THE FUNCTIONALISATION OF MUSIC…

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Introduction

This paper intends to specifically reconsider those novel musical practices that consist in using music for purposes other than those for which it was originally created (music in advertising and in public places, sound illustration…). In other words, this paper will examine the role of music in our everyday lives and analyse the "functionalisation" of music which, by turns, becomes accompaniment, ambient, design or there again the image of a brand or place. In short, this paper will set out just how these original everyday musical practices are constructed and highlight the questions they raise on aesthetic, economic and social levels.

Towards critical pragmatism

To speak of functional music or functionalisation is equivocal. As shown by the sociologist Ivo Supicic (1988, p.176), all music is functional. Although unconvinced by the distinction Supicic makes between use and function, this paper will simply retain that this musical determination depends less on the object itself than on the way the researcher perceives it. Therefore, rather than decide immediately in favour of a disciplinary analytical context leading to insoluble and recurring dualities (aesthetic criticism/commercial proselytism, scholarly/popular music, effects of music/musical functionalities), tending on occasion towards functions in order to deduce their effects and then working on the effects so as to outline their functions, this paper proposes to reverse the order. It proposes to start with an object and understand, by tracing the mediations involved, just how it is constructed by protagonists, situations, techniques and contexts.

The objective of these critical pragmatics is threefold. On one hand, it aims at not confining the object a priori to a particular context but outlining it rather according to

practices[1], everyday "ways of operating" (De Certeau, 1980). Then, it intends to reinscribe these practices within musical "worlds" (Becker, 1984), to contextualise them historically and in everyday life. Finally, it should enable a re-examination of the objectives and questions specific to these practices. In addition to the analytical and methodological problems it poses (how to approach an object that is by nature elusive), this subject questions more classic issues such as the place held by a work in society, musical aesthetics and the relationship with the market economy, in a different way.

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[1] We use the term 'practice' here in the general sense of the word that includes both modes of production and reception.

From functional music to musical functionalisation

The inscription of music within everyday activities is inherent in its history. Since antiquity, it has evolved within a codified relationship of power whether religious, political or military and it is the symbolic and physical expression that accompanies everyday life. In the precepts that govern "The Republic", Plato lays down the principles of musical composition according to the activity involved. With Bach or Handel's "Watermusic", music is intended to elevate the soul or magnify royal power. In the same way, Telemann's "Tafelmusik" (table music), Mozart's "Divertimenti", Erik Satie's "Furniture Music" or Brian Eno's "Music for Airports" perpetuate this tradition by proposing compositions meant to accompany everyday activities.

And yet, today's originality lies in the use of music for purposes other than those for which it was created. Whether it be a question of diffusion in public places, advertising, on hold messaging, or again an accompaniment to a sports or political event, the music used pre-exists these different uses. Today, having become autonomous through technical evolutions, it inhabits what David Toop (1995) calls "the ocean of sound".

The originality of current practices rests therefore on three points:
-    the shift from functional music to the functionalisation of music, that's to say the use of existing music for purposes other than those for which it was composed;
-    the integration of this music into theme-based programming and compilations;
-    a simple tool in the midst of complex marketing and communication strategies, paradoxically it serves to create, personalise and transform the image and identity of brands, places and objects.

Music and images

Working with these equivocal relationships between sound and image, producers and communication companies attempt to rationalise music and its surrounds so as to enhance identities and personalise images. To this end, they deploy competitive strategies and develop original concepts. However, beyond these methods, their activities are developed from three identical devices:

The first relies on music that is widely known: "gold", "hits". Whether it is a case of advertising executives using it individually or specialised companies (Muzak, Mood Media, Canalmusic…) integrating it into personalised or generic programmes (public places, events), the intention here is to play on the cultural nature of music. Like the "Ranz des vaches" for Rousseau, it is less the musical object that is taken into account as the signs (in the mythological sense of the term) it creates and that create it in return. "They evoke", "they remind you of… ». The device is based on symbols, pre-existing individual and collective images[2]. According to this logic, it does not matter what the music is, provided it corresponds to the strategy developed. Hence the gradual disappearance of music as an aesthetic object in favour, occasionally, of musical variables (tempo, rhythm, harmony) but, more frequently, in favour of social and commercial ones (target population, commercial impacts, creation and promotion of an image).

