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Raphaël NOWAK, *Consuming Music in the Digital Age: Technologies, Roles and Everyday Life*

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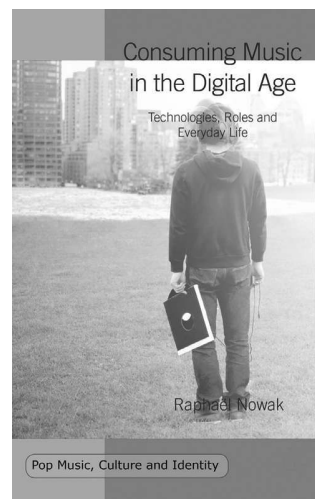
Notes de lecture

Raphaël Nowak, *Consuming Music in the Digital Age: Technologies, Roles and Everyday Life*, Hampshire & New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016

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By Shara Rambarran

People's habits and practices in consuming and listening to music have gradually changed over time. It is frightening to think that these habits have changed continuously over somewhat more than 20 years due to the rapid evolution of the digital age. The peak of digital music consumption (for example, CD/MP3 and streaming) was part of the early 2000s to when streaming took over. This revolution not only transformed our practices in "everyday listening" to music but our daily lives as well. It is a choice, on whether we listen to and enjoy music, and if so, as part of this listening practice, we can let particular music technology (for consumption purposes) become part of our lives. Raphaël Nowak explores this concept in his book, *Consuming Music in the Digital*



Age: Technologies, Roles and Everyday Life, part of the Palgrave Macmillan "Pop Music, Culture and Identity" book series.

This book examines the various methods the youth employs when listening to music, and how music consumption via digital technologies have shaped their lives. As the book is more geared to sociology (rather than music as a subject), Nowak acknowledges previous music and cultural theories that have addressed specific patterns and concepts surrounding musical consumption practices and attempts to add his contributions and arguments. To implement this, he surveys individual listeners in Australia mainly between 2010-14 and presents the results in five chapters. Nowak monitors on how music continues (or does not continue) to have an impact in their life, by investigating ways they "hear, listen to, and are accompanied by music, throughout the various contexts of their everyday lives" (5).

In Chapter One, "The Material Modalities of Music Consumption", Nowak offers the reader the newer methods of music

consumption via music technologies. To understand the new practices of digital music consumption, the reader (or indeed the unfamiliar reader), is briefly informed of previous (and traditional) methods of individual music consumption (e.g. vinyl, CD, etc.). Nowak makes a point that in the digital age, music is becoming disposable (and replaceable), and he questions on how “individuals have adopted new music technologies and seeks to understand how they use them, and how they have adapted their modes of consumption to a greater array of material options at their disposal” (15). As previously stated, he achieves this by surveying participants (mainly under 30 years old) and their listening habits. He questions what attracts them to specific digital formats and particular music (e.g. genre, band, situation), and whether their music consumption has changed over time (e.g. are they still listening to the same type of music, do they still “own” the format, or why has their listening habits changed).

Nowak then examines the intertwinement of music and everyday life in Chapter Two (“Music within Everyday Life in the Digital Age”). This chapter facilitates more theoretical and methodological framework that was previously offered by the likes of Tia DeNora, Antoine Hennion, Michael Bull, and others, and where appropriate, highlights the struggles, or suggests new and fresh arguments in exploring these concepts further. For example, Nowak offers his definition of “everyday life” and implements on how emotion (he uses the term “emotional reflexivity”) is a significant contributor to the practices of music consumption.

In “Role-Normative Modes of Listening and Affective Possibilities of Music”, Nowak investigates the actual

practices of individual music listening and the “affect”. Nowak conveniently again offers his definition of the term “affect” and how it relates to his investigation. He refers to his participants for answers, and identifies that personal memories and social situations trigger emotional behaviour (affect) in music consumption. He also investigates the musical experience for the individual (e.g. a particular song) and whether their reaction can result in the same emotional response in a social-collective setting (e.g. a concert).

The concept of emotionally responding to certain songs in an individual or collective setting neatly leads to the next chapter where Nowak looks at “Music Taste as Assemblage”. Here, he explores the historical, cultural and social practices of music tastes, and how they shape the individual’s musical choices and habits. The chapter heavily focuses on the participants, and how their musical tastes have changed over time (e.g. life situations). Interestingly, as we head to the current methods of consumption (e.g. streaming) that is more visual based (when one thinks of social media and YouTube), this is slightly underexplored. Nowak acknowledges this gap. The reader has to be aware that the main research covers a specific timeframe and that new/current methods of music consumption practices are constantly emerging, as Nowak argues that “music tastes evolve over time, as individuals incorporate new context and abandon other content [...] tastes unfold throughout their life narratives. Music matters over time” (125).

With “time” and “life narrative” serving a few of many keywords in this book, Nowak draws on these theories by looking at how individuals actually grow (or specifically “age”) with music. In the final chapter,

“Rethinking the Roles of Music through its Association with Life Narratives”, Nowak investigates how life narratives can alter one’s musical habits and listening practices. While the concept of ageing and forming identities are key factors, Nowak also considers how the material aspects of music consumption, interaction, and encounters can have a major impact on an individual and his/her “life narrative” over time.

Overall, Nowak does a splendid job in surveying music consumption in the digital age. While the theme carries a cultural-sociological approach, the book would appeal to researchers and academics in this field (especially under/postgraduate students). Nowak conducted the field research in Australia, and the participants are ordinary everyday listeners/consumers of music (in other words there is limited information on whether the responses included music practitioners, e.g. musicians, producers etc.). With this in mind, interested non-cultural sociologists will find some aspects of this books useful, particularly the fresh theories offered by Nowak that he applies to music consumption practices, via music technology, in the digital age. This book serves as a useful contribution to ongoing academic topics on music and digitalism.

Raphaël Nowak & Andrew Whelan, *Networked Music Cultures: Contemporary Approaches, Emerging Issues*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire & New York, 2016

By Shara Rambarran

In the exciting age of digitalism, music admirers, whether they are in the form of a consumer, practitioner, musician, educator, etc. (or all), are fortunate to have unlimited access to music. The Internet, for example, has provided a gateway for computer/digital based device users to search, share, listen and download music anytime and anywhere (Whiteley & Rambarran, 2016). Indeed, there are restricted factors that need to be addressed as unlimited “free” access to music for all, does not necessarily mean “free for all”. This means, economic circumstances need to be considered (e.g. consumers’ affordability to have access to music services; the music industry monitoring paid and unpaid consumption services), not forgetting censorship (where specific