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## **Distinctive Signs and Musical Practice: A Research Paradigm for Music Sociological Analysis?**

In this paper, I aim to introduce and discuss the concept of ‘distinctive signs’ – a term influenced by Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 482) – as an approach to music-sociological analysis. The central issue is to examine how social processes structure and organise music, as well as how music, in turn, can structure social practices.

The starting point is the observation that previous approaches seeking to combine musical and sociological analysis – such as those of Kurt Blaukopf (1996), Christian Kaden (2004), and Philip Tagg (2012) – rely on a framework rooted in communication theory. This theoretical paradigm, however, can be considered ‘antagonistic’ (Reckwitz 2003) to practice theory. The latter, by contrast, offers valuable critique when the two paradigms are brought into what Peter Zima (2020) calls a “theory dialogue”, which seeks to uncover blind spots and enable mutual critique. Practice theory argues that communication-leaning approaches neglect the actual social agents – the senders and receivers within a communication chain – their positions in social fields, and their habitus, instead prioritising the analysis of the channel as semiotic structures or social systems (e.g. Bourdieu 1991; Lange 2010).

By engaging in a dialogue between these two paradigms and presenting the concept of distinctive signs as a bridge between them, my paper will illustrate and address both the theoretical and methodological consequences of such an approach. Furthermore, it will demonstrate the application of this concept through two case studies already conducted (Sturm 2022; 2025) and how distinctive signs link musical material and social practice as means of community building and identification.

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