new aspects of the role of music in life-course narratives—which sometimes commands the selection of some extreme or deviant cases (Suri, 2011).

The cases selected for this dissertation embrace three types of repackaging, which is the central phenomenon under investigation here: (1) a one-off commercial reunion, (2) a “surviving” pop act, and (3) a recurring reunion. As one would expect, each case, and hence each type of repackaging, highlights a different kind of audience. The one-off reunion is a reunion with bands that were popular in the late 1990s and in the subsequent decade, which means that its initial audiences are now somewhere between 25 and 40–50. This is also the age group of most participants in the interview study for the Big Reunion (chapter 4). Such

people witnessed the band's first performances and are able to tell how this music features in the various transitions in their life and in narratives about them. The same is true of the second and third case studies. The Backstreet Boys is a band that has been around for almost 25 years; the audience members who attended its survival act had aged in parallel with the music and the members of the band. Assuming that the Backstreet Boys fans were pre-teens or teenagers in the 1990s, these people are now in their post-youth phase (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012). The Doe Maar band was popular in the 1980s and regrouped in 2000. This suggests that there may be people who remained Doe Maar fans from the eighties until now. In consequence I selected an initial target audience from the 1980s in order to examine whether (and how) Doe Maar featured then and features now in narratives about these people's lives.

Although each of my three cases will illustrate a particular type of repackaging musical acts from the past, results speak only for one particular group in one particular situation (for similar results, see also Maxwell, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Silverman, 2013). Yet these samples provide qualitative insights into a particular audience group—insights that might be emblematic of how other audiences give meaning to repackaged music from the past and of how such music features in life-course narratives and in stories of transition. It is possible to generalize the results of case-study research if the exploration of the research question in different settings has led to consensus or there is saturation in the data (i.e., if new data no longer generate new results; see Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Moreover, generalization is legitimate if certain conclusions are generalizable within the studied setting or group (Maxwell, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). But this makes it vital to select apt cases for the study, which is based on purposeful or purposive sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Silverman, 2013). In purposeful sampling an item is selected because it illustrates some aspect or process of the phenomenon under study.

In addition to my three case studies, I also conducted nine in-depth interviews with producers, creators, or editors of various TV and radio shows in the Netherlands and in the United Kingdom that actively repackage popular music from the past (see Appendix C). These interviews, which especially provide additional insights into the original “intentions” of producers, were used to complement and enrich the data and the analysis in the following chapters. In chapter 4 one of these interviews, with the “founder” of the Big Reunion, is drawn upon to offer more insight into the objectives of the production team.

In each of the empirical chapters I provide a more elaborate discussion of the specific research design for each case study. I give below a very brief overview of the sampling and

recruitment process for each case study. This will allow me to point out the limitations and the strengths of these selections.

3.3.1 Sampling and recruiting in the one-off reunion: The Big Reunion

The Big Reunion offered two strands for exploration: the TV series and the concert tour. The dataset consists of two British online message boards with talk about the TV series, data gathered through interviews on the spot (Rapp, 2005; Wood et al., 2007; Reijnders, 2011), and observations during two concerts of the Big Reunion Christmas Tour. This mixture of online and offline data permits a good look at the phenomenon of different audiences giving meaning to the Big Reunion.

The forums I selected for analysis are Digital Spy and Popjustice—two forums popular and still active in the United Kingdom. Both focus on pop culture, which probably explains why, overall, they appeal to an audience interested in new popular television, movies, or music. Moreover, the message boards on these forums can be read without a registered account. For analysis, I selected four threads that discussed the TV series and used the season of the show as their title. There were other threads on the Big Reunion, but these focused only on the tour, or only on one of the bands. The season threads provided room to discuss all these elements. The selected threads contained 5,987 posts in total. These posts or comments formed the input for the thematic qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All posts were analyzed and coded (see 3.3), and in a later phase of the analysis comments with the same codes were grouped together into themes.

I visited two concert locations of the Big Reunion Christmas Tour, London and Birmingham, where I observed the concert and the visitors on site and held on-the-spot interviews with 42 concert attendees (hence that sample was made up of concert attendees). But not all these interviewees were necessarily fans or people who felt a close connection to the Big Reunion. Some of them liked visiting concerts in general, others were there to meet up with friends. As mentioned before, I spoke to many female concert visitors—maybe because I am a woman myself (Van Maanen, 2011; Silverman, 2013), but certainly because the females outnumbered the males. This is not surprising, given that most of the performing acts at the Big Reunion Christmas Party had a large female fan base or were originally marketed for young girls (Brabazon, 2002; Jamieson, 2007; Duffett, 2012). The difficulty was that the interviews were relatively short and did not offer room to discuss topics in depth. I aimed to compensate for this limitation through follow-up, but only five participants replied

to my emails. These emails were included in the thematic content analysis that I applied to the on-the-spot interviews and forum comments. In addition, I interviewed the creative producer of the show and asked him to talk about the commercial idea behind the Big Reunion.

3.3.2 Sampling and recruiting in the survival act: The Backstreet Boys

This case study draws on 24 in-depth interviews with self-identified Backstreet Boys fans, all female. The participants were found and recruited between December 2013 and June 2014, via Twitter and snowball sampling (on these methods, see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

In December 2013, I recruited respondents via Twitter: they replied to a tweet I posted with the hash-tags #BackstreetBoys and #TvShow. That December the band was interviewed in a Dutch TV show called *De TV Show*, and fans were invited as audience members. A few of the fans who had been present at the show reacted to my tweets. One of these tweets asked: “What did you think of it? #backstreetboys #tvshow”; and in a later follow-up tweet I asked for research participants to be interviewed about their long-term connection with the Backstreet Boys.

Many of the interviewees appeared to know each other from concerts they had attended in the past (from 2006 to 2012). This particular group, which called itself “the Dutchies” by way of pointing to their Dutch nationality in a global fandom (Driessen, 2015a), kept in touch with each other. Thus, when I asked one of them whether they knew any other potential research participants, they would introduce me to someone from their group. Not all fans came via that select group. Some replied to my later attempts to identify fans through my personal Facebook and (again) Twitter account. Others were friends of friends. This last method made for interesting “recruitment,” because it helped me to include in the sample less visible and active fans—particularly by comparison with the Dutchies. A fan whom I found through Twitter introduced herself as an “ex-fan” of the band but still wished to participate in the research and share her story about the band and its significance for her life. Former fans are rather difficult to find: they may have rejected the band or redirected their fandom to other artists (Williams, 2015). In this case, the fact that the “ex-fan” was talking about her past experiences as a fan and had decided to “stop” her fandom “only” in 2013 made her narrative compatible with those of the other fans in the sample.

The Backstreet Boys were originally aimed at female teenage audiences. Many of these female teens continued to be fans of the band. An all-female sample might be

considered remarkable in a study on popular music (see Frith & McRobbie, 1991), yet in this particular variety of pop it is to be expected (see Jamieson, 2007). In any case, my aim here is not to explore the gendered dimensions of repackaged music. Brabazon (2002) argues that women often look upon their past musical attachments in disdain, treating them as manifestations of a silly teenage girl phase. Hence it was quite a challenge to find these post-youth women (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012) willing to talk about their passion for the Backstreet Boys today, when they had taken on adult duties and responsibilities. Nevertheless, 24 women in exactly this situation, who identified as Backstreet Boys fans, consented to being interviewed and offered precious insights into the role that the Backstreet Boys played in different stages of their lives.

3.3.3 Sampling and recruiting in Doe Maar's recurring reunions

For the last case study on audiences of Doe Maar it was difficult to find participants. The group of people who had liked Doe Maar as teens are now 40 years or older, as they were pre-teens and teenagers in the 1980s. This made it a challenge to find them through recruitment methods like the ones previously described, which are particularly appropriate and effective for locating people in their teens, twenties, and thirties. Where before I could rely on Twitter and Facebook, I now opted for my personal network and let friends approach their friends or relatives. That led to finding a few participants, who then knew a few other potential participants, and thus, through "snowballing," the sample slowly grew (see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). After I had done a few interviews, I was introduced to a Facebook group of which many Doe Maar fans were members. When I posted a call for participants in this Facebook community I quickly found more participants. In total, 18 self-identified fans of Doe Maar, former and current, participated in the interview study.

Within this group of 18 interviewees, three identified as former fans and some identified as members of the Mutsen, a group of six whose investment in Doe Maar was more visible and present than that of the others. Like the Dutchies in the Backstreet Boys sample, this small separate group of fans had found one another through social media, around the time when the second reunion of Doe Maar in 2008.

The 18 participants in this study were slightly older than people in the groups I had previously interviewed. Some were initially hesitant. One attributed this to the teenage hysteria surrounding Doe Maar in the past and suggested that the respondents might fear the stigma of being seen as screaming teens. In the past, some of them had been interviewed by

the Dutch media, which had painted this stigmatic picture of them in their reports; this made many fans somewhat reluctant to talk about their Doe Maar fandom (see also Brabazon, 2002; Jennings & Gardner, 2012; Harrington, Bielby, & Bardo, 2014). Moreover, some fans may have decided to not “renew” their fandom (Williams, 2015).

Although Doe Maar had been particularly popular among girls in the 1980s, there were five male Doe Maar fans included in this sample. They also signed themselves up after seeing my call for participants in the Facebook group or heard from previous interviewees about my study. This ratio of male ($n = 5$) to female participants ($n = 13$) corresponded to the ratio of male to female Doe Maar fans in the 1980s (Van der Plas, 2003).

3.3.4 Implications of the sampling and recruiting process

In the first case study on the Big Reunion, the 42 concert visitors were aged between 25 and 40–50, which is in line with the age group of the interviewed Backstreet Boys fans, who were aged between 25 and 33. Although I do not have access to the demographics of the forum members who commented on Digital Spy and Popjustice about the Big Reunion—this was neither posted nor part of their biographies on the site or part of their comments—I assume that they fit this age group as well, because the show targeted those who witnessed the bands the first time round, and probably appealed mostly to them. The interviewees in the Doe Maar study are older than those groups.

The on-the-spot interviews for the Big Reunion were held in English. While I am not a native speaker, I do not find it difficult to communicate in English. However, my questions and responses may have been less nuanced or eloquent in English than they would be in Dutch. That could be a limitation in the data I gathered for this study. The two other case studies both involved Dutch participants, and thus the interviews were conducted in Dutch.

With the participants in in-depth interviews in the Backstreet Boys and Doe Maar studies I asked about their educational backgrounds as well as about their professions and current jobs. These varied: most interviewees had completed high school (lower vocational education) and held jobs at an intermediary or higher vocational level. Some had a bachelor’s or a master’s degree or were about to complete one. This variety in education and job levels sheds some light on the meaning-making power of repackaged music, spread as it is across a wide range of audiences.

The recruitment method I used for the Doe Maar case study—finding respondents via a Facebook group—was challenging. My call for participants lost priority when someone

else posted a new message. This is why I let people sign up via Typeform—an online form and website that allows the gathering of people’s email addresses. Moreover, the form offers space for explaining the topic and procedure of the research. Once my respondents signed up through this form, I emailed and asked them to decide upon a date and time for the interview. Of course, creating and using such a form—and using social media platforms in general—may have excluded potential participants, as this recruitment technology inevitably assumes that everyone is tech-savvy, familiar with the use of platforms like Typeform, and not averse to having a Twitter or a Facebook account.

3.4 The analysis of data

The interviews I conducted with participants were then transcribed by me for analysis. The transcripts stated where and when each person had been interviewed, whether there was someone else accompanying the participant (and thus, at times, joining the conversation), and what my impressions were of a participant’s state during the interview (e.g., at ease, nervously fidgeting or twirling his/her hair). The forum messages were scraped from the websites with a web-scraping tool. This means that they were downloaded from the forum sites just as they had been posted at that moment. Through this scraping process the posts were downloaded into a file as separate variables, which facilitated a more organized analysis.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. All silences and nonverbal or emotional sound fillers (e.g., *eeuh*, *hmm*) were faithfully reproduced in the original transcriptions. In the reproduction of the data in subsequent chapters, a silence or a short pause from the interviewee is rendered through ellipsis (“...”). In order to make the interview fragments readable, I left out the sound fillers; but these elements were a great support for me when I would listen to an interview again, before analyzing it. They helped me relive the interview and made me aware of how the respondents structured their answers (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

After transcribing the interviews and collecting the forum comments in a file, I set up and carried out a qualitative content analysis (see section 3.1.2). More specifically, I performed a thematic analysis on the data sets, which consisted of interviews and forum messages. As already explained, this kind of analysis focuses on themes mentioned in the material (see, e.g., Schreier, 2012); hence it exposed several themes as well as prevalent, recurring topics, all based on the “*patterned response[s] or meaning[s]*” (Braun & Clarke,

2006: 82) found in the interviews and forum messages. By taking this approach I aimed to provide a detailed and nuanced account of the data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Next, the interviews were transferred to Atlas.ti, a software application that facilitates qualitative content analyses. Atlas.ti offers a space in which all interviews can be collected, coded, compared, and analyzed (Rivas, 2012; Saldaña, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

In order to explore the data and perform the thematic analysis, I assigned codes to specific fragments (sentences or collections of sentences) in the interviewees' responses. I illustrate this coding process below. When applying a thematic approach, it is helpful to ask the data what it is that they inform us about (Rivas, 2012). For example, what words, expressions or arguments are chosen by the interviewee to produce a narrative? In what kind of context or situation does the interviewee discuss this topic? How often is that topic recurring in the data?

The transcripts were coded in three cycles or stages (Rivas, 2012; Saldaña, 2013). The first, the "open coding" stage, is a generic, exploratory phase in which the researcher becomes familiar with data (Boeije, 2005; Emerson et al., 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). After (re)reading the material, the researcher assigns codes to fragments of text. Sometimes these are very specific codes, applicable only to a piece of text, or they are *in vivo* (i.e., they mark that the text is quoted; see Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Open coding is followed by "axial coding" (Boeije, 2005). In this second step of the coding process, I grouped the open codes into broader categories. The aim here is to develop categories and typologies that are more abstract than the open codes (Rivas, 2012). For example, several interviewees in the dataset for my first case study talked about how music enabled them to "let go," or made them "not think about X in everyday life" or allowed them to "just dance" or "forget about everything." These responses form a pattern: they all show how the interviewees' meanings revolved around the theme of "letting go or forgetting about X." A patterned theme of this sort becomes the category or axial code assigned to responses that fit into the corresponding group of open-code segments.

The final step is the creation of themes or "selective codes" (Rivas, 2012; Saldaña, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2015) on the basis of the patterns established by axial codes. The codes are then compared for similarities and differences and for latent and manifest elements in the data (Rivas, 2012). Returning to the previous example, at this stage the theme of "letting go or forgetting about X" expands into the theme of escapism, because letting go or forgetting about one's duties and responsibilities is indicative of music's capacity to afford

these participants the chance to “escape” particular situations in their everyday lives. In combination, these main themes identified in the data provide answer to the main research question(s).

3.5 Aca-fan or fan-academic?

Geertz (1973) states that the researcher, when studying a village and immersing him- or herself in it, will never become a villager. Yet many researchers do try to enter the society or group they study as well and appropriately as possible. In her research on the Dutch chapters of the Red Hat Society, a society of (middle-aged) women celebrating fun, friendship and frivolousness, Van Bohemen (2015) reflects on how she studied this group of women as an outsider. She documented various events and occasions on which the women of this international fellowship wear a red hat to mark their inclusion and age (50 years and over), and how this gesture differs from the wearing of a purple or a pink hat—which signifies that the women are under 50 years of age. Through her participation in these events, and sometimes by complying with the group’s traditions (e.g., Van Bohemen was too young to wear a red hat, so she had to wear a pink hat), she learned to understand why and how the women did what they did (Emerson et al., 2011).

However, whereas Van Bohemen was and could remain an outsider to her topic of study, in popular music and fan studies many researchers are “villagers” insofar as they are fans of the bands or artists they study (see Zwaan & Duffett, 2016). They are already part of the village; but they have or gain an academic interest in the community too. For example, Bennett (2013b), in his study on aging punks in the United Kingdom, concludes after attending several concerts that the older punkers stayed at the back of the venue and did not participate in moshing or in slamdancing. Because he liked the music he studied and was familiar with the conventions of the scene, he knew that the behavior of these punks was “odd.” His personal involvement gave him a better sense of the music culture than perhaps an outsider would have had.

In fan studies, villagers studying their village from an academic point of view are called “aca-fans” (Jenkins, 1992; Hills, 2002; Duffett, 2013b; Cristofari & Guitton, 2016). In a seminal work on the productive and political practices of fan communities that considers fans as textual poachers, Henry Jenkins (1992) introduced himself as academic fan. He admitted that he was a fan of what he studied and that he was in consequence familiar with the traditions and knowledge of the Star Trek fandom. Due to his academic formation, he

was also knowledgeable about theories of popular culture, and this allowed him to move between and make sense of his two identities. Duffett (2013b) defines the aca-fan as “an academic who [...] supports the cultural legitimacy of fandom as a social identity and proudly attests to being a fan in her/her own life and work” (p. 289). Hills (2002) uses the concept of the aca-fan to identify another category of popular culture and fan researchers: the fan-aca, the fan academic, an academic who studies fans, yet has no further personal involvement with the object of his or her study (see also Cristofari & Guitton, 2016).

Since I am discussing different music acts in this dissertation, it is important that I state my own position with respect to the bands discussed here. Being born in 1987 in the Netherlands, I was a teenager in the late 1990s and early into the new century. Therefore I was part of the target audience of the music I now study, particularly the music of “boy” and “girl” bands aimed at appealing to young girls (Brabazon, 2002; Sanders, 2002; Duffett, 2012). In the Netherlands, where I grew up, we had easy and copious access to American and British music, which made up most of the music in the Top 40 charts. As explained in the previous chapters, boy bands like Take That, the Backstreet Boys, Sive, and Boyzone and girl bands like Solid Harmony, All Saints, and Atomic Kitten were very popular at that time and dominated the mainstream Top 40 in the Netherlands. Hence I am very familiar with these bands and their music. Yet I was not a big fan of the bands studied in this dissertation; I was a fan of boy band Boyzone (Driessen & Jones, 2016), which was popular in the late 1990s.

While I was not yet born in the 1980s at the time when Doe Maar was extremely popular, I became and still am very familiar with its music. The music of Doe Maar is well known in the Netherlands (see Mutsaers, 2001 and Van der Plas, 2003) and at times is revived in a cover by a younger artist. That is, the music of Doe Maar is part of the Dutch popular music heritage (Mutsaers, 2001; Van der Plas, 2003). Despite being familiar with Doe Maar’s music, I do not own any of this band’s records, nor do I frequent its reunion concerts. As a fan-aca, I have watched the documentary made by broadcaster BNN about the band, a TV series that features one of the lead singers of Doe Maar, and I read a book related to the band.

As I clarify elsewhere (Driessen & Jones, 2016), I was a fan of the Irish boy band Boyzone in my teens because I liked the idea that Boyzone was, in comparison to the other big pop acts at the time, the “underdog.” Having been a Boyzone fan and having immersed myself in this sort of experience, I have now firsthand knowledge of what many interviewees talk about: falling in love with a member of a boy band, talking to other girls about “boys,”

and liking your own music (instead of picking up something that your parents liked or picked out for you). The Backstreet Boys, 5ive, or Doe Maar fans also experienced this. Due to the overall popularity of boy and girl bands in the Netherlands at the time when I grew up, their songs were frequently played on radio stations and their music videos featured often on the Music Factory, a Dutch music TV channel inspired by MTV. Moreover, because I am from this particular generational cohort, I also feel part of the target audience when I visit events such as the Big Reunion.

Thus, while I am not an aca-fan, I do share many characteristics with the interviewees. Being from the same generation and being a former fan of a pop music act does not make me a native “villager”; but it makes me understand quite well both the cohort time and the historical time (see Givskov & Deuze, 2016): I am familiar both with the age-graded life transitions the interviewees undergo (or already underwent) and with the “political, economical and technological conditions and changes” (p. 7) that took place during their life so far.

3.6 Conclusion

In sum, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach to the study of what the affordances of repackaged popular music from the past are, and how they relate to audiences’ position in the life course.. Each of the three cases under investigation—the Big Reunion as a reunion of music from the past; the “surviving” Backstreet Boys as a continuation of music from the past; and the continuous repackaging of Doe Maar’s music from the past through recurrent reunions—has its own design and data collection. The first case study includes in its remit the audience’s perception of televised repackaging, in addition to the live concerts. The latter two emphasize the participants’ personal narratives in order to illustrate the affordances of these repackaged music events and how these feature in life-course narratives. Apart from these case studies, which focus on the reunion or survival of pop acts, I also conducted nine in-depth interviews with the producers, creators, and editors of different TV and radio shows in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom that actively repackage popular music from the past. In chapter 4 such an interview is used in addition to the empirical data to shed light on the original intentions of producers, and to complement and enrich the material of the case study.

The different designs and methods—content analysis, on-the-spot and in-depth interviews, and observations—have their own sampling and recruitment process. Data for

the Big Reunion case study were gathered online from two message boards and offline through on-the-spot interviews and on-site observations at Big Reunion Christmas Party concerts. For the second and third case study, self-identified fans were actively recruited via social media platforms.

Together, the cases constitute a qualitative study that provides unique insight into why and how aging audiences consume the commercially driven revival initiatives that features music from their childhood or teens. The role of meaning-making processes in the audiences' transformative self-narratives and autobiographical reasoning is reconstructed through a thematic content analysis carried out on different kinds of discourses. The use of qualitative methods enables the participants to share their stories, to attribute importance to what they feel about music, and thus to apply autobiographical reasoning or update their narrative biographies.

In the upcoming chapters, I will present the material according to a set template. First I introduce the case and establish that a synthetic or an organic ideology of creativity is present. This involves explaining how the music is repackaged (e.g., through a documentary or TV show) or presented as a survival. Next I give a concise overview of the methodology used. Thereafter I present the findings of my various analyses. Each chapter ends with a conclusion about the specific case study, which also highlights its limitations and the implications for future research.

4. Reading the Big Reunion in the life course

TV shows in which a particular decade is remembered are abundant. *National Geographic*, for example, reflected on the past decades as “The ’80s: The Decade That Made Us,” “The ’90s: The Last Great Decade?” and “The ’00s: The Decade We Saw It All.” Not only politics and technology feature heavily in such series; pop culture—most often in the form of well-remembered movies, series, or hit singles of the period of interest—is a key component too. Many of the movies and series from the past, such as *Jurassic Park*, *Mad Max*, or *Baywatch*, are remade 30 years later and presented again (Lizardi, 2015). Music, however, seems to be more a more difficult subject of “remakes”; and yet music holds great potential for recalling past decades, both personally and collectively (see Van Dijck, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2013; Van der Hoeven, 2014). This could be the reason why, increasingly, musicians who have “retired” from the music industry make serious attempts return to the limelight. Although the structure of successful previous acts may differ and key members may disappear, it is a trend for classic rock bands and once prominent pop acts to try to enter this “nostalgia market”—to use Shuker’s (2016) characterization.

Previous scholarship discussed the affordances of music in personal and collective lives (see DeNora, 1999; Van Dijck, 2006); nevertheless, the affordances and different modes of repackaging music from the past are typically overlooked. Repackaged music is music that is reoffered to its former audience through a reunion or through a survival—that is, “surviving performers” (Shuker, 2016) who have aged together with their audience.

This chapter focuses on the reunited British acts that feature in the Big Reunion, a UK ITV series and concert tour aimed at reuniting pop acts, particularly girl and boy bands, that were popular in the 1990s and the next decade. The case study explores how the meanings that various audiences—both of the series and of the concerts—give to the Big Reunion phenomenon can be explained through the prism of their members’ life course. By exploring this phenomenon, I intend to pursue the main research question of my dissertation: *What are the affordances of the Big Reunion phenomenon for its audiences, and how do they relate to their current life-course position?*

As I already explained, the popular music reunion is a phenomenon that has received little academic attention so far. A notable exception is the re-formation of “classic rock” bands like Queen or the Grateful Dead and their continuation with different artists.

Particularly the Grateful Dead, an American psychedelic rock band famous for its lengthy live performances, features in scholarships that addresses how fans dealt with their aging (Adams & Harmon, 2014) or how these Deadheads, after the passing of Jerry Garcia, their lead singer, still reunite at fan gatherings or purchase rare bootlegs (Adams, Ernstes, & Lucey, 2013; Smith & Inglis, 2013). Although these studies throw some light on how a particular fandom gives meaning to a music act, they concern genres such as psychedelic rock, which—intentionally—were never part of the mainstream. Furthermore, in the case of the Grateful Dead, the band reconvened in different formations over time, offering its fans different versions of itself to feel connected to. Shuker (2016) classifies even such bands among “surviving performers.”

I emphasize the non-mainstream character of the Grateful Dead’s music, because reunions of highly commercial mainstream popular music acts are overlooked in academic research. An exception is the reunion of the 1990s’ UK boy band Take That. Their re-formation is emblematic of a successful pop music reunion: the band was able to release new albums and regain its former audiences (Wise, 2012). Löbert (2012) analyzes Take That’s reunion and finds that, after their initial split, bands can have the two types of reunion that I presented in chapter 2: explorative and assumptive. The first explores and evaluates the market of potential audiences, while the second anticipates success before testing the market.

Bearing these distinctive reunion categories in mind, I will start by describing the phenomenon of the Big Reunion and will consider the ways in which its multimedia platform seeks to bring music from the past back into audiences’ current lives. Next I will present the content analysis of the material I collected for this study: forum messages related to the TV shows and on-the-spot interviews with visitors of the Big Reunion Christmas Party concerts.

My qualitative study revealed that the audiences analyzed in this study—the forum members and the concert visitors—offer three readings of the Big Reunion, which can be explained from the perspective of these people’s aging and general life course. First, the forum members and the concert attendees, who are now young adults, read the reunion as a nostalgic phenomenon: it evokes memories of their childhood, upon which they are now able to reflect as a distinct period of their life. Second, they read the televised reunion as an ironic event, distancing themselves from the Big Reunion phenomenon while simultaneously problematizing instances where the producers of the show do the same—because these viewers have come to identify with the difficulties and struggles of the performers, as depicted in the TV series. Having grown older, the audience is now able to register the

inauthenticity of the acts and of the televised show. This interplay between enjoyment and ironic detachment in the course of renegotiating the narratives presented by the Big Reunion's producers is characteristic of what Ang (1985) defined as ironic consumption. Finally, the third reading is one in which audiences ethically question the Big Reunion formula. This third reading is the most distinctive one: it reflects a new mode of meaning making, through the prism of the audiences' current place in the life course. The conclusion to this chapter consequently argues that age and the life course offer distinct and exclusive discursive resources (see Brunsdon & Morley, 1999) for giving meaning to repackaged music from the past.

4.1 Case study: The Big Reunion

With the world at their feet, six of pop's hugest names suddenly vanished from the charts. Some imploded in a haze of excess, and some were shown the door by their record labels. Now, after a decade away, for one night only: They're back! And so are the dance routines! This is the story of unfinished business, one last shot at fame and an epic concert that they'll never forget. This is the Big Reunion!

The Big Reunion: opening credits

The Big Reunion TV episodes opened each week with the mantra above. The premise of the show: reunite a number of once mega-successful but now retired or forgotten pop stars for a one-off concert, in the notorious venue that is the Hammersmith Apollo in London. The production of the TV show was done by the production company Potato and the show was broadcasted by ITV2, a British commercial channel that mostly features entertainment programs and is particularly popular among young adult viewers (Kelpie, personal communication, October 20, 2014).

In 2011 the popular 1990s band Steps had reformed in its own reality program, *Steps: Reunion*. Michael Kelpie, Potato's managing director, led the production and creation of this reunion reality show. The success of *Steps: Reunion* sparked interest from broadcasters and offered commercial potential for other bands from that decade to reunite. Consequently, in late 2012, ITV2 announced the Big Reunion. Again, Michael Kelpie, whom I had the rare opportunity to interview as part of my study, was involved as executive and creative director of this reunion show.

The Big Reunion can be considered a reality documentary (Andrejevic, 2004; Holmes & Jermyn, 2004; Hill, 2005), a show that purports to document “real” events, stories, and people but actually is a form of entertainment that draws on scripts for events happening in the show and on the people participating in it. Reality television is located between the fields of information and entertainment, which makes it difficult for people to tell the difference between what is real and what is not (Hill, 2005). On the one hand, the Big Reunion uses this reality TV format to seriously document the participating acts’ background stories, but on the other hand the format itself shows their struggles to make a second claim to fame.

The first season of the Big Reunion aired in 2013 and comprised nine episodes. The first five focus on the individual stories of the selected bands, while the other five show the participating acts rehearsing for the one-off concert in London. Allegedly, due to the show’s popularity—it attracted about 1 million viewers a week⁴—an entire arena tour was organized. An additional three-part miniseries was then produced by Potato to highlight this tour: *The Big Reunion: On Tour*. This was later followed by a televised “Christmas special” that covered the Christmas Party Tour held at the end of 2013: *The Big Christmas Reunion*.

The second series (or season) of the Big Reunion used the same formula as the first: a mix of acts that were popular in the late 1990s and immediately after 2000 were selected by Potato to partake in the Big Reunion and to get together in a one-off reunion.

Like the bands in Series 1, the bands of Series 2 were brought together by a manager, and manufactured into one band for the pop market (Sanders, 2002; Peterson, 2005). The second series of the Big Reunion was less successful. It attracted about 500,000 viewers per episode—half the number that Series 1 had attracted. The one-off concert was the only opportunity for the show’s fans to see this second series’ participants perform. The tour that followed the series was held with a combination of boy bands from both series. No spin-offs comparable to the Christmas Party Tour after Series 1 were announced after Series 2 and there was no third series.

The bands covered in the first series were high-grossing acts in the late 1990s and at the turn of the new century. They had been very popular in the boy and girl band hype of those decades, especially among the teenage segments (Baker, 2013; Driessen & Jones,

⁴ The ratings, per individual episode, can be found, for Season 1, at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Reunion_\(series_1\)_-Ratings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Reunion_(series_1)_-Ratings) and, for Season 2, at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Reunion_\(series_2\)#Ratings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Reunion_(series_2)#Ratings).

2016), and had dominated the British and many other European music markets during that period (Huber, 2007). Many of these pop acts were known to be among the Smash Hits Poll Winners (Kelpie, personal communication, October 20, 2014). *Smash Hits* was a British pop and entertainment magazine⁵ that appeared from 1978 till 2006 and was a popular outlet for the promotion and publicity of manufactured pop acts, and the Smash Hits Poll Winners' Party was just such an event: an awards ceremony voted by the magazine's readers. By contrast, not all the bands in the second season originally featured that heavily in *Smash Hits* or had an international reach beyond the United Kingdom.

The acts that participated both in the two TV series and in the different reunion tours are listed chronologically in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Bands participating in the Big Reunion

Season/Tour	Participating bands
TV Series 1	5ive, Atomic Kitten, B*Witched, 911, the Honeyz, Liberty X, Blue
One-off concert	5ive Atomic Kitten, B*Witched, 911, the Honeyz, Liberty X, Blue
Tour Season 1	5ive, Atomic Kitten, B*Witched, 911, the Honeyz, Liberty X, Blue
Christmas Party	5ive, Atomic Kitten, B*Witched, 911, the Honeyz, Liberty X (Blue)
TV Series 2	Girl Thing, Damage, A1, Eternal, 3T, 5th Story
One-off concert	Girl Thing, Damage, A1, Eternal, 3T, 5th Story
Boy band tour	Five, 911, Blue, A1, 3T, Damage, 5th Story

The next section discusses the Big Reunion's two modes of repackaging these acts from the past; then it further contextualizes them (see Orgad, 2009) by building on an interview I conducted on November 20, 2014 with Michael Kelpie, the executive and creative producer of the TV series. These phenomena are placed against the background of previous studies on consuming reality TV and media texts from the past, in order for the Big Reunion to be better understood as a cross-media phenomenon.

⁵ Visit BBC Home at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4673136.stm>.

4.2 The Big Reunion: Modes of repackaging

The Big Reunion is the result of two modes of repackaging. One is the mode that created the TV series: the so-called “reality documentary,” which documents the reconvening of the bands and records their “journey” on the road to regaining their physique and vocal talents (for parallels, see Holmes, 2004, which is a study of the British TV competition show *Pop Idol*). The other mode is the concert tour: the live performance of the one-off reunion. Both these modes or styles of repackaging enable the Big Reunion participants to present themselves and, together, they complement each other. The TV show highlights the reformed acts’ narratives, purporting to show the world “what actually happened” to the bands, while the tour functions as an occasion for these acts to illustrate their stage skills: Would they still be able to impress audiences after two decades of absence?

4.2.1 The TV series

To explicate the first mode of repackaging, it is key to understand the typical structure of the TV series and its episodes. A typical episode of the Big Reunion constructs a narrative of how and why one of the participating bands split, what happened to its members after the breakup, how they “finally” met again, and how, together, they reflected on the “story” of their act. Most of these bands had often just disappeared from the limelight or were discharged by their record companies because they would not sell enough material (Seabrook, 2015). The TV series provides them with a setting to talk through such moments. According to Redmond (2008: 149), these narratives of the pop acts are meant to have a “confessional” character in the eyes of the show’s audiences. This confession is “[a] self-reflexive performance, often stage-managed and manipulative, and therefore designed to raise, redeem or resurrect a profile” or to effect some “damage limitation” (p. 149). Often the TV audience, most of whose members were (pre-)teens in the 1990s, would not know why a band split or stopped performing. By watching such confessions, they become at once “silent witnesses” to the “drama” and “active participants/accusers/judgers/empathizers” (p. 151)—as if they were specifically asked to partake or comment on the show. Moreover, this “carnal confession” (p. 154) gives the celebrities an image of being pure and authentic and makes the audience feel more closely related to them. By sharing with the audience the conflicts and secrets of teen pop-star life and thereby disclosing its nature, the bands may become able to reconnect with their audiences. Redmond explains how the confessional “creates a (be)longing space for the search for an essential humanness, and a belief in an innate good

and evil that somehow lies above and beyond the artifice of the celebrity and the withering irony of the age” (p. 154). Audiences are asked to reconnect with the pop stars of the past.

After these confessions, which also reinforce the idea that being a pop star is hard work (Holmes, 2004), the program focuses on the efforts and investments that the former stars will need to make if they are to get back in shape, such as vocal training and dance training. This focus on hard work and labor is a trademark: it can be found in other reality TV series that “produce” stars. For example, in her study on the *Pop Idol* series, Holmes (2004: 155) reveals how the show puts “an emphasis on the labour of producing a star.” This focus on physical labor and styling encompasses the participants’ work toward a big climax, such as the concert in the last the Big Reunion episode, and thus underscores their successful transformation process (see Ouelette & Hay, 2008; Bennett & Holmes, 2010).

To provide more background information about the format of the series and the intentions of the producers, I interviewed Michael Kelpie, the executive and creative producer of the Big Reunion. Kelpie describes the premise of the Big Reunion as follows:

If we put a whole bunch of these bands back together, and got them to reunite. And told stories of them and how they went through that process [...] It would allow you to get back on stage for one night only, perform some of your hit singles from the first time around, and *allow the viewers and the fans to decide whether they are excited about you coming back. Or, at the very least will give you the opportunity to come back* and do the magic of what you did best, which was perform pop songs to an audience.

