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# On Researching Music in Everyday Life, Assessing the Musician as Producer of Commercialised Music

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**On the methods of researching music in everyday life: Assessing the musician as producer of commercialized music.**

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**On the methods of researching music in everyday life: Assessing the musician as producer of commercialized music.**

The commercial appropriation of music is becoming more and more common as marketing managers increasingly look to music as part of their communications mix. Recently Microsoft reportedly paid \$12 million for a commercial license to use the song *Start Me Up* (Allison, 1995) signifying the growth in importance. We are developing a framework to understand and locate music in its theoretical context. This paper, which draws on postgraduate research, examines music from the context of the consumer society and examines music appropriation as a two-way process thus embracing the spirit of change investigated in this conference.

## **On the methods of researching music in everyday life: Assessing the musician as producer of commercialized music.**

The commercial appropriation of music is becoming more and more common as advertisers and retail atmospheric managers increasingly look to the use of music as part of their communications mix. Recently Microsoft reportedly paid \$12 million for a commercial license to use the song *Start Me Up* (Allison, 1995) signifying the recognition within marketing that the use of music is of extreme importance. We are developing a framework to understand and locate music in its theoretical context. This paper, which draws on postgraduate research, examines music from the context of the consumer society and examines music appropriation as a two-way process. The paper examines the following issues:

- 1) Music in the consumer society
- 2) Pop Art
- 3) Pop music as Pop art
- 4) The Commercial appropriation of music
- 5) Research issues
- 6) The Present Study
- 7) Research Framework
- 8) Discussion

### **Music and the Consumer Society**

Baudrillard (1998:pp26) argues that the consumer no longer relates to a particular object in its specific utility, but to a set of objects in its total signification which act as a “chain of signifiers”. The consumer, then, becomes immersed in this directive path of consumption and art, hence, becomes culturised until a drugstore is indistinguishable from an art gallery (pp27). So too music has entered this chain with one piece of classical music identified as being the

“Hovis song now” due to its use in an advertisement (O'Donohue, 1997:pp245). This reflects a change from the use of music in advertisements from aiding product recall to transferring or exchanging value from the music to the product. Music thus becomes broken down into signifiers and signified (Goldman and Papson, 1996:pp70). Such is the extensive appropriation of music by advertisers that one observer notes that watching — or at least listening to — television commercials is almost like flipping around the radio dial as more songs, from every era and every kind of artist, are filling up the commercial breaks (De Marco, 2002). Indeed one advertiser recently described music and ads as having “walked hand-in-hand up the aisle of advertising” (Channel-4, 2002).

### **Pop Art**

Baudrillard states that the outcome of the “chain of signifiers” is that the logic of consumption eliminates the traditional sublime status of artistic representation as they coexist in the same physical and logical space where they both ‘operate’ as signs (Baudrillard, 1998:pp115). He suggests that one form of art that thrives in this chain were the Pop Artists such as Lichtenstein, Oldenberg and Warhol. It is an art, he states, that is contemporaneous with the logic of signs and consumption whilst also an effect of fashion, and hence itself a mere object of consumption (Baudrillard, 1998:pp115). Whiting (1997:pp4) described Pop Art as borrowing from consumer culture, but also consumer culture re-appropriated and disseminated Pop art. Pop art such as Warhol’s paintings of Campbell’s soup tins or Oldenberg’s *Shop* ought to be regarded as a celebration of the market (Frith and Horne, 1987; Whiting, 1997) and as homogenous with the industrial, mass production and hence with the artificial, manufactured character of the consumer society (Baudrillard, 1998:pp115).

## **Pop art becomes Pop music**

Frith & Horn (1987) illustrate the large number of pop musicians who were influenced by Pop artists. Pete Townshend the songwriter and guitar player for The Who was an example and, in an interview for *Melody Maker*, stated: ‘We stand for Pop art clothes, Pop art music and Pop art behaviour... we don’t change offstage, we live Pop art’ (cited by Frith and Horne, 1987:pp101). A classic example of The Who as Pop artists was provided by their album *The Who Sell Out* which included fake *Radio London* and *Heinz Beans* jingles created by the band and whose packaging featured themselves in advertising imagery (Friedlander, 1996; Frith and Horne, 1987). Frith & Horne regard the album as being a Pop Art masterpiece noting how the album celebrated its own sales process. Townshend was, they argue, on a mission to destroy the division between what was high Pop and low Pop (pp101).