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[2] It should be noted however that this enhancement of image through music is linked to the emergence of the "communication society" where everything becomes a "pre-text" to communicate. Historically, therefore, we have gradually gone from background music (launched by the American company Muzak in the 1920s to improve production conditions) to sound illustration, integrating by turns concepts of "foreground music" (introduced by another American company AEImusic, now DMXmusic) and "business music". (Rouzé, 2004)

The second has recourse to so-called "original" music, known only to a few enlightened amateurs or a few initiates, but unknown to the majority of "listeners/consumers". The use of Marina Topley's work for the Kenzo perfume "Flower", or Shaggy's "Bombastic" in the Levi's advertisement allows for originality whilst ensuring the symbolism of the chosen musical genre. In the same way, classical music (10% of commercials) is used for these cultural codes (intellectual character, refinement …) and to illustrate the concepts of restraint, elegance, luxury, sophistication. Shostakovich has thus become emblematic of the CNP bank. The purpose of this device is the demarcation of competition by stressing the originality of the product, its rarity, its luxurious character. In short, it enhances what professionals call the "capital image".

In this case, there is a shift from the symbolic prop of the particular piece of music towards the cultural prop of the musical genre. This contributes towards the creation of fresh images, towards the hybridisation of music that is reappropriated in various ways by users[3].

Finally, the last, more marginal device, takes up the tradition of functional music. In this case, companies hire musicians and artists capable of creating original compositions that correspond to defined specifications, a practice referred to as sound design. The company Diasonic, run by Louis Dandrel, is an example of this, producing music or jingles for firms or specific events.

From functions to effects

Having outlined these various practices, it remains to be seen what the relationships are between the functions and effects of this music since functionalisation relies mainly on the efficiency of the device in market value terms. If much of the research (mainly Anglo-Saxon) carried out in psychology and/or marketing attempts to outline the obvious connections between a piece of music and its effects, it is nevertheless advisable to relativise the conclusions. Whatever the orientation (cognitivist, behaviourist or functionalist), according to the authors themselves, these approaches cannot in any way be applied generally since the effects are recorded according to variables defined by the authors and within a framework of a given experiment. My own thesis work dealing with music diffused in public places shows indeed that the links of causalities between functions and effects are far from stable. They depend on simultaneous conjunction, individual and collective positioning. Whether users listen attentively or, on the contrary, pay no particular attention, the majority stress that "it all depends". Listening to them describe their ways of perceiving this music, it emerges that the effects, criticised or appreciated, depend on multiple factors: appreciation of diffused music, attention levels fluctuating between hearing and listening, moods, activities. In short, it is an interaction that is renewed each time through the individual and collective context. Paradoxically, by playing on the images it summons, prompts or evokes, music contributes towards the symbolism of a place, a brand, an event[4].

Misappropriations, hybridisations

As Walter Benjamin (1936) put it, with the industrialisation of culture and its systems of reproduction, one might legitimately wonder about the influence of these practices on art. Is it a question of the misappropriation of music for promotional purposes, the loss of the musical "aura" or, on the contrary, of fresh hybridisations encouraging us to rethink what music is, or could be today?

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[3] Moreover, this is how certain artists make themselves known to a wider audience.
[4] For, as many authors have underlined, music cannot have meaning in the same way language does, since it lacks the double linguistic articulation *signified/signifier*.

Why use music to enhance a (brand) image or the identity of a place? Does not integration into marketing strategies such as "branding" work against creation? Is not this desire to use these continuous sound fluxes and short musical formats symptomatic of a society where communication and speed have become the key words and where the past, silence, a time for reflection are often forgotten? Should these uses be denounced a priori as so many misappropriations or, on the contrary, should they be considered as everyday hybridisations of music?

Although there are no definitive answers to such questions, it can be asserted that this functionalisation of music is complex and revives long-standing debates: those that oppose aesthetics to economy, scholarly music to popular and commercial music. From an economic point of view, the functionalisation of music contributes to its diffusion and generates royalties for the composer/performer and its producer. These profits enable production companies to invest in new works. From an aesthetic point of view, integration into an advertisement or a