The last part of Kelpie’s explanation—that viewers and fans are to decide on the band’s comeback—indeed warrants the importance of the element of “carnal confession” in the reality TV documentary. Kelpie himself explains that a band’s commitment to delivering such a confession was a key criterion for its inclusion in the show:

Some, you know, struggle, they move on, some have big problems, drug or alcohol addiction problems, relationship problems [...] there was a lot of rich narrative, lots of great stories to be told that would be surprising to the viewers. As long as each of *the individuals in the band would keep up with us and told their story truly, and allow us access into their lives and into their homes*. Then the viewers would sit up and pay attention to this and then *the fans who maybe*

had not thought about that band in a decade would be interested and be amazed and surprised.

Here “hard work” is not just about being able to sing or dance properly, or about physique and attraction. It extends into another dimension, which may bring success to the reunion (and thus to yet another mode of repackaging)—namely confession through transparent storytelling. According to Kelpie, the importance of this kind of confession comes from its affinity with the demands of today’s media industry:

If you are a fan of 5ive, 911, or Atomic Kitten, one of those acts, all you knew was... That sort of the PR facing front, the perfectly made up glossy, well-produced song and well-polished answers, you never really knew what they were like as people. [...] This generation, the younger generation of pop fans now, expects to have more access [...] because they expect to know much more than just accept what they get when they see the band on stage or on television.

It is thus crucial for the commercial industry to give audiences some mediated access to the stars and their stories, because these audiences are the ones that support—and thus commercially consume—the reuniting bands. The contact produced through this access contributes to the impression of authenticity and thus helps the bands reconstruct, for audiences, *their own* transformational narrative, as opposed to the story about them that comes from a manager of a record company. Moreover, in the TV show the pop acts also address how a manager or the industry formed the band in the 1990s. According to Kelpie, the success of the Big Reunion as an actual reunion was due on the one hand to the bands’ openness in sharing their stories and on the other hand to the existence of an audience that became invested in these stories. Kelpie had previous experience with constructing a successful reunion: that of Steps, another British pop act from the 1990s:

No broadcaster had thought that *that age group could be nostalgic*, because... *You know, they’re too young to be nostalgic*, but we knew having seen what happened with Steps that there was a huge audience, who were nostalgic and when they were given the opportunity to revisit the stories of Steps and they listened again to the songs and they go to concerts, they went and they enjoyed it. *The bonus for all the commercial partners was that that age group* [...] this audience still buys tickets to concerts, this audience still buys music, this

audience still buys T-shirts and DVDs, *because this audience is still consuming music.*

So, for the first series, the producers aimed at creating a nostalgic tone that was both emotionally and commercially attractive. However, making the Big Reunion acts' stories interesting and recognizable was more difficult in the second series, which was less successful in terms of viewer ratings.

4.2.2 The live dimension: The one-off reunion concerts

The characteristics of the TV show and the concert setup support Löbert's (2012) view that the purpose of an explorative reunion is to test the current music market. The songs and dance routines that the bands were to execute at the Hammersmith Apollo for the actual reunion concert were to mimic those of the acts' original performances. The success of the TV series seemed to offer an ideal vehicle for the promotion of tours. Holmes' (2004) study of the *Pop Idol* phenomenon illustrates how pop music, in particular through its cultural and economic appeal, has become an important site "on which to construct a televisual and media event" (p. 151). Placing a one-off concert at the end of a series seems to create just such a media event. Conceived of in this way, the concert is the grand finale as well as a reward for those pop acts and proof that their documented transformation and step back into the limelight were successful.

As specified in the earlier table, each series concluded with a one-off reunion concert with all the participating bands. But Series 1 was followed by two concert tours, while Series 2 was followed by a "boy band tour" that included the boy bands from both series. Big Reunion producer Michael Kelpie was involved in organizing the one-off concert at the end of the televised series. Kelpie explains the relationship between "his" formula of the Big Reunion and the tour organized by other producers through the prism of a *grammar*:

[ITV2] started to think about the Big Reunion, we then said well right, if we have to get together six bands, and we talked expense because each of them should do three singles and that would be 18 songs and that would be enough for the one time concert of the show. You know, that's a two-hour show. That would be great for the audience to come along to see the show tonight. And it's sort of, it's, *it mimics the Smash Hits Pop shows, the Smash Hits tour's that had happened, like they had done the first time around.* [...] so there was a *grammar* there that would

be enough in the practical sense of putting them together for the concert, six bands would be enough, because that would be 18 songs.

Although Kelpie has not organized the concert series, he describes how the tour came about:

We were approached by a tour promoter and then we saw the commercial opportunities of doing a tour which they presented to us, and then we went to the bands, and said: “There is chance that we can take to show on the road. Do you want to do this to earn more money, get a chance to play, not just for one night in front of 3,000 people, but we can do 16 nights in front of 150,000 people. What you think about that?” They get very excited about this, but also very, very nervous, because they haven’t even gotten back up on stage once. This was before the first concert had been. But, there was enough people in there who needed the money. There were enough in there who were already starting to enjoy being back on with their fellow bandmates [...] So, *that sort of came as a bonus* when we were halfway true filming the series. [...] none of us anticipated that when we first embarked upon this.

The initial aim of the Big Reunion, to have a one-off reunion in which the bands are re-introduced on stage, places it right into Löbert’s (2012) category of explorative reunion. The unanticipated tour that the bands committed to has the characteristics of an assumptive reunion (Löbert, 2012). In spite of this, Kelpie’s overall conception of the Big Reunion as a phenomenon, whether that was the tour or the televised show, seemed to follow the explorative model:

The show we were putting together was a nostalgia show, so *it was no opportunity for them to reinvent themselves* [...] It was an opportunity to their fans too, to sort of enjoy the *nostalgic experience*. So, some adjustments have been made in wardrobe and cost you, but *by and large they stayed true to what they did the first time round*.

Since it followed the explorative reunion model, then, the Big Reunion gave “no opportunity” for reinvention; it was instead a chance for these past pop acts to stay “true to what they did the first time round.” Kelpie emphasizes this aspect of repeating the past and seems to advise against producing new songs or new dance routines, for example. Total concentration on

performing the original songs and routines (i.e., on following the explorative model) ensures that the concert has a nostalgic vibe. The concert visitors can experience a show that is similar to one that could have happened in the 1990s. This emphasis on authenticity and originality follows Kelpie's suggestion that the show should mimic the "grammar" of *Smash Hits* parties because this is how this commercially interesting audience "who still buys" music, tickets, and T-shirts is conceptualized by the commercial media and music industry.

The interview with Michael Kelpie provides the producer's angle on the TV series and the tour. By having the bands share on television their transformational narratives about past breakups and the hard work they commit to in the present for the sake of coming back, the producers aimed to warrant the real or authentic investment of the acts' former audiences, which are now first and foremost TV audiences. Additionally, the show was created so as to fit into the "nostalgia market" that suits these young audiences, which are commercially interesting and old enough to reminisce about their past tastes and pleasures. The latter aspect, this nostalgic appeal, was secured by giving the reunion an explorative character, namely by having the bands perform their original songs and dance routines.

But did the actual audiences of the series and of the concerts read the Big Reunion the way Kelpie and its producers intended? The next section of this chapter sets out my research design for investigating the meanings that audiences assigned to the Big Reunion's particular modes of repackaging music from the past.

4.2.3 Making sense of the Big Reunion phenomenon

To summarize, the attempt to bring back the reunion acts to the audience develops in two steps or modes. First, a reality TV documentary follows the acts during the process of re-forming and returning to the stage and emphasizes the element of hardship in their heydays in the 1990s and the way the band split up. According to Löbert (2012), this emphasis is important in "playing up" the authenticity of the acts' intentions to come back. Second, the concerts in the aftermath of the series are presented as moments in which the successful transformation of the pop acts is revealed to and celebrated with a live audience. But how do these audiences really make sense of the TV series and concerts, now that they are adults in the social and financial position to be part of such events (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012)?

To get a first understanding of this potentially changed engagement with the Big Reunion's music and acts, I turn again to Kelpie's interview and his observations about the

audience that visited the concerts. Kelpie attended some of the concerts related to the first series and the Christmas Party:

[*the audience was*] aged everything from 20 to their mid-thirties, such a massive age range. They were 75% female, you know, which is not a surprise. It's like the biggest hen party in the world. And there was a sort of huge number of gay males there as well obviously, and there were a small number of judicial husbands and boyfriends, who had been dragged along, and they tried, but they also knew all the words to the songs.

On the one hand, Kelpie's description corresponds to what he has previously defined as a nostalgic audience: an audience made up of people who were teenagers in the 1990s or around the turn of the millennium. That group is now aged between 20-something and 40-something. Its members may well revisit acts that were popular in their youth, but they probably think differently about those pop idols, now that both they and the idols have grown up. On the other hand, Kelpie's analogy between the concert and "the biggest hen party in the world" implies that visiting this concert goes beyond nostalgia. A hen or stage party is a fun festive event meant as a farewell to one's bachelor life. That farewell is often celebrated with drinks among friends and family, yet it also involves activities that one does not normally engage in every day. Such one-offs are often outrageous—the sort of activities one would not allow oneself as manifestations of one's personality; they are justified only by the exceptional nature of the circumstances, and they are indulged in with ironic detachment. The hen party has acquired quite a reputation on account of its celebration style, and this makes Kelpie's analogy suggest that the Big Reunion is not always taken seriously but rather consumed through the lens of covert enjoyment or irony. In what follows I will endeavor to explain these two factors, because they could influence the process of meaning making in the Big Reunion's case.

The fans of the various original acts of the Big Reunion acts are now in their twenties, thirties or forties; as young adults, they have reached what Hodkinson and Bennett (2012) label the "post-youth" phase of their life. They have undergone certain transitions and gained new duties and responsibilities. They may have kids and jobs, houses and cars of their own—and bills that need paying, too. Also, this post-youth cohort has become financially and socially independent, which makes it appealing from a commercial point of view. This is particularly important from the angle of my study.

Age-graded life transitions easily pair up with music (Harrington & Bielby, 2010b; Lavin, 2015); for instance, music is reminiscent of particular events or moments in people's lives and helps them construct the story of who they are now (McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a; Giddens, 1991). This is part of music's potential as a template for reflection on the life course, which is behind my entire research.

Because the members of Big Reunion audiences have grown into adulthood, they may also reassess the passion they had as teenagers for various kinds of music—particularly if they consider this music to fall somehow in the same category of phenomena as a hen party. Brabazon (2002: 50), in her reflection on how former Take That member Robbie Williams came to be a successful solo artist, argues: “As these girls become young women, they decry these memories within themselves, dismissing them as a stage, phase or crazy summer.” On the one hand, Brabazon's explanation implies that these young adult women now take a more critical, perhaps even dismissive stance to the idea of their having liked these bands in the past, or maybe still liking them now. A former passion like this, for mainstream pop acts of the 1990s, can become more covert, insofar as it is considered no longer age-appropriate (Jennings & Gardner, 2012); or one may attempt to hide it altogether. In “covert serious” consumption (Peters, Van der Jagt, Van Eijck, Michael, & Berkers, 2015: 40) people pretend to be less serious than others about this consumption, yet they secretly enjoy it more than they let others see.

On the other hand, Brabazon's claim that this teenage phase is dismissed at a later age also suggests that the young women may take now a different position to the Big Reunion phenomenon itself and distance themselves from it. This distanced position (Ang, 1985; Chouliaraki, 2011) can be based on feelings of pity or irony for the event or the artists involved. According to Bennett (2013a), it is reasonable to assume that popular music audiences legitimize the pleasure they take in “bad” music—such as qualitatively dubious pop music from the past—as ironic consumption. Bennett labels this practice of legitimization “ironic listening” and depicts it as a process of deconstructing the manufactured character of a band or performance by turning those “qualities of the music and its artists that are intended to startle or offend into occasions for laughter and non-serious enjoyment” (Bennett, 2013a: 205). Listeners who, for example, reverse the meaning of a song's lyrics or consider it to be over the top demonstrate this ironic listening. Further, Bennett argues that this kind of listening, and thus the ridiculing of artists or songs, is a means

for the audience to “react against [...] the branding and marketing discourses of the music industry” (p. 210).

However, whether these feelings of pity or irony play a role in the audiences’ consumption of the Big Reunion is to be explored in this study. The emphasis on the “carnal confessions” (Redmond, 2008) in the narratives of the TV shows and on the hard work (Holmes, 2004) of the band throughout the season’s episodes might intend precisely to avoid an ironic reading. However, through the explorative nature of the reunion, the bands also have to rebuilt or remanufacture their former image, which was equally built and manufactured. Such a reconstruction can invite ironic listening (Bennett, 2013a), although it also offers a good opportunity to engage with the pop act.

4.3 Method

To explore the affordances of the Big Reunion for its audience, and how they relate to their current life-course position, I conducted an analysis of forum messages related to the TV series, in which both the Big Reunion seasons were discussed. I also collected data at the Big Reunion Christmas Party concerts (in 2013) in Birmingham and London, where I held on-the-spot interviews (Rapp, 2005; Wood, Duffy, & Smith, 2007; Reijnders, 2011) with concerts attendees.

I opted for this combination of research sites because the Big Reunion is not just a TV series or a concert series. This cross-media phenomenon entails both a visual (televised) dimension and a live dimension (the actual concerts), and thus requires an inquiry into both these forms. Building on different data sets—forum messages, casual interviews and observations, and an in-depth interview—I examine how the Big Reunions audiences’ meanings around either the TV series or the concerts follow from their life course. I first explain why these methods were chosen, which is followed by a description of how and where the thematic qualitative content analysis and on-the-spot interviews were conducted. Finally, I elaborate on how the data were subsequently analyzed.

As I already explained, previous work on popular music and its connection, permanent or renewed, to the life course is limited (see Harrington & Bielby, 2010b; Bennett, 2012). Furthermore, such studies scarcely use forums as a type of source. By reviewing previous studies that draw on data from online music forums, I was able to conclude that such studies typically discuss the development of fan communities (see Baym, 2007; Williams, 2013), highlight fans’ discourses about a band, or examine fans’ musical practices.

The topic of maintaining an enduring connection with a mainstream music act remains overlooked.

Nevertheless, I found some of the existing studies inspirational. For example, Bennett (2011) reveals how a small group of R.E.M. fans aim to reproduce the ultimate first listen of an album. The online postings of the dedicated R.E.M. fans are complemented by interviews, because the fans used the forum mainly to build up anticipation and not so much to exchange listening practices. Through this study, Bennett highlights the fans' aims and practices of anticipation; but also reveals a limitation of the online data.

In similar fashion, through an exploration of fan forums of the electronic music band Autechre, Brett (2015) finds that fans respond to the band's music, or express their passion for it, in two modes: either they discuss its techniques and sounds or they share stories about it and its concerts. Van den Bulck and Gorp (2011) use interviews taken at a concert and analyze an online guestbook of the Belgian schlager singer Jo Vally. One of their aims is to find out how a documentary about Vally's divorce comes to function for his fans as a mirror in which they reflect themselves (see Sandvoss, 2005). And they emphasize how other changes in Vally's life offer his fans a model of coping in adverse circumstances.

These examples illustrate that fan forums and interviews are relevant sites for exploring how music acquires meaning and how these readings or interpretations relate to audiences' life course. The study documented in this chapter relies on qualitative methods to investigate and reconstruct these meaning-making practices (see chapter 3).

I have already explained in the methodological chapter how I selected my threads from Digital Spy and Popjustice (see also Sveningsson Elm, 2009, on the use of openly accessible data). These threads contained 5,987 posts in total. The Series 1 thread on Digital Spy contained 1,735 posts; the Series 2 thread 696 posts, and the Series 3 thread 73 posts. The Popjustice thread contained 3,483 posts. After selecting these threads, I scraped the posts of the site and put them into a single file for analysis, which was facilitated by import.io, an online tool for scraping content from websites.

In the threads on Digital Spy, the forum members provide mostly mini reviews of what they liked or disliked about the episodes. At times, a particular act is discussed more intensely (for example, the introduction of B*Witched as featuring in Series 1 led to a lot of excitement). The thread on Series 1 on Digital Spy contains slightly more posts, because forum members returned to the thread to discuss the episodes televised later, which featured the regular tour and the Christmas Party Tour. Season 3 was not announced, but the posters

took the liberty to predict who would participate in it anyway. The Popjustice forum was very similar in terms of content. It was initiated before Series 2 officially started, hence before any review of the episodes; and, like Digital Spy, it contains speculation about who would participate in the second season.

In addition to the forum analysis, I visited and observed a Christmas Party Tour concert in Birmingham and both the matinee and evening version of the same concert in London. On both sites I held on-the-spot interviews with concertgoers (on this type of interview, see Rapp, 2005; Wood et al., 2007; Reijnders, 2011; see also chapter 3, especially on its value as participatory tactic).

I attended three out of seven Christmas Party Tour concerts. This limited sample offers an insight into people's behavior at the concert sites but does not allow me to give an extensive ethnographic account of the concerts or of the Big Reunion audience. This is why I included interviews on the spot and elaborate descriptions of people's behavior. As I explained in chapter 3, by using thick descriptions in conjunction with these small conversations I was able to capture all sorts of elements (ways of acting, affectivity) that quantitative methods would inevitably miss.

As mentioned above, the data were subjected to a thematic content analysis for which I used Atlas.ti, a program that facilitates qualitative content analysis (Rivas, 2012). I assigned open codes, then axial codes, then large themes (see chapter 3 on this method). Take, for example, the following forum comment: "There are quite a few other bands they could do though, Blue, Another Level, East 17, Eternal, Cleopatra, All Saints." This statement would first be coded on the basis of the separate band names. Next, axially or at the level of larger categories, it would become "groups possibly participating in Series 2," and the selected code would be "suggestions S2."

The main themes were obtained by grouping together the selected codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Certain patterns (codes) kept recurring in the data, and through these patterns larger themes could be identified that helped unfold latent topics in the data and thereby answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Rivas, 2012). The aim of the entire case study was to examine how the affordances of the Big Reunion feature in its audiences' current life-course position. The themes are presented in the next section.

4.4 Results

As stated above, I conducted a thematic qualitative content analysis with the aim of exploring audiences' construction of affordances around the Big Reunion and the way in which these affordances relate to the audiences' specific (generational, but also socioeconomic) position in the life course. The themes, or readings of these affordances identified in the data represent both the data collected via on-the-spot interviews and observations and the forum comments taken from Digital Spy and Popjustice. However, it must be noted that the last theme was predominantly present in the forum data. This might also be due to the fact that this data set contained comments on the second series of the televised series (I did not conduct on-the-spot interviews for the "boy band tour" following the second season).

I describe the themes as different readings (see Hall, 1973) or as different ways in which audiences made sense of the affordances of the Big Reunion. First, the forum members and concert attendees read the reunion as a nostalgic phenomenon. That is, it evokes memories from their (pre-)adolescence or childhood. Consequently, from their now adult position, they reflect on this period as a positive moment in their life course. Second, they read, and consume, the (televised) reunion as an ironic event, yet defend the Big Reunion when it is ridiculed and made a subject of mockery by the show's producers. Even if they look at the show through adult eyes, they are critical of this irony, in particular when they detect that it was intentionally encoded by the show's producers. The third reading highlights how the reunion is questioned for its formula, especially in the second televised season. In this way we get a glimpse into how forum members think about a reunion like this from the perspective of their current position in life. The suggestion is that these audience members are now able to see through the "grammar" of the manufactured pop act. Moreover, they normatively assess the concept of the reunion by providing guidelines for what it should entail.

The reflections of forum members and of participants interviewed on the spot form rich accounts of meaning making, in particular about how these people's *current* involvement with the explorative reunion and its acts features in their current lives. This also amounts to a rich account of the viewers and interviewees' adult life. Thus the findings illustrate how the Big Reunion features in, and is given meaning to, from the perspective of their current, adult, and socially independent positions.

The subsequent exposition uses material from the forum comments and on-the-spot interviews.⁶ The quotations selected here are the most representative illustrations of the highlighted theme. But I also selected deviant cases, which show us what differences there are within a theme and thus indicate its range. I will reflect upon such occasions in the analysis that follows.

Some of the quoted material is italicized. These italics emphasize thematic discursive components investigated in the analysis and further discussed here.

4.4.1 A nostalgic reading of the Big Reunion

The first kind of reading—or meaning—that people gave the Big Reunion phenomenon was nostalgic and this is also how they related the Big reunion to the development of their life course. This theme was found both in the forum posts from Digital Spy and Popjustice and in the on-site interviews at the concert sites. Music is relevant to forum participant and concertgoers because it is able to evoke an (idealized) past and the strong feelings related to it (see also Davis, 1979; Pickering & Keightley, 2006). The following forum posts⁷ are paradigms of this nostalgic meaning:

MODEYINK I'm actually rather looking forward to this... I was your typical '90s kid/young teen, so I'm excited for the nostalgia haha.

APPLEPIE2100 It's like being 15/16 all over again

REHAB_101 Well i was a massive Five fan way back when, walls covered in posters, vhs's full of all their tv appearances, the lot. So i'm not gunna lie, i loved it [...] And yes, i totally bought tickets for the show

CFC86 When Five set foot on that stage I shall scream like a little girl, don't worry

The first two comments refer to the time in their teen lives when these forum members (Modeyink and Applepie2100) first heard of the bands. Rehab_101's comment demonstrates that this member was a fan of one of the bands back in the day and loved the show, which is reason enough to get tickets for the live show now. The fourth poster indicates that the thought of seeing Five back on stage evokes a desire to "scream like a little girl." All these

⁶ The original interviews were held in Dutch. The quotations used in this chapter have been translated into English by me.

⁷ The language of the forum posts is not corrected but reproduced here in its original form.

comments are informative about a period when the pop acts that featured in the Big Reunion were present in these people's life: clearly the acts were part of their youth. The posters reveal their emotional investment and "nostalgic" intentions in anticipation of the event. The latter were particularly obvious when forum members would talk about the concert series in Birmingham and London. For example Amy, who introduced herself as "a massive fan of [boyband] 911," anticipates attending the London Christmas Party:

It's just music when it's played at a club, everyone knows the songs and lyrics and then dances and sings to it, because you know the moves too. *It's childhood memories, it reminds you of being a kid and being young... I'm 30 going 13.*

Other interviewees who visited the concerts said they were there because of "memories" (Calmita), "it is music *from our youth*, so..." (Nathalie), and "it just brings back *memories of childhood*" (Reanne). Like the comments on the forums, these responses at the Big Reunion Christmas Party Tour imply that the reunion is reminiscent of memories of youth and childhood. Elaborating on and further clarifying such responses, Ranga, who attended the matinee concert in London with her mother and a friend, to celebrate her thirtieth birthday, mentioned: "It's childhood memories, it is music from *when I was a teenager*." Likewise, Selina, who attended the matinee concert as well, said: "Childhood memories. *They're really the bands we grew up with* when we were younger." Laura made the same point: "It really just reminds me of childhood and that's nice. That was *really a good period in my life*." Jayne, who came to the Birmingham concert with three other female friends and had just bought a Big Reunion T-shirt and glow sticks, observed: "*to feel young again and relive our kid, well, teen years* a little. It is the music they *played in the disco* when we were younger."

Just like the forum data, these explanations suggest that the idea of seeing a familiar pop act from the past perform again was the trigger that made these young adults visit the concert. Moreover, the on-the-spot interviewees connect their memories of the music to a particular phase in their life ("childhood memories," "when I was a teenager"). They also connect the music to specific practices or feelings from that period; thus they state that the music reminds them of "a good period in my life," or of occasions when it was "played in the disco." Some of the responses indicate a comparison, implicit or explicit, with the respondent's current position as an adult: "when we were younger" or "feel young again, and

relive our kid years.” Such comments imply that the Big Reunion offers them an moment in which they can remember or reclaim this youthful period in their lives (see Anderson, 2012).

Stefano, who flew to the Christmas Party in London from Italy, gave a distinctive example of “reclaiming” his youth. He said:

We flew in from Italy just to see Atomic Kitten. I never had the chance to see them because they weren’t that popular. [...] As soon as I found out about this, I booked tickets already in April just to come here for the show.

In response to a follow-up email he sent to me after the concert, Stefano wrote:

The music itself was a *journey back to my teenage [years]* [...]. All those groups performing were the “heroes” of my youth. Back in the 90s I used to have posters of them on my bedroom wall. I used to wait for them to played [*sic*] on MTV. [...] *I felt I sort of came full circle with what my teenage dreams and “obsessions” used to be.* I saw them all! It was not just a video on a screen: I WAS THERE [original emphasis].

Stefano’s example is illustrative of how the meanings he gives to Atomic Kitten, one of the participating acts of the Big Reunion in Series 1, still feature in his current life. Stefano flew from Italy to London just for the show, and he ordered his tickets well in advance—in April, when the show took place in December, around Christmas. This travel outside Italy is something he is now able to do thanks to his financial social independence. He is thus able to give himself, for the first time, a concert experience that he has never been able to construct in his youth. Going to a concert in London is a mode of engagement he can commit to now, as an adult. In the past he was confined to expressing his fandom by hanging posters on the wall or watching Atomic Kitten on MTV.

Second, Stefano points out how he feels that he “sort of came full circle with what my teenage dreams and obsessions used to be.” This implies that the concert offers him a sense of completion. The Atomic Kitten’s music and act have become relevant *again* in his life, by way of ensuring a feeling of closure (Harrington, 2013; Hills, 2014). His case illustrates how the reunion enables a novel connection with the past. Thus, for Stefano, visiting the Big Reunion Christmas Party seems to go beyond reclaiming his youth. The reunion offers a means of demonstrating and (re)negotiating his deep level of investment,

past and present, in Atomic Kitten. The band was a part of him, of his childhood years, and the reunion gave him a reason to reflect on and return to these moments.

These explanations of why people started watching the first series on television, or attended the reunion concert, are closely associated with remembering, and possibly reconstructing, their own (positive) past. Repackaged music thus afforded this audience feelings that led to remembering the past in a positive light: it seems to function as a tool that facilitates such memories, or has the force to evoke them. In the forum comments, some members explained that these memories became somewhat tainted after they saw the stories behind the scenes that purported to come from the old days. As discussed before, the confessional revelations of the pop acts were included in order to make the band come across as more authentic, yet they created confusion among the fans:

COLLYBIRD It was constantly mentioned that J was like a dad to Sean. Makes me feel so uneasy that Sean had to go along with that “storyline” when their relationship was actually the total opposite. *It’s also not nice for fans to find out years down the line they were being treated like mugs.*

UKOOL Pretty shocked at some of the stuff the 5ive lads were coming out with, like drinking before going on kids tv, *but as a kid you dont notice these things, and i dont rememeber any bad press around the band.*

HSELLORS I loved this show. I was between the ages of 10–13 when most of these bands were big so listening to their music brings back lots of memories. Really interesting hearing the nitty gritty bits of being in a band. *As a naive kid I would have thought all was rosy.*

TEJAS I’m excited about the B*witched episode too, but slightly *worried it might taint my youth!*

As the first three messages indicate, the storylines they witnessed as kids (teens) do not fit the stories they are now fed via the show. The viewers considered these discrepancies preposterous, together with the fact that information was withheld from them in the past; yet some of them also felt sympathy for the band members on account of these revelations. Moreover, some of the forum posters—for example Hsellors and Ukool—reflected on their own naivety as kids and on how, back then, they did not yet understand the workings of this manufactured, synthetic music industry. Hearing these stories prompted forum members to

reassess how they felt about the bands and their breakups. As viewers of the show, they also took a peak into how a band is repackaged—which is what the “authentic stories” were doing.

For Series 2, the lack of familiarity with the bands explains why many of the viewers of Series 1 gave up watching and would not get tickets for the tour. Some Popjustice forum members wrote:

PMAS Be interesting to see what the ratings do. A1 and Eternal are the draws of this series but *do they have the same level of nostalgia around them for the “general public”* as Five/Atomic Kitten/B*Witched?

ALIAS104 The new boy band is a big mistake. *There is no nostalgia associated with this which is what the series trades on.* Shows have tried this old popstars new band thing before and it has sank. I just don’t think people will have the patience to see some patronising struggle from them

MIKE *The nostalgia factor is barely there because there is so little to get nostalgic about.* Girl Thing were a disaster. 5th Story have been cobbled together from acts that were middlingly successful at best and had long since faded from memory. 3T and Damage had successful debuts but totally failed to build on them. Even A1 were only about the third or fourth biggest boyband around at the time. *Without the nostalgia factor to rely on, it’s all been manufactured drama (both past and present), misery porn and a couple of famous spouses hanging around to pull sympathetic faces. Not exactly must-see TV.*

While nostalgia was perceived as a positive aspect of the Big Reunion’s first series, the lack of opportunity to be nostalgic was an issue for the second. As can be read in the comments, forum members wonder whether the participants chosen for season two have “enough” of the “nostalgic factor”; or they wonder how a “new” boy band, composed of members from former boy bands, can invite nostalgia. Mike assesses Series 2 critically by stating: “without the nostalgia factor to rely on, it’s all been manufactured drama.”

Building on these findings, I argue that nostalgia becomes contested here: after all, what is it that makes for a good nostalgic factor, if nostalgia is chosen as a criterion for participation in the Big Reunion? Is it the level of fame or longevity of the band? If something from the past is reused into something new, can it still evoke nostalgia? While this kind of re-forming did not stand in the way of success for the rock bands Queen and the Grateful Dead, discussed earlier, the inherent lack of authenticity of a synthetic pop act might work

against the acceptance of a new pop band with members of old pop bands. These seem to be factors to be taken into account if the reunion is to succeed. Thus I argue that nostalgia plays an important role in giving meaning to how the Big Reunion features in the audiences' lives, but only when it is "good" nostalgia (Davis, 1979; Pickering & Keightley, 2006).

4.4.2 Being ironic, yet defending mockery

The second way in which audiences read the TV series and the concerts of the Big Reunion is through the veil of irony. At the Big Reunion Christmas Tour concerts, some audience members expressed the view that the event gave them—and represented—pleasurable leisure time to spend with friends. For example, a university student interviewed on the spot said: "*I don't really like the music, but it's just good fun.*" Another visitor said that she was "[l]ooking forward to the dancing and singing, and just to have a *good time*." Louise and Florence, two friends attending the London concert, stated that, had it not been for one of them winning free tickets to the show, "*I don't know if I had come otherwise.*" In similar vein, another group of three women, Kristy, Donna, and Lisa, characterized the reunion as "[j]ust a *fun thing for after work*." Lisa said, "I've seen 911 and 5ive before, together with Peter Andre, in their early days, 1995 or so? [...] But I have to get back to the kids after the show."

It is time to look back at one of the remarks made by the Big Reunion producer Kelpie and mentioned earlier in this chapter—namely that the concerts resembled a "hen party." The quotations above play along this view: they certify that these interviewees (and the larger part of the audience they stand for) do not take the event too seriously. Nor do they seem to enjoy it in secret (on this kind of behavior, see Peters et al., 2015). From what these interviewees say, it seems that they simply distance themselves from the Big Reunion concert. Earlier on I wrapped up this entire category under the label "ironic listening" (on this notion, see Bennett, 2013a), yet the interviewees' implicit laissez-faire attitude to the event invites further distinctions within this position of general distance.

Let us zoom in on the ironic consumption of media texts—especially cultural objects. Ien Ang (1985: 61), in her work on patterns in Dutch viewers' consumption of the American soap opera *Dallas*, states that irony is found in how "identification and distancing constantly alternate with one another." These viewers consider *Dallas* a low-status cultural object; yet they can still enjoy it by means of looking at it ironically. Performing an ironic viewing has a few distinctive features. Viewers do not take the series seriously; they also make it an object of mockery, and even change or invert the meaning of events that happen in it. In other words,

the ironic *Dallas* viewers ridicule the show by turning the “drama” into comedy, and in this way they feel superior to it (Ang, 1985; McCoy & Scarborough, 2014). When it comes to television, McCoy and Scarborough describe ironic consumption as a situation in which “the viewer revels and delights in the ‘trashiness’ of ‘bad’ television, often engaging in a mocking and ridiculing viewing style that may incorporate a running commentary” (2014: 48).

Irony is hard to analyze on paper, yet Ang’s analysis, together with subsequent work by Chouliaraki (2011; 2013), can help us detect and analyze irony in texts such as forum comments or interview fragments. Let us get back to Ang’s (1985: 61) fundamental point: irony is found in how “identification and distancing constantly alternate with one another.” Chouliaraki explains that this is because irony holds the power to replace the “moral proximity between self and other,” which “views vulnerability as a politics of the self” (2011: 364). Attaching an ironic perception to the media text, in this case the Big Reunion, creates a feeling of (self-)distance. That self-distance, according to Chouliaraki (2011), “takes the self to be the source of morality and assumes an equally misleading radical difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 372).

The following post from forum member Ravensborough is an example of how both identification and distancing are present in forum messages:

RAVENSBOROUGH A part of me feels sorry for Linzi and Kavana because it seems that they’ve been through hell in the last couple of years, bur *another part of me is finding it difficult to empathize with them completely as they had fifteen years to take stock, stop feeling sorry for themselves and make something out of themselves. If being a pop star was no longer a viable option, why not get some qualifications and train to do something else?* Easter and Vernie from Eternal and the lads from Damage all moved on and made a go of their lives outside of the spotlight.

Here Ravensborough is an “ironic spectator” (Chouliaraki, 2013: 2): a person who is simultaneously skeptical of ethical appeals to solidarity with Kavana and Linzi (*distancing*) and open to proposals of doing something about their suffering (*identification*). On the one hand, Ravensborough feels sorry for two singers; on the other hand he shows detachment by stating that Linzi and Kavana should have stopped feeling sorry for themselves and moved on: “why not get some qualifications and train to do something else?” Through the reality TV documentary, Ravensborough is now a potential “judger or empathiser” (Redmond, 2008: 151) to these transformations of the former pop stars.

Witnessing these struggles of the stars can make audience members like Ravensborough feel better about themselves, because they find themselves now in a position to judge others, who should have grown up just as they did. When Ravensborough discovers Linzi and Kavana, his childhood idols, among such “others,” the feeling of distance or estrangement that he may already have had for them increases. This suggests that the process of aging along, especially when the age gap between audience members and performers is small (or feels smaller), is not necessarily a positive feature in a reunion.

Some viewers discuss on the online message boards how “fake” and “staged” the Big Reunion TV series is. These notions contradict the feeling of authenticity that producers of the show such as Michael Kelpie wanted to convey (Hill, 2005; Ouelette & Hay, 2008). But such perceptions can put the show in the category of guilty pleasures—that is, transform it into a show the audiences do not want to watch but cannot stop watching (McCoy & Scarborough, 2014). This fakeness was mentioned many times, but particularly prominently in a Series 1 episode that featured the reunion between two former partners: Lee from 911 and Lindsey from B*Witched. Allegedly the two singers had not spoken to each for years. SkyGirl19 commented:

SKYGIRL19 The Lee and Lindsey chat seemed a bit awkward and staged. I wouldn't be surprised if the producers made them do that.