Since the 60s there have been significant technological changes that allow the musicians more freedom to explore signification and popular music has witnessed the emergence of the DJ who remixes or samples sound bytes of existing pieces of music and creates a pastiche. Just as where the Pop Artists had stripped art of its sublime privileged status, the DJ is a glorified craftsman questioning the traditional concept of the artist, blowing it apart and re-establishing it in overhauled form (Poschardt, 1998:pp14). DJ music, according to Rice, can communicate “cool” much more effectively than magazines who attempt to tune into the zeitgeist through such topics as video games, models, rock bands and so forth. Though they are whole reported on within the magazine, therein they remain as isolated and distinct units unlike the DJs who can mix them all together and the signification yields to meaning shifts (Rice, 2000). Strange takes this notion further and claims that of all social commentators, the DJ, using the logo minefield of America as source, is placed to be in tune with the zeitgeist and therefore ought to be regarded as the meme shaman, a musician as commercial producer who provides the public with the ultimate form of music, one that resembles “a really cool commercial” (pp8). Hence



there is a process which Goodwin (1992) describes as the “mediaisation” of popular music with sound-bytes and forms of editing associated with advertising being integrated into popular music.

A further development in terms of the mediaisation of music has been the development of video. The music video is described by Savage as an advert turned into product: “pop is now culture in the situationist sense, with its own past, its own references, even its own marketing, as part of a seamless package. With its industrial importance, it can’t afford not to be” (1990:pp149). The rise of the video, note Frith & Horn (1987), further blurs the traditional distinction between making music and marketing a commodity as pop groups are expected by their record companies to construct their music as its own advertisement as a video spot (pp176).

Tomlinson observes how popular music has commonly been a celebration of consumption rather than creativity (Tomlinson, 1990:pp30) whilst Frith notes how the overt selling of pop groups such Frankie Goes To Hollywood represents a visible deconstruction of the pop sales process and a breathy celebration of sales people (1990:pp131). In the case of Frankie Goes To Hollywood, the music is considered secondary to the overall spectacle leading Frith to conclude that the form had eclipsed the content (1990). Adorno had the following to say:

The entire practice of the culture industry transfers the profit motive naked onto cultural forms. Ever since these cultural forms first began to earn a living for their creators as commodities in the marketplace they had already possessed something of this quality. But then they sought after profit only indirectly, over and above their autonomous essence. (Adorno, 2000:pp269)

Adorno is typical of the romanticists who view music as occupying a separate dimension to capitalism, “music”, according to Beethoven, is “a higher revelation than any philosophy” (cited by Berlyne, 1971:pp41). However it was the success of Pop Artists such as Warhol that they managed to destroy this distinction and instead create an ambiguity between what was art and what was capitalism. Therefore we now live in a period where pop music is often Pop art music, homogenous with the immanent chain of signifiers and comfortably co-existing as both art and product.

### **The Commercial Appropriation of Music**

Two of the most commonly researched uses of music within consumer research are of the contexts of retail atmospherics and advertising. In both areas a notion that is regarded by many writers as central is that of musical fit (Areni and Kim, 1993; Bruner and Gordon, 1990; Chebat et al., 2001; De Nora, 2000; Dubé and Morin, 2001; MacInnis and Park, 1991; North and Hargreaves, 1996, 1997c, 1997a, 1999, 2000; North and Law, 2000; Oakes, 2000; Park and Young, 1986), defined by MacInnis & Park as the ‘consumer’s subjective perceptions of the music’s relevance or appropriateness to the central ad message’ (1991:pp162). That music can fit a context suggests that there is an underlying meaning within the music that resonates with the context. As that context is commonly commercial and we live in a period where the musician is described as commercial producer (Strange, 2002) the suggestion is that the music may lend itself to commercial appropriation. Where music is successfully appropriated then the process can become, as comedian Vic Reeves described it, a “passport to No. 1” (Channel-4, 2002). In recent years numerous songs have gone on to become chart hits after their appropriation by advertisements (Channel-4, 2002; De Marco, 2002; Sexton, 2000). The outcome is what Derek Robson of the advertising agency Bartle Bogle & Hegarty described as a marriage between music and advertising (Channel-4, 2002)