Skygirl19 comments on the authenticity of the show, describing the reunion moment as “staged” and wondering if “the producers made them do that.” Although she does not comment on the manufactured aspect of the bands themselves, Skygirl19 is implicitly asking whether the producers scripted this conversation between the two former partners, and why. In the past she would not have wondered about the realness of the relationship between the two singers.

More of these ironic interpretations appeared when the lineup for the second season was announced. Most forum members disliked the lineup and commented on it rather lightly. For example, the next two comments are about the “throwaway nature” of pop music from the 1990s, as well as about how the show approaches reliving the heydays of the Big Reunion acts:

SOLENCIENNES They did kinda jam pack Series 1 with big names from the 90–00s because obviously there were no plans for a new batch of reuniting bands. *The*

problem with the throwaway nature of pop music back then is that there weren't that many groups that managed any kind of longevity so you really are scraping the barrel once you count out the six from the first series...

SPILLETT It's true. There were so many pop acts in the 90s and early 00s that only lasted one album or maybe 2 singles. Would people really be interested in these types of groups reforming. *The whole point of the big reunion was to allow the groups and the fan to relive the glory days. You have to have had some glory days to begin with if you're going to try and relive them...*

The bands in Series 2 are not so well known—they didn't have any of those “glory days”—which fueled criticism, at least from these two forum members. By commenting on this aspect, they also questioned the quality of the music and suggested that there is a hierarchy of taste at stake. This also shows in the next few messages:

BIONICFRANK Its just *ITV attempting to cash in* following the success of series 1!

HECTORMCCLURE they are really scraping the barrel. The standard has dropped this year. *Only A1 I would say had any type of long-term success but even they weren't that bid.* They had much better artists last year. *Putting the five solo artists together is a complete joke.*

MIMICOLE None of them were *household names*, were they?

STRAIGHTACTING19 Sure they could've gotten Jade Ewen to round up two other girls and performed as Sugababes 100.0. Girl Thing?! *Christ, and people were laughing at the suggestion of Deuce a few months ago...*

The bands in Series 1, although already acclimatized to the “throwaway nature” of the pop music market, were superior to the acts that were brought into Series 2. Girl Thing obviously does not have enough credentials to feature, and StraightActing19 wonders why they were not able to get an act like the Sugababes or Deuce. As Spillett commented, “you have to have had some glory days to begin with if you're going to try and relive them.”

The observations of these forum members sum up the fact that the bands in Series 2 are not “famous enough” to be remembered in a reunion. Consequently, ITV is criticized for its attempt to “cash in” on the success of the previous season. However, being an unknown band can also work to the group's advantage, according to forum member Mvnl:

MVNL Why are we assuming ITV wants their comeback to be a success? First and foremost they're making television, and a complete trainwreck might make for just as interesting a program as 6 bands having the time of their lives. Also, let's not underestimate the power of good reality tv. I know this hardly has an X Factor audience, but if they get their sob stories right people might actually end up rooting for them. Will they buy their records? Probably not. But they might want to witness what's basically the climax to the story they saw on TV.

In Mvnl's view, one should not forget that the Big Reunion is a reality TV show, which also needs to follow the rules of this genre. Thus "trainwreck" stories might work well for ITV's aim with the Big Reunion; they could also explain why viewers will buy tickets for the concert, which comes across in Mvnl's last comment: "they might want to witness [...] the climax to the story they saw on TV." In other words, these "sob stories" can produce some kind of identification with an act, even if the audience is not expected to buy the act's record.

Some of the forum members seek an explanation for the change of success of the series:

MISTAKENBIOLOGY The thing why this series has been purely disastrous is because of the ridiculous decisions made by the producers. [...] The producers have gone about this series in completely the wrong one. Instead of looking at what worked well with the last series (*genuine bands who the public actually remembered/invested in at one time*), they've gone for bands (bar Eternal and A1) who they think would *pull in viewers just by association* (Michael Jackson, Kian from Westlife [paha!], and Emma Bunton). And I know a lot of people enjoy the script written by Peter, but again, it just defeats the magic of the first series where the story of the band was told... *instead it all just seems to be a piss take, which in retrospect is quite symbolic of this series*. I think we can definitely rule a third series and tour out.

MistakenBiology seems to assume that ITV does not aim at identification, since the acts are not "genuine bands" but bands that pull in viewers "just by association" with more successful relatives or partners of the acts. Moreover, "it all just seems to be a piss take." This last observation seems to imply that ITV itself is not taking the reunion seriously. The suggestion that the bands are intentionally ridiculed is also made upon in the next three forum messages:

LUNNI I'm not even enjoying the script. I think it can be quite mocking and mean (this series much more so than the last), especially about the ones who have "crap" day jobs and it makes me uncomfortable. And I have quite a mean sense of humour myself. I just don't really like taking the piss out of people who are doing their best to make a living or support their kids or whatever and are probably doing this because they really need the money. Also, this series just doesn't have the fun and lighthearted element that the last one had, IMO...

BABY CLYDE Completely. Whilst it's funny it's also quite offensive. We're supposed to be invested in these comebacks *but that idea is completely undermined when their situations are being constantly ridiculed*. Making fun of the acts is just rude.

MOORIE It would be funny if it was self-deprecating but it's very cheap in the way the script insults the acts and insults the viewer (especially rewriting the history of the acts involved).

In their comments, these forum members point out that it makes them uncomfortable when the financial and social situation of a former star is deprecated and made fun of, while it is assumed that ITV wants the viewer to become invested. Commenter Baby Clyde then struggles with understanding how one's investment in a band could tally with the ridicule that producers bring to the acts—which Moorie describes as "insult[ing] the viewer." In order for the explorative reunion to succeed, the bands are supposed to attract and reconquer their former fans, ensure that this audience will engage with them again. Yet the mockery involved in the series itself and the possible ridiculing of the viewer could in fact alienate audiences from the Big Reunion.

The discrepancies between the bands' stories and the voiceover narrating them, especially in Series 2, make it difficult for the viewers to empathize with the acts. They also cause confusion over the meaning of the Big Reunion as a whole and doubts as to how the series should be perceived. The forum members are not sure whether they should go along with the mockery or reject it and try to see through it—discover the levels of manufacturing of the past.

ALIAS104 This series was something that was nostalgic and brilliant in series 1 and has become something tasteless and grimy where the producers are almost saying "you were wrong to like these bands." They have got it so so wrong and completely misjudged their audience from the outset hence the inclusion of Girlthing and 5th

story. In the process of ruining the show they torpedoed any chance of a tour too. What a complete disaster. Hopefully Eternal will do something else. Emma Bunion and Kian Egan have said more in this series than Kelle.

JDS The way the stories have been spliced together, the unnecessary covering up of the truth again and the manner some of the sarcastic commentary is delivered all wrong compared to last series.

Here as in previous comments, Alias104 and JDS reflect on how the tone changed in Series 2. They found Series 1 strong because it has a nostalgic character and provided the artists with a good comeback story. On the contrary, in Series 2 it seems that these elements were abused. For example, Alias104 thinks that the producers made the second season grimy and tasteless. As in Moorie's previously quoted comment, these forum members feel that the viewer is not taken seriously any longer ("wrong to like these bands"; "misjudged their audience"). Moreover, the element of authenticity is put to the test ("covering up the truth again")—and this element is so important if the attempt to come back is to be taken seriously (Holmes, 2004; Löbert, 2012).

The ironic consumption of the Big Reunion, together with the accompanying process of giving meaning to this repackaged phenomenon, has two complementary sides: one of distancing, another of identification (remember Ang's analysis). On the side of distancing, the adult audience saw the concert as an ironic event to engage in, or found a guilty pleasure in watching "trainwrecks" in a reality TV show. On the side of identification, these "ironic spectators" did feel protective of the bands and their stories, because the former pop stars may have needed the show and the money from it to support their families. In their reflections, audience members compared the situations of the various Big Reunions acts with their own development and position in the life course. Both the forum members and the concertgoers I interviewed referred to their social and financial independence; they may have had experiences similar to those of the performers and learned how to cope with such situations. Their life course—that is, the "sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time" (Giele & Elder, 1998: 2)—has become an important factor in giving meaning in this ironic mode. That implies that the process of aging and the life course itself have grown into discursive resources (Brunsdon & Morley, 1999)—tools that facilitate reflection on the show and the concert.

4.4.3 Questioning the reunion formula

The third major reading of the Big Reunion is one in which, through its current *adult* position in the life course, the audience questions the show's formula. Specifically, audiences negotiate the Big Reunion's authentic and credible character after the late addition to Series 1 of the boy band Blue, which had already reunited for the Eurovision Song Contest in 2011. Also, after the release of the second series, they again found the formula conflicting, this time because of the lesser known acts and the manufactured boy band 5th Story. While the interviews on the spot carried out at the concerts conveyed a sense of praise for the event, this topic of credibility was extensively discussed in the forums of Digital Spy and Popjustice.

This questioning of the Big Reunion's formula was already somewhat visible in Series 1, where 5ive reunited with only four members, for example, or where Kerry Katona was invited as lead singer instead of Jenny Frost—the real the lead singer of Atomic Kitten's hit singles:

TEJAS I'm not sure what I think to be honest... other than being glad that I prefer B*witched and that they're all present and correct! It does seem a shame to have a "reunion" with someone missing, but then again, is any one person in Five really that irreplaceable?

Tejas' comment clearly criticizes the fact that one band member is missing: the band is not "really" reuniting. Moreover, Tejas drops the big question as to whether a member of a manufactured band is irreplaceable.

Generally the late addition of Blue to the show was incomprehensible for many viewers, since Blue had not broken up and had participated in the Eurovision Song Contest only a few years before. See the next comments for illustration:

JAMIEHT I know this show has been economical with the truth when it comes to band members seeing each other etc. but having Blue as part of it cheapens it somewhat seeing as they were quite famously together just 2 years ago. I'll be fed up if the other bands lose (further) screentime to Blue. *I really like Blue but they're not "reuniting" for this show.*

REHAB_101 Glad I'm not the only one thinking this about Blue joining. Don't get me wrong I like them, but they've been back together on and off over the years and properly got back together a couple of years ago and have spent a lot of time in

Germany among other places being Blue... It feels a bit like they've jumped on the bandwagon a little too late "oooo this reunion thing seems to be going pretty well, we've not managed to pull off success in the uk again, so let's give this a go."

Because the viewers had already "invested" in the other acts, they were not necessarily interested in a late addition. Perhaps, as Rehab_101 comments, this gesture sends the wrong signal about this band's motive for joining in. In any case, the late addition of Blue is also the first clear instance where what JamieHT described as "the show's 'economical truth'" is exposed. The section on the ironic consumption of the Big Reunion included several comments whose authors made the point that the show needs to get the stories "right" to make the series credible. Yet in the second season this theme has given way to a recurrent discussion of why people dislike the Big Reunion. The show is especially criticized for the portrayal of boy band A1, which has been successful in reuniting in Norway, but not in the United Kingdom:

STRAIGHTACTING19 I get that it's called "Big Reunion," but really, they have a made-up boyband this season, would it be so hard to mention they [A1] released some records in Norway? *I get why failed reunions that led to nothing like the 5ive one and Eternal's get omitted, but come on. It's getting quite silly at this point. It's not the 80s, it's all out there on the net. [...]* A1 reunited without failing. They released records, albeit in a limited market. Also, 5th Story is hardly a reunion, is it? It's trashy television for sure, which is what made the Big Reunion 1 an appealing show, but not an actual reunion of any kind.

Here StraightActing19 observes that the show gets "silly at this point," namely by not admitting that some of the bands have made previous (failed) reunion attempts. Moreover, this information is available to the audience once they start searching for it. Hence the comment that this show is "not an actual reunion of any kind"; or, put another way, it challenges any audience's understanding of what a reunion is. It is implied that all participating acts are reuniting; but, as mentioned above, A1 already had a reunion abroad, 5th story was put together for the reunion, and 5ive and Eternal had failed reunion attempts.

These comments criticize the reunion formula and demonstrate the forum members' knowledge ("it's all out there on the net") in a way that resonates with Duffett's (2013b: 162) notion of the "knowing field." Although Duffett finds the knowing field to be a "terrain of

affect,” a conscious and emotional commitment to a fandom, these forum members’ comments demonstrate how they struggle with the (encoded) reading of the producers. Now, as adults, they are able to detect the “synthetic” and “fake” nature (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005) of pop music acts in the 1990s, which could not have realized as teenagers. Accordingly, it seems “silly” to StraightActing19 that the show follows its own version of pop history.

Other forum members consider the second Big Reunion series less interesting and viable as a result of the success of Series 1, which raised the stakes too high:

LETSGETTOIT I think by focusing so much on the UK *they ended up going too far Z-list*. Of course with the title, I don’t care if it isn’t a true reunion, at the very least you’re reuniting the public with the bands and that is enough. That is what will get them to a Series 3 and 4, not just digging up any obscure UK band for the sake of it.

LUNNI I agree that the main problem is that nobody could have foreseen the popularity of Series One. *It was meant to be a cheesy little show on ITV2 with a cheesy one-off concert*. It ended up taking on a life of its own which I’m sure none of the bands or producers expected. *There was no way Series 2 could ever have done as well given that most of the big names were used up first time around and the novelty value has worn off...*

All these comments give, albeit indirectly, a new perspective on how a reunion could make itself successful; they do so by summing up the alleged reasons why Series 2 fared poorly. First, the acts chosen for it were not famous enough (a forum member labels them “obscure”). Second, the producers assumed too much after the first series’ success; they wanted to imitate it, when in fact the novelty of the formula was gone (“it was supposed to be a one-off concert and a cheesy little show”). These interpretations and reasons, then, give a broad definition of what it takes to put together a true reunion: a novel, innovative show, aimed at reuniting somewhat famous bands.

Löbert (2012) suggests that, for a successful comeback, the band needs to be clear about its story and first test the market to see whether it would fit in. In an assumptive reunion, this is not the case. In this kind of reunion, the band releases new material assuming that there will be a market for it. It would seem, then, that the Big Reunion as a concept moved from an explorative to a more assumptive-driven reunion (Löbert, 2012). This transformation is

due to ITV's expectation that the use of an identical formula would make the second season equally successful. But, as the forum members comment, the result was very different indeed.

This last section also highlights how audiences gave meaning to the reunion itself. Clearly the reunion in the first series was appreciated much better than in the second. In fact Series 2 endangered the notion of "reunion" itself through a number of contested actions—such as bringing in lesser known acts, presenting a narrative that was "economical with the truth," or organizing a tour with only the male acts of the Big Reunion. Moreover, the audience came to question the show's general credibility and authenticity—precisely the two elements that reality TV is supposed to reinforce.

4.5 Conclusion and discussion

This chapter explored the affordances of the Big Reunion phenomenon for its audiences, and how they relate to their current life-course position. Three distinct readings of what the Big Reunion affords its audience were identified. Yet, after reviewing them, I argue that these readings are conditional.

First, because of their current position as young or post-youth adults, audience members "read" the Big Reunion as a nostalgic phenomenon. It reminds them of their childhood or teenage years, which many look upon as a positive phase in their life course. This nostalgic understanding of the Big Reunion is in line with the intentions of the producers. Additionally, reliving the specific teenage period through the music consumed at that age allows audiences to reflect on the past, both individually and collectively. This finding supports scholarship on how music from the past features in a generation's collective cultural memory (Van Dijck, 2006; Van der Hoeven, 2014) or in one's personal biography (Stevenson, 2009; Lavin, 2015). However, it is remarkable that in this case the audience is critical of the past too. Because the TV series devotes so much space and energy to constructing narratives about the various bands' split-ups and reconnections, the audience members, in retrospect, look at their younger selves as naïve and, through these new stories that are put to them, begin to realize how the commercial music industry misinformed them (then as well as now).

The second reading of the Big Reunion follows from this process of renegotiating and reassessing the bands. Concert attendees and forum members either distance themselves from the "trainwrecks" being brought back on stage, or, due to the televised series, are able to identify with the pop acts and empathize with their hard work (see Holmes, 2004; Redmond,

2008). Moreover, when this transformative labor is ridiculed by the producers through the scripting of the TV series, the forum members even defend the participating acts. Their adulthood and the developments in their life seem to act as discursive resources that facilitate this reading. Because these people are now mature, they are able to compare themselves with the various performers and acts. This often results in an ironic reading of the Big Reunion. Ironic spectatorship is a complex phenomenon, present at several levels and in different forms. People took their distance or felt estranged from an act but at the same time identified with it, especially when the performer's vulnerabilities were exposed; and in cases of this sort they blamed the producers and the mocking tone of their scripts. Thus their irony did not ally itself with the perceived mockery of the show but turned against it.

These same discursive resources of aging and the life course are also present in the third reading, which questions the Big Reunion's formula, especially as used in the second televised series. And this reading gives us another insight into how an audience of former fans reflects upon such an event from a mature and adult perspective. These people are now able to uncover the formula of compiling a manufactured act. Moreover, their aged selves also reassess, in addition to the bands' own narratives, a theorization of the reunion itself, by renegotiating what it should entail. They are no longer the naïve teens they once were; they understand that most of the mainstream pop acts featuring in the Big Reunion followed a synthetic ideology (Negus, 1992). Both the forum members and the concert attendees in my study question the authenticity of the phenomenon, particularly the televised show (Andrejevic, 2004; Holmes, 2004). This sparks a discussion about what a reunion really is—what constitutes it essentially. In taking up this theme, forum members are particularly critical of the authenticity of the show and of the fact that there was only a boy band tour after the second series. This criticism suggests that the female audience is the most actively engaged part of the music audience, at least when it comes to music consumption. Along similar lines, the notion of reunion comes under severe scrutiny due to the participation of an already reunited band (Blue) in Series 1 and of a manufactured band (5th story) in Series 2. Here the audience is critical of the very formula of the Big Reunion, wonders what its premise actually is, and asks whether it qualifies as a "reunion" at all.

Thus, by examining how the meanings that audiences of the Big Reunion give to this phenomenon feature in their life course, this study shed light on links between the popular music reunion and wider issues of artistic definition and reception.

However, note how these different readings rely on one condition. The Big Reunion audience is “old enough” to be nostalgic, and this nostalgia is (or should be) positive: visiting the concerts or watching the Big Reunion episodes on television awakes good memories, which allow people to reflect on the happy aspects of one’s youth—not on the awkwardness of being a teenager and the struggles one had in that phase of life. The audience members appreciate that the acts—their former idols—worked hard to regain their fame; being adults themselves they can connect to these efforts, in fact they feel quite strongly about it. Thus they find it inappropriate when the show is scripted in a manner that attracts ridicule around such efforts, and this often translates into a general disappointment with the entire concept of the show.

The material examined in this chapter makes me conclude that, even when a reunion is promoted through the platform of a TV show, this kind of event should best remain explorative in order to succeed. The assumptive reunion in the second series decreased in popularity due to expecting too much from its audience. Researching this one-off reunion, which featured multiple acts and was preceded by a TV series, has made it very clear that nostalgia and authenticity are important factors in organizing and executing a successful reunion.

Because it has focused on a highly commercial reunion with multiple bands, this chapter also has some limitations. This type of repackaged music, the one-off reunion show, does not allow discussing long-term connections to a particular act within the reunion. The meanings attached to the music and to its role in the life course can vary if one has a continuous attachment to one band rather than revisiting several bands. The Big Reunion was treated as an event that reunited musical acts from the 1990s, not as a comeback of individual bands—say, 5ive, Atomic Kitten, or Eternal. This limitation invites further research into the return and reception of individual music acts such as these.

Besides, all Big Reunion participants are manufactured, inauthentic, synthetic acts. Future studies could examine whether the readings of an organic act differ in terms of how they are invested with meaning and the place they occupy in one’s life course. What is more, this explorative reunion of manufactured bands had at its disposal a TV series, which executed a thorough investigation into the potential market for these bands. It would be interesting to compare the Big Reunion with a reunion that does not benefit from this promotional feature, especially considering that many of the bands that participated in the Big Reunion had already made failed attempts at reunion.

Finally, since there have been ample studies about the fact that pop music studies at large do not pay much heed to female audience members once these cease being teenagers, it would be interesting to explore how the reunion fits with young adult women's consumption of popular music and how the latter features across their life course. Such a topic would require a different type of analysis, for example conducting in-depth interviews on the consumption of music and its meaning.

5. How Continued Engagement with the Backstreet Boys Features in Long-Term Fans' Narratives about Their Life Course

In this chapter the focus will be on the Backstreet Boys, an American boy band that has enjoyed global fame for over 20 years (and still does). By taking this band as an object of study, I am able to explore the question of how fans give meaning to a “survival” in the music industry (see Shuker, 2016). Although the band itself and many of its fans claim that the Backstreet Boys never officially broke up, the band did disappear from the public eye for a few years, after having dominated the global mainstream music market in the late 1990s. This hiatus is also marked by the Backstreet Boys’ absence as a band from music TV channels, radio stations, and interviews in pop or teen magazines, although some of its members went solo.

Nevertheless, the band occupied a great role in many teenagers’ lives (Vannini & Myers, 2002), and many of these former teenyboppers stuck around. Previous work in the field of popular music studies illustrates how teenybop—that is, pop music that particularly targeted a teenage audience, as the Backstreet Boys and other boy bands did—has been a source of empowerment (Vannini & Myers, 2002; Wald, 2002; Lowe, 2004; Baker, 2001, 2004, 2013). For example, Baker (2013: 23) claims that those young girls were not passive consumers but “aware and critical individuals who actively engage with the products of the cultural industries in complex ways to negotiate their place in the world.” However, whether teenybop has the potential to be an empowering resource at a later age has not been extensively studied yet (Duffett, 2013a; Zwaan & Duffett, 2016). Also unexplored is, for the time being, the relationship between how a band ages alongside its fans and how the fans age alongside their band. This kind of continued connection is not very common in the world of commercial pop acts, since those usually have a short life span. According to Duffett (2013a), this is one of the “hard problems” to tackle when studying music fans: trying to understand fandom for acts that are passed their heydays, yet have continued to stay in the spotlight. The present case study aims to explore and clarify the meaning and use of this continued engagement with music by studying the aging audience of the Backstreet Boys—a band that returned after a hiatus and kept touring small and large venues in the desire to stay somewhat in the limelight.

Unlike the previous chapter, which discussed the (partly televised) reunion of several bands, this chapter examines the survival of a single band. Here the leading question is:

What are the affordances of surviving act the Backstreet Boys, and how are they connected to life-course transitions of its fans?

To answer this question, I will start by describing who the Backstreet Boys are, then show how their (mediated) return or continuation took place. I will also shed some light on how previous returns or continued engagements with popular culture have been discussed in the literature. Then I will give an account of my research design and of the methodology I pursued in this study, which draws on 24 in-depth interviews with self-identified Dutch Backstreet Boys fans.

This will be followed by a presentation of the results of my qualitative content analysis. In a nutshell, these results reveal three strands of meaning-giving acts that tie the band to the interviewees' life course. First, the interviewees stress how they, as (pre-)teens, had to learn English in order to follow news about the band, or how they learned to build websites or to surf online only to keep up their fandom. Second, the interviewees compare how the Backstreet Boys featured in their teenage self-narratives and in their current life-course narratives. In particular, they emphasize that the band continues to have a healing effect on them and helps them cope with everyday situations and deal with big transitions in life. Third, the interviewees evaluate the survival aspect of the band—and I mean “survival” in the sense defined by Shuker (2016). They describe their experience of aging along with the Backstreet Boys and reflect on the different, often more commercial practices they can now commit to as socially and financially independent adults.

The last section of this chapter will offer a conclusion and discuss the limitations of the study and potential avenues for future research.

5.1 Case study: The Backstreet Boys

The Backstreet Boys is a boy band created by former manager Lou Pearlman in 1993. Although American, the band had its first successes in Europe around 1997–9. Its music is best described as mainstream pop music. On its first record, the band promoted itself as a vocal harmony group, following in the footsteps of Boyz II Men or New Edition—perhaps in order to overcome the boy band stigma (see Wald, 2002). However, from 1995 onward the Backstreet Boys has been working together with Swedish pop music songwriter and producer Max Martin, who wrote its biggest hit singles, *We've Got It Goin' On*, *I Want It*

That Way, As Long As You Love Me, and Everybody ... Backstreet's Back. Martin turned the band's vocal harmony repertoire and image into a variety of dance pop heavily influenced by European dance music, which was very popular in the late 1990s and provided a stark contrast to the grunge music genre, also popular at that time (Seabrook, 2015). The Backstreet Boys is also famous for its dance routines, which featured regularly in their videos and which they performed on stage during the concerts.

The band is a typical example of what Negus (1992) describes as a band following the synthetic ideology of creativity; it consists of five members who were brought together by a manager, after auditioning to be in the band. As in the case of New Kids on the Block or Take That (their predecessors), these members were grouped together on the basis of their skills—singing, performing, and dancing—and looks (Bloss, 1998; Sanders, 2002; Duffett, 2012); thus they were marketed to attract a broad audience, predominantly of teenagers and young women (Bloss, 1998; Jamieson, 2007). The five members of the band are Nick Carter, Brian Littrel, A. J. McLean, Howie Dorough, and Kevin Richardson. The youngest member, Nick, was only 14 when the band became famous. The oldest, Kevin, was 22. When the band had only just risen to fame, each member had a clear and distinctive character trait (e.g., AJ was “the bad guy,” Nick was “the cute, young one”), which is typical of a boy band (Sanders, 2002; Jamieson, 2007; Duffett, 2012). Although it is not my aim in this thesis to provide a gendered account of the Backstreet Boys, I should note that previous studies observe that their videos and performances have been “girlish” or “androgynous” enough to appeal to young queer or gay male audiences—and not only to teenage girls (Wald, 2002; Jamieson, 2007).

A typical Backstreet Boys song produced between 1993 and 2001 highlighted love or a breakup, was accompanied by a video of the band members singing and dancing, and was either ballad-like or cheerful. The later albums followed this successful formula, yet *In a World Like This* (the band's last studio album, released in 2013) included songs about parenthood, which built on the band members' own life experiences. Furthermore, the “boys” wrote a large portion of the album's songs themselves, which they had not done before. In their live performances the “boys” have always sung a cappella, to display their singing skills. Yet in more recent concerts of the band they often support their live songs with an acoustic guitar played by a few of them (Nick, Howie, and Brian).

These elements—writing its own songs, singing about “adult” topics like fatherhood, and performing a song live on guitar—may be taken to indicate how that band and its music

matured at a personal, lyrical, and musical level. Moreover, the same features make it interesting to scrutinize the current meaning of the band in its fans' narratives about their own life transitions.

Vannini and Myers (2002: 13) reason that “[t]een pop music is a system of meanings used by its young listeners to develop a sense of self and identity, as well as to interpret information about the realities of leisure, love and interpersonal relationships.” However, most teen pop is granted only a short lifetime. The Backstreet Boys seems to be an exception, having been around allegedly for over 20 years. Therefore I am especially interested in how this “system of meanings” (on which see also DeNora, 2000; Frith, 2007) develops over time around an audience of “surviving performers,” to use Shuker’s (2016) term. Does the Backstreet Boys’ music still resonate in adulthood, or do its affordances change once teenagers grow up? Unlike the bands analyzed in chapters 4 and 6, the Backstreet Boys has actively extended its repertoire over the years and its members have managed to maintain their career.

This career has included many albums, numerous tours, and a documentary about the band’s 20-year existence. In 2001 the Backstreet Boys released its first compilation album, *The Hits: Chapter One*. This album contained a collection of hits from the band’s four previous albums and was immensely successful throughout Europe and the United States.⁸ However, it is also around 2001 that the narrative of the Backstreet Boys and their roadmap for the future became blurry. The “boys” wanted to leave their record company at the time and A. J. McLean was admitted to rehab, to gain control over his alcoholism and depression. Tensions in the band mounted, allegedly because Nick Carter would not break the contract with the record company, which was releasing his solo album. After these events, news around the band was scarce and it was not until A. J. McLean’s appearance on the Oprah Winfrey Show in 2003, to talk about his additions, that the group was seen together again.

In 2004 the band went on tour again and in 2005 it released *Never Gone*, the first album after the hiatus. But in 2006 Kevin Richardson decided to leave the band to pursue a solo career. The other members had attempted solo careers between 2001 and 2004. The albums in 2007 (*Unbreakable*) and 2009 (*This Is Us*) were recorded without Richardson.

⁸ See the archive of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry platinum awards for the period 1996–9 (https://web.archive.org/web/20100310163954/http://www.ifpi.org/content/section_news/plat1999.html)

However, in 2012 it was announced officially that Richardson has returned to the group, so the band was back to its original formation for its twentieth anniversary in 2013.

As this brief outline indicates, the history of the Backstreet Boys is at certain points unclear. The band never announced an official breakup, which implies that the period of absence could be considered a hiatus. Most of the boy bands that dominated the mainstream in the late 1990s vanished at some point, often due to events that were not visible to the public (this element was also present in the Big Reunion’s participating acts’ stories). The album titles after the hiatus seem to have been carefully chosen to suggest that the band was “never gone”: the “boys” are “unbreakable” and even the four-piece Backstreet Boys (without Kevin Richardson) is still “us.”

Table 5.1 gives an overview of the band’s artistic activity:

Table 5.1 The Backstreet Boys’ albums and documentary

Year	Studio Album title
1996	Backstreet Boys
1997	Backstreet’s Back
1999	Millennium
2000	Black & Blue
2005	Never Gone
2007	Unbreakable
2009	This is Us
2013	In a World Like This
2015	Show ‘em What You’re Made of*

* *Show ‘Em What You’re Made of* is a documentary, not an album.

To celebrate its twentieth anniversary—which, again, suggests mere hiatus, not breakup—the band released the album *In a World Like This*. Shortly thereafter, in 2015, a documentary on the 20-year existence of the band came out. There its members reflected on how they started—meeting one another and Lou Pearlman, fighting a corrupt management—and how they got back into shape, ready to go on stage again. Moreover, the film stresses that the band

members have stuck around and have grown up to become even closer friends, “real” musicians who can play an instrument, and also husbands and fathers. They are now mature, adult men, but they do not shun away from using the term “boy band,” although they prefer to be considered a vocal harmony group. In 2017, at the time of writing, the Backstreet Boys have a residency show in Las Vegas titled *Larger than Life*, and will give 17 performances spread out between March and July.

In addition to compilation and studio albums, a documentary, and concert tours, the band also hosted several cruises with fans. Since 2010, the fans could join the band on a three-day cruise that sailed the waters from the United States to the Bahamas in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2014 and in the Mediterranean region in 2016. On the cruise, the band gives performances, organizes quizzes and parties, and holds meet-and-greets and other photo and signing opportunities (see Cashman, 2016a and 2016b on the cruise phenomenon and Reijnders, 2011 on media tourism; but note that these fans travel *with* the band rather than after it or in its spirit). These opportunities to meet the band up close and personal are part of the cruise, although some elements might require an additional fee; in this the cruise differs from the concert. For the concert series, meet-and-greet and photo arrangements can be booked in addition to a regular concert tickets. Likewise, early access to a concert venue can be obtained by purchasing a so-called golden circle ticket, which secures the fans a place close to the stage in the concert venue.

5.2 Repackaging the Backstreet Boys

The albums, the concerts, and the documentary demonstrate how the Backstreet Boys presented (or branded) their own narrative, as it changed throughout the years. Accordingly, the ways in which the fans make themselves able to physically and financially engage with the band have also changed over time. From buying a CD or putting a poster on the wall, the fan—now an adult—has come to buy a photo opportunity or a special ticket that guarantees him or her a place to sit on the stage while the band is performing, or to go on a three-day cruise with other fans and the Backstreet Boys members themselves.

In the previous chapter we have seen that the bands featuring in *The Big Reunion* fitted the description of a “synthetic” ideology; and so did like the Backstreet Boys (Negus, 1992). Record companies created these bands (Sanders, 2002; Duffett, 2012). This manufactured character gave them a bad image: they were considered inauthentic or fake (Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor, 2007). Nevertheless, they were very popular and

dominated the mainstream music landscape in Europe and the United States from around 1990 until around 2010 (Huber, 2013). As was illustrated in the previous chapter, such pop acts are not often granted longevity in the music industry, given their manufactured nature. When they no longer produce hits or dominate the mainstream, they are easily forgotten and replaced by new bands.⁹

Against this background, the Backstreet Boys seems to be an exceptional case. Not only is this band a “surviving performer” (Shuker, 2016) in a genre known for its volatility; it also managed to continue after a successful comeback in 2004/5, which followed the style of an assumptive reunion (Löbert, 2012). In 2005, the Backstreet Boys released a new album and performed a tour with new songs instead of replaying its old repertoire and making sure that its audience would return. However, it should be noted that the Backstreet Boys had been absent from the global music scene for only four years; the Big Reunion acts had been absent for about a decade, and the band to be discussed in the next chapter, Doe Maar, for about 16 years. Still, the Backstreet Boys did not reach mainstream success again, at least not in the Netherlands, until about 10 years after the release of *Never Gone*.

In 2013 the band reached the number-one album position in the Netherlands for the second time, with its eighth studio album, *In A World Like This*.¹⁰ This achievement should be considered a turning point in the band’s history, because it generated renewed attention in the Dutch press and air time on the radio. At least for a brief moment, the “boys” were back in the spotlight and visible to a broader audience than that of the fans who had remained loyal since 2004.

Studies that scrutinize audiences’ long-term commitment to a mainstream popular music act, in particular a boy band such as the Backstreet Boys, are scarce (Duffett, 2013a; Zwaan & Duffett, 2016). It is during their teens that people are most likely to become fans of a band (Cavicchi, 1998; Hills, 2002; Nolte, 2013; Duffett, 2013b); and then they are expected to grow out of it once they reach a certain age, or under the pressure of gender ideals (Jennings & Gardner, 2012; Duffett, 2013b). An adult person might reflect back on his or her fandom as a typical phase that belongs to childhood or the teenage years (Brabazon, 2002).

⁹ For example, at the turn of the millennium the Backstreet Boys was replaced or overruled in popularity by another band put together by the same manager Lou Pearlman: its “rival,” *N SYNC.

¹⁰ *In A World Like This* reached the number-one position upon entry in the Netherlands in August 2013; only *Millennium* had reached that position before, in 1999 (visit <http://www.nu.nl/muziek/3546649/backstreet-boys-veertien-jaar-weer-nummer-1.html>).

The image of fandom as a part of youth culture might also contribute to such conceptions. The media often portray the fan stereotypically, as a young, screaming girl (Ehrenreich et al., 1992), while being an avid music listener at a young age might be considered empowering by these young fans themselves (Baker, 2004, 2013).

What meaning fans give to the music after these teenage years has not been not extensively examined in popular music or fan studies to date. Yet DeNora (1999: 158) identifies music as a “key resource for the production of and the narrative thread of the self.” This implies that music is a key site for constructing or reconstructing one’s narrative identity or biography (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Thus studying how meanings generated by the Backstreet Boys feature in one’s life may also illuminate the kind of role that music fulfills after one’s childhood or teenage years. Harrington and Bielby (2010b) point to a lack of studies on how popular culture is consumed at a later stage in one’s life.