## **Research Issues**

Rohde & Platteel state that the best way to understand the generation who have been bombarded by the symbols and signs of the consumer society is not through their politics or economics but by interpreting their symbols as the bearers of their collective experiences (1999:pp11). Within consumer research numerous writers have called for such analysis of works of art as means of gaining knowledge (Belk, 1986; Brown, 1997; Holbrook and Grayson, 1986; Schroeder, 1997). Noting how only art can convey the specific, personal, and experiential knowledge in a way that approaches the intensity and intimacy of the actual experience (pp23), Belk encourages consumer researchers to use art as a “non-traditional vantage point” (pp6) to generate hypotheses for further analysis through scientific methods. This is a similar approach to Holbrook & Grayson, Brown and Schroeder who analyse film, fiction and art respectively. In all cases the consumer behaviour that they are investigating is directly represented however this is rarely the case in music. According to the composer Mendelssohn, ‘The feelings expressed in music are incapable of articulation, not because they are too vague for words, but on the contrary, because they are too specific’ (cited by Holbrook, 1990:pp1). Schopenhauer (2001) states that music is the most powerful and penetrating of all art forms as, where other arts “speak only of the shadow... music is the essence” (pp92). Whilst recognising the abstract nature of music as there is often an obscurity of the subject, Schopenhauer argues that music can communicate the essence of a phenomenon and, whilst we may not be able to explain why, when music is applied to context, we can sense that it has conveyed the “secret meaning” of the context (pp94). Therefore the essence of music can be difficult to represent in non-musical form. In this sense the interpretation of art as proposed by the various consumer researchers either is inappropriate for interpreting musical pieces or lacks penetration.

## **Context Bound Research**

Within consumer research there has been a tradition of observing musical response within the context which it is typically heard by the consumer such as retail atmospherics (Areni and Kim, 1993; Bruner and Gordon, 1990; Hui et al., 1997; Milliman, 1982, 1986; Oakes, 2000; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990). This is in marked contrast to studies such as Holbrook & Schindler (1989) and Lacher & Mizerski (1994) that attempt to recreate the listening experience in laboratory style contexts. Outside of consumer research, the context bound approach has been admired as it recognises the tendency of people to listen to music whilst occupied in other tasks (De Nora, 2000; De Nora and Belcher, 2000; North and Hargreaves, 1997b) and also as the prototypicality of the music, defined as the extent to which a stimulus is typical of its class (North and Hargreaves, 1996), can be a driver of the response to the music. Therefore an analysis of music based on other consumer research analyses into art (Belk, 1986; Brown, 1997; Holbrook and Grayson, 1986; Schroeder, 1997) that recognises it as an autonomous art form will fail to account for the impact of the prototypical influences that drive musical response.

### **The Present Study**

In light of the need to examine commercialised music with due regards to the prototypical dimensions of consumption whilst also dealing with the difficulties of representing a non-verbal form of communication through verbal means, a method that allows the phenomenon to be examined on its own terms is required. Hence a method of naturalistic inquiry is selected. In naturalistic inquiry, no assumptions are made, instead researchers build an understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs *in situ*, later testing the veracity of that understanding, also *in situ* (Belk et al., 1989). Belk et al identify the first step in such inquiry as observing and recording the phenomenon in detail. Researchers then specify their understanding and construct guidelines for further data collection to test the emerging understanding. Rather than data

collection followed by analysis, data collected previously form the basis for an interpretation, which then defines what data are required to test the interpretation (Belk et al., 1989:pp3).

In order to observe and record the phenomenon in detail, a number of in-depth interviews were carried out adopting the humanist emergent design where initial interviews were largely nondirective. A series of respondents were chosen who were expected to have impassioned and educated views on the notions of music in the consumer society. The interviewees included: Mocean Worker , a New York based DJ who has produced three solo albums as well as scoring the music for numerous films and documentaries who has licensed his music to appear in several commercial contexts. Pat Hannon, a multi-award winning freelance radio advertiser who has licensed the music of many musicians. Gerald Davis – a Dublin based artist, gallery owner and jazz record label owner who has campaigned against the abuse of background music. Pipedown – an English based lobby group who campaign for the freedom from piped music

One such theme that emerged from the pilot study was the notion of the musician as producer of commercial music. In asking Mocean Worker why the American retail chain *Old Navy* had licensed one his songs, *Tres Tres Chic*, he responded by describing the song as being “the flavour” of the business, it was for Old Navy, “who we are”. He also commented:

I wrote this song and was like, “you’ll see, this song will become a coffee commercial”. And then it ends up getting used by Old Navy and they’re whole thing was, it wasn’t really like a loungey coffee thing but it was like pretty near close to it.

The above comment shows how even before the song became appropriated by *Old Navy*, Mocean Worker had an expectation that it would become part of a commercial. Though the

song's lyrics contains no reference to coffee or textile or any such notion, there is an underlying meaning or intertextuality within the piece that lends itself towards commercial appropriation. Similarly when Pat Hannon licensed the song *Inside* by Moby for a commercial, he claims that he knew immediately upon first hearing of the song that it would be perfect for the ad as it "underpinned the architecture" of the ad.

Mocean Worker stated that the conservatism of the radio stations and other cultural intermediaries in terms of allowing new forms of music to emerge, forces musicians to explore other avenues of distribution.

I think that, like, licensing is a gift to a lot of composers that would not necessarily ever get noticed because the machine, as it works now, precludes a lot of different stuff from being noticed, period. Y'know film supervisors are actively going out of their way to find this music that nobody else knows about because they want to have something exclusive in their film.

This pragmatic approach to music differs to the more romantic approaches to music. For example the artist Gerald Davis considered the commercial appropriation of music to be insulting to the musician whilst one member of Pipedown described music during dinnertime as an insult to both the musician and the chef! A common argument put forward against the use of background music was that it was found to be distracting, for example one member of Pipedown, Mr Wackett, made the following point:

I'm a great fan of music. I spend a lot of my time listening to music, *listening* to music so my ears are fairly well tuned to listen carefully. Now when this Muzak is being

poured over me, I find it very difficult *not* to listen because my ears are sensitive to listening and therefore it is even more of an affront...

Similarly Gerald Davis expressed irritation at finding himself listening to music in restaurants whilst also trying to engage in conversation. These views contrast with Mocean Workers' experience who enjoyed background music as a "soundtrack to your life". Given the age differential between the respondents, the above lends supporting evidence to De Nora's (2000) finding that the older generation are used to music as an autonomous art form that should be purposefully listened to as a solo activity whereas the younger generation are used to hearing music in such contexts.

### **Research Framework**

Using naturalistic inquiry, the above interpretations are to form the basis of future investigation. The question, therefore, is what interpretation lies at the heart of the issue? Firstly that the older generation have difficulty accepting the usage of music in such commercial contexts lends support to the notion that, at some stage, music became integrated into the chain of signifiers. As research demonstrates that the typical music listeners' interest in listening to music declines around the age of 24 (Holbrook and Schindler, 1989; North and Hargreaves, 1997b), it is entirely possible that this integration of music into a chain of signifiers would go unnoticed by the older generation. That those who object to the commercial appropriation of music do so due to romantic notions of how music ought to be consumed, suggests that they still subscribe to the notion of music as an autonomous art form. Mocean Worker's claims that the closed shop nature of the music industry is forcing musicians to investigate other forms of distribution such as licensing music for commercial appropriation suggests that the intertextual notion of music will increase in the future. All of these interpretations lend support to the notion that music has become integrated into the chain

of signifiers. In this context the question becomes **how the production of commercial music this manifests itself (if at all) and how that music becomes re-appropriated back into the consumer society.**

Baudrillard's (1998) "chain of signifiers" may be represented in the below framework:

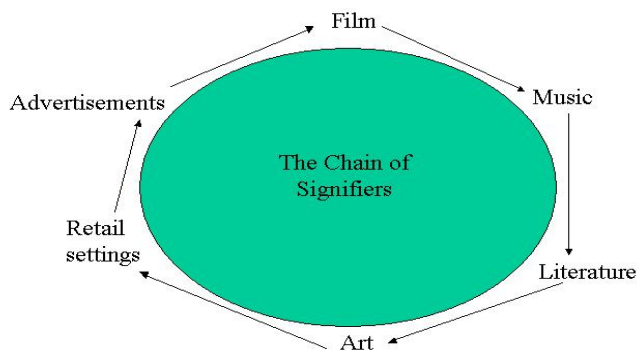


Figure 1 – The Chain of Signifiers

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The framework notes how each of the cultural artefacts of the consumer society all signify each other in an intertextual chain. O'Donohue (1997) states that intertextuality also includes decoding in terms of how meanings generated from one text are determined partly by the meaning of others. The exchange of meaning therefore is a two way process. Narrowing the framework down, the following research framework may be extrapolated by the lead author:

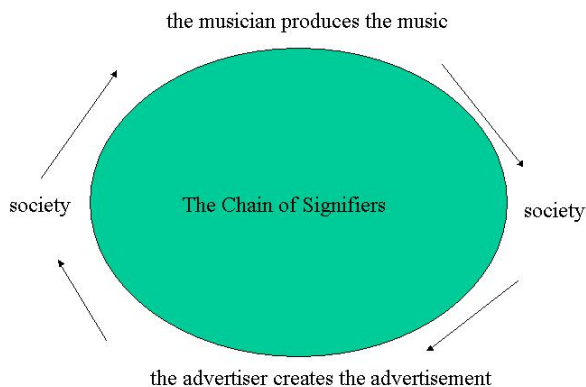




Figure 2 represents a research framework that investigates the intertextual relationship that exists in the creative processes of the musician as producer of music and the advertiser who appropriates the music for commercial purposes. The intervening process involves society who applies their own meaning to the chain of signifiers. In order to proceed with this framework it is decided to focus upon the musicians who actively allow their music to be used in commercial contexts. Data shall then be gathered from in-depth interviews and journals, participant observation, multimedia analysis such as websites and popular media articles. Though not a direct study of consumers, the framework incorporates Rohde & Platteel's (1999) ontology that the best way to study the current generation is through an analysis of their signs and symbols.

## **Discussion**

The research framework embraces the spirit of change investigated in this conference. In the past the research of music in marketing contexts has typically taken the form of positivist single variable analysis studies (Alpert and Alpert, 1990; Areni and Kim, 1993; Babin and Attaway, 2000; Chebat et al., 2001; Gorn, 1982; Herrington and Capella, 1994, 1996; Hui et al., 1997; Kellaris and Cox, 1989; Kellaris and Kent, 1992; Kellaris and Mantel, 1994; MacInnis and Park, 1991; Milliman, 1982, 1986; Park and Young, 1986; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990) however more recent studies (De Nora, 2000; De Nora and Belcher, 2000; O'Donohue, 1997) reflect the marketing academy opening its doors to other forms of methodological analysis (Brown, 1995). This paper has argued that, for many, music no longer exists as an autonomous art form and a method is required that will investigate the phenomenon on its own terms. Naturalistic inquiry provides that method. The phenomenon is observed from the perspective of the musician following recognition from numerous writers that the analysis of art can provide some of the most pertinent knowledge for consumer

researchers (Belk, 1986; Brown, 1997; Holbrook and Grayson, 1986; Schroeder, 1997). It is hoped that the framework can provide a new way of investigating an under researched phenomenon.

Where before music has been regarded in highly romanticised views, the integration of music into the chain of signifiers destroys music's claim to sublime status until we arrive at a point where Beethoven's music might now be regarded as the music from the ad for IBM. The transition of music into the chain has not been always been smooth. Where the meaning of the music is thrown against itself, research has found that hostility can result (O'Donohue, 1997) and Nike's use of The Beatles' *Revolution* for a commercial caused widespread revulsion (De Marco, 2002; Densmore, 2002; Scott, 1994) and accusations of, to carry forth the Yeats allusion, "fumbling in the greasy till". John Densmore, former member of the Doors recently described musical appropriation as being "bribed to make a pact with the devil" (pp4).

However when the mediatised forms of musical production are considered alongside Strange's writings about the ultimate piece of contemporary music being a "really cool advert", musicians such as Densmore and their romantic approach towards music in commercial contexts appear anachronistic. Many of today's musicians, then, reject such romantic approaches to music and, like the Pop artists, can ride the line that separates art from consumerism. Even in Ireland this process is manifesting itself and in 2002 both the Walls and Jerry Fish & the Mudbug Club have had hit singles after selling commercial licenses to AIB and Vodafone respectively. "All changed, changed utterly" indeed, and the outcome is, to quote Yeats again, that "Romantic Ireland is dead and gone, it's with O'Leary in his grave".

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