Illustrative of reviewing popular culture consumption at a later age is Harrington and Brothers’ (2010) work on aging soap actors. Harrington and Brothers (2010) show how the characters of a long-running soap series function as a cultural resource for both the actors and the viewers of the show. For example, by playing an aging character, the actor learns or philosophizes about his or her own process of aging. Although Harrington and Brothers’ study does not cover music but a different form of popular culture (the soap series), it clearly suggests that music may function as a similar resource in its fans’ lives.

Previous works analyzing a long-term engagement with music haven highlighted the continuous presence of, say, the music of Bruce Springsteen (Cavicchi, 1998), Kate Bush (Vroomen, 2004), David Bowie (Stevenson, 2009), Patti Smith (Lavin, 2015), or punk music in general (Bennett, 2013b) in the life of these artists’ fans. This element of continuity has elucidated how Springsteen helps create a sense of autobiography—that is, of continuation of the self; how Bush is a source of empowerment in everyday life; how Bowie functions as a cultural resource on which fans can draw to cope with transitions in their life; or how an aging punk’s role is closely connected to passing on knowledge about the local scene and about punk as a lifestyle. Like Bowie in Stevenson’s (2009) study or Smith in Lavin’s (2015), the artist who was an object of veneration in one’s teens remains an example and grows into the image of an older sister or friend—someone to turn to for advice in times of need.

But these works discuss acts that fit the “organic” creative ideology (Negus, 1992) of the pop music spectrum—acts that are not manufactured or compiled by a manager.

Although British new wave pop act Duran Duran also follows this “organic” creative ideology, its largely female fan base is somewhat reminiscent of that of the Backstreet Boys. In a study on the now adult fandom of Duran Duran, Tonya Anderson (2012) examines how these teenage fans from the 1980s have returned to the band when they reunited in the early years of the twenty-first century. As Anderson is a Duran Duran fan herself, her ethnographic account is a rich source of information and insights; she tells us how she reconvened with fellow fans and the band and engaged in fan practices again (e.g., by visiting a concert or chasing after the band). Anderson’s work explains very well how these adult women find nostalgic identification with their younger selves when they visit a concert or listen to Duran Duran’s music. Further, she describes how these fans “reclaim” their youthful selves. For example, at the concert, the women are able to let go or forget about everyday responsibilities and duties. They can for a moment become these young girls again, which is something very different from what they experience every day in their role as wives or mothers.

My case study set out to examine something similar: whether such feelings and experiences of “reclaiming youth” or “nostalgic identification” also feature in the narratives of a “synthetic” pop act that one stay connected to for a longer period of time. And the results of this research also support and substantiate Hills’ (2005; 2014) idea that fandom is relevant to people in different degrees at different times and stages in their life.

And now I go on to explain how I studied the role of the surviving Backstreet Boys in its audiences’ narratives.

5.3 Method

In order to explore the affordances of the “surviving” Backstreet Boys and how they are connected to life-course transitions of its fans, I interviewed 24 Dutch self-confessed fans. According to Hermanowicz (2002: 480), the interview is “the most basic and fundamental of methods, and one which, if executed well, brings us arguably closer than many other methods to an intimate understanding of people and their social worlds.” In this chapter I aim to provide an (intimate) understanding of the Backstreet Boys’ fans and their social worlds.

The group was not homogenous; the 24 respondents differed in their self-determined levels of fandom. A large proportion still considered themselves heavy or “real,” fans (i.e., people who engage with the band’s music on an everyday basis; see Cavicchi, 1998). A smaller subgroup within this sample would go to Backstreet Boys concerts and still enjoyed that music, but did not listen to it every day. Finally, a few of the interviewees identified

themselves as former fans of the band and considered this to be an important part of their youth. Although they would not listen to the band any more, or go to its concerts, their connection with the Backstreet Boys was still there and took the form of preserving old posters, pictures, or concert tickets (Williams, 2015).

All interviewees were female (see Appendix A); this does not mean that the band had no male fans, but that males were outnumbered by far in this fandom (Wald, 2002; Jamieson, 2007). The youngest woman interviewed was 25 years old, the oldest 33 years old. The majority of the women (11) had completed a postsecondary college degree (senior vocational education), nine had completed or were completing a university degree in applied sciences, and four had obtained or were working toward a master's degree. The sample included a nurse, a lecturer, a childcare worker, a flight attendant, an entrepreneur, a project manager, and a sales advisor. Ten of the women lived with a partner, five were married, and nine were single at the time of the interviews (which took place in 2013 and 2014). Four of the interviewees had one or more children.

Most of the women were recruited via Twitter; I also used snowball sampling after having interviewed a few fans. When the Backstreet Boys were guests in a popular TV show on Dutch television (*De TV Show*, aired on December 12, 2013), I tweeted that I was looking for fans of the Backstreet Boys to interview them for a study about the band (I used the hash-tags #backstreetboys or #tvshow). Soon enough a few fans replied to this message and I could meet them for an interview. I visited fans at home, or we met up at a café; both were places where they felt comfortable. Conducting interviews in a place where the interviewees feel comfortable is key to establishing a good rapport and mutual trust (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Edwards & Holland, 2013).

For some fans it was difficult to meet up during the day, or they preferred to be interviewed in the evening. Some interviewees also preferred doing the interview via telephone or Skype. They considered their fandom quite a sensitive topic to talk about. During telephone interviews it can be difficult to fully engage with the interviewee; however, specifically asking the interviewees to articulate their emotions made up for the lack of facial cues (here I followed Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. One interview was conducted via email, because the participant had a hearing impairment and impaired verbal communication. She preferred to do the interview in writing, which was more flexible for her also in that she could take her time to formulate a response (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

The interviews were semi-structured: this means that certain topics or questions decided upon in advance guide the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The topics covered were intended to give me an insight into the difference between the past and the current meanings that the band had for them, their fan practices, and the role the band played throughout their lives. But such a list of topics should be considered as a guiding instrument; a semi-structured interview leaves room for deviating from the prescribed list (see Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Silverman, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and with phonetic rendering of all the emotional and participatory noises. Subsequently they were analyzed by the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti and then coded, in a tripartite process. First they were coded with “open codes” (Boeije, 2005); next these codes were grouped together and formed categories (see Ravis, 2012); and, finally, the categories were clustered in themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this process of going from open to thematic coding helps the researcher identify latent themes in participants’ narratives.

Interviewing fans who lived in the Netherlands enabled me to visit them for interviews, did not bring about time differences in the phone interviews, and allowed the researcher—me— to talk to the interviewees in their own language, which was also the researcher’s native language. These are three vital elements for effective interviewing (see Edwards & Holland, 2013; Silverman, 2013).

The global fandom of the band is largely made up of females in their late twenties or early thirties—young women who were in their teenage years in the 1990s, when the Backstreet Boys was popular. Baker (2013) and Huber (2013) observe that that was a period when boy bands dominated the mainstream music landscape. Due to this dominance, the Backstreet Boys was famous throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Consequently, many of the teenage girls who grew up in the late 1990s share a collective coming of age (Baker, 2013) in which the Backstreet Boys played a part. Although the Dutch fans are a small sample of this large, global fandom and will not fully represent each individual’s experiences as a fan, my sample does offer insight into a local chapter of this long-term global fandom. To this extent, it is representative.

5.4 Results

In 1995, the Backstreet Boys' first single "We've Got It Goin' On" became a top five hit in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, and the Netherlands; but in the United States it ranked only 69th. Although the global reach of popular culture products was still in its early stages, the band's record company, BMG, succeeded in creating a global interest in the band (Jamieson, 2007). Nevertheless, one should also understand the situation of Dutch society at the time. In the Netherlands of the late 1990s, very few households had access to the Internet (about one in 15 was online in 1997).¹¹ Thus following international or global news was much more difficult then than it is today. Additionally, it should be noted that the Backstreet Boys featured regularly on the Music Factory (TMF), a Dutch competitor to MTV that had been created in 1995. Thus, as participants in this study reflect on the early days of the Backstreet Boys phenomenon in the late 1990s, they also give us an interesting personal angle on much larger transitions that occurred at the sociocultural level (Frith, 2007).

The aim of my study of the Backstreet Boys is to explore how the affordances that fan audiences attached to this band and its music featured in reflections about their lives. In this exploration, three key themes were identified in the interview data. My discussion will follow these three themes. First, the interviewees revealed how, as (pre-)teens, they became skilled in using English to understand interviews with the band, and how this skillset was subsequently extended into building a website or going online to continue finding news about the Backstreet Boys. Second, they described how the Backstreet Boys featured in their teenage autobiographical reasoning (McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a), and how this band became a factor of continued engagement in their adult narrative biographies (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991). According to the interviewees, the core of this continued engagement is the healing effect of the Backstreet Boys' music, which they find particularly helpful in difficult periods and situations in their lives. Third, because the Backstreet Boys had been around for over 20 years, the interviewees clarify how they themselves aged along with the performers. Thus the interviewees reflected on how the fan activities they committed to developed over time, but also demonstrated that, as young adults, they can now engage in and commit to very different practices.

¹¹ According to a study on cybergeography in the Netherlands that I consulted on January 15, 2015 at <http://www.sociosite.org/demografie.php>.

5.4.1 Developing the self and one's skills by being a fan

The interviewees consider the Backstreet Boys to be their first musical discovery, namely music that *they* really liked, rather than their parents. Alternatively, they started to like the band because their siblings were listening to it. When the band topped the European charts between 1997 and 2000, most of the interviewees were either in the last years of elementary school or in the first years of high school. Boy bands were “cool” at that time and part of the mainstream musical landscape in the Netherlands. Most of the fans had their first encounter with the Backstreet Boys via the Dutch media. The interviewees indicated that watching music videos on the Dutch music channel TMF was a popular pastime for them in the late 1990s. Consequently, many of the participants saw the Backstreet Boys for the first time on television. As Claire (29, a student who works part-time in a bakery) revealed:

We used to watch MTV or TMF, and then I always saw the video of *We've got it goin' on* [...] I found that amazing! And then it all started for me; there was the Break-Out and Hitkrant—and all these magazines you saw them in, and that became bigger and bigger [...] Then, in the newspaper, I saw that they were coming to the Netherlands to put on a show. I was completely sold!¹²

Several fans reported seeing the band's videos (or subtitled interviews), like the ones Claire saw, on MTV or TMF. Sarah (27, research student) saw them when she was “nine or ten [...] I was watching TMF at home, and they performed in Amsterdam [...] they did a few songs and I'd never heard of them before.” Later on she was won over and her babysitter gave her a copy of the album. Meanwhile, Janine (33, sales advisor) remembered that she “saw the video of ‘Get Down’ in the summer of 1996 on MTV” and has listened to the music ever since. Suzanne (27, flight attendant) recalled: “At the end of '98, '99 [...] they were hip. Everywhere you looked it was Backstreet Boys, and every girl was a fan. You couldn't watch TV without seeing them.” Elise (32, childcare worker) mentioned: “I saw ‘We've Got It Going On’ on TMF, and thought ‘who's that handsome guy with the sunglasses on,’ so I stuck around until I saw the name of the band.” Likewise, Cynthia (30, self-employed in the real-estate business) remembered: “They looked really good. And just being a fan of something [...] all your friends were fans of them.” The band was popular and somewhat

¹² All the quotations originally in Dutch are translated into English by me.

hyped, which shows in the fact that their music was very present in the mainstream media and on music television.

These interviewees' narratives are illustrative of how the band became part of the fans' lives: through their videos. Because the sound and looks of the band were appealing to the young girls, they started following the Backstreet Boys and collecting items related to the band.

Being a fan was also a social activity they could share with other girls of their age. However, sharing information about the Backstreet Boys back in the 1990s was deemed difficult by the interviewees. Since the band was American, the "boys" not only sang in English—they gave their interviews in English, too; and that made them difficult to understand for the teenage Dutch fans.

Through the coverage of the band in the Dutch media and by collecting various items from the band, the fans learned more about their idols. Yet, due to their young age, they also relied on this coverage, and particularly on subtitled interviews on TMF. Maaïke (29, lecturer in English) mentioned: "Back in the day, I knew so little English that I had to ask my parents what they were singing about." Her example also demonstrates that the Backstreet Boys as a cultural text was not completely unavailable to her. She could ask her parents for help. This skill of helping to solve the issue of not comprehending the cultural text's original language is reminiscent of how anime fandoms "sub(title)" anime or manga clips for other fans who have not mastered the language of the original content (Lee, 2011).

Comprehending translated interviews on television and reading about the band in Dutch magazines are two examples where language skills surfaced as a challenge to following a band or becoming a fan of it. Although English grammar and vocabulary are taught in elementary school in the Netherlands, many fans reflected that their low ability to read, write, or speak English was a reason why they preferred Dutch material about the band. This lack of proper mastery of English also stood in the way of understanding the band's lyrics, which posed a problem for many fans. Danique (28, entrepreneur) reflected:

When the first CD was released, I was very young. [...] And now, sometimes when I listen to a song I think "Oh that's what they are actually singing about." Because you don't always realize when you're 10 years old and you've barely mastered the English language.

While some fans sought help, others saw this challenge as an opportunity to enhance their English language skills. Indeed, understanding English and Dutch enabled them to follow (and collect) news that was spread in both Dutch magazines and the English publications available in the Netherlands. As Sarah remembered:

I made these scrapbooks. And I also bought the English magazines. I think I became good at English because of listening to that music and buying all these magazines. Because I eeuh... cut everything out and read it.

Furthermore, the popularity of the band also spiked them to collect everything there was about it, as Linda (31, account manager) testifies:

If they released a new album, I was already at the record store before the doors opened for that day! I taped everything, you know on these old VCR-tapes, and I made scrapbooks. I purchased all kinds of things for my room; I had about 78 posters, a wallet, key-chains, T-shirts, everything I could get my hands on!

As well as having access to what the Dutch media printed, Sarah created an additional source to read news about the band. As Linda's and Sarah's comments illustrated, they were avid collectors of physical tokens related to the band, yet they did not exchange such items with international peers. Daniëlle (28, presenter), reminisced about writing "a letter to them [the band] in terrible English," which she gave to a bodyguard at a concert. Albeit Dutch fans were aware, through these same magazines, that the band had fans in neighboring countries like Belgium, Germany, or the United Kingdom, they did not engage in exchanging posters or memorabilia across countries (Löbert, 2015). This might have been because of their young age, lack of permission from parents, or inability to communicate in another language.

The formation of an early Dutch Backstreet Boys fandom was largely the result of the band's videos, which implies that the artists' sound and looks were important factors in turning young girls into fans. The interviewees also recollected how they used to share their fandom with peers. Sharing enabled them to gain more information about the band or to get access to their music more easily. Apart from the fact that the "boys" were possibly these young girls' first "love interest" (musically and probably sexually, too), being a fan of the Backstreet Boys invited them to develop particular skills. To understand news about the band and the lyrics of its songs, they had to become proficient in English. This passion was a strong motivator for teens to improve their linguistic skills.

However, the Dutch fandom and its engagement with the Backstreet Boys changed from the late 1990s on, when Internet usage increased (Kruse, 2010): in 2001, 61% of Dutch households were online, and the figure rose to 78% in 2005.¹³

5.4.2 Helpful and healing in times of transition

After the enormous success of the *Millennium* album in 1999, its successor, *Black & Blue*, did not do as well in the Dutch charts.¹⁴ The Dutch media thus lost interest in the band. For the Dutch fans, this introduced a period with hardly any news about the band, except for the headlines about band member A. J. McLean's going into rehab. That event also signposted the beginning of what I called the band's hiatus. For many of the fans I interviewed, this was a transitional moment. The period of hiatus lasted from 2001 to 2005—the first time when the band visited the Netherlands again. During these years, the youngsters had transitioned into their late teens, or even into young adulthood. Linda recalled: “You grow older and go to college, and other things happen, other things also become important. Then it shifts a bit to the background.” As high school students at the time, most interviewees did not shed their fan identity completely; only some of them did. Yet something changed: what they prioritized in that phase of their life, and how they did it. Esther (29, assistant office manager) explained:

As a teen, my life wasn't that much fun. I was bullied, and lonely, so the music was very comforting to me. That's why I was extremely preoccupied with it, it made me feel less lonely [...] But eventually you don't cling and wait in front of the TV anymore for news [about the band, SD], or buy all the magazines. You start spending your money on other things, you also want to do fun things with your boyfriend, and go shopping with your friends.

“Other things,” for instance studying, finding a partner, partying, or shopping, became more important for Esther. However, she also found the music comforting, as it made her feel less lonely when she was bullied. Her reflections indicate that the Backstreet Boys' music “helped” her or had a healing, comforting effect on her.

¹³ These percentages are taken from reports published by the Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics on <http://statline.cbs.nl/Statweb/search/?Q=toegang+tot+internet&LA=NL>.

¹⁴ *Millennium* stayed in the Dutch album charts for 45 weeks and went platinum twice, which means that the album achieved sales of over 200,000; by comparison, *Black & Blue* held a chart-position for 21 weeks and sold “only” 100,000 copies (visit via <http://www.backstreet-boys.nl/biografie/backstreet-boys>).

Mieke (28, project manager) indicated that she became friends with a different group of people after high school, and she reflected on how it was no longer “cool” to be a fan of the Backstreet Boys, but she still never hid (or hides) her fandom from others. In addition, she mentioned how her taste in music changed: “From age ten to fourteen I was really crazy about the band, but after a while, I started working at a record company and got a bit better taste in music.” She also recalled that the band had stopped coming to the Netherlands: “I listened to them less and less, but that also aligned with that they came less, but that I also had less interest... But I kept listening.” Getting different friends and gaining an interest in other kinds of music were aspects of her development that made the Backstreet Boys less relevant (Hills, 2005; 2014). Like other interviewees, Mieke kept listening to the band’s music, although less often than before.

The interviewees’ experience of the hiatus helps illuminate why they saw the Backstreet Boys as a “surviving act” (Shuker, 2016) rather than a reuniting act. Many of the interviewees, whether they identified themselves as former fans or as current fans, made a point of emphasizing that the band had not broken up. Tanja (26, PhD student) explained: “You didn’t hear much about them on radio or television, but that doesn’t mean they were gone. They always kept making music.” And yet, although most interviewees continued to listen to the music (and some attended the concerts of Brian or AJ performing solo), those years of silence were a turning point in the interviewees’ fan “careers.” Daniëlle, who still bought the band’s albums, remembered: “You might have heard less from the boys, but sometimes there was a video from the US or via MTV or whatever. The Internet still wasn’t all that [great, SD] at the time, but for me they were still there.” Further, some of the Dutch fans, like Esther, created online spaces to share what information there was. Due to this lack of news, Esther decided to circulate news about the band among other fans by creating a website (in Dutch):

See, I had a website for a while about the Backstreet Boys. It had a lot of hits and it was a major Dutch website in those terms. So, in that way I was really engaged with it: because you’re constantly looking for news and things to post.

For Maaïke, going online and visiting such websites, both Dutch and international, was also a means to find other fans:

I know that for a lot of people it stopped there. But that was the time I went

online, around 1999 my parents had this dial-up connection. [...] So, I met other fans online. And that's how it stayed [active] for me. I'm pretty sure that if it weren't for the Internet, I wouldn't have been a fan after I turned 16. Because of the Internet it was so easy to find like-minded people. Because at that time you also couldn't find any news about them in the papers anymore, they had made way for new stars.

Here the Internet fulfilled a need to connect with other fans. Maaïke also alluded to the fact that she started chatting to people from South Africa, Italy, and the United States, and later became involved as a moderator on international forums about the Backstreet Boys. She kept her fandom going by engaging in these activities, but also by staying abreast of new developments concerning the band. Maaïke mentioned, for instance, that Kevin performed on Broadway for a while and Nick released a solo record, which were two news items she did not hear about in the Dutch media; but they were covered elsewhere. This illustrates how her Internet use enabled her to participate in non-local practices with other committed fans from all over the world at a time when not much attention was paid to the band at the local level. This allowed her to keep track of the band, although its mainstream position in the charts and in the media had faded.

According to the interviewees, the Dutch mainstream media neglected to report the band's visit to the Netherlands in 2005 for the *Never Gone* tour. The fans thus still had to look for news elsewhere. Yet, thanks to the rise of the Internet, as the interviewees themselves were growing older, they could now immerse in the global Backstreet Boys fandom. Unlike during their teen years, now, as young adults, they could buy their own tickets or fund a forum; they had also become more fluent in English (Harrington & Bielby, 2010b; Hodgkinson & Bennett, 2012). One of the interviewees, Samantha (27, childcare worker), decided because of this newfound social and financial independence to create her own Dutch Backstreet Boys forum:

Yeah, in 2005... I went looking for information about where they performed, what kind of shows and stuff. And I noticed that there was hardly any information to find about them. I searched on forums and stuff, but there were only fans from abroad. There wasn't really a Dutch forum. So, with a friend, I created a free forum. [...] At its peak, the forum had about 2000 members.

The forum soon had another important function: it *connected* the Dutch fans on- and offline, at a national level. In other words, the forum seemed to fill in the gap that the Backstreet Boys had left behind. Samantha continued:

There was a lot of activity (on the forum). And then we held a meeting in Utrecht for every fan who wanted to come; we went bowling and everyone had these customized T-shirts. It was great fun and I got to know a lot of girls through it [the forum, SD]. I'm still in touch with some of them.

The fans met up in Utrecht and got to know one another. A few of them became close friends, and the group started profiling itself as “the Dutchies”—a reference to their Dutch nationality, hinting at a feeling of national pride, but also a way of upholding their distinct national identity within a vast worldwide fandom. Some of the interviewees, such as Danique, Daniëlle, and Claire, identified themselves as members of this group; others knew about it. Sarah knew that the Dutchies were “the fans who are always very active and always found near the stage.” The forum offered the Dutch fans a shared foundation in their own language and country. Overall, connecting on- and offline, particularly for the Dutchies, produced friends who also *still* liked the Backstreet Boys.

By 2005 most of the fans had grown into young women, had studied, held jobs, had financial responsibilities, and some had become mothers, too. When the Backstreet Boys announced a concert in Rotterdam in 2005, many of the now post-youth fans attended with friends from the forum. Meeting other fans online after the announcement of the 2005 tour completely revived the fandom for Danique, who said: “[I] went to the concert for nostalgic reasons, but then I met some fellow fans via the forum.” Those fans took her along to the band’s hotel, where they ran into AJ, and Danique has been crazy about them again ever since.

Being an adult fan of a boy band became less difficult when the experience was shared with like-minded women, their fellow fans on- and offline (Zubernis & Larsen, 2012). The forum both reopened the gateways for news about the Backstreet Boys and reawakened the affinity many fans had with the band. It was the foundation of the Dutchies, uniting them, but also marking their own unique position on the worldwide web. For other interviewees, it offered the support they did not find offline.

As a result of the lack of coverage of the Backstreet Boys in the mainstream Dutch media, many people believe that the band has returned or reunited. Yet, as the interviewees

quoted above illustrate, a group of fans has continued to follow the band throughout the whole period of its absence from the public eye. They did so through their own forums or websites, which became rich sources of information for all the fans—and irreplaceable sources, since there were no official reports on the activities of the Backstreet Boys. Moreover, the band did not provide a narrative or explanation of its absence either, besides acknowledging that there was a hiatus. In spite of the alleged breakup, most interviewees recall that their decision to commit (or not) to new fan activities came slightly later, after 2005. In 2005 the band returned to the Netherlands for a tour, which for some was the pinnacle of their fandom. For other interviewees, that supreme moment came in 2008 or 2009, when the band toured the Netherlands again (yet this time without Kevin Richardson, who had temporarily left the band). In 2013 it toured Europe, including the Netherlands, as a five piece. When interviewees were asked when they had rekindled or discontinued their interest in the surviving performers and their music, many mentioned a concert as a “peak moment” (on this notion, see also Green, 2016).

As we have seen, Mieke admits that she still listens to the music, but the Backstreet Boys have become less relevant in her life. She explains: “It has to be triggered by something I see on Facebook, or if my friends invite me to the concert.” In those instances she would think back to her more active fandom of the Backstreet Boys. In her childhood she identified with the band very strongly, and she expands on it thus: “I found my escape in it, they were my best friends, and they were also what tied me to my friends. I was an only child, so if you have such a huge hobby it is a part of your family life as well. I remember that my dad had to type 28-01, Nick’s birthday, as the password for our videotheque card.” If asked to, she would still attend a concert of the band, joining old friends from her youth. Likewise Esther, who has founded one of the websites on the band, identifies herself even now as a fan, albeit a more passive one:

I like it, and I like the concerts, but I can’t invest that much money or time in it, because I have other things I want to invest time, money and energy in. [...] I’ll still go to the concert, to relive that old feeling, but I can’t become completely hysterical anymore.

Here again, the concert is mentioned as something that is still visited, yet only for the sake of reliving that youthful feeling of back then (see Anderson, 2012). Other interviewees who had preserved their attachment nevertheless indicated similar reasons for prioritizing now

other things in life over the Backstreet Boys, reasons related to their transition into a more mature phase—young adulthood or late high school years.

For some interviewees, the band's return and the several concert opportunities it opened crystallized into a point of realization of what the Backstreet Boys afforded them over time. Suzanne reflected:

because for 15 years [...] they've been sort of a part of your life. [...] And a lot has changed since then, from that 12-year old high-school student to a 27-year old woman, who works, owns a house, a car and everything. But well, they [the band, SD] are this perpetual factor.

In similar fashion Linda, although considering herself not heavily invested anymore, explained how the music of the Backstreet Boys remained meaningful over the past 20 years:

I don't want to say it's a form of support... that's too big a word for it [...] But yeah, [it's] a safe haven actually. If you put the music on, then it has something familiar—that gives you a feeling of freedom, and you do need that sometimes.

That feeling of freedom this musical safe haven offered Linda means that the music transports her back in time, to high school. As Linda reminisced: "It carries a sort of carefreeness, because now you're older there's more things to worry about. Back then you only worried about if they'd break up, or your exams." These feelings for the band as a perpetual factor, or even as a safe haven, resonated with many other fans. To give a few examples, Janine said of the music that "it's sort of an outlet [a way to vent, SD] for me. If I have a lot of stress, I am really able to relax with their music." Danique said: "if you're in high school, hitting puberty and everything about you changes... I know I listened to their music a lot to help me through rough times, and that really helped me through these periods, their music." She still finds the music helpful: "If I'm having a night when I'm not feeling so well, then the first thing I'll do is put on their DVD to watch the concert. Just because I know it will give me a good feeling, or will make me feel good [...]. With them [their music, SD] it's just like a sort of medicine." Again, the comforting effect of the Backstreet Boys' music appears to explain these interviewees' continued engagement. Although the reasons for listening to the music or the situations these respondents find themselves in while listening are different now (they are not bullied, but they had a rough day), the effect of the band remains similar: it helps them through "life events" (McLean, 2008).

Deshny (27, student) also recalled this healing force of the music in difficult moments:

I had a difficult childhood, so it was a sort of comfort. And [...] Those CD's and the stuff and music you have of them, that's always there. So to me that was sort of ... a fixed point in life that was always there and always positive. And always comforting, sweet and warm.

This healing force of music is reminiscent of its effect on participants in DeNora's (2000) analysis of the works on music in everyday life, where we see women using music as a means to control their mood. Jessica (25, personal healthcare assistant) pointed out how the Backstreet Boys literally helped her getting over a breakup: "Then it really was 'I'll never break your heart' [...] I was sitting in my room and listening to the music, and that helped to well, move on. By listening to their music, which has always been this continuous factor." Her reflection, like the ones previously quoted, also illustrate that the music functions as a continuously comforting element in these interviewees' lives. Janine shared:

I have a tattoo with one of their lyrics [...] that was not per se for the Backstreet Boys, but as a means to remember those who I've lost in my life. This way they're always with me, and this is the first text that I thought of.

Likewise, Elise also found a special meaning in the lyrics: "'Show Me the Meaning' is my crying song at concerts. My father, who passed away, Jesus, sorry I already almost have to cry." Her example of this specific song is an emblematic illustration and reflection of music's role as "an ordering device at the personal level, as a means for creating, enhancing, sustaining and changing subjective, cognitive, bodily and self-conceptual states"—as DeNora aptly describes it (2000: 49).

The David Bowie fans interviewed by Stevenson (2009) also attributed such an anchoring position to their idol. As in the findings of this study, Stevenson's (2009) fans called Bowie a cultural and emotional resource to hold onto, whose identity they reinterpreted over the course of their life. My interviewees assign a similar significance to the Backstreet Boys. By depicting in this way the continuous presence of the band, they imply that it is this aspect of the "surviving" character of the band that is particularly appreciated. This means that the Backstreet Boys has always held a relevant position in the interviewees' life courses. Furthermore, this seems to suggest that their fandom did not necessarily decrease in relevance

(Hills, 2002; 2005), or that its power as a source is limited to reclaiming memories of their youth (Anderson, 2012). Accordingly, this perpetual presence of the Backstreet Boys is helpful and healing in times of life transitions.

5.4.3 Feeling (more) connected to the band and fandom

The interviewees' holding onto the surviving act is not only a mental process, but also material. Jessica, like many other interviewees, mentioned how she held onto her collection of posters, scrapbooks, and Backstreet Boys memorabilia from her youth and explained the importance of keeping it:

I am unable to get rid of it. It just belongs... My husband told me, now you can put it away—those scrapbooks and posters, but I told him no. [...] maybe I will look at it once or twice or maybe never, but I know that it's up in the attic and that it's mine; it stuck with me throughout my life, and that feels nice.

Still having this Backstreet Boys collection makes her feel better. Keeping these objects, holding on to past times and reflecting on life through them demonstrates how her fandom is an extension of her youthful self (Sandvoss, 2005), which is preserved through these tangible objects. Although they hold onto such relics, most interviewees also indicate that they do not buy posters, pillows, or key chains anymore. For example, Tanja said that she bought a T-shirt of the band at the last tour but is not sure whether she will actually wear it.

While these youthful memories are somewhat romanticized by the interviewees, they assess critically the products that the Backstreet Boys offers nowadays. The T-shirts and tour booklets are still on sale at the concerts, but there is also an increased market for experiences related to the band. It is as if the band knows and targets this newfound social and financial independence of most of its fans. Already in 2007, upon the release of a new album and tour, the band launched an initiative for fan club members with paid membership: a paid meet-and-greet with the band. There were several packages launched for the *Unbreakable* tour, which enabled fans to visit the sound-check session and have a photo opportunity with the band. In 2009, this package cost €75; in the latest tour—the *In a World Like This* tour in 2013—the “golden ticket” package cost about \$400. Elise reflected:

You have more freedom now... sometimes I regret it that you can't sleep in front of the door anymore, to ensure you're the first one in. Now it's more a matter of

having the money. If you have it you'll be in the front, can meet them and that kind of stuff.

Here Elise evaluates how nowadays being a fan seems to be about “having the money”: being financially able to buy a ticket for the cruise, or a special ticket to get closer to the stage, or to meet the band before the show. Yet some of the interviewees found this a very positive development. Claire said:

At some point everybody [in the fandom, SD] became a bit more adult, and for the most it decreased, but for me it increased. And yeah, then I found this fixed group of friends [the Dutchies, SD] with whom I went to the concerts, and it's actually since these last few years, that I've found this group that it increased so much. Now the sky is the limit, we can go everywhere, it doesn't matter anymore... it's another level than back in the day.

Claire considered the increased opportunities to engage with the band beneficial. Yet she gained the most value from the friends she met, the Dutchies, who also were willing to participate in these activities. Now, as adults, they no longer depend on parents, older family members, or friends to take them to the concert or tape the Backstreet Boys on a cassette or a DVD. Jessica, when she gained her driver's license, indicated how that gave an extra dimension to her fandom. For example, she was now able to travel to the hotels where the band members stayed: “I heard they were in Cologne, so I just drove there on a Sunday afternoon.” She remarked that, due to this age-graded transition, the fans no longer rely on their parents or on older friends, who used to drive them to the concerts when they were in their teens but would not help them “chase” after the band members for a photo. She visited concerts in neighboring countries, Belgium and Germany, because she had her own means of transportation.

Moreover, some of the interviewed Dutchies recounted how, in addition to the concerts they attended in the Netherlands, they traveled with other Dutch and international fans to different parts of the world, to see the band perform. Claire flew to New York to see the band, and joined the Backstreet Boys cruise in the Bahamas. The interviewed Dutchies engaged in such activities mostly with fellow Dutchies, but also made friends with other fans from the United States, the United Kingdom, or even Mexico. Danique explained:

We meet so many people there, and you visit places you normally wouldn't go to. I've been to Miami twice now, once to Orlando and once to the Bahamas. If I call any of my other friends, they would like to join me, but wouldn't have the money for it.

According to Danique—who, like many fans, keeps a savings account for partaking in these activities—meeting so many other fans has a spontaneous quality that she values highly; this is something she appreciates about the long-term fandom. Suzanne traveled to Miami also, but many interviewees indicated that they considered the trip too expensive: it involved traveling to the United States first, paying for the cruise—and the journey was too long for just a three-day event. However, Suzanne, like Danique, declared that she kept a savings account for everything BSB-related. She argued: “I’m saving for a holiday—but it is a Backstreet Boys-related holiday.” Suzanne and Jessica both remarked that they might have to skip going out for dinner for a month; but having a full-time job gave the women freedom to save money for these Backstreet Boys-related experiences. Particularly as there are not many new fans of the band—most have aged along—hierarchy is not at stake in long-term loyalty. It matters more how committed one is to the band, and that can be demonstrated by partaking in more fan activities.

However, some of the fans feel that now, as adults, they have to hide this heavy involvement, or they find that it is misunderstood. For example, Marjan (32, healthcare inspector), felt that she could not always tell others that she attended concerts or traveled abroad for the band: “I told people I was visiting a friend in Amsterdam or had been on a city trip to London”—when in fact she was camping out at a studio where the Backstreet Boys were recording an album. Jessica’s parents did not understand why she should want to see the same concert four times, “it’s four times the same show, the same outfits, and four times the same songs... Yeah, they don’t really get it,” nor did her sister or her colleagues; they wouldn’t understand her passion for the band. Her husband, however, was at peace with it: “He just says—if you really want to do it, just do it, and because they might not return for another year or two, you never know.” Tatum (30, nurse) feels comfortable sharing pictures of the concerts or selfies of band members with her colleagues, but she knows they find it a bit odd that she is still a fan: “They’ll look at your pictures and like it, but they’ll laugh behind your back about it.” Claire, meanwhile, was very open about her fandom and even cancelled her own birthday party when the band happened to be in the Netherlands for a radio show.

As she described it,

Most of my friends and colleagues just like it... But I know they think “oh God, again? Couldn’t you spend your money on a better cause?” but they do like it and want to know everything.

Clearly the surviving, adult fandom that remained faithful and aged along with the band is about more than just the music. Suzanne explained: “To me it’s not four times the same concert, it is everything around that; road tripping with friends... You go abroad together; or to the hotels... you just have that shared passion.” This suggests that, for some interviewees, the real value of the surviving band lies in the new opportunities it offers them as adult fans.

This notion of the band’s being more accessible to its fans than it was in the late 1990s or at the beginning of millennium also resonates with what Michael Kelpie revealed in the interview about the Big Reunion (see chapter 4). It would appear that nowadays fans expect acts to be more accessible or more visible via social media. It may not seem relevant to pursue this line of investigation in attempting to discover what meanings the interviewees attach to the band as surviving act, but increased accessibility is an important factor in the maintenance and continuation of their fandom.

Over the course of 2009 fan forums went out of fashion and were replaced by social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The interviewees reported that they used these platforms actively; the Backstreet Boys themselves went online with a Facebook and Twitter page for the band itself, while individual band members also created accounts on these platforms. AJ and Brian regularly tweet photos featuring their families, and Nick often updates his fans via Facebook and Twitter with selfies of himself, his wife, and his whereabouts. Howie and Kevin are a little less active but still share backstage photos with their followers. Maaïke criticized the band a little for its social media presence, but she admitted that this was the reason why she joined Twitter (on this motivating factor, see Deller, 2014). Furthermore, she understood the value of the band’s online presence: “I think that because they share pictures on Instagram—people like it, and that might be an enormous trigger to stay a fan.”

Miriam (26, social worker) stated that the social media did indeed play a role in her current fandom too, “because the distance between them, as an artist, and you, as a fan, has decreased, and I like that a lot.” She could now respond via a tweet, or she could “like” the band’s pictures or messages. This made her feel closer to the band members than she was before. Tatum similarly said: “you can follow their whole lives on Twitter. It seems like

you're always with them, while they don't have an idea who I am or what I do with my life.” However, this did not stop her or other fans from tweeting the band members, who sometimes replied. Jolanda (29, receptionist) explained that getting a reply “is fun [...] you're far away, yet also really close.”

These narratives illustrate that the social media are a viable tool for the Backstreet Boys to spread news about themselves directly and create the impression of their being personally connected to the fans (Bennett, 2014). Social media messages easily cross national borders and give fans the feeling that they can interact with band members. The interviewees talked about how they connect to other Dutch fans via Dutch Facebook groups, sharing photos of their meet-and-greets with the band. Yet the fans are not always keen on sharing information about the whereabouts of the band members; they would do this only within their close group of friends (the Dutchies), via instant or direct messaging on Facebook or Twitter. Here they draw a line between real fans and those who are only seeking an opportunity to meet the band.

Within the Facebook group the fans also share practicalities, as Jolanda detailed: “The other fans give you advice on how to pick up a ticket for an after-party or what bag to take or shoes to wear.” Apart from Facebook, the fans use YouTube to upload their concert videos. Daniëlle proudly stated that she “made enough movies of them, I completely filled up my YouTube channel with them.” Before YouTube, fans had to wait for an official DVD to be produced—and then they waited some more for its specific release date in the Netherlands; now they could instantly share and see concert videos from all over the world. Thus, whereas in the past these fans did not exchange memorabilia, nowadays they would easily engage with other fans.

The interviewees indicated how their current engagement with the Backstreet Boys happens. Through their newfound social and financial independence (and through their new friends, the Dutchies, or global Facebook groups), they were able to get involved in ways that were not accessible to them in the past. However, for some interviewees this same post-youth status was also a reason to focus more on other aspects of their life and to look at the band as a thing of the past, a memory without an active role in the present.

5.5 Conclusion and discussion

In this study I explored how the affordances of the “surviving” Backstreet Boys—the band and its music—feature in narratives about their life course. After conducting interviews with

24 self-identified Backstreet Boys fans and analyzing these interviews, I found three different ways in which these interviewees give meaning to the band and interpret its influence on their life course.

First I highlighted how, as young teenagers, the interviewees were motivated to master the English language in order to come to understand various things from the culture of the Backstreet Boys—from simple news to complex lyrics. Next I investigated how the band remained a part of the interviewees' life (or not) by looking at the connection they maintained with the band and its music. Some developed new skills in the online environment, building websites or participating in forums in order to support their fandom.

Second, I showed that the interviewees continued to cultivate their passion for the Backstreet Boys because they felt that the band and its music *still* offered comfort and had a benefic, healing effect in difficult times and situations.

Finally, aging along with the Backstreet Boys gave these participants another reason for letting the band continue to influence their life course. Both the “boys” in the band and their fans are now adults, and the resources for involvement and participation in fan acts are different from what they were two decades ago. As socially and financially independent adults, the interviewees can now engage in more commercial practices—visits to concerts in distant locations, tours and cruises with the band, or expensive tickets for activities such as meet-and-greets.

Against the background of previous work on music consumption, I have highlighted how teenagers find music a source of empowerment (see Vannini & Myers, 2002; Lowe, 2004; Baker, 2004). This empowerment is evident in the Dutch fans' narratives about the function of the Backstreet Boys in their life course. Initiatives such as becoming proficient in English at a very young age illustrate this function particularly well. Or, when the Dutch media stopped reporting news of the band, some of the interviewees felt prompted to fill the gap by creating their own news outlets. This turned them into skillful website builders. Such accomplishments, particularly at a time when the Backstreet Boys did not dominate the mainstream music landscape, are clear examples of empowerment.

According to the interviewees, the Backstreet Boys' period of hiatus was crucial for the survival of their own fandom. Some interviewees decreased their fan activities, prioritizing various other elements and transitions in their life (getting new friends, a boyfriend, a family, an education, a career), while others went online to connect to others with whom they could share their fandom. Some interviewees indicated that they kept

listening to the music of the Backstreet Boys, although less frequently than in their (pre-)adolescent years. That music still played a role in their adult lives; and it offered a kind of comfort that they considered healing and benefic, helping them make sense of their feelings or overcome a particular event (see McLean, 2008). Whereas in their teens the music helped them overcome bullying or a breakup, now it provided comfort after a rough day at work or in dealing with a painful loss. The memory of the Backstreet Boys seems to be ingrained in these interviewees' life narratives (on this notion, see Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991), and the theme of its healing force resonates with the findings of other analyses of the role of music in everyday life—as a tool to control moods, or as a cultural resource to mitigate challenging times (see, e.g., DeNora, 2000 and Stevenson, 2009).

Consequently, when the band came back from their hiatus and started performing new songs and releasing new albums, most of the interviewees decided to go to the concerts. Some did so in order to meet up with old friends and revisit their own younger selves. Some met a completely new group of friends, the Dutchies, thanks to the forums and sites that had been created during the band's hiatus. Having become financially and socially independent adults, the participants felt that they had more freedom of movement and choice than in their teens, and some of them used this freedom to support various fan activities.

Noteworthy in this case study is the role of what I should call the online realm. Many interviewees indicated that online platforms are their primary means to stay informed about the Backstreet Boys and to connect with other fans worldwide. The importance of this connection is twofold. First, the interviewees appreciate that the band wishes to assimilate its fans by showing them snippets of its members' personal life via social media. These media outlets then become a place where fans can talk about activities unrelated to the Backstreet Boys and share photos or videos of their children and spouses. Second, the interviewees indicate that they like to connect online with people who “understand.” This is what Duffett (2013b) would call the knowing field: a level of “emotional knowing”—knowing what it means to be a fan and to be actively invested in such practices. Not all of the fans I interviewed have a supportive family or a group of friends who understand what it is like to be such a dedicated adult fan.

This study does lead to a quest for more research about the influence of language and place on an aging fandom. What is the role of language in shaping a long-term connection to music (see Van der Hoeven, Janssen, & Driessen, 2016)? Thus, if the fans had been able to understand the pop act from an early age, would their connection to it be different later on,

specifically with regard to the continuation of their fandom? Further, the respondents grew up in a (possibly) more controlled media environment, with fewer news sources about the band in the form of magazines, radio and TV interviews, and with no Internet. This environment changed radically in a relatively short period of time. How did this massive change influence the phenomenon of fandom in terms of survival or desistance? Then, while the Dutch fans became proficient in English, it would be interesting to see what influence language had on desisting from fandom. Another theme with good potential is the effect of the social and financial independence of long-term fans. It is this factor that created opportunities for a commercial exploitation of nostalgia—both by the band and by the music industry. In 2016 the Backstreet Boys offered their European fans a cruise; hence these fans enjoyed the same commercial opportunities as the United States-based fans. These commercial elements would make an interesting topic for further research, because they could reveal more about the changing fan practices of different audiences (e.g., male or older generation ones) and their relevance to maintaining and valuing one's fandom. They would also allow for a cross-national comparison between the fan groups, and perhaps reveal more about how location matters for a surviving act that intends to return to the limelight.

Further, as the Backstreet Boys' second shot at fame shows, it would be interesting to see how these developments in adapting new media technologies and changing fan practices would function in a fandom that deals with a reunion or breakup of their favorite organic band. The absence of Kevin Richardson was barely discussed by the interviewees; but the situation might have been different if the band had not been a manufactured group.

On the basis of my interviews with this group of 24 Dutch self-identified fans, former and present, of the Backstreet Boys, I highlighted that the band played and continues to play an important part in the fans' lives, particularly in the transitions they undergo, for instance from girl to woman, or through a first romantic breakup. The music represents a constant, a perpetual element in their lives, something they can hold onto during these transitions, both as they grow up and later on. It reminds them of their childhood and takes them back to that period in their lives. In doing so, it offers them consolation as they cope with change: it is healing and comforting. Hills (2005: 804) argued that a long-term fandom might be considered a "cyclical fandom," which he theorized as a "fan identity that is open to multiple revisions and rewriting without prior fan objects necessarily being viewed as embarrassing, inauthentic, or deficient." Drawing on the findings of the study presented in this chapter, I would argue that the surviving act needs to adapt to current times too; hence the offer of

different experiences and the invitation to look at everyday life through new media technologies. This might appeal strongly to fans, because it reminds them that band members undergo certain transitions too, which are then reflected in their music (e.g., they grow older, lose a parent, or become parents themselves).

The Backstreet Boys may not dominate the charts or hold a fixed spot in the limelight any longer, but the fans I interviewed continue in their passion for this band. Their fandom has found ways to “survive” along the act, and they see the music as a perpetual element in their lives. And the music survived because it was an anchoring point in their youth.

6. Exploring the Meaning of Doe Maar's Recurring Reunions in Its Fans' Lives

In this chapter I focus on former and current Dutch fans of Doe Maar, a Dutch pop and ska group that was highly popular in the Netherlands from 1979 until 1984 and reunited many times since 2000.

Previous chapters researched the meanings of repackaged music through a reunion with multiple bands or through the “surviving act” of one band (Shuker, 2016). Doe Maar is a band that held and still holds multiple reunions. In contrast to the material presented in previous chapters, Doe Maar is an example of “organic” band (on this notion, see Negus, 1992): it was not manufactured or put together artificially, by a record company or manager, but created by real musicians, who thereby became its members. The band was founded in 1978, but it was not until 1980 that it was noticed by the music industry; after that, it became hugely popular among teenagers (Van Elteren, 1997; Schuyt & Taverne, 2004). The Doe Maar “mania,” a type of phenomenon previously unknown in the Netherlands, reached its peak in 1982 and 1983 (Mutsaers, 2001).

The Doe Maar “hype” returned in 2000, when Doe Maar announced two reunion shows (Mutsaers, 2001). Ever since, reunions of the band are ongoing—unlike the Big Reunion concert series, which gathered multiple acts but was itself a one-off. Moreover, because Doe Maar did not release any new albums after 2000, the repertoire of these concerts is limited. At each reunion concert the band plays a mixture of songs from its existing repertoire, which consists of five albums released in the 1980s and a sixth one, *Klaar*, released in 2000. Nevertheless, each time Doe Maar announces a reunion show, the concert(s) sell out. This chapter explores the identities of these Doe Maar reunion audience members: who they are, how they engage with an organic band that keeps reuniting, and how the affordances they attribute to this band and to their engagements with it feature on the wider canvas of their life course.

Previous research on popular music reunions established that a reunion can be “explorative” or “assumptive” in nature (Löbert, 2012). An explorative reunion would test the waters with old songs, to see how much interest there still is in the band; an assumptive reunion would work on the premise that, if the band goes ahead to release new songs, there will be a market for them. The format of Doe Maar's reunions—concerts in which only “old”

songs are performed—seems to fit with the aims of an explorative reunion, but the recurrent aspect of these reunions and the absence of any tendency to release new material give the act a very different character. Therefore I coined a new name for the Doe Maar reunions from 2000 on: *recurring reunions*.

When a typical Doe Maar reunion is targeted at the band's former audience (Löbert, 2012), most of its public will consist of people in their forties, fifties, and maybe even sixties, because this is by and large the age group of those who were children and teenagers in 1980, when Doe Maar started having a following. This implies that typical Doe Maar attendees have experienced more life transitions (Harrington & Bielby, 2010b) than the fans and concert goers discussed so far; the Big Reunion and Backstreet Boys fans, labeled “post-youth,” are aged on average between 25 and 40. For my purposes, this age discrepancy could offer an interesting point of comparison with respect to investment with meanings, music's role in life-course transitions and narratives about them, and so on.

This chapter investigates the following research question: *What are the affordances of the recurrent reunions of Doe Maar for its audiences, and what role do these events play in developments in their life course?*

To answer this question, I first contextualize Doe Maar and describe its repackaging—and thus the (mediated) return and continuation of the band's music from 2000 on. Then I present the research design for this study and next to it its empirical findings. The latter point out three main reasons or motivations for audiences' ongoing engagement with Doe Maar. The first reason is related to fans for whom a very active current participation in Doe Maar fandom is an opportunity to reflect on their teenage years and renegotiate their involvement with the band and the place they are prepared to give it in their everyday life. This sort of reflection is their motivation. The second reason comes from fans for whom the reunions offer the experience of a brief return to their “younger selves” in 1984. This experience is their motivation. Finally, the third kind of motive is the feeling that the old Doe Maar repertoire provides comfort and a resource to cope with situations in everyday life. This is another strong reason why people who feel this way should continue their engagement with this band.

6.1 Case study: Doe Maar

Let me start by restating a few facts about the band studied here. Particularly when considered against the background of earlier commercial bands from the United Kingdom and the United

States, Doe Maar is a band that came together through a process of organic creativity: unlike synthetic, fabricated bands, it already existed before it was pushed to commercial fame and recognition by a record company. Doe Maar was founded in 1978 and soon afterwards secured a record deal with the Dutch label Telstar. At the time, that label was renowned for producing German schlagers and Dutch tearjerkers (*smartlappen*). It was a label that would sign contracts with artists who sang in Dutch (Van der Plas, 2003; Schuyt & Taverne, 2004; Van der Hoeven et al., 2016), but it was now known for signing agreements with pop acts. One of the first singles of Doe Maar, “32 Jaar: Sinds een dag of twee” (“32 Years: Since One or Two Days”), gained airtime in 1981 on *De Avondspits*, a public service radio show that was very popular in the 1980s (Van Elderen, 1984; Van Elteren, 1997). However, the band’s real breakthrough came in 1982, with the release of its single “Doris Day.”

Both in its original and in its “reunited” formation, Doe Maar consists of two singers, Ernst Jansz and Henny Vrienten, and one guitar player, Jan Hendriks. These are the core members of Doe Maar. The initial drummer of the band, Carel Copier, was replaced by René van Collem. Van Collem was evicted from the band in 1982 and replaced by Jan Pijnenburg, who later rejoined the band for a few reunion concerts. In 2012 and 2013 Van Collem replaced Pijnenburg at the reunion concerts.

Doe Maar’s music can be described as *Nederpop* (Van der Plas, 2003), the vernacular term used for popular music sung in Dutch. Yet the band uses reggae and ska rhythms with a heavy emphasis on (reggae) bass lines. In that sense, Doe Maar’s repertoire is comparable with that of its British counterparts, The Police or UB40. The original success of Doe Maar is thus to be understood as part of the international—or at least western—popularity wave of reggae in the 1980s (Van Elderen, 1984; Van Elteren, 1997), but also as part of a renaissance of Dutch language or Dutch dialect pop songs, which was increasingly the trend in the 1980s (Schuyt & Taverne, 2004; Grijp, 2007; Van der Hoeven et al., 2016).

The intense reaction that Doe Maar evoked among teenage audiences was unheard of in the Netherlands (Van Elteren, 1997; Mutsaers, 2001). A 2013 documentary about the band, *Dit is Alles* (*This Is It*: a pun on one of its biggest hits, “Is This It?”), produced by and for the public service broadcaster BNN, shows scenes in enormous halls and concert venues, all filled with screaming teenagers. Moreover, these youngsters wore the band’s badges, shirts, or anything neon pink and green—after the color scheme of the cover of Doe Maar’s second album, *Skunk*. While such images might seem normal, particularly at that time, for international bands like the Beatles, it was considered impossible that such a craze could

erupt in a modest country like the Netherlands. This was, of course, the biggest craze in Dutch pop music history (Mutsaers, 2001).

Although Doe Maar was sometimes referred to as the “Dutch Beatles of the Eighties” (Van Elderen, 1984: 115), the band had no intention or desire to appeal to the very public it appealed to: teenage audiences (Van Elteren, 1997; Schuyt & Taverne, 2004). Its members were in their late twenties and early thirties, yet Doe Maar’s audience consisted of “kids, mostly 12–14 year olds” (Van Elteren, 1997: 99). In addition, the two lead singers had arguments about the style and sound of the next album. According to interviews with the band members in the *Dit is Alles* documentary, those arguments eventually contributed to the band’s breakup in 1984 (*Dit is Alles*, 2013). After a series of notorious final concert(s), most of the members continued performing as solo artists (Jansz, Vrienten), joined a backing band (Hendriks), or turned to writing scores for film and television (Vrienten).

Then, in November 1999, the four former members of Doe Maar announced that they would reconvene for two reunion concerts and that they have produced a new album, *Klaar* (meaning both *Finished* and *Ready*). The section below describes how this “one-off” reunion spilled into a series of “reunions” that still go on. According to Mutsaers’ (2001) study of the popular Marlboro Flashback Tour’s tribute concert series in the Netherlands, the plans for a reunion had been triggered there. The Flashback Tour was a tribute concert series in which Dutch bands and singers covered a popular international or national artist or band. The Doe Maar tribute was performed by a contemporary popular Nederpop band, Bløf. Mutsaers (2001) claims that, after seeing Bløf perform and realizing how much the Flashback audience liked Doe Maar’s music, the former members of Doe Maar decided to give a reunion concert. The two Doe Maar reunion concerts, held at what was at the time the biggest indoor venue in the Netherlands, were sold out almost immediately. Mutsaers considers this a testimony to “how strong the band was edged into collective memory” and how badly audience members, most of whom had grown from teenagers to early middle age in the meantime, wanted to “relive the feeling of back in the day” (Mutsaers, 2001: 871). Fourteen dates were soon added to the schedule. As many as 175.000 people attended this first series of reunion concerts, and *Klaar* topped the Dutch album charts for five weeks.¹⁵ According to Mutsaers

¹⁵ The album held the number-one position for five weeks in the Dutch charts (visit <http://www.dutchcharts.nl/showitem.asp?interpret=Doe+Maar&titel=Klaar&cat=a>).

(2001: 145), “[i]n the first half of 2000 the Doe Maar reunion overshadowed all other music news. The Reunion grew into monstrous proportions.”

Then, in 2007, the music of Doe Maar was used as inspiration for a musical called *Doe Maar! De Popmusical* (*Doe Maar! The Pop musical*), written by Pieter van de Waterbeemd for the production company V & V Entertainment. The format bears resemblance to that of *Mamma Mia!*, which was based on Abba’s repertoire and was a huge international success at the time. *Doe Maar!* told the story of Dutch society in the 1980s through the subjects and themes of Doe Maar’s songs, for example the “heroin epidemic” in 1980s’ Amsterdam, the exorbitant statistics of unemployment among young people, the Cold War divide, and the nuclear threat (Van Elderen, 1984; Schuyt & Taverne, 2004; Grijp, 2007). Some of Doe Maar’s original members, Jansz and Vrienten, were involved in the creation of the storyline.

A year later, in 2008, allegedly on the basis of the musical’s success, another “one-off” reunion was announced: Doe Maar performed in De Kuip, the biggest outdoor stadium arena in the Netherlands. Just like the concerts in 1999, the shows were almost instantly sold-out. At the end of this tour the band played the Symphonica in Rosso concerts in 2012, a popular format in which well-known international artists perform their repertoires with a symphony orchestra in a big stadium. Then, in 2013, Doe Maar organized the Glad IJs (Thin Ice) tour for small venues and released two EPs (extended plays) for which it had collaborated with Dutch rap artists. In that same year the band actively participated in the *Dit is Alles* BNN documentary. In 2016 it gave three concerts in an indoor arena in Amsterdam and performed at the Pinkpop festival, the biggest outdoor festival in the Netherlands, which the band had also headlined in 1983. Doe Maar has announced that it will play at several festivals in the summer of 2017.

This timeline of Doe Maar’s ongoing reunion is captured in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Doe Maar's recurring reunions

Year	Reunion	Performances	Capacity of Venue
2000	Klaar ("Ready/Done") & try outs	16 & 4	15,000
2007	Musical	64	
2008	De Kuip & diverse try outs	2 & 5	51,000
2012	Symphonica in Rosso	3	34,000
2013	Glad Ijs ("Thin Ice")	8	3,000 to 5,500
2016	Ziggo Dome & Pinkpop	4	17,000/ 60,000
2017	Various festivals	9	

6.2 Repackaging Doe Maar: The recurring reunion

The six concerts, the documentary, the musical, and the planned festival shows are all instances of Doe Maar's recurring reunion. As mentioned before, the recurring reunion partly overlaps with the explorative reunion (Löbert, 2012). But after *Klaar* Doe Maar did not release new material, which is considered the reason for organizing an explorative reunion in the first place (Löbert, 2012). Moreover, Doe Maar returned several times after the first reunion. I use the term *recurring reunion* both to single out the atypical character of these reunions and to capture the repetitive, almost habitual manner in which the band seems to reconvene. The recurring feature of Doe Maar's reunions represents a different kind of repackaging from the ones previously discussed—the one-off reunion (the Big Reunion) and the surviving act (the Backstreet Boys). The recurring reunion can be treated as a hybrid between the explorative reunion and the surviving act. Accordingly, Doe Maar's recurring reunions offer the researcher a new angle on the examination of the theme I set out to explore: how audiences give meaning to repackaged popular music and how these meanings, in turn, feature in audiences' narratives about their life course.

The small body of works that investigate fans' long-term commitment to music, scarce as it is, does show that such commitments relate to reclaiming one's youth (Anderson, 2012), to preserving a particular piece of music history or a particular genre (Bennett, 2006b, 2013b; Van der Hoeven, 2014), or to feeling that music is a source of empowerment across the life course (Cavicchi, 1998; Vroomen, 2004; Stevenson, 2009). But, as I had occasion to point out, having a long-term connection to music may differ from having an opportunity to

“return” to the music (Anderson, 2012; Nolte, 2012)—which is one of the premises of the Doe Maar reunion series. Moreover, the recurring reunion elicits questions about audiences’ engagement with the same music over time. Are these the fans of the Doe Maar that was founded in the eighties, or are they passionate about the current “one-off” performance of the band? Additionally, how exclusive is it to get a chance to see Doe Maar in concert and relive one’s youth (Mutsaers, 2001; Anderson, 2012)? What sort of meaning does one give these elements when one is offered multiple, even continuous occasions to travel back in time through music? How do these elements receive meaning then?

The first reunion concert occurred in 2000 and the latest in 2017; the two are 17 years apart. During this time span a lot must have happened in the fans’ lives. And one of the things that happened is that they were offered multiple occasions to reunite with Doe Maar. This makes the case of Doe Maar doubly interesting to explore in relation to one’s “transformational self-narrative”—that is, in relation to the fans’ moment of “falling ‘head-over-heals’ in love” with Doe Maar (Hills, 2014: 18). Moreover, these fans may have experienced such a moment more than once.

The moment of becoming a fan is challenging to pinpoint. Hills (2014: 15) argues: “it can affectively and psychically emerge, unexpectedly and without desire’s ministrations, and how its ‘aesthetic moment’ can then be (re)lived across the life course.” Alternatively, Duffett (2013b: 154) explains how this moment, in hindsight, is “rather like driving past a roadside spectacle on your own biographic highway.” For the Doe Maar fans, this *reliving of* and *reflecting on* their “becoming-a-fan narrative” might be even more complex than that of the “aging” fans, which was explored in the previous two chapters. Doe Maar was part of the fans’ life in the 1980s, returned to it in 2000, and has since been part of it again. Before discussing this recurrence of the band in relation to the fans’ “biographic highway” (Duffett, 2013b) or life course, it is important to explain the popularity of the band in the 1980s, particularly among children and teenagers.

Although Doe Maar played reggae music, the band’s lyrics were in Dutch. This localized aspect of the genre is of great significance. Up until then, typical Dutch language music had been *de smartlap*, the traditional “tearjerker,” a genre typically classified as lowbrow (Van der Plas, 2003; Schuyt & Taverne, 2004). Doe Maar constituted an antidote to this and, as a young band playing a very “global” music genre, it became a part of youth culture in the Netherlands (Schuyt & Taverne, 2004). Moreover, the Dutch songs were understandable and possibly fostered a strong sense of belonging, because expressing oneself

was not limited by language issues (Bennett, 1999; Grijp, 2007; Van der Hoeven et al., 2016). This was crucial in the Netherlands of the 1980s, where proficiency in English was not as widespread as it is today.

Doe Maar's breakup offered a clear moment of closure to its fans (Harrington, 2013): the band's performers announced their split in national media and held farewell concerts. Although Doe Maar existed for a period of only five years, it probably left a lasting impression on its young audience. People's teenage years often are the first moment to become a fan of something or someone (Cavicchi, 1998; Hills, 2002; Nolte, 2013; Duffett, 2013b). And that fandom can become relevant again at a later point in time (Hills, 2014). Daniel Cavicchi (1998), in his ethnography of Bruce Springsteen fans, explains how the interviewees in his study were stimulated to reflect on their lives through Springsteen's music. He argues: "When fans talk about recognizing themselves in the songs or using the music as a photo album that maps their life histories, they are engaged in an on-going process of self-discovery" (p. 136). Moreover, this process is about "making a personal connection between oneself and something outside oneself" (p. 137). That paradox makes being—or becoming—a fan also an amplified moment of self-consciousness.

However, for the very young fans it can be difficult to reflect deeply on such a moment. Duffett (2013b: 159) describes how becoming a fan of an act feels sometimes "*as if they have found us.*" Interesting about this study of aged Doe Maar fans is that, when Doe Maar returned in 2000, its audiences had developed into adulthood: the 14-year-olds from the 1980s were at that point in time at least 30 years old. Seventeen years and multiple Doe Maar reunions later, these same fans are in their forties, fifties, and sixties. Thus, unlike during their younger years as fans, now they may reflect more seriously or be aware of this becoming-a-fan process upon returning to fandom.

Cavicchi (1998) points out that many of the fans he interviewed had changed in terms of their homes or clothing style, but also in terms of partnerships and hairstyles, during the course of his study. Yet Springsteen was continuously present. Cavicchi explicates: "fandom shapes and maintains a continuous self by acting as a map or overlay with which to mark the passage of time and organize one's perception of oneself in this" (1998: 150). Thus artifacts related to Springsteen, whether they are albums, newspapers clippings, or concert T-shirts, helped fans to construct a sense of self over time and situate themselves in relation to the moments represented by these artifacts.

Returning to Hills' (2014) characterization of fandom as a fluid concept, Cavicchi's fans demonstrate how this fluidity is shaped and maintained. Although they are still fans of that one artist, Cavicchi's Springsteen fans exemplify how they attempt to relive the aesthetic "peak moment" (Green, 2016) of becoming a fan or "seeing Bruce for the first time" by holding onto particular artifacts. In particular, they are holding onto the memories evoked by that artifact or moment. Moreover, McLean (2008) argues that, if a person makes a connection to a particular event in his or her teens, that person is more likely to make such connections across the lifespan: it becomes part of his or her narrative identity (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Bringing the different perspectives of these studies together, the present chapter is premised on the idea that young Doe Maar fans, by becoming fans and by collecting artifacts of the band in their teens, are able to return to such moments in later life—for example, to relive that aesthetic moment of their first time hearing or seeing Doe Maar, or to further shape and maintain a sense of continuity in their personal life. The recurring reunion can offer such opportunities to the adult fans.

Not much has been written about holding on to music or recreating an attachment to music over the life course, or about what happens if this mutual relationship is brought to an end. From research that deals with the endings of TV shows (Williams, 2011; Harrington, 2013), movies (Williams, 2015), or games (Lizardi, 2015), it is known that fans end their fandom and move on, renegotiate the series or movies' role in their life, or reject the text. A stark difference between a TV show and music is that a media text of the former type, which builds on a particular narrative, can (satisfyingly) end that story. But the sudden breakup of a pop act might not enable its fans to find closure. Consequently, this study attempts to establish whether the value of this type of text stays the same over time, especially if people might assign different degrees of relevance to their fandom at different times (Hills, 2005).

Thus, by looking at what meanings this aging cohort of fans gives to the recurring reunions of Doe Maar as well as to the ending or renewing of their own fandom, the study documented in this chapter investigates how these affordances feature in fans' life courses.

6.3 Method

McAdams and McLean, in their work on meaning-making practices related to people's life stories, explain that, "[t]hrough meaning making, people go beyond the plots and event details of their personal stories to articulate what they believe their stories say about who they are" (2013: 236). By this token, inviting fans of Doe Maar to engage in

“autobiographical reasoning” (McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a) has a good change of eliciting accounts of how these people give meaning to their experiences of the recurring reunion, especially in relation to developments in their own lives. As we have seen in previous chapters, these accounts have been labeled “transformational self-narratives” (Hills, 2014: 18) precisely because they highlight such changes. Such stories have been sparsely mapped out through research, but how adult fans interact with repackaged mainstream popular music in later life is still very much in need of being studied and understood.

The study of Doe Maar presented in this chapter draws on an interview study that invited and sought to reconstruct such narratives from 18 (self-identified) former or current fans of Doe Maar. Through an interview, one is able to gain an intimate understanding of a person’s life and world (Hermanowicz, 2006). Moreover, Riessman (2001) considers one’s personal narrative to be a (discursive) unit of meaning making. Thus the narratives elicited through interviewing invite the interviewees to reflect, modify, communicate, trust, adjust, and express their interaction with others and the world (Giddens, 1991). In interviews of this sort, participants produce narratives about themselves that are enmeshed in memories and feelings—in the present case, about Doe Maar. By producing these narratives, they reflect on their own identity and tell us who they are in terms of a narrative biography (Giddens, 1991).

I made use of a semi-structured topic guide (Edwards & Holland, 2013) for my interviews. The topics covered in the interviews were aimed at giving me an understanding of these fans’ past and current attachment to Doe Maar in their everyday life (DeNora, 2000), as well as of how they give meaning to their fan practices. I would start an interview by asking the participant how s/he had come to know Doe Maar. In addition to this “becoming-a-fan story” (Harrington & Bielby, 2010b), I was interested in finding out how the interviewees’ practices reflected their past and current fandom, whom they shared it with, and how the music of Doe Maar related to their other musical preferences, then and now. After these questions, I asked about Doe Maar’s breakup, what they remembered of it, and how they had experienced it. Then I asked about the year 2000 and whether or why they had or had not attended the first reunion concert. I also asked them to talk me through what they had done in their private lives from this period onward. This elicited narratives about work and travel, but also their family situation (e.g., relationships, marriage, divorce, children). I also asked questions designed to explore how this return of Doe Maar featured in transitional

moments of their life course (see Zittoun et al., 2003; Harrington & Bielby, 2010b) and how the recurring reunion concerts were experienced. The semi-structured character of the interview allowed me to deviate from the pre-designed questions and to delve deeper into a topic that the interviewees made relevant.

For many interviewees, there was a difference between their teen and their adult passion for Doe Maar. Taking up this line of inquiry meant discussing things and topics that were not always included on the topic list. For example, one of the interviewees played in a Doe Maar tribute band; another had learned to play guitar because of Doe Maar. These topics were not on the interview guide but are of great significance in the respondents' lives. While talking about the reunion shows, I also asked about their expectations from and experiences of these shows and potential new albums of Doe Maar. What was different today in terms of fan practices and feelings? What does the music mean to them now, and how does it fit their current musical tastes? These last questions proved particularly insightful, because the music of Doe Maar has not changed very much since the 1980s. Except for *Klaar*, the band's fifth studio album, Doe Maar has not released any new work. Hence answers about what Doe Maar means to the respondents in their everyday life this also indicated whether what they cared about most was the Doe Maar they had known in their youth or Doe Maar they had known in their adult lives. The first option suggests that, after all, attendees to these recurring reunion concerts expect the band to stick to its older repertoire and style of performance, because that best captures the band and the music they became attached to.

I selected the group for this study by posting a call for participants in several social media outlets. I used Twitter and Facebook groups related to Doe Maar to post a typeform.¹⁶ The form (created as a small web page) had a picture of Doe Maar on it, and the following text:

Done! [*Klaar*!] That's what they were in 1984, or weren't they? Last summer they returned (again). They played at Pinkpop, and blew the roof off the Ziggo Dome. Were you there in the eighties, or this summer? ... I am Simone Driessen and I study pop music at Erasmus University Rotterdam. For my research I wish to map Dutch music memories. Doe Maar is not to be missed there. Will you help me map these memories?

¹⁶ The typeform can be found at <https://simone134.typeform.com/to/jXjN4F>.

After this call for participation, respondents could sign up by completing the form, which asked for their name, age, and email address. Twenty-one people left an email address, and 14 agreed upon a date for an interview. Of the remaining seven people, four did not reply to emails and three had filled in the form because they were curious about the research project but did not want to be interviewed. In addition to these 14 respondents, most of whom had seen my initial call in one of the Facebook groups, I found the other four via snowball sampling—that is, they were introduced to me by respondents in the group of 14 (on this method of selection, also known as chain/referral sampling, see Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This second part of the process of finding participants also led to the identification of members of an existing social network. The group calls itself the *Mutsen*, literally “the Bonnets,” which triggers associations with a derogatory term for women.¹⁷

In total, 18 self-identified Doe Maar enthusiasts were interviewed; the group was made up of 5 men and 13 women (see Appendix B). In terms of quantity, this group captures only a fraction of the group of Doe Maar fans, and their experiences would not reflect all individual Doe Maar fans’ experiences. But the sample provides qualitative insights that may well be emblematic of how all former and current Doe Maar audiences give meaning to the band and its recurring reunions and insert them into their own life narratives.

The male–female ratio among fans seems to still verify what Van Elderen (1984: 100) remarked about Doe Maar fans back in the 1980s: “to every one boy there are three, often even four girls.” The youngest interviewee was 36 years old; the oldest was 56 years old; and the average age in the sample was 46 years and 9 months. This variety in age span is a telling feature of Doe Maar fans. If a participant is now 50–60 (and over), s/he must have been a teenager in the 1980s; if a participant is now 30–40, s/he must have been a pre-teen back then. All of the respondents live in the Netherlands and have various levels of education. Their occupations range from stay-at-home mother to nurse, administrative assistant, and psychologist. Four participants were single at the time of the interview; three of these were divorced single parents. Another 12 mentioned being in a relationship (married or remarried). Two did not wish to talk about this aspect of their life. Fourteen interviewees had children (one or more). I mention these characteristics here because they usually signpost particular transitions that people have experienced in life.

¹⁷ In Dutch the word *Muts*, applied figuratively to people, qualifies a person as an “old cow,” a silly or dumb woman.

Within the group of 18 interviewees, three identified as former fans. These are Emma, Paul, and Mike. Another group of interviewees who displayed a particular type of identification in the Doe Maar fandom were the Mutsen. This small group of fans found one another via social media in 2008, around the time of the second Doe Maar reunion. Six of the participants in my study—interviewees Marian, Louisa, Wilma, Christina, Agnes, and Yvette—considered themselves members of this group, and their investment in Doe Maar was more visible and present than the others’.

The interviews were held between September and December 2016. Sixteen of the interviews were conducted via telephone, two were held in person. As I had occasion to explain in chapter 3, conducting in-depth interviews via telephone is generally considered something of a challenge—for example because the parties engaged do not see each other’s facial expressions, or because it is more difficult to build up trust over the phone and in the absence of trust respondents feel inclined to give more conventional, socially desirable answers (Block & Erskine, 2012). However, as I explained in chapter 3 in discussing my application of this method, telephone interviews proved to work particularly well in this case, because they granted people anonymity and a flexible interviewing schedule. Marian, one of the participants, preferred a phone interview because she feared the stigma of teenage hysteria attached to Doe Maar fans and did not want to be seen in that light. Another interviewee found it difficult to talk to people in person about her passion for Doe Maar, because in the past she had been bullied about her fandom. She mentioned how such conversations made her nervous. But she felt more in control and more comfortable over the phone. Another interviewee was diagnosed with autism and found that a phone conversation created a calmer and safer environment for him to talk about his life and his passion for Doe Maar’s music.

All interviewees spoke freely on the phone. Wilma recalled events in great detail, as she combined giving the interview with cooking pancakes. Louisa even indicated that she was almost about to cry (this was also noticeable in her voice), and Mike sang and mimicked the melodies of several pieces of Doe Maar’s music he really admired by drumming on a hard surface. To secure the participants’ privacy, their real identities are anonymized and fictional names are used. All interviewees gave consent for their contributions to be used in published academic research. The interviews lasted anything between 30 and 90 minutes and were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The original transcripts include the phonetic transcription of all the speech data (e.g., participatory noises).

After transcription, the interviews were transferred, as usual, to Atlas.ti for content analysis. Then I conducted a thematic qualitative content analysis myself, looking for patterns in the interviewees' material. In order to identify these patterns I followed the same procedure as in the other two case studies: I assigned three levels of codes to the interview transcripts, namely open codes to the smallest units (fragments, sentences, or words), axial codes to the broader categories, and thematic codes to the major themes (see chapter 3, with references). The themes produced in this analysis will be discussed in the next section.

6.4 Results

This section presents the results of the qualitative content analysis conducted for the Doe Maar study. It starts with an overview that builds on three main themes identified through inductive analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). These themes illustrate the main motives for the participants' engagement with Doe Maar and, together, answer my initial research question: *What are the affordances of the recurrent reunions of Doe Maar for its audiences, and what role do these events play in developments in their life course?*

The first theme—reflecting on one's younger self and renegotiating the place of the band in one's life—highlights that the interviewees feel they can now give themselves experiences they could not have had in the past. For example, some of the participants were too young to attend concerts of the band in the 1980s. But their current selves are socially and financially independent, and thus in a stronger position to get involved in such activities than their much younger selves were in their teens, or even than their moderately younger selves were around 30. This theme also stresses how the interviewees go about renegotiating the changing meanings they give the band and its music.

The second theme, reliving 1984, illustrates how the interviewees consider the recurring reunions as moments in which they can return to or reexperience their younger selves or revisit their youth in the 1980s. Doe Maar's repertoire is seen as the instigator of this feeling. Moreover, Doe Maar's recurring reunions allowed the interviewees moments in which they could return to their past, which also means that they can also escape for a brief moment from their current selves and from the lives they are caught in.

The third theme, Doe Maar as coping mechanism, unfolds how the recurring reunions and Doe Maar's music in particular constitute a resource for coping with difficulties in everyday life and for dealing with important transitions. In the narratives about their life course, the interviewees recall happy and difficult times of their youngest selves, younger

selves, and current selves. In these narratives, Doe Maar's music and reunions are a source of moral support throughout age-graded life transitions such as a divorce or the loss of a father.

The quotations given in this case study are representative illustrations of the highlighted themes.¹⁸ I selected both the strongest examples, which illustrate their theme best, and material that introduces deviant cases. This permits us to appreciate the differences that can occur within a theme and to get an idea of its range. I will reflect upon such matters in the analysis that follows.

Some quotations contain italics. These are meant to point out emblematic discursive elements that are probed in the subsequent analysis.

6.4.1 Reflecting on the younger self

Visiting the reunion concerts was for many interviewees a way to make up for the past, in particular by way of being now able, as grown-ups, to do something they could not do before: see Doe Maar in a live concert (which some of them did many times over). These visits prompted them to renegotiate the way in which the band could feature in their current everyday life, which invited a comparison with the past. Almost all interviewees had been in their teens (11 to 13) or even younger (6 to 9) in Doe Maar's heyday. As a child, Joyce (45, stay-at-home mother) was not allowed by her parents to go to a Doe Maar show and found herself now in sympathy with their decision: "I also wouldn't want that for my own daughter. The madness going on at a concert. The fainting girls. The heat." While Joyce's story is exemplary for some of the interviewees, others, such as Nadine (50, nurse), were granted permission, if grudgingly, to go to the final shows in 1984. She remembered: "My mom didn't allow me to go, but my brother bought tickets. And obviously, the concert was great." Viktor (47, laboratory assistant) was only allowed to go when he took his older brother with him. The only interviewee who had been "old enough" to attend such concerts on her own was Christina (56, carer for the disabled), who was in her twenties at the time. She said:

Well, I had a job at the time, and I remember that we wanted to pimp our work place a little. So, we all brought posters of bands to put up on the wall. So, as a

¹⁸ The original interviews were held in Dutch. The quotations selected for this chapter have been translated into English by me.

good Doe Maar fan I brought a poster of Doe Maar. *My boss was very surprised, he was like: Are you feeling all right? Doe Maar, that's for kids.*

She did put up the Doe Maar poster, but also understood that her boss would consider Doe Maar something appropriate for kids rather than for young adults like herself. She went on: “He thought I wasn’t completely sane.” By then the mass hysteria surrounding Doe Maar was contagious (Duffett, 2013b); the band was known throughout the whole of the Netherlands in the early 1980s (Mutsaers, 2001; Van der Plas, 2003). Christina clarified later in her interview that at the later concerts, when the mania was in full swing, she herself felt indeed too old to be there: “*You* didn’t want to be in between *these kids*.” She was also aware of the stigma associated with being a Doe Maar fan; yet still hung the poster in her office and visited a few concerts in her residential area until she felt too old for it. Interestingly, she distances herself from the younger Doe Maar fans by calling them “kids” and by putting her attitude across in the form of an impersonal generalization: she doesn’t say in the first person “I didn’t want to be in between *these kids*.” Her reflection is a typical reaction to a hyped event and perhaps incorporates the realization that older people like her boss found Doe Maar not appropriate for a twenty-something like herself.

Richard, a 51-year-old nurse and drummer in a Doe Maar tribute band, even let two Doe Maar LPs (long-playing albums) he bought get gift-wrapped in the shop. He thought that this way the record clerk would be tricked into thinking the he bought the LPs for someone else, not wanting to admit that they were actually a personal purchase. Duffett (2013b: 158) observes that how fandom “seems to end through pressures such as gender ideals or notions of appropriate taste.” Such pressures seem to be at play in the narratives of Christina and Richard too. But the Doe Maar fandom eventually ended because the band itself decided to quit.

After an absence of 16 years, Doe Maar announced a reunion. For the child fans of the old days, who had now grown into young adults, this offered an opportunity to see Doe Maar in concert either at last or again. Dennis (36, carer for the disabled) said that he considered the reunion as a moment of “nostalgia... *revert to the past*, but also just the chance to *finally see what you’ve witnessed on these videos* [old concert tapes, SD] [...] Even to get a glimpse of how it must have been back in the day.” Dennis had been too young to see Doe Maar live in the eighties. Accordingly, he reflects on the old videos that he had of the band, which—if he now plays these tapes—are nostalgic to him. The concert is, for him, a moment

in which he would finally experience directly what he saw on these tapes. In similar fashion, Karin (44, psychologist) mentions that she considered the reunion a party: “I did not see it coming that they were coming back. But it was like, ‘Oh yes!’ Finally *I get an opportunity to see* as many concerts as possible.” In reconstructing this moment of the reunion and reflecting on why she visits the reunions, Karin talks in the present tense, as if she were looking at that former, younger self “live” (note the emphasis). And she explains:

As a kid, you could sing all songs from A to Z. Then you had some moments in between, when you put a cd on, in the car or whatever. However, at a certain point, they come back and *you’re still able to sing along* with every word. [...] *Everything is still in your system*. Moreover, that’s so fun about a concert. That you’re there and think *I still know these songs*. *They’re still a part of me*.

Here Karin is integrating this reconstructed past into her current life. She refers to herself as a young child (“a kid”) and how Doe Maar held significance then. Before this, she pointed to her memory of Doe Maar’s first reunion by stating that she “finally gets an opportunity,” as if she could actively put herself in that position again. Through this autobiographical reasoning she gets an opportunity to develop and understanding of the past and the current “me,” of which Doe Maar is still a part (McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a). Moreover, her quotation illustrates how Doe Maar has been part of her life course thus far. Albeit it has been many years since she first heard Doe Maar’s songs, she says clearly that she “still” considers them part of her system, “still” part of herself. This implies that the band has never completely left her system; feelings and memories about it are still around, and they are stirred by the new wave of reunions. For Karin and Dennis, the return of Doe Maar offered (a) a chance to rediscover the band in a live setting and (b) the realization that the band was still part of their life narratives.

For other respondents, namely Emma, Paul, and Mike, the reunion concert was a moment to remember Doe Maar and why they had once liked the band. Mike (47, unemployed) said he had mostly appreciated the difficult musical rhythms Doe Maar used, Emma (46, designer) did not recall the band’s split, and Paul (48, IT-assistant) stated that he musically considered Doe Maar a good band but had moved on to other bands. For these interviewees, the meanings that their younger, teen selves gave to the band did not resurface when Doe Maar reunited in 2000 or thereafter. They remembered Doe Maar and

acknowledged that they had found it a good band, but the recurring reunions (or Doe Maar's music) no longer played a role in their current selves' lives.

Marian (47, administrative assistant) and Louisa (46, project coordinator), two self-identified members of the Mutsen group, indicated how their younger selves had been devastated when Doe Maar split. The reunions offered an opportunity to process that sadness and to return to the fandom. Marian recalled how she had been unable to grasp the announcement of Doe Maar's reunion in 2000: "I walked around like a zombie for two weeks," with which she wanted to express her confusion about the situation at hand. Moreover, she also criticized the reunion: "All of a sudden Doe Maar was a hot topic again, and *I didn't get that, because in the years before the reunion I had never met anyone who liked Doe Maar.*" By making this difference, Marian separates genuine fans from the fans who join on the spur of the moment (Cavicchi, 1998). Of course, she places herself among the "real" fans.

This rediscovered and reassessed relevance of Doe Maar, and the new financial and social independence of the interviewees (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012), spurred some of them to increase their fandom and their commitment to the band. Yvette, the 48-year-old owner of a holiday park, clarified: "Yeah, I just go each time they return, because, well, *I might have to wait a whole time before they come back again.*" For fear that there may not be a next show, this interviewee points out that she visits as many shows as possible; she does not want to miss out on them, or perhaps lose Doe Maar again from her life. Yvette, too, is a self-identified member of the Mutsen. When I asked her why she aims to visit as many concerts as possible, she explained that she finds it appealing to visit so many reunions because they give her a positive feeling: "it's an intense moment of enjoyment [...] *you feel young again, not that I feel like a teenager again, but well...* it's a positive energy I take from it." Here "current-self Yvette" seems to find herself feeling like "younger-self Yvette," and this brings her intense joy. This suggests that Yvette, by visiting the reunions, has found a "new" position for the band and their music in her current life. She is able to keep Doe Maar as an ongoing presence, and thus a means to unearth and bring back from time to time the feeling of being young again.

Marian mentioned in similar fashion that she visits so many concerts because "they [the reunions, SD] make me intensely happy." Yvette said that the reunion concerts are better fun than the concerts in the heydays, because everybody has grown up, which makes the concert less of a hectic experience. Moreover, she observed:

Now there's a bit more space to move and dance, and sing along. Consequently, *you're building up friendships with the people who also visit the shows.* Especially since the *Glad Ijs* tour it has grown more intense, and more fun. Not just because *you now have a chance to actually meet the band*, but also that *it creates a connection with other fans.*

However, this active participation in a reunion that recurs on multiple evenings in multiple places is financially somewhat challenging. Marian openly declared:

It's a big expense. But these are things, *it just has to.* Fortunately, I don't have a husband anymore, just two kids, so yes, I'm boss over my own wallet, thus *accountable to myself and no one else.* *If I make sure the kids have dinner each night, no one can tell me what to do. That's a freedom I now have,* also in comparison to those concerts in 2000, *because then we really had marital discussion about it [...]* Now it's like "kids, I'm off."

Here Marian indicates how, for her "younger self" in 2000, the concerts were a big expense, a theme that also caused marital frictions when still married. However, due to her newfound social and financial independence ("accountable to myself"), she is now able to enjoy what she refers to as the freedom to engage in multiple reunions. Although this does not directly indicate how she gives meanings to Doe Maar's recurring reunions in a discursive meaning-making way, it does demonstrate her vastly expressive level of commitment and loyalty to the band. Moreover, it shows how she manages to keep Doe Maar a part of her life course, no matter what transitions she goes through and what obstacles she needs to overcome.

6.4.2 Reliving the 1980s

Thus far the material has illustrated that, for a number of interviewees, the recurring reunions were particularly meaningful personally, as a means for them to reflect on their very young selves and to let Doe Maar feature anew in their lives. But others visited the reunions in order to relive or reexperience the decade of the eighties. This was, specifically, a nostalgic trip to their youth, which allowed them most of all to recall a happy feeling. Some of the fans anticipated this; they expected the reunion concerts to have this effect. Richard remembered how he visited different Doe Maar reunions, including the Symphonica in Rosso concerts (where the band played with a live symphonic orchestra) and the reunion gigs in 2016.

However, he indicated he preferred concerts of the latter kind: “Just *the more pure Doe Maar*. That I liked best.” Likewise, Dennis stated: “I just wanted to hear Doe Maar, nothing else. Because *you’re used to them that way*.” Expressions like “pure” Doe Maar and “nothing else,” then, refer in these situations to the band that performs its old, familiar repertoire.

Only three of the participants in this study indicated that they were actually happy with the new songs when Doe Maar released *Klaar* in 2000. The first one, Paul, described how he recalled that moment: “When that album was released it was confirmed what I had known for years, that they were very special musicians, because that album was just completely Doe Maar, but it had grown so much in time.” However, Paul said that after the concert series in 2000 he did not return to other Doe Maar reunions, because they had not released more new work and he had grown into liking new, progressive artists such as Prince and David Bowie.

Roxy (45, archivist), was the second interviewee who appreciated the new album; and she expressed a wish that Doe Maar released more new albums: “I also really like the songs of *Klaar*. But it’s *the big audience that still wants to hear those famous songs* from the eighties.” While making this statement, Roxy makes the point that the (commercially interesting) audience the band serves is actually not interested in hearing how the band developed over time. She philosophizes over the idea that the “big audience”—and here she implies that these are not genuine fans like her—visits the reunion concerts in order to hear the famous songs. She seems to suggest that, in her view, this is why Doe Maar is not producing or performing new songs—or at least more recent ones, like those of *Klaar* for example. Wendy (47, nurse) prefers the old Doe Maar repertoire, but this did not stop her from making a similar comment: “the reunion concerts are only like once per two years, so I don’t think it’s that bad if they then play the same songs. These are *the songs people want to hear and sing along*.” According to Wendy, the fact that the concerts are reunions and therefore take place only occasionally justifies the band’s decision to play their “same songs.”

The third participant in this subgroup, Karin, explains why she dislikes the fact that Doe Maar did not produce more new material: “I still like those lyrics, but eeah... [...] *those lyrics have not really grown along with you*. With others artists I do have that sometimes.” Here Karin seems to assign importance to being able to age along with the music. She indicated in her interview that she could find that feeling in Bruce Springsteen’s music. These three interviewees thus seem to resent the fact that the music does not “grow” or age along with them.

However, other interviewees in this study's sample indicated that they found the recurring reunions meaningful precisely because they afforded them the possibility to reexperience the 1980s. In contrast to Paul's, Roxy's, and Karin's dislike of the non-progressive character of Doe Maar's music, these interviewees found the continuation of the old meaningful. What they wanted to see at reunions was the Doe Maar they became passionate about in the 1980s (Hills, 2014). Anne explained:

I am glad they mostly play old songs. And the last time [2016, SD] it was only old [more unfamiliar, SD] songs. That I enjoy even more. *Because that was the Doe Maar you became a fan of.* Not the Doe Maar they are now.

In her reflection on the last concert in 2016, Anne points out that she prefers the *continuation* of the old, even the more unfamiliar of the older songs. The Doe Maar that performed these songs is the one that she became a fan of—which implies that, in her view, the “reunited” Doe Maar needs to be a version of that Doe Maar and should not perform new work. In similar fashion, Nadine (50, nurse) declared: “I only want to hear Doe Maar, *I don't want any other music. That is not what I'm there for.* Then I could have just visited a concert of Kenny. If I had wanted to hear that.” Nadine refers to a guest performance by rapper Kenny B, who was invited by Doe Maar to join in on their performance for a few songs. However, Nadine did not appreciate this, as her response shows: she visited the reunion to see Doe Maar, and only Doe Maar.

As illustrated in the previous section, the recurring reunions prompted the interviewees to reflect on their younger selves: their teen years, their childhood. But, whereas for those participants that reflection often was a first step in actively renegotiating and reassessing the position of Doe Maar in their lives, for the ones discussed here the reunions offered a more general evocation of the 1980s.

These interviewees saw remembering the 1980s through Doe Maar's reunions as a positive affordance of these recurring events. Agnes (48, personal healthcare assistant) spoke of how the reunions remind her of “[t]he music of back then... and the memories of those days. *Because now you're a mom, you have a job. And now, those feelings of being that little girl surface.* So yeah, I enjoy jumping around [at the concerts].” Agnes said that “now,” while she is at the concerts, the feelings of her “being a young girl” again surface. This suggests that she experiences the reunion as a trip back in time—a time in which she did not yet have

the duties of being a mother or the responsibilities of a job. Perhaps the reunions are occasions for her to take a break from these obligations. Viktor shared this sentiment:

The moment you're there, *you also want to regain that old feeling from the past* somehow. [...] ... for a large part it [the music,] is indeed connected *to how I developed over time*. And yeah, you just have good memories of that time. It's like... like *reminiscing about the past, in a bar, with a few old mates*. Sort of... sort of that feeling.

Here Viktor makes it very clear that he visits the reunions in order to regain “old feelings” from the past; and he does so because he considers the music to be connected to how he developed in life. Moreover, that development was an experience he has good memories of, so he enjoys reflecting on it. It is visible in Viktor's response that he makes sense of the music as something anchored in his past, and also as something woven into his narrative biography (see Giddens, 1991). For him, the feeling evoked at the reunions seems less of an escape from current duties than nostalgia for his personal past (he casually recollects sitting “in a bar, with old friends”).

This nostalgia was also present in Joyce's narrative when she reflected upon Doe Maar playing only its familiar repertoire:

JOYCE *They have so much own work, that I don't think it's necessary [to make new songs]. [...] To me it's more about that nostalgia, I think... at least for me. And the songs [of Klaar] are nice, but it's the older that I like best.*

SD *And what does that nostalgia mean to you?*

JOYCE *... just to go back to the time when you were young (laughs).*

Joyce's (and also Viktor's) considerations about nostalgia in the context of going back to the time when she was young and became a fan of Doe Maar lends strong support to Anderson's (2012: 261) qualification of such a return as a “nostalgic identification with their teen selves.” The recurring reunion takes these people back in time for the duration of the concert and allows them to reflect on that period in their lives. They do not necessarily compare their current situation with that of the past and reassess one in the light of the other, as do the respondents discussed in the first section of this analysis. Far from renegotiating their younger selves' memories, these interviewees wish to step back into the past, if only for one evening.

In addition to this gamut of personal reflections, four interviewees also claimed that the recurring reunions changed their understanding of Dutch society in the 1980s.¹⁹ One of the band's political songs, "De Bom" ("The Bomb"), which was written in reaction against the American government's idea of planting cruise missiles in the Netherlands, became a number-one hit single. This political edge was pronounced in Anne's, Viktor's, and Paul's interviews, but the most emblematic recollection was Richard's:

In the beginning of the eighties, we were happy children, but there was always this atmosphere of protest in the air. No against the Atom Bomb, Nuclear Energy [...] There were many squatters, riots in Amsterdam for the housing market, those kind of things. *There was a lot of commotion in the country, and that resonated in their lyrics.*

Richard points to various uproars that happened in the Netherlands and to the fact that the music is reminiscent of these events. Yet he admits that these understandings came to him in hindsight: "I did not think at the time 'what a special time I live in as an adolescent.' But I do know what kept people occupied." Moreover, he reflected:

Nowadays, people can Google you know... my kids, if they need stuff for school, they Google it. [...] But back then, if something was said, you took it for granted. ... You could go to the library, but the books there were ten years old. That didn't help much.

Due to listening to the music in current times, Richard is able to see what happened in the decade of the 1980s, or what was at stake. His younger self did not grasp the meaning of the lyrics then, but his current self does. And this makes the music "timeless" for him, because now he can see that the themes Doe Maar sang about "still are relevant in today's world." Although such reflections do not show directly how the interviewees give meaning to the recurring reunions music-wise, they do reveal an awareness (if in hindsight) of how the music fitted into Dutch society at large. Moreover, it was important to these few interviewees to bring up political memories in their interviews. This would imply that reliving one's youth

¹⁹ It is a given that some Doe Maar songs were politically oriented (Van der Plas, 2003), which most interviewees acknowledged but did not discuss in any detail.

through a recurring reunion is not just a matter of personal reflection but also a social process that connects individuals to the collective memories of a given era.

6.4.3 Doe Maar as a coping mechanism

All interviewees were asked what the music of Doe Maar currently meant to them. This question invited them to reflect on what the band had meant to them in their teens as well. As previously illustrated, these participants treated the recurring reunions as occasions to reassess the role of the band in their lives insofar as it made them reflect on their younger selves and offered them a temporary escape (Dyer, 2002) from the present. Another way in which Doe Maar's music appeared to be meaningful to its fans was by giving them a mechanism for coping in difficult situations.

To understand the value of this coping mechanism, it is necessary to reconstruct the role of Doe Maar and its music in the fans' narratives about their life course. Doe Maar is a meaningful tool not only for the current self, although the current self reflects more strongly on this value because it has more life experiences to reflect on. Doe Maar's music has been a part of these interviewees' life-course narrative since they were children or adolescents. However, when the respondents in this study reflected on how the meanings they bestowed on to the band and its music feature in narratives about their life course, their most emblematic examples were related to Doe Maar's first reunions in 2000 and 2008. Thereafter, the band reconvened at shorter intervals (2012, 2013, 2016, 2017). Louisa reflected on the first reunion as follows:

I was 29 or 30, and my life was upside down. I had just become a mom, and unfortunately, the relationship with the child's father had fallen apart. I was actually really busy with my own life. [...] It was fun to see them again, but I had things that were more important on my mind.

Due to certain transitions in her life (motherhood, broken relationship), being a fan of Doe Maar became less relevant for Louisa. Those transformative events compelled her to renegotiate her position as a fan. She did not reject Doe Maar but spent less time on it and assigned it less importance: the events in her own life now came first. In her teens she had considered Doe Maar an additional form of support, which explained to her how the world functioned. Strikingly, her answer implies that the situation had changed by the time of the

first reunion: she did not feel this support during her own life transitions in this phase of her life.

On the contrary, for Marian, who had said that she “bawled my eyes out” when Doe Maar split, having gone through certain life transitions added an extra dimension to the way the music fitted in and changed her narrative biography (see Giddens, 1991). In particular the second Doe Maar reunion, in 2008, came for Marian at a turning point in her life. She remembered:

In 2008, I just got divorced, was in a complete slump, emotionally, financially, *my whole life was one big drama. Doe Maar was a little bright light in that.* That was so incredibly awesome, that in the most difficult time of my life they decided to get back on stage. That was *a great gift.* [...] The songs, you always find a way to relate them to your own life. You’ll always feel what they’ll do for you. *My life... I’m 47 now, and it’s filled with quotes of Doe Maar, and Doe Maar.* Every situation you find yourself in, there’s a Doe Maar song that fits or helps you with that situation.

For Marian, unlike for Louisa, the music grew to acquire a more relevant or more prominent position when she was going through turmoil in the course of her life. The music, in her own words, “was a little bright light,” “a gift” amid those transformative events. Doe Maar, through its music and lyrics, gave her a way to make sense of these emotions and situations (see Grossberg, 1992a). Marian picked up her fandom again. Moreover, she renegotiated the meaning that the lyrics of Doe Maar held for her: Marian said that she found the songs capable of being related to all possible situations in her life, big and small. Her autobiographical reasoning highlights how the band and its music relates to the transitions she underwent and why they continues to fit into her “current self’s life” as a 47-year-old. Moreover, Marian’s narrative shows traces of what Anderson found in her study of adult Duran Duran fans when these renewed their dedication to the band: that the fans “reassess themselves and the progress they have made in their lives up to that point” (Anderson, 2012: 258).

Such a moment of reassessing progress—or perhaps life in general—is extremely well captured in Louisa’s account of the reunion show she visited in the summer of 2016. Previously in the interview, when talking about how Doe Maar’s break-up affected her, Louisa had indicated that her “very young self” considered Doe Maar to function for her as

an extra pair of parents, “because in their songs they also explained how the world functioned. How to survive on your own, that you need to think about things, and pay close attention. *I did feel a little left behind.*” As a young teen, she felt left behind when Doe Maar, that great parental figure, split up. However, in 2016 Louisa actually had just lost her father. She recalled how Doe Maar had performed the song “Pa (Dad)”:

LOUISA A few months ago, I lost my dad. And then, they went on stage again. That was a real gift, but also that they were there for the last night. That was super emotional. I was afraid that they would quit again too. That was intense, that last concert I really went from laughter to crying, to laughter, to crying. It was as if I said goodbye to more than that.

SD How do you mean, more than that?

LOUISA Well... Your youth. Through the loss of my father, I lost a piece of my youth... A piece of your youth that was always around is gone, and they [Doe Maar] always brought that feeling back.

Her account unfolds how she negotiates both the loss of her father and the potential loss of the band in connection to losing a part of her youth. Through the passing of her dad she lost a piece of her childhood; and her narrative implies that, if Doe Maar were to quit, she would lose still more of that youthful identity. The full force of the transitional experience of losing her father, which is closely connected to facing one’s own mortality, hit her in a concert setting: there, upon hearing a song at the reunion, she “went from laughter to crying to laughter.” This kind of swing between contrasting feelings and states of mind suggests that Louisa was trying to process these emotions, particularly because she points out how the concert “was saying goodbye to more than that.” Perhaps Louisa feared losing another important entity that offered help and security in her life. Here the reunion—itself a transitional moment—served as a sort of bubble from the security of which one could cope with these uncertainties (on this use, see Giddens, 1991). The music of Doe Maar afforded her a unique space: it helped her overcome these life transitions and laugh, but also challenged her and made her cry about them.

Likewise, Doe Maar’s recurring reunions made Anne reflect on situations she had been through in life:

I always found “Alles Gaat Voorbij” (“Everything Passes”) a very beautiful song,

but if I hear it now, I feel really badly, because then I start to think “oh, my mom has died,” and then you read or see the song entirely different. If you hear that song you have a certain vision of it, and that makes it different. If you hear an easy song like “32 jaar” that you’ll just sing along. But “Alles Gaat Voorbij,” yeah, it’s a pretty dark song. And you’ll listen to it differently now. I easily feel touched by something like that.

Anne’s response demonstrates how the meaning of this particular song changed for her, now that she has grown older and something in her life actually “passed.” The song is about time passing by, and thus running out; and it gained a new meaning once Anne had to deal with an event such as the death of her mother, of which she is now reminded upon hearing the song.

Christina’s response is somewhat different. She finds comfort in the song “Tijd Genoeg” (“Enough Time”):

I found that such a beautiful song. Like, there is always something better, more beautiful, that will last and is prettier anyway. [...] It’s also my personality, that everything will be all right, no matter how bad it is, or in whatever way possible, and no matter how long you need to wait for it, it always will be fine.

For Christina, the song did not change meaning over the years. She connects it even to her personality: she regards it as an extension of herself—or perhaps this is a part of the band’s music that she aims to project onto her everyday life (Sandvoss, 2005). Christina also mentions that her inclusion in the Mutsen, who found each other via these recurring reunions, formed an important part of her fan experience. Moreover, she found their very existence to be supportive:

In less good phases in my life, *it is also an escape I think*. These moments, when I’m there [at a reunion] I can forget everything. It has been also, because at a point my mother became very ill, and she passed away six months later. [...] Then you’re also in touch with these people, *and they’re very accessible and supportive. And yeah, that offers an escape out of that darker side of life.*

For Christina, then, this is not just about Doe Maar or the recurring reunions; it is also about the Mutsen, whom she considers supportive, while the music and the concerts offer an escape

from her everyday sorrows. Both the reunion shows and the Mutsen helped her cope with her mother's situation.

Dennis, the youngest interviewee in the sample, said: "Until you're forty, you can easily learn some astute life lessons from the songs from Doe Maar." He clarified:

*I've been married for 10 years, and that has its ups and downs, like any other marriage. And, a song like "Is Dit Alles?" ("Is This It?") that then *all of a sudden becomes meaningful*. I think that that is the force [...] *because you're now growing to that age that they had when they wrote the song, and that enables you to recognize things*. [...] That song, about a couple that's been together for such a long time and doesn't know what to do. Before you're in such a situation, you can't think about something like that unless you've been together for ten years.*

Here Dennis demonstrates how one particular song can give him the belief that he understands Doe Maar better now as an adult. Perhaps as a combined result of his younger age and the recurring reunions, he does feel that he has grown older with the band. He even remarks that he is able to recognize elements in their songs just because he has reached a particular age and has undergone the transitions that those elements presuppose. He almost seems to turn to Doe Maar for advice. Dennis' reflection calls to mind Stevenson's (2009) study on David Bowie fans, which described how male fans considered Bowie a cultural resource, which they could interpret in accordance with the transitions they underwent and the phase they reached in life. In Louisa's, Christina's, and Dennis' narrative biographies, Doe Maar acts as a constant. The band is always around due to its recurring reunions, and it is there to either comfort or challenge them. Because it is such a familiar and deeply interwoven element in their lives, it offers them tools, whether in the form of a song or a reunion, to cope with any particular situation they find themselves in.

Resonating with Stevenson's (2009) findings on long-term Bowie fans who see him as a cultural resource, Marian's account of how the band is meaningful to her in adult life gives us insight into another important aspect: how this potential of music is present in a *reunited* band. Marian explains:

No matter what happens in my life, good, bad, nice, sad, it doesn't matter. Doe Maar is this perpetual element in my life... For every situation you end up in, there is a song, or a piece of a song, a lyric or what not, that matches that

[situation], or that you take strength from, or I don't know. But that's so incredibly awesome. *My life is intertwined with Doe Maar. Ever since I was 12, so I almost don't know any better.*

What Marian expresses here is the feeling that Doe Maar is a continuous presence and cultural resource for her. Because of the strong connection she formed with the band in her teens and its multiple recurrences in her adult life, she considers Doe Maar an anchor in her life. This passage comes from a different part of her interview, and yet it sounds as if it were continuous with the one quoted before, where she talks about her life in 2008. Marian clearly feels the music as a perpetual force. Even if Doe Maar was not a continuous presence, she experiences it as a continuous element in her narrative biography.

It is clear that the band remained very meaningful for the interviewees. But they are confronted sometimes by people who do not understand the phenomenon of Doe Maar fandom and why one still feels so enthusiastically about a band from the 1980s. Anne commented: "You either understand or you don't. I have a friend who, like me, loves music. It is him who I take along to Doe Maar, because *he just gets it*." She attributes her continuing passion for Doe Maar to love for this music. Sharing it with this friend who "gets it" implies that other people do not ("you either understand or you don't"). Anne confesses: "I can sit down at night, put my headphones on, and just listen to music from the eighties." Yvette, too, tried to explain the complex feeling of passion for the music in the context of others' incomprehension—which fans seem to encounter a lot:

It's like magic. But we obviously talked about this with different people [of] our age, about "I don't get what Doe Maar means to you." But Doe Maar just makes me merry, happy, and content [...] *those memories have only become better in the past few years due to the reunions.*

When I broached with the respondents the topic of the comments they received about being adult fans of Doe Maar, Louisa responded: "There's always a bit of sniggering, as in '... you're going again? You've already seen that!' But then I ask them, *do you play a record only once?*." By making this comparison between going repeatedly to a concert and playing a record more than once, Louisa implies that going to a concert is analogous to playing a record. But this analogy leaves out important differences; for example, she does not mention the costs of such visits, or how they may affect her work life. Louisa philosophizes:

It's a *sense of happiness*. Doe Maar is just... Every Dutch person knows Doe Maar. It's just public, how do you call it, *cultural heritage so to speak*. And I have experienced it intensely, and that's fun. It's a part of Dutch history, pop music history. Later, when I'm a grandma, in an elderly home, *I can boast about that*.

Louisa gives it as a truism that Doe Maar played a great role in the history of Dutch popular music; she even presents it as a part of Dutch cultural heritage—and she, in turn, was part of the whole phenomenon—she was there, witnessed it. This reaction reveals how proud she is of the band. Maybe there is here an element of compensation: one could try to overcome the stigma of being associated with a band for screaming kids by stating that that band has grown into something so important that it's now “heritage.” In any case Louisa's addition about being a grandma who boasts about Doe Maar suggests that she is planning to keep the music in her life-course narrative, for her “future self.”

6.5 Conclusion and discussion

This chapter showed what the recurrent reunions of Doe Maar mean to current and former fans of the band, in relation to developments in their life course.

Three themes prevail in my respondents' reflections on the role of the recurring reunions in their lives. Overall, the interviewees' narratives move between reconstructing their teenage self (1979–1984), their (reclaimed) younger self (2000, 2008, 2012, 2013) and their (reclaimed) current self (2016) with regard to Doe Maar's music, breakup, and concerts—both the original ones in the 1980s and those of the recurring reunions (Grossberg, 1992b; McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a; Anderson, 2012; Hills, 2014).

First, for some of the interviewees, the recurring reunions offered an opportunity (a) to reflect on their very young selves' engagement with the band and its music and (b) to renegotiate the kind of place that the reunited band could take in their everyday lives. Their current selves displayed an eagerness to visit as many reunions as their financial and social situation, their family ties, and their work duties would allow. This is no doubt because participants in this subgroup gained much from these reflections in terms of giving meaning to events in their lives, reassessing how their lives evolved, and getting a unified and richer picture of its direction (for literature on all these trends, see Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991; McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010b).

Second, other participants felt that a Doe Maar reunion was a kind of vehicle that transported them back in time; and this how they found the recurring reunions to be meaningful to them. Participants in this category visit the recurring reunions simply because they want to relive the 1980s. They are nostalgic about their teenage selves, the feelings of happiness that surrounded the 1980s for them, and the carefree time of childhood. The recurring reunion offers an entertaining escape, a brief moment in which they can let go of everyday adult duties and responsibilities and just dance and sing along, as they were doing in the 1980s. Moreover, this group of interviewees, when visiting the concert, want to see the “pure” Doe Maar; they have no taste for additional guest performances or new music. Here one should remember that an explorative reunion is held in order to see whether the old repertoire can regain the hearts of its (former) audience (Löbert, 2012). If Doe Maar’s reunions have remained in this particular phase, this may be because keeping things as they were worked out very well for this band: according to 15 interviewees in this study, this is what the audience wants to see. It must be said, however, not all the fans were pleased with the fact that Doe Maar did not renew its music: some did not visit the reunions for this reason.

Thirdly, the participants indicated that the recurring reunion, together with Doe Maar’s old repertoire, provided comfort and gave them a resource for coping with all kinds of difficulties in life, from trivial upsets to traumatic events and turning points. The interviewees in this category felt for instance that they could now better understand certain songs because they lived or witnessed the situations described in those songs. They connected the events in these songs to events in their everyday life—which is recorded in literature elsewhere (see Giddens, 1991; McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010a; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Some participants explained very clearly how they can now put such songs into perspective on the basis of their own life experiences (Stevenson, 2009; Lavin, 2015). Others showed why this whole process enables Doe Maar’s music to function for them as a bubble of security and comfort. And, remarkably, this music was not only an anchor in their lives, but a presence that was experienced as constant and continuous, although the band had disappeared and only reconvened irregularly over the past 17 years.

Even if the recurring reunion is an occasional event that presents its audience with multiple moments to reconnect with or disconnect from Doe Maar, the findings of this study align with those of previous studies (Cavicchi, 1998; Stevenson, 2009; Anderson, 2012; Lavin, 2015), which discuss how adult fans maintain a *long-term* relationship with their object of fandom. Perhaps this lack of a marked boundary between long-term fandom and

the fandom around Doe Maar can be ascribed to the long period over which Doe Maar's reconvened (17 years). Whatever its cause, the longevity of this fandom is exceptional; and it made it possible for the interviewees to renegotiate, perhaps even reject, their attachment to Doe Maar over and over (see also Harrington, 2013; Hills, 2014; Williams, 2015).

The sample of former fans of Doe Maar was small in this study (three); this theme would be interesting to explore further. One of the three did not care much about Doe Maar after its return in 2000 and the mania that accompanied that first reunion; two of them did visit the first reunion, but all three indicated that they had moved away from Doe Maar because the band did not produce any new music. This absence of renewal or novelty played an important part in the renegotiation of one's fandom. Because Doe Maar had featured so strongly in their youthful lives, most fans did decide to return to the recurring reunions. But the lack of new songs deserves further investigation. Is this the main reason why more of those who are no longer fans have come to dislike a band? The element of growing older together is important (Lavin, 2015; Shuker, 2016), but if this kind of aging and a deeper understanding of the lyrics and songs are so strongly associated for some interviewees, then why not also for others?

The very active Doe Maar fans—the Mutsen—interviewed for this study gave a clear illustration of the practices they currently engage in. But these current practices differ from those of the past. It would be interesting for future studies to sketch how tangible and intangible artifacts feature in renegotiating one's position as a fan (Cavicchi, 1998). Do people still feel a need to express their fandom by collecting snippets or rare recordings? How has the habit of collecting changed over time between the teenage self and the adult self?

7. General Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore what the affordances of repackaged popular music from the past are, and how they feature in audiences' reflections on different stages and transitions in their life course. In other words, I studied how music from the past, once repackaged or reoffered to audiences in several different modes, plays a role in audiences' current, everyday life. I sought to illustrate what exactly the different types of this renewed music from the past afford—what affordances they have for their audiences—and how the meanings with which they are invested relate to the specific—emotional, generational, socioeconomic—position of audience members in their life course. By examining three different settings of repackaged mainstream music—a one-off reunion, a surviving pop act, and a recurring reunion—I set out to demonstrate that commercial mainstream pop music is a very serious meaning-making resource for audiences across their life course.

In the remainder of this chapter I intend in the first place to summarize the results of my three case studies in order to map out the whole area of the different modes in which audiences understand repackaged mainstream popular music. The main theme here is how the meaning-making process relates to the construction of narratives about the life course. I also consider these findings in the light of previous work on the wider subject of the role and place of popular music in everyday life. One of my aims here is to highlight how my thesis contributes to a more specialist area: the understanding of *fan audiences'* attitudes to popular music and the function of *repackaged* popular music in the life course. I also propose to reflect on the limitations of my research and on themes and directions it opens for future investigations. Finally, I argue that the results of this study are relevant not only descriptively, for understanding these practices, but also for policies about the music industry and the media industry at large. I will do this by discussing the significance of contemporary repackaging practices in the Netherlands that creatively appropriate and reoffer popular music as part of their public service remit.

7.1 Scientific contribution: Taking repackaged music seriously

This dissertation endeavored to examine how the affordances of reunited and surviving pop acts that constituted mainstream popular music at some point in the past relate to audiences' life course and to their perceptions and narratives about it. The results indicate that this kind

of music is to be taken seriously, for it can hold important values and functions throughout a person's life.

Chapter 4 was concerned with the Big Reunion, a TV and concert series in which former British pop acts were reunited, and explored the values attached to this particular mode of repackaging music from the past. With the help of analyses of forum messages and interviews conducted on the spot with visitors of the program's Christmas Party Tour, I discovered three different readings of the Big Reunion as a cross-media text. (1) Because the original audiences of teenager fans have reached adulthood, they have now a nostalgic attitude to the Big Reunion's performing acts; they look back at them as reminders of their own childhood and see them in a positive light. (2) But the adult eye also conjures an ironic reading of the event, turning especially the viewers of the two TV series into "ironic spectators" (see Chouliaraki, 2013) and ironic listeners (see Bennett, 2013a). The results yielded by this second reading of the repackaged phenomenon converge particularly well with those of Ien Ang's (1985) study of the ironic consumption of the American soap opera *Dallas*. Ang found that irony is the product of a pendular movement between identification with and distancing from a media text. In the case of the Big Reunion, today's grown-up audiences still enjoy (sometimes covertly) the music of acts like 5ive, Atomic Kitten and Blue, although they consider it qualitatively dubious. Their identification with the participating acts can take the form of empathy with the hardships faced by the performers on the road to renewed stardom. For example, the TV series emphasized how the performers needed to get back into shape or to be able to provide a financially secure future for their kids. Identification can also emerge from the simple process of aging alongside each other: performers and audiences are now adults with similar duties and responsibilities in life (see Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012). This supports my conclusion that age and the life course—regarded as the accumulation of a person's sociocultural development, transitions, and experiences—operate as "discursive resources" (Brunsdon & Morley, 1999) in the attribution of meaning even to hyper-commercial media texts like the Big Reunion. (3) But these resources also make room for a third reading, which steps from irony into overt criticism: several audience members demonstrate awareness of the manufactured nature of the acts and of the conscious efforts of the music industry to commercially exploit stories of rise and fall; and this awareness often prompts them to reflect critically upon the Big Reunion formula. This tendency was particularly exhibited by forum members who questioned the authenticity of the Big Reunion, especially as depicted in the second series of the TV show.

Chapter 5 looked at the affordances of surviving act the Backstreet Boys, and how they are connected to life-course transitions of its fan audience. This case study drew on interviews with a group of 24 Dutch self-identified fans of the Backstreet Boys. The evidence indicates that the band forms an important part of these fans' lives, particularly in relation to important transitions and passage rites—such as going from girl to woman or dealing with a first breakup. In their (pre-) adolescent years, the fans were motivated to master the English language or to create their own websites in order to gather information about the Backstreet Boys or understand their lyrics. Today, in their adult lives, they connect with other Backstreet Boys aficionados around the globe, and this makes them feel closer to the band and its community. The interviewees refer to the Backstreet Boys as a “constant” or perpetual presence in their lives. They have a clear feeling that, as they grow older, the band and its music is there for them during major transitions and everyday events. Due to the band's surviving character, its music can offer both consolation and power to cope with various changes in life. It functions as an anchoring point, healing and comforting—because it has always been with them since early childhood. Although the Backstreet Boys is no longer in the limelight, it still has a loyal following; and it is valued because it offers these fans a specific way of aging along. For example, the band's lyrics have changed: they speak now to transitions in life that both the fans and the performers have experienced, such as losing a parent or becoming one. For these fans, the affordance of “aging alongside” the act is an important aspect of their perpetual fandom.

While the Backstreet Boys, being around for almost 25 years, has survived both as a band and in its fans' lives, Doe Maar—the object of my third case study in chapter 6—has used a lengthy timespan of 17 years to hold recurrent reunions for its audience. Chapter 6, then, provided another angle on how the meanings attached by a fan audience to a pop act and its repackaged music feature in their life-course narratives. The study of this Dutch band was based on the analysis of 18 interviews with former and current self-identified Doe Maar fans. My analysis revealed three different modes of experiencing Doe Maar's recurring reunions. The reunions enable audiences to reflect on their teenage selves; they remind them of who and where they were in their teens, particularly in comparison to their adult selves. An important feature of Doe Maar is that it has a fixed repertoire, which did not change over time; and this offers its audiences a means to relive the 1980s. Similar forms of nostalgic identification with the past, and with a past self, can be found in scholarship on aging fans; for example, the fans in Anderson's (2012) study of aging Duran Duran fans typically regard

Duran Duran concerts as brief moments to “reclaim their youth.” However, Doe Maar fans experience the recurring reunions as occasions not only to “go back in time,” but also to temporarily escape everyday adult duties and responsibilities; and they do not necessarily “reclaim” their youth. They also feel that their ongoing enjoyment of Doe Maar’s music enables them to cope with difficult situations in their life course; this is its specific affordance for them. Like the Backstreet Boys fans studied in chapter 5, the fans of Doe Maar thus actively find the music helpful in difficult times.

On the basis of these findings, it is now possible to highlight the differences between “youth” and “adult” meaning-making practices related to popular music. As teens, fans had to develop new skills in order to cultivate their passion: understand the lyrics, keep up to date with news about the band, or stay connected to other fans. The music helped these young fans cope with heartbreaks and overcome all sorts of difficulties. For many of my interviewees, interest in a band meant the first assertion of a musical taste of their own, distinct from parental influence; hence fandom was a strong ingredient in their developing personality. What is more, this interest was shared with peers, siblings, or friends at school, so it created a sense of community. For others, fandom also brought about a first exploration of emotional attachment or sexual feelings. Interviewees in this group would remember liking one performer in particular, following the band adoringly, being mesmerized by the performers’ looks, and the like.

The process of growing up made the fans in the first place more critical of the kind of manufactured pop acts that try to reunite or survive in the music industry. It needs to be said that, although my interviewees made no secret of how much they enjoyed the acts and their music when they were in their teens, not all of them continue their fandom into adulthood; many have outgrown this phase. As for those who remain fans to this day, they display three kinds of attitude to the object of their devotion, which indicates how the original sentiment has grown richer or acquired depth. First, interviewees in this group provide now reasons for valuing their idols that are similar to the reasons they had in childhood. For them, this music, albeit repackaged, afforded the same comfort, refuge, and help in challenging situations. Second, for many of them the music has also acquired an aura of nostalgia: it has now the power to remind them of positive aspects of their youth. Fans who express this feeling value in particular the affordance of “letting go”: the music provides them with a means to temporarily escape their everyday duties and responsibilities, and it is this oasis of freedom that they love most. Finally, in another strand, interviewees indicate that they value

the repackaged acts as a tool for making comparisons between the various stages of their own selves. In particular, they are able to compare how their life was when they became fans and the point in life where they are now. Along this line, as I already observed, they also reflect critically—not only upon the manufactured nature of the acts but also upon their own naivety in childhood.

These three separate and very different case studies lead me to conclude that all forms of repackaged mainstream popular music, of the synthetic no less than the organic variety, be they “reunited” or “surviving,” should be treated as serious and meaningful expressions of popular culture. Although some audiences will consume repackaged music in an ironic fashion, for most of the interviewees in my case studies repackaged music has many valuable affordances. Whether it is a one-off reunion, a surviving act, or a recurring reunion, it allows its audiences to cope with difficult situations in life. Because this music has deep roots in these people’s youth, it functions as an anchoring point in their adult lives and becomes a cultural resource for them. Repackaged music also awakes memories of one’s younger self and affords all manners of reflection—on it, on one’s present self by comparison, on the stages of development one has experienced in between, and much more. I would summarize all this by saying that—to use DeNora’s (1999) apt metaphor—repackaged music functions as a soundtrack that recalls and rearranges particular memories and helps people (especially fans) give meanings to particular experiences and mutations, thereby changing their narrative biography.

I now turn to the central issue of the aging of popular music fans in relation to their attitude to repackaged music—central because aging and the life course are inextricably interwoven.

7.1.1 Popular music fandom

My dissertation seeks to contribute to an emergent but still very small body of scholarship, which addresses the theme of long-term or renewed engagement with a media text. This research illustrates how pop music—and thus being a pop music fan—can be meaningful throughout the life course (Cavicchi, 1998; Vroomen, 2004; Stevenson, 2009); it also highlights the ways in which people continue to engage in a subculture at an older age (Bennett, 2013b; Hodkinson, 2013). However, most of these studies are still focused on acts of “higher” culture—that is, pop music genres that look down on the sorts of music explored in this dissertation and on their audiences. For example, David Bowie and Bruce Springsteen

hold a different position in the hierarchy of music industry from that of acts like Atomic Kitten or the Backstreet Boys. Nevertheless, my research has found that the highly commercial mainstream popular music, regardless of whether it follows a synthetic or a slightly more organic ideology of creativity, can be equally meaningful and valuable to people in later life.

Although it is impossible to assemble a definitive and clear-cut portrait of the typical fan of this particular kind of mainstream music, I argue that there are several features these audience members share, which all point to what they *do* in everyday life with the music of their choice (see Zwaan & Duffett, 2016). In line with the findings of previous studies, my research has demonstrated that repackaged popular music is appreciated for evoking a nostalgic effect (chapter 4 and 6), for its ability to offer comfort (chapters 5 and 6), and for its continuous presence as an anchor or resource to tap into in times of need (chapters 5 and 6). Nostalgic identification is particularly valued when it enables the audiences to relive a particular time (see chapter 6). However, when repackaged music evokes feelings about one's youth (see chapters 4 and 5), these feelings do not necessarily involve a wish to "reclaim youth" or identify with it. In fact, repackaged music can create the opposite: a feeling of estrangement or distance (chapter 4). The teenagers from the three decades from the 1980s on are now adults of very different ages, many of them able to look with a critical eye at the manufactured nature of the music and bands they used—and often continue—to hold so dear.

Chapters 5 and 6 attempted to understand why audiences continued their fandom in adult life and how they maintained it. Both the Backstreet Boys and Doe Maar are acts that attracted very young fans. Having started at an early age proved to be a vital reason why these people upheld their devotion and fandom in adulthood. The interviewees explained how the Backstreet Boys or Doe Maar had been a constant factor in their lives, in spite of occasional disappearances from the public eye. It is this perpetual presence that creates the feeling of aging along and accounts for the bands' transformations into cultural resources for their fans. However, the fans in my study experienced this aspect quite differently from, say, Bruce Springsteen fans (see Cavicchi, 1998) or David Bowie fans (see Stevenson, 2009). Bowie and Springsteen functioned as cultural resources too, but in a manner that absorbed the inspirational quality of their sociopolitical views into the general appreciation for their music. The respondents whom I interviewed for the studies in chapter 5 and 6 appreciate the music of Doe Maar and the Backstreet Boys along a different dimension: for them, it is a

cultural resource in that it has a healing effect. And this value is occasionally enhanced when the bands offer new forms of engagement (such as meet-and-greets or photo opportunities).

7.1.2 Repackaged music in the life course

DeNora (1999) argues that music is a vital resource for constructing one's autobiography. She considers music a soundtrack to one's life, a means to relive a particular event, and a resource that gives meaning to the world, whether in specific situations or via particular emotions that one may experience. Building on her work, I argue that survival and reunion acts, both unique and recurrent ones, have a similar set of affordances. Repackaged music, being incessant by its very nature, plays a continuous role in one's narrative biography (on this notion, see Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1991).

Previous work studied how (pre-)teens use teenybop—highly commercial pop aimed at teens—as a source of empowerment (Baker, 2004; 2013). But it had not been studied whether this affordance continued in later life. In the course of my research, I found that sometimes empowerment turns into a feeling of mere enjoyment (chapter 4), which still offers a mode of escaping from every life. Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate how, for some fans, music from their childhood and early adolescence is still very much a serious resource, which goes beyond feelings of empowerment: these audiences use music as a template to make sense of the world (DeNora, 1999) and to give meaning to their own feelings. The Backstreet Boys, for example, now sing about parenthood and loss—new themes in their repertoire. Doe Maar did not make such changes, but its fans claim to have come to understand fully its old songs only now, because they have gone through transitions such as those the band sings about. Thus songs about an unstable marriage or a divorce would find in them much deeper layers of meaning now than in the past, because they may have experienced such a situation.

Having aged and grown into adults, all these people have experienced or are experiencing extremely varied yet typical age-graded transitions (McLean, 2008; Harrington & Bielby, 2010b). They could be finishing their studies, feverishly applying for a job, or working to secure some stable financial position; or they may be already in a position of social and financial independence, which allows them to travel even to a distant part of the world in order to see their favorite band in a concert (they would have the funds for it—and often a driver's license to get themselves there, too). These new freedoms are characteristic of the life-course developments and transitions that lead to adulthood. But an adult position in life also brings responsibilities (such as taking your child to school or not being late for

work), which can be experienced as confinements or limitations. This explains the value of something like the music one loved in childhood, which can afford the person a temporary escape from them.

Repackaged popular music is thus meaningful at a later age not only through its lyrics. The “post-youth” (Hodkinson & Bennett, 2012) audience groups in chapters 4 and 5, and also the slightly older sample in chapter 6, have either returned to their favorite artists or aged along with them. As teenagers, they were dependent on their parents, older siblings, or friends to take them to concerts and, when needed, translate interviews, news about the band, or their lyrics (see chapter 5). Now, as young adults, they are able to do these things themselves, and much, much more besides. And one should remember that some of the interviewees gained access to a new group, with whose members they can share fan experiences (see chapters 5 and 6). This social aspect is sometimes more strongly appreciated than the music itself.

Drawing on these three case studies, I argue that repackaged music involves more than a “trip down memory lane” and therefore its meaning should not be confined or reduced to its nostalgic powers. Although the interviewees in my studies often describe how music from the past evokes feelings of nostalgia or sentimentality, they also demonstrate that repackaged music fulfills an important role in their lives. No matter how it reaches them (via a reunion or a surviving act), it makes an insightful resource and tool for reflecting on a particular phase or event in the life course, if not for constructing one’s narrative biography as a whole. This affordance—reflecting on life through music—exists because the music has always accompanied that life. As we have seen time and again in these chapters, repackaged mainstream popular music, in spite of its synthetic and allegedly fake nature and low cultural value (see Peterson, 2005), is capable of offering a coping mechanism and of having a comforting effect, and this remains true at all ages and stages of life.

7.2 Discussion and future research

Due to my theoretical focus and to the choice of a qualitative method, I had to leave some related themes unaddressed. Here I bring up a number of such themes, which fall outside the scope of my present study, yet relate to its main findings and therefore are potential avenues for future research on this topic.

I have illustrated how pop music, whether it follows an organic or synthetic ideology, is meaningful across the life course. Apart from the personal affordances I have discussed so far, repackaged popular music also has the ability to reunite “old friends,” or a particular

cohort that has grown up with that music. Although collective music consumption was not always experienced as something serious or important, it has been demonstrated that this music, once mainstream, still has the power to bring audiences together. At the Big Reunion concerts I witnessed in person the bridging potential of music—and I mean by this that music can also function as a bridge across generations (see also, e.g., Van Dijck, 2006; Tinker, 2012; Bennett, 2013b; Van der Hoeven, 2014). These shows were attended not only by their old audiences and fans from the 1990s but also by family members from other generations: some of these fans took their parents or children along. Since previous work, which uses quantitative methods (see for example Ter Bogt, Delsing, Van Zalk, Christenson, & Meeus, 2011), argues that the musical taste of parents can influence that of children, I wonder what the influence of the “repackaging” of a reunion concert would be as part of this transfer of taste. This would make quite an interesting theme for further research.

The Big Reunion study also revealed that a very young audience, which was not expected to be nostalgic, can be nostalgic about its recent past. Although the Big Reunion was marketed as a nostalgia concert, it does invite a closer examination, or possibly redefinition, of the concept of nostalgia. In general, nostalgia is taken to involve looking back at a past that gains significance “from the particular way we juxtapose it to certain features of our present lives” (Davis, 1979: 13). The members of the Big Reunion audience seem to consider their youth to be such a period; and their youth is a phase in their life that is not far away from the present. What does this tell us about their current life? Is it more difficult than their youth? Do sociocultural or technological changes have anything to do with these perceptions? The on-the-spot interviews and forum comments were analyzed with different questions in mind, but it would be interesting to conduct a follow-up study along these new lines.

Although there never seems to be a time-span requirement for nostalgia, perhaps one could problematize its temporal aspect: *When* can somebody become nostalgic about the past? Or is such a question legitimate, and why? Is nostalgia in case of the Big Reunion a marketing product, an artificially induced effect designed to celebrate the past and to ensure that the show appeals to the “right audience”? And here it would be vital to reconsider nostalgia in the light of the ongoing trends, such as “retromania.” Future studies that aim to give meaning to consuming popular culture from the past should definitely have a close look at mediated nostalgia.

The audiences in chapters 5 and 6 indicated how much they appreciated new means of getting involved with the reunited or surviving band. Their current financial and social position enabled them to do much more besides attending concerts: they would buy photo opportunities, meet-and-greet tickets, or a better spot in a concert hall. As we have seen, the Backstreet Boys, remarkably, offers a cruise in which fans interact with band members. These highly commercial activities are new ways of involving one's fans; but maybe they also invite new ways of theorizing today's fandoms. Fandom has always built on a grassroots mentality: often fan activities illustrate a level of disagreement with producers or creators (a typical example is fan fiction, in which fans rewrite the characters' storylines to their liking). It would be interesting to pay closer attention to such developments in music fandom at large, since they are not restricted to pop acts: rock acts like Guns N' Roses and Metallica now offer concert packages for a stronger fan experience. Moreover, these paid forms of involvement might lead to social stratification or inequality between fans, since there will be some who can afford them and others who cannot. Future research could track these developments over time, in a longitudinal study.

Finally, although studies of popular music and its audiences often highlight male involvement with a particular genre or subculture, chapters 5 and 6 are predominantly based on accounts of female music fans. This demonstrates that women are serious consumers of popular music too. It needs to be noted here that mainstream popular music, in particular the synthetic variety, is often marketed for teenage girls (Baker, 2004; Huber, 2013). I have shown that this connection to music from a young age onward is meaningful, but I did not refer here to any differences in consumption between boys and girls or (over time) between men and women. The affordances of repackaged mainstream music from a gender studies perspective would be most stimulating to examine in the future—together with the reality (or not) of an all-male fan basis of a synthetic pop music act.

7.3 Recommendations and practical implications

Throughout this dissertation I have documented the affordances of repackaged mainstream popular music and I concluded that even this highly commercial genre should be considered a meaningful aspect of popular culture—and one that deserves serious study. On the basis of my own findings, I will attempt in this final section to contextualize current Dutch cases that already implement different modes of repackaging music, at least to a certain extent; and I will give an idea of how this research might be inspirational for such programs.

Although there are rich systems that document chart-topping hits on a weekly basis—for example, a country's Top 40 (see Dowd, 2013), or an event like the annual *Top 2000* in the Netherlands (see chapter 1; Van Dijck, 2004, 2006)—mainstream popular music has not had many other forms of consecration (see Schmutz, 2005) or means of obtaining an officially acclaimed recognition. Also, music that temporarily dominates the market may be a mere trend and lose its mainstream significance after a while. It is enough to remember how grunge dominated the 1990s, or to think of the current peak of electronic dance music in the charts, to realize this simple truth. In chapter 2 I gave a basic outline of how music from the past is currently repackaged for audiences: I argued there that this happened via music documentaries, tribute bands, and popular music reunions. However, in view of the evidence I found in the course of my research for this thesis, I came to think that the modes of repackaging a particular genre, perhaps more acclaimed, but non-mainstream, differ from those of repackaging highly commercial mainstream music.

Within music genres and particular subcultures, some former chart toppers are able to survive or prolong their status via cover and remake practices or canonization. Plasketes (2005) tells us how hip-hop uses samples of hits from the past. Through this literal repackaging or embedding of a song within another song, the sampled or covered song gains critical acclaim. Bennett (2009) writes about the canonization of “heritage rock”; the original rock fans of the 1960s are now in positions where they can decide who should have status in this genre. These fans have established a canon built on an elite discourse that emanates from those who have been around since the beginning (Bennett, 2009). A small group of rock aficionados decides what music to collect—and hence preserve. This makes canonization a practice that should be handled with great care: canons can “influence the narration of the past” (Regev, 2006: 2). Interestingly, the rise of ‘decade-parties’ and television shows that focus on decades like the 1980s, 1990s, or the early years of the new millennium might be signals of a change in canonization and the ‘elite’ that is in charge of preserving music from the past.

A striking example here, that could be taken from this thesis and is recommendable building on the results of this thesis, is the change in programming of a diverse array of music festivals. For example, the Dutch pop-rock festival Pinkpop, modified its programming to appeal to a younger, ‘newer’ audience, and thereby moves away from the ‘rock’ stamp it always had. That means, that the festival extended its musical programming from a high focus on rock acts (like Muse, Foo Fighters, or Queens of the Stone Age) to in its 2017 edition

also include more poppy acts like DJ Martin Garrix or former teen-idol and now electronic music star Justin Bieber. Glastonbury, the biggest music festival in the United Kingdom, hosted pop singer Adele as one of its main acts, whereas the festival is typically considered a festival where primarily alternative music features.

Albeit these festivals are still somewhat commercial initiatives, pop music from the past seems to be on the rise in gaining more official ‘critical acclaim’: Stockholm, although under the premise of national heritage and tourism, has now an ABBA museum (see Bolderman and Reijnders, 2016). And Watford in the United Kingdom had an exhibition to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of popular ‘90s girl group the Spice Girls with “SpiceWorld: the Exhibition”.

In my research for this dissertation I found that audiences take repackaged mainstream popular music seriously, but the events that celebrate it are all highly commercial initiatives. The lack of official institutional recognition for these events appears to be due to mainstream music’s alleged “inauthentic,” “commercial,” and “low-brow” character, as a result of which such music is not considered a serious form of popular culture.

My dissertation contradicts this view insofar as it reveals that mainstream music from the past is deeply meaningful for audiences. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 all demonstrated that such music brought together specific cohorts and even created bridges across generations. Many of the people I interviewed pointed out that this music went beyond their personal lives; it belonged to whole decades. I consider these strong affordances of mainstream popular music and therefore recommend that institutions further “democratize” the notion of heritage by incorporating pop music, because it, too, is a part of a country’s or a generation’s heritage.

Focusing on mainstream popular music from the past, I have attempted to demonstrate how this type of music is able to reach and unite a wide audience. I did so by studying various forms of preservation, exhibition, education, and remembrance—which can all be classified as “heritage practices” (Brandellero & Janssen, 2014: 236). I examined different modes of repackaging in three different case studies. I also looked at how this repackaging ensures that music is successfully preserved, exhibited, or remembered or that it features in education.

Chapter 4 illustrated how the Big Reunion was able to draw a young generation to an event where music from a particular decade was being commemorated. Through nostalgic

branding it arose a positive feeling in the audience, helped artists from the past return to the limelight, and succeeded in bridging the generation gap (it's worth observing that young adults brought along their parents—who used to drive them to such concerts in the past). The Big Reunion also acted as an event designed to preserve music from a particular decade and as an educational platform in that it taught younger audiences about music from that decade and about the society in which that music became popular. The lesson learned from this case, which can be implemented in similar events in the future, is to remain focused on the “old” and not set out to reinvent the music. Repackaging, following the explorative reunion model, is valued for offering “the original,” not an improved or renewed version of the old music or the music act. Thus events, programs, or music acts that aspire to return to the spotlight are best served by honest and dedicated attempts to re-create the image that earned them fame and success to begin with; exploring new avenues should come second.

Interestingly, if this formula is followed, “repackaging music” in terms of manufacturing a band through the application of an old recipe may also prove to be inspirational and “educational” for talent shows on television such as *The Voice*, *Pop Idol* (*Idols*), *The X-Factor*, or, to give a local example, *The Next Boy/Girl Band*. Think about the five boys who participated in a UK edition of *X Factor*, failed as solo competitors, but then were “manufactured” into one of the most successful boy bands of this decade: One Direction. Following the blueprint of previous boy bands by giving each member his own particular image and role, the band gained a massive following among an audience of teenage girls.

Chapters 5 and 6 have unveiled the power of the audience in the process of repackaging music from the past—a power also demonstrated by TV programs that need to establish an audience for viewer ratings. In both case studies, the music acts constituted a continuous presence in their audiences' lives. The Backstreet Boys was able to renew its music by constructing a narrative around its aging along with the fans. Doe Maar did not release new material but still thrives on its old repertoire. However, I found a form of behavior that fans of these two bands have in common: they have kept memorabilia related to their artists of choice. Exhibition, as a form of heritage practice (Brandellero & Janssen, 2014), have not had a high focus on mainstream pop music thus far. If museums, for example, were to recognize these fan collections as items of heritage, that would certainly produce interesting results—and I mean interesting for the bands as well. True, the Backstreet Boys has exhibited its own narrative in a documentary of its own making, *Show 'em What You're*

Made of, and Doe Maar had its story captured in another documentary, *Dit is Alles (This Is It)*. But the perspective of the audience is missing from these documentaries. To offer a complete picture of these bands' histories and narratives, the audience, in particular the fans, should have a voice, too—especially in canonization and consecration. This is all the more important as exhibitions often occur in an environment that is reserved for more “official voices” (see Roberts & Cohen, 2014).

All this may become very interesting in the near future due to a shift in the industry to the so-called “experience economy,” in which there will be a stronger focus on festivals and concerts where one can “experience” the music; and such occasions will also be more commercially interesting for the artist, as a source of income. Artists will still sell T-shirts at concerts; but, as pop magazines are disappearing (e.g., in the Netherlands) and albums are sometimes released solely online, there will be fewer opportunities to collect tangible items from or related to an artist. Today one can easily snap a picture with a favorite star, on one's phone, and create a poster out of it; or curate or archive a playlist via platforms like Spotify or YouTube instead of buying CDs or concert DVDs. Fans often hold on to their collection of memorabilia because of its emotional value.

Inspired by the findings of my dissertation, these final recommendations show how repackaged music might feature in future heritage practices. Such practices would offer means for audiences and for music industry professionals alike to continue to engage with, preserve, and exhibit repackaged music from the past, thus ensuring that even highly commercial mainstream music is remembered.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Chapter 5

Overview of interviewees - chapter 5

Interviewee	Age	Profession/ education level
Janine	33	Sales advisor (mbo – higher vocational education)
Sarah	27	Research master student (MA - master)
Claire	29	University student / part-time employee bakery (hbo – university of applied sciences)
Suzanne	27	Flight attendant (hbo)
Jolanda	29	Receptionist (mbo)
Tatum	32	Nurse (hbo)
Marian	31	Inspector daycare centers (hbo)
Danique	28	Entrepreneur / stylist (hbo)
Elise	32	Childcare worker (mbo)
Susan	30	Personal healthcare assistant (mbo)
Laura	32	HR employee (mbo)
Jessica	25	Personal healthcare assistant (mbo)
Deshny	27	Student (mbo)
Marlinda	31	Account manager (hbo)
Esther	29	Assistant office manager (mbo)
Samantha	27	Childcare worker (mbo)
Maaïke	29	Lecturer (research master)
Danielle	28	Presenter, casting agency employee (hbo)
Nathalie	28	Sales employee (mbo)
Mieke	28	Project manager (hbo)
Cynthia	30	Self-employed real estate agent (mbo)
Anja	26	PhD student (MSc)
Pauline	26	Student (BA)
Miriam	26	Social worker (hbo)

Interview guide chapter 5

About the past*:

- How did your fandom start/ where did you first hear about the band or their music?
- How did you express your fandom?
- Were you able to share your fandom?
- What did you like about the Backstreet Boys (what kind of other music did you like)?

Hiatus:

- How did you experience & what happened when things around the BSB quieted down?
Can you talk me through that part in your life?
- How did you find out they were coming to the Netherlands (again) or released new material?
- If you look back at those first encounters, concerts etc.: What has changed about that?

Now:

- How do you currently express your fandom?
- What role does the Backstreet Boys play in your everyday life?
- How would you describe them to friends and family? In other words, how do you explain your fandom to friends, family, partner, or coworkers?
- What do you find the most important/ valuable aspect about being a fan (and what not)?
- Now, you can also follow them via social media. How do you feel about /experience that?
- How do you experience being a Backstreet Boys now, as an adult? (In comparison to your teens)

* All interviews were conducted in Dutch; the interview guide has been translated into English for the purpose of this thesis.

Appendix B - Chapter 6

Overview of interviewees - chapter 6

Interviewee	Age	Profession
Emma	46	Designer
Dennis	36	Carer for the disabled
Marian	47	Administrative assistant
Anne	47	Child minder
Karin	44	Psychologist
Wilma	47	Domestic worker
Joyce	45	Stay-at-home-parent
Nadine	50	Cook
Christina	56	Carer for the disabled
Victor	47	Laboratory assistant
Richard	51	Nurse
Mike	47	Unemployed
Agnes	48	Personal healthcare assistant
Wendy	47	Nurse
Paul	48	IT-staff member
Louisa	46	Project coordinator
Roxy	45	Archivist
Yvette	48	Owner recreation park

Interview guide chapter 6

About the past*:

- How did you hear about the band or their music?
- How did that fit your life at the time?
- What kind of music did you listen to in your teens?
- What did you like about Doe Maar?
- How did you express your fandom?
- Were you able to share it with others?

Break in 1984:

- In 1984 the band split. How did you experience that moment? (Do you remember it?)
- Can you talk me through what your life looked like then? (What other music did you listen to?)
- What role did Doe Maar get in your life then (after the split)?

First reunion in 2000 and onwards:

- In 1999 they announced they came back for a reunion concert. How did you experience this? Did you go to the concerts? Talk me through that phase in your life, what it was like now in 2000.
- After 2000 they disappeared again. What was that like? How do you experience these moments in between reunions?
- Can you tell me about reunion concerts you visited (Symphonica in Rosso / Glad IJs/ the musical/ Ziggo Dome)? What were they like?
- Why did you decide to (not) visit the reunion(s)?
- How do you feel about their repertoire at the reunions?
- Do you expect any new albums or new concerts? Why (not)?
- How do you express your Doe Maar fandom currently?
- Who do you visit the concerts with, if you take anyone along?
- How do friends, partner, coworkers or family react to your fandom?
- Has being a fan changed for you?

Now:

- It has been about 32 years after that initial split. What role does Doe Maar (now/ still) play in your (everyday) life?
- How does that current role compare to what role they had in your teens? Or around 2000/ previous reunions?
- How does it currently fit in your musical menu?
- What about the future, what if Doe Maar decided to not reunite anymore?

* All interviews were conducted in Dutch; the interview guide has been translated into English for the purpose of this thesis.

Appendix C - Chapter 7

Overview of interviewees - chapter 7

Program	Interviewee & function	Aim of the show
Top 2000 (radio)	Project leader (male) Statistician (m) Music manager (m)	Radio chart created in 1999 to form a list of the best 2000 songs to take into the new millennium
GI:EL's "Playground" (radio)	Program coordinator (m)	Fragment in a radio show (<i>GI:EL</i>) in which a song is covered by a new artist
Ali B op Volle Toeren (Cover Me) (TV)	Executive producer (female)	Connect an evergreen artist to a young artist
Nick & Simon: The Dream (TV)	Executive editor (f)	Singers Nick & Simon go abroad to have their international breakthrough & explore a country's music culture
The Big Reunion (TV, UK)	Executive & creative producer (m)	Reunited acts that were popular in the 1990s, early years of the new millennium
LVK (Limburgs Vastelaovesleedjes Konkoer) (radio & TV)	Organizer & presenter (m)	Annual song contest for the selection of the best carnival songs in Limburg, a province of the Netherlands
De Beste Zangers (Best Singers) (TV)	Executive editor (m)	A group of Dutch singers covers/revamps one of the group members' songs in order to put him/her in the spotlight

Summary

The affordances of repackaged popular music from the past

In the Netherlands, there is nearly every weekend a chance to travel back in time. There are parties celebrating the 1980s, the 1990s, or the early years of this millennium. More specifically, these decades are remembered through movie fragments and music that was popular at the time. Nowadays, we might consider such music from the past to be a ‘guilty pleasure’ and find its quality debatable. Still, the music is recognized and remembered by those people growing up in these times. Headliners at these so-called decade-parties are often one-hit-wonders like Lou Bega (of “Mambo no 5”) or past chart-topping acts like 5ive, Atomic Kitten, East 17 or All Saints.

The popularity and abundance of these decade-celebrations fits, on the one hand, the commercial trend of releasing re-makes or follow-ups to previously successful popular culture products - think about *Mad Max*, *the Gilmore Girls*, *Fuller House* or *Pokémon Go*. While, on the other hand, there also seems to be a longing from the audiences of such music, movies, series or games to relive a particular phase in one’s past. In any case, the presumption of a need to reflect on the recent past seems to be justified, and it is a need that is particularly found commercially interesting by the music industry.

Because of this interest in the past, many formerly popular Top 40 acts attempt a comeback to reclaim their past fame. Such mainstream acts hold a *reunion*, in which they are reunited with each other and their audience, or they try to *continue* keeping up their position in today’s fast-changing music industry, albeit for a smaller audience than back in their heydays. This first type of returning to the stage, the reunion, happens most often, but can still occur in different shapes and with different purposes: There are bands that only perform at and reunite for decade-parties, some hold a tour and attempt to release new material, and others perform only occasionally. The second type – the continuing act –, a band from the 1980s, 1990s or early years of the millennium that still releases new music, is what this thesis describes as *surviving performers* (Shuker, 2016). In other words, these music acts stood the test of time. Both the reuniting and the surviving band are examples of what this thesis calls modes of ‘repackaged popular music’.

Most interesting about these modes of repackaged music are the consumers: the audiences, who have been with these bands that are repackaged since their beginning or those who have (re)discovered these bands at a later age. Why do these, now adult people, attend a reunion-concert of an act that was popular when they were teens? And what does it afford them to still be a fan of a band they discovered as a child, or in their adolescence? These audiences are interesting because they now, just like the bands they admire, have experienced particular developments in their lives and have gained experience with particular situations in life. Those who were children in the 1980s or 1990s are now adults, aged twenty-five to fifty years and older. The teenager from back in the day is now a grown-up with certain duties and responsibilities, like working a fulltime job, or maintaining a family. Thus far, little academic attention has been paid to what role popular culture, in particular music, can play in later life (see Harrington & Bielby, 2010b; Bennett, 2012; Zwaan & Duffett, 2016).

Furthermore, studies that do highlight music's position in one's life course often tend to focus on a particular subculture, or the more acclaimed genres of popular music instead of the 'fake, inauthentic and low' mainstream pop music (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor, 2007) discussed in this thesis. Therefore, this research offers an exploration of the affordances of this type of music, the (manufactured and) mainstream pop bands. Moreover, it maps the phenomenon of the commercially driven pop reunions and 'survivals'. This dissertation thus provides an exploration of three thus-far overlooked themes: the lack of knowledge about a) pop music's role in later life, b) the role of manufactured pop music, and c) the affordances of the reunion-phenomenon for the participants of such events. I further explain this in the first chapter of this dissertation.

Previous research, which I discuss in-depth in chapter 2, on the role of pop music in someone's life has illustrated how it can have a bridging effect between different groups and generations (see Van Dijck, 2006; Van der Hoeven, 2014), and how esteemed pop acts like David Bowie or Bruce Springsteen can be an important cultural resource for people (Cavicchi, 1998; Stevenson, 2009). That means, people can, for example, mirror the artist's personal development in life (see Stevenson, 2009; Lavin, 2015), or that an artist and his music influence people's socio-political views on the world (Cavicchi, 1998; Bennett, 2013b), or their everyday life (DeNora, 2000; Vroomen, 2004). Additionally, pop music from one's youth can evoke feelings of nostalgia, or lets its listeners reclaim their adulthood (Anderson, 2012). These examples demonstrate how music can function as a tool for

reflection on events and situations happening in life (DeNora, 2000). Although previous work demonstrates how music can play a role in one's life for a longer period of time, the music in these studies has a more respected and acclaimed status than the music featuring in the reunion-events discussed here.

The bands discussed in this dissertation are all examples of *mainstream* popular music, which is music that dominated the charts for a particular time (Huber, 2013). This thesis distinguishes, following Negus (1992), 'synthetic' and 'organic' music acts. The first refers to bands that were compiled by record companies based on their looks, singing- and dancing abilities to manufacture different personalities within the band. Examples for this category would be bands such as the Backstreet Boys, *N SYNC or Boyzone; the gamut of boy bands rising to fame in the late 1990s – and the different styles the individual band members had to present. The second form of mainstream music is the 'organic' act, a band that only received support from a record company to have their breakthrough.

In short, this dissertation studies what the affordances of repackaged mainstream popular music from the past are, and how they feature in audiences' reflections on different stages and transitions in their life course.

To discover the affordances of repackaged popular music from the past in relation to one's life course, I studied three different forms of 'repackaging' this (commercial, manufactured) pop music from the recent past. These forms are the 1) the one-off reunion (*The Big Reunion*), 2) a band that can be considered as 'surviving' in the industry for over twenty years already (*the Backstreet Boys*), and 3) a recurring reunion (the occasional reunions of Dutch organic act *Doe Maar*); these reunion-types from the three empirical cases that I researched. The three studies were conducted with the help of qualitative research methods. For the first case study, I performed a qualitative content analysis on forum messages, and for case 2 and 3 I conducted in-depth interviews with the audiences focused upon in the respective cases. Chapter three offers a more detailed outline of this thesis' methodological considerations and research methods.

I present the results of the three cases in chapter 4, 5 and 6 of this thesis. The first case study concerns the one-off reunion. Herein I focus on the British TV-show and concert series the Big Reunion, in which former 1990s chart-topping bands like 5ive, Atomic Kitten, Blue and B*Witched were reunited. I looked at the affordances of the Big Reunion

phenomenon for its viewers and concert attendees, and how these affordances relate to these audiences' current life-course position. I discovered, based on analyzing forum messages on UK-pop forums DigitalSpy and Popjustice and on-the-spot interviews at the concert sites, that the audiences 'read' (see Hall, 1973) the Big Reunion in three ways. First, because the members of this audience are now adults, they reflect on the Big Reunion in a nostalgic mode, which evokes positive feelings about their own past. Second, because they are watching the Big Reunion from an 'adult-perspective', they are somewhat ironic about the phenomenon and more covert in expressing whether they (still) like the bands. This ironic consumption of the Big Reunion is particularly present in how the respondents, on the one hand, identify with the artists and what these acts experience in the show (e.g. they need to work hard to provide for their families). Yet, on the other hand, the audience distances itself from the insulting tone of voice the program at times uses about the status of these artists. This ironic, but mature attitude of the audience demonstrates how age and the life course function as discursive tools to make sense of this form of repackaged popular music from the past. Based on their own position and experiences in life, the viewers and concertgoers are capable of giving their opinion about the show. The latter also becomes clear in the third 'reading' of the phenomenon: the respondents are critical about the show's format. As children, they might still have been naive enough to believe that a band got together on their own, but today they no longer believe in such narratives. They are aware of the 'fabricated' nature of the acts, and find that the producers could (and should) have been more open about this.

In chapter 5, I study what the affordances are of surviving act the American boy band Backstreet Boys, and how these affordances are connected to life-course transitions of its fans. Building on 24 interviews with Dutch female fans, I describe how the band forms an important element in their everyday life and is considered very valuable in relation to particular developments in the life course of these women, like the passage rite from young girl to female. In their teens these fans already had to learn (to master) the English language in order to keep up with news about the band, and they created their own websites when Dutch media no longer reported about the band. Now, as adult women, the fans are connected to other fans across the globe. The interviewees consider the band a constant element in their lives, a tower of strength, which they can rely on in difficult times. They find that the music offers comfort and support, because it has been around since their youth. This perpetual connection, even though the band was absent due to their hiatus and is not a part of the mainstream anymore, is what the fans value most. They feel that they have grown up and

grown old together with this synthetic, inauthentic band. This is also caused by the band's lyrics, which now discuss more 'adult' topics like becoming a parent, or losing a parent and how to cope with such a loss.

The third case study, chapter 6, discusses the affordances of the recurrent reunions for its audiences, and what role these events play in the developments in their life course. The Dutch pop and ska band Doe Maar split in 1984, after having been the center of teenage attention in the Netherlands for four years. The band was very popular among female teens at the beginning of the 1980s, which led to talks of a Dutch "Beatle-mania", but then spurred on by Doe Maar. Since 2000, the year in which the band reunited for the first time, the band held multiple – yet occasional – reunions (in 2008, 2012, 2013, 2016 and 2017), across a timespan of seventeen years. This recurring reunion is experienced in three different ways, which show from the interviews I conducted with eighteen former and current Doe Maar aficionados. First, the reunion affords the audience to reflect on their teen-identity, thus how they were as teens in comparison to the current life-phase they find themselves in. Second, Doe Maar did not release new material after 2000; thus the band is committed to playing its old repertoire, which affords its audiences a temporary 'escape' from everyday life and its duties. It offers them a moment to relive the 1980s. Third, Doe Maar's music – having been around that long – is a coping mechanism that is used to make sense of particular situations and transitions that happen in the current everyday life of the interviewees. In a similar fashion as the Backstreet Boys fans indicated, the Doe Maar audience finds the music an instrument to rely on in difficult times.

In the last chapter of the thesis (chapter 7), I present my conclusions, which are based on the findings of the three case study chapters. The main conclusion of this research is that we also should take (highly commercial) repackaged mainstream popular music serious, for it offers a multitude of affordances for its audiences. Because the music always has been around in someone's life and has become ingrained with one's life course, music functions as a pillar of strength for these audiences. However, some interviewees have also indicated that repackaged music belongs to their youth – thus is predominantly considered nostalgic, and therefore does not gain much attention in their adult lives. In the concluding chapter, I also present some recommendations and practical implications of my research. Hereby I pay attention to, for example, how television shows can repackage music from the past. Finally,

I argue that also the forms of mainstream popular music I studied in this thesis, which are often still deemed to be expressions of ‘low culture’, should be looked at from a heritage-perspective because we should not underestimate the value of this type of music.

Samenvatting

De betekenis en waarde van opnieuw aangeboden populaire muziek uit het verleden

In Nederland kun je ieder weekend wel even terug in de tijd. Voor een nacht de jaren '80 of '90 herbeleven, of het begin van het nieuwe millennium op feesten die de muziek van dat decennium centraal stellen. Denk aan de populaire “WE ALL LOVE: 80s/90s/00s”- feesten maar ook de ‘Foute Party’, waar ‘foute hits’ van vroeger voorbij komen. De muziek op dit soort feesten heeft vaak een dubieus tintje; het is kwalitatief misschien niet heel sterke of goede muziek, maar ze is wel herkenbaar voor iedereen die in die decennia opgroeide. De hoofdaacts op dit soort party's zijn dan ook vaak muzikale eendagsvliegen zoals Lou Bega (van “*Mambo no 5*”), of andere (oud) aanvoerders van de Top 40 zoals de 5ive, East 17, All Saints of Atomic Kitten.

De populariteit en het overvloedige aanbod van dit soort feesten passen enerzijds in de commerciële trend dat veel vormen van populaire cultuur worden heruitgegeven en oude succesformules -denk aan *Mad Max*, de *Gilmore Girls*, *Fuller House* of *Pokémon Go*- weer opnieuw worden toegepast, zij het vaak in een anders jasje. Anderzijds lijkt er ook een verlangen bij het publiek van deze muziek, films, series of games te bestaan om bepaalde fases uit hun leven te herbeleven. In ieder geval lijkt de veronderstelling gerechtvaardigd dat er behoefte is aan een terugblik op het (recente) verleden, en dat die behoefte in het bijzonder in de muziekindustrie commercieel interessant gevonden wordt.

Door die interesse in muziek uit het verleden, proberen veel bands, die eerder hoog scoorden in hitlijsten, een comeback te maken. Deze *mainstream* acts houden reünies, waarbij ze herenigd worden met elkaar en met hun publiek, of proberen hun werk (nog steeds) voort te zetten in het huidige (snel veranderde) muzieklandschap, zij het voor een kleiner publiek. Die eerste manier van terugkeren, de reünie komt het vaakst voor, maar kan desondanks verschillende vormen en doelen aannemen; zo zijn er bands die alleen op de '90s-feesten spelen, sommigen houden een hele comeback-toer en proberen nieuw materiaal uit te brengen, en weer andere treden alleen af en toe op. De tweede vorm, een band uit de jaren '80, '90 of '00 die nog steeds nieuwe muziek uitbrengt, beschrijft dit proefschrift als *surviving performers*, ofwel de ‘overlevenden’ - de bands die de tand des tijds hebben

doorstaan. Beide vormen, de reünie – in welke vorm dan ook – en de ‘overlevenden’ zijn voorbeelden van wat dit proefschrift ‘opnieuw aangeboden populaire muziek uit het verleden’ (*repackaged music*) noemt.

Wat dit opnieuw aanbieden van deze muziek uit het verleden zo interessant maakt is het publiek: diegenen die al bij ze zijn sinds de beginjaren, of mensen die deze bands (her)ontdekten op latere leeftijd. Wat beweegt deze, nu volwassen mensen om naar een reünie-concert te gaan van een act die populair was toen ze tieners waren? En wat betekent het om nog steeds fan te zijn van een band die ze als kind of jongere ontdekten? Dat publiek is dus zo interessant omdat zij, net als de bands, inmiddels bepaalde ontwikkelingen doorgemaakt en ervaringen hebben opgedaan in hun leven. Het kind van de jaren ’80 of ’90 is nu een man of vrouw, en ergens tussen de 25 en 50 jaar oud. De tiener zonder zorgen is nu een volwassen persoon die bepaalde verantwoordelijkheden en verplichtingen heeft, zoals fulltime werken of een gezin onderhouden. Tot nu toe is er (wetenschappelijk) weinig bekend over de rol van populaire cultuur, in het bijzonder muziek, op latere leeftijd (zie Harrington & Bielby, 2010b; Bennett, 2012; Zwaan & Duffett, 2016).

Daarbij komt dat studies over de rol van populaire muziek in iemands leven zich vaak richten op bepaalde subculturen of muziek die een ietwat hogere status heeft dan deze ‘synthetische’, gefabriceerde popmuziek van boy- of girl bands (Negus, 1992; Peterson, 2005; Barker & Taylor, 2007). Deze studie biedt daarom een verkenning van de betekenis en waarde van dit laatste type muziek. Het brengt bovendien het fenomeen van de commercieel ingestoken en gedreven popreünies in kaart. Dit proefschrift voorziet dus in een drietal lacunes: a) het gebrek aan kennis over a) de rol van muziek op latere leeftijd, b) de rol van gefabriceerde popmuziek, en c) de betekenis van het reünie-fenomeen voor de deelnemers aan dergelijke evenementen. Ik leg dit verder uit in het eerste hoofdstuk van deze thesis.

Eerder onderzoek, wat ik gedetailleerd bespreek in hoofdstuk 2, naar de rol van popmuziek in iemands leven heeft al aangetoond dat popmuziek een element van verbinding tussen groepen en generaties kan zijn (Van Dijck, 2006; Van der Hoeven, 2014), en hoe de muziek van hooggewaardeerde goede pop acts als David Bowie of Bruce Springsteen een belangrijke culturele inspiratiebron kan vormen voor mensen. Dat houdt in dat ze zich bijvoorbeeld spiegelen aan persoonlijke ontwikkelingen die een artiest doormaakt (Stevenson, 2009; Lavin, 2015) of dat een artiest en zijn muziek een impact heeft op hun politieke opvattingen (Cavicchi, 1998; Bennett, 2013b) of hun blik op het leven (DeNora,

2000; Vroomen, 2004). Ook kan popmuziek uit iemands tienerjaren gevoelens van nostalgie oproepen, of een manier bieden om zich tijdelijk weer even jong te voelen (Anderson, 2012). Deze voorbeelden laten zien hoe muziek een rode draad vormt in het leven kan functioneren als een instrument voor reflectie op (gebeurtenissen in) het leven (DeNora, 2000). Hoewel eerder onderzoek laat zien hoe muziek gedurende langere tijd een rol kan spelen in iemands leven, heeft de muziek die in deze studies centraal staat een hoger aanzien dan de muziek die opnieuw wordt aangeboden via de reünie-events.

De bands die besproken worden in dit proefschrift zijn allen voorbeelden van *mainstream* popmuziek; muziek die gedurende een bepaalde periode de hitlijsten domineerde (Huber, 2013). Daarin worden zowel ‘synthetische’ als ‘organische’ acts in aanmerking genomen (zie Negus, 1992). De eerste verwijst naar een band die is samengesteld door een platenmaatschappij op basis van hun uiterlijk, dans- en zangkunsten om zo tot verschillende types in een band te komen. Hierbij kan gedacht worden aan de boy bands die ontstonden in de jaren '90, zoals the Backstreet Boys, *N SYNC of Boyzone – en de verschillende imago's die de bandleden werden aangemeten. De tweede vorm, de organische band, is een (pop)band die slechts een duwtje in de rug heeft gehad van een platenmaatschappij op weg naar hun doorbraak.

Kortom, dit proefschrift onderzoekt welke betekenis en waarde deze opnieuw aangeboden mainstream popmuziek uit het verleden heeft, en hoe deze betekenis(sen) en waarde(s) een rol spelen in de reflecties van deze publieken (fans/ muziekliefhebbers) op verschillende fases en ontwikkelingen in hun levensloop.

Om te ontdekken hoe opnieuw aangeboden muziek uit het verleden een rol kan spelen in reflecties op iemands levensloop, bestudeerde ik drie verschillende vormen van dit ‘opnieuw aanbieden’ van (commerciële, gefabriceerde) popmuziek uit het recente verleden. Deze vormen zijn 1) een eenmalige reünie (*The Big Reunion*), 2) een band die al ruim twintig jaar ‘overleeft’ (*the Backstreet Boys*), en 3) een terugkerende reünie (van *Doe Maar*); deze reünie-types vormen de drie empirische casussen die zijn onderzocht. De studies zijn alle drie met behulp van kwalitatieve onderzoeksmethoden uitgevoerd. Zo heb ik voor de eerste casestudie een kwalitatieve inhoudsanalyse van forumberichten uitgevoerd en diepte-interviews gehouden met de publieken die in case 2 en 3 centraal staan. Hoofdstuk drie biedt een

uitgebreide methodologische verantwoording van het onderzoek.

De resultaten van de drie case studies presenteer ik in hoofdstuk 4, 5 en 6 van het proefschrift. De eerste casestudie betreft het fenomeen van de eenmalige reünie. Hierin staat de Britse tv-serie en concertreeks the Big Reunion centraal, waarin bands werden herenigd, zoals *Five*, *Atomic Kitten*, *Blue* en *B*Witched*, die eind jaren '90 de Britse hitlijsten veroverden. Ik onderzoek de betekenis die kijkers en concertbezoekers van the Big Reunion aan het fenomeen gaven vanuit hun huidige positie in hun levensloop. Hiervoor analyseerde ik forumberichten op de twee grootste popcultuur fora van het Verenigd Koninkrijk, DigitalSpy en Popjustice. Ook hield ik korte interviews met bezoekers van the Big Reunion Christmas Party Tour-concerten. Op basis van een analyse van die twee databestanden, concludeerde ik dat het Big Reunion-publiek het fenomeen op drie verschillende manieren 'leest' (interpreteert, zie Hall, 1973). Omdat de leden van dit publiek nu volwassen zijn, hebben ze ten eerste een soort nostalgische houding ten opzichte van de bands die deelnemen aan het programma, wat positieve associaties met hun eigen verleden /jeugd oproept. Doordat ze nu met een 'volwassen' blik naar het fenomeen kijken, zijn ze er in de tweede plaats ook enigszins ironisch over en zijn ze meer gesloten over of ze de bands nog leuk vinden. Deze ironische consumptie van the Big Reunion is vooral terug te zien in hoe de respondenten zich enerzijds identificeren met de artiesten en wat deze meemaken in de show (bijv. hard werken om voor hun gezin te zorgen), maar zich anderzijds distantiëren van de beledigende toon die het programma soms gebruikt over de status van de artiesten. Deze ironische, doch 'volwassen' houding van het publiek toont aan dat leeftijd en levensloop als handvatten kunnen functioneren om betekenis te geven aan deze vorm van opnieuw aangeboden muziek uit het verleden. Op basis van hun huidige positie en ervaringen in het leven, zijn de betrokken kijker en concertbezoekers in staat om een bepaald oordeel over de show te vellen. Dat laatste wordt ook duidelijk in de derde 'lezing' van het fenomeen: de respondenten zijn kritisch op het format van het programma. Waar ze als kind misschien nog naïef genoeg waren om te geloven dat een band uit zichzelf bij elkaar was gekomen, zijn ze dat nu niet meer. Ze prikken nu door het 'geproduceerde' karakter van de acts van destijds heen, maar ze vinden dat de productie van de show zich daar te weinig rekenschap geeft.

In hoofdstuk 5 wordt onderzocht hoe de betekenis en waarde van Amerikaanse boy band Backstreet Boys verbonden is met ontwikkelingen in de levensloop van hun (Nederlandse) fans. Op basis van een interview-studie met 24 Nederlandse fans, beschrijf ik

hoe de band een belangrijk onderdeel van hun leven vormt en vooral als betekenisvol wordt beschouwd in relatie tot belangrijke ontwikkelingen en overgangsrten, bijvoorbeeld de transitie van jonge meid naar vrouw. Als tieners leerden de fans Engels, om zo nieuws over the Backstreet Boys te kunnen volgen, en creëerden ze hun eigen websites toen de Nederlandse media de band niet meer bespraken. Nu, als volwassen vrouwen, staan ze in verbinding met fans wereldwijd. De geïnterviewde fans zien de band als een constante factor in hun leven, een soort rots in de branding, waarop ze kunnen vertrouwen in moeilijke tijden. Ze vinden dat de muziek troost en rust biedt, omdat ze deze al kennen sinds hun jonge jaren. Die langdurige connectie, ook al was de band enkele jaren afwezig en vormt die geen onderdeel meer van de mainstream, is wat de fans het meest waarderen. Ze hebben het gevoel dat ze samen met deze zogenaamde ‘synthetische’, niet authentieke band zijn opgegroeid en samen volwassen zijn geworden. Dat komt ook doordat de teksten van de band nu bijvoorbeeld gaan over ‘volwassen’ zaken en ervaringen, bijvoorbeeld het verliezen van een ouder, of zelf moeder of vader worden.

De derde casestudie, besproken in hoofdstuk 6, kijkt naar de betekenis en waarde van de steeds terugkerende reünie, en hoe deze een rol speelt in relatie tot levensloop-reflecties van het betrokken publiek. Doe Maar, de Nederlandse pop en ska-band die het onderwerp van deze studie vormt, ging uit elkaar in 1984, na een zeer succesvolle maar heftige carrière van vier jaar. Doe Maar liet in de jaren '80 een ware gekte ontstaan bij tienermeiden, zoals the Beatles in Engeland ooit hadden opgeroepen. Sinds 2000, toen de band de eerste keer herenigde, heeft de band al meerdere reünies gehouden (2008, 2012, 2013, 2016 en 2017) over een tijdsspanne van zeventien jaar. Deze terugkerende reünie, wordt op drie manieren ervaren, zo bleek uit de interviews die ik hield met achttien voormalige en huidige Doe Maar liefhebbers. Allereerst stelt de reünie hen in staat om te reflecteren op hun tienerjaren, en hoe ze destijds in het leven stonden tegenover hoe ze dat nu doen. Ten tweede, omdat Doe Maar een vast repertoire heeft (ze brachten na 2000 geen nieuw werk meer uit), biedt de reünie een herleving van de jaren '80 voor de fans. Dat stelt ze ook in staat om tijdelijk hun verantwoordelijkheden en verplichtingen te vergeten. Ten derde wordt de muziek van Doe Maar gebruikt om betekenis te geven aan bepaalde situaties die plaatsvinden in het huidige leven van de geïnterviewde. Net zoals de Backstreet Boys-fans aangaven, vormt ook de muziek van Doe Maar een hulpmiddel in moeilijke tijden waarop fans kunnen vertrouwen of terugvallen.

In het laatste hoofdstuk van het proefschrift (hoofdstuk 7) presenteer ik mijn conclusies op basis van de bevindingen opgedaan in de casestudie-hoofdstukken. De hoofdconclusie van het onderzoek is dat ook (zeer) commerciële muziek uit iemands verleden die nu opnieuw aangeboden wordt betekenisvol en waardevol kan zijn voor (verschillende) publieken. Omdat de muziek er altijd al geweest is in iemands leven en als een rode draad verweven is met iemands levensloop, functioneert de muziek als steun en toeverlaat. Echter, niet iedereen gaat opnieuw in op het aanbod van ‘oude muziek’. Sommige geïnterviewden geven aan dat de muziek hoort bij hun jeugd, nostalgisch is, en verder niet veel aandacht krijgt in hun volwassen leven. In het afsluitende hoofdstuk presenteer ik ook enkele adviezen en praktische toepassingen van mijn onderzoek, waarbij ik onder meer aandacht schenk aan hoe tv-programma’s muziek uit het verleden opnieuw kunnen aanbieden. Ten slotte pleit ik ervoor om ook de door mij bestudeerde vormen van mainstream popmuziek, die vaak nog als ‘lagere’ cultuuruitingen gezien worden, vanuit een erfgoed-perspectief te bekijken, omdat we de waarde van dit type muziek niet mogen onderschatten.

Portfolio

In the course of my five-and-a-half year appointment as a PhD candidate and lecturer (September 2011 until February 2017) in Media and Communication, at the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University Rotterdam, I spent 60% of my time on my PhD research, and dedicated 40% of my time to teaching in the International Bachelor of Communication and Media.

Courses followed during the PhD project:

Academic / Methodological

2011-2012

- Advanced Qualitative Methods, Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR, 5 ECTS)

2012-2013

- Research School for Media Studies (RMeS) Summer school: Audiences & Users, RMeS & Erasmus Centre for Media, Communication and Culture (ERMeCC. 5 ECTS)
- Master class Locating Imagination, EUR, RMeS & ERMeCC (Rotterdam, 1 ECTS)
- Returning the Gaze: reception consumption, and 'the audience' construct, RMeS (1 ECTS)
- PhD Seminar 'Popular Culture, Celebrity & Fans', NeFCA (University of Antwerp, Certificate of participation)

2013-2014

- RMeS Winter School, RMeS (Radboud University, 2 ECTS)
- Master class Nick Couldry, RMeS (Utrecht University, 1 ECTS)
- Qualitative Methods, Erasmus Graduate School of Social Sciences and the Humanities (EGS3H) & Evers Research (Erasmus University, 3 ECTS)
- Dean's Master Class Families and Morality & Ethics, EGS3H (Erasmus University, DAME Award)

2014-2015

- How to get your Article published, EG3SH (Erasmus University)
- Philosophy of the Social Sciences and Humanities, EG3SH (Erasmus University)
- Music Matters Master Class, International Association Popular Music Studies (IASPM) and Tilburg University & EUR (Tilburg University)
- RMeS Winter School (Free University Amsterdam, 2 ECTS)
- International Women, Ageing, Media Summer School (University of Gloucester, United Kingdom)

2015-2016

- RMeS Winter School, RMeS (University of Groningen)
- Seminar Ageing celebrities and ageing fans in popular media culture (University of Copenhagen, Denmark)

Didactic courses

University Teaching Qualification, Research Training Consultancy Risbo (EUR)

Completed August 2015

Workshop Feedback geven en begeleiden, Risbo (EUR)

Completed May 7 2012

Courses taught during the PhD project

Media Entertainment & Popular Culture

(2014-15, 2015-16, Seminar design focused on participation, one seminar group)

Communication as a Social Force

(From 2011-12 up and until 2016, two to three tutorial groups, additionally in 2015 course coordination and lectures)

International and Global Communication

(From 2011-12 up and until 2016-17, two to four tutorial group, additionally one lecture)

Key Concepts in the Social Sciences

(From 2011 up and until 2013-14, one or two tutorial groups, content design of pre-master tutorial groups)

Research Workshop Cross-national Comparative Research

(2011-12 and 2012-2013, one or two research work groups)

Media Systems in Comparative Perspective

(2011-12, two tutorial groups)

Internship Supervision

(2014-15, supervision of second and third year students)

Master thesis supervision

(2014-15, 2015-16, three theses from the Dutch language master program, one international master program thesis)

Conferences and academic meetings during the PhD project

June/July 2015	Back to the Future: Popular Music and Time. IASPM, 18th Biannual Conference: Campinas, Brazil (2015, June 29 - 2015, July 3).
April 2015	International Symposium on Popular Music Fandom and the Public Sphere: University of Chester, Chester, United Kingdom (2015, April, 10).
February 2015	Reliving pop music memories at The Big Reunion concert. Etmaal voor de Communicatiewetenschap: Antwerpen, Belgium (2015, February 2 - 2015, February 3).
November 2014	Insights in the longterm fandom of the Backstreet Boys. IASPM Benelux: Erasmus University Rotterdam (2014, November 6).
September 2014	Paper presentation: 'As long as you love me' - Insights in the longterm Dutch Backstreet Boys fandom. Fan Studies Network: London, United Kingdom (2014, September 27).
August 2013	Back to the '90s & '00s: reliving the past through popular music. ESA 11th international European Conference: Crisis, Critique and Change: Turin, Italy (2013, August 31).

November 2013	Popular music and aging minds. Fan Studies Network Symposium: University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom (2013, November 30).
November 2013	Tunes of Identity. European Fandom & Fan Studies Conference: 'Localization and Translation': Amsterdam, the Netherlands (2013, November 9).
February 2013	Tunes of Identity: Audience memories of local music. Etmaal voor de Communicatiewetenschap: Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2013, February 7 - 2013, February 8).
January 2013	Tunes of Identity: How localities can be remembered through music-narratives of the audience. POPiD conference: Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2013, January 30 - 2013, February 1).
May 2012	Het is een kwestie van geduld: publiek en het vertoog van regionale populaire muziek. Dag van de Sociologie: Utrecht, the Netherlands (2012, May 25 - 2012, May 25).
September 2012	The Discourse of regional popular music (re)considered. ESA Conference: Communication, Culture and Creativity: Berlin, Germany (2012, September 5 - 2012, September 7).

Academic services

- Main Organizer European Fan Cultures Conference: Erasmus University Rotterdam, the Netherlands (November, 2015)
- Student board member of the Erasmus Research Centre for Media, Culture and Communication (2015 – 2017)
- Student board member and representative for Erasmus University at the Research School for Media Studies (2014 – 2017)
- Member of the International Association of Popular Music Studies (2014 – 2017)

List of publications related to the PhD project

Articles

Driessen, S. (2015). Larger than life: Exploring the transcultural fan practices of the Dutch Backstreet Boys fandom. *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies*, 12(2), 180–196.

Driessen, S. (2015). Still “got the feeling”: Exploring post-youth’s enjoyment of music from their recent past. *Postgraduate Journal of Women, Ageing and Media*, 2, 90–98.

Co-authored articles

Driessen, S. & Jones, B. (2016). Love me for a reason: An auto-ethnographic account of Boyzone fandom. *IASPM@Journal*, 6(1), 68–84.

Hoeven, A. Van der, Janssen, S., & Driessen, S. (2016). Articulations of identity and distinction: The meanings of language in Dutch popular music. *Popular Music & Society*, 39(1), 43–58.

Book chapters

Driessen, S. (forthcoming, 2017). ‘I’ll never break your heart’: The Perpetual fandom of the Backstreet Boys. In R. Williams (Ed.), *Endings, Transitions & Resurrections in Fandom*. Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press.

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Curriculum Vitae

Simone Driessen (1987) holds a Master's degree in Media Studies (2011, Erasmus University Rotterdam), and a Bachelor's degree in Journalism (2009, Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Tilburg). During her Bachelor-program, Simone worked as a music journalist for various online platforms and music magazines. In these publications, she not only focused on the music acts themselves, but also paid attention to their loyal audience: the fans. In her PhD, she gained the opportunity to combine these two interests by researching music fans.

In 2011 she started as a PhD candidate at the Media and Communication Department at Erasmus University Rotterdam. In addition to conducting research, Simone also taught various classes in the International Bachelor of Communication and Media, and supervised internships and theses. In 2015, she organized a two-day conference focused on European Fan Culture, which brought together an international group of fan studies scholars.

During her PhD candidacy, Simone participated in national and international conferences, summer schools and seminars. She was also an active member of the Erasmus Centre for Media, Communication and Culture (ERMeCC) PhD Club and their student representative in the ERMeCC board, as well as the PhD representative for the Research School for Media Studies (RMeS). Besides these activities, Simone kept her journalism skills up to date by participating in the Social Media Working Group of the Erasmus Graduate School for Social Sciences and the Humanities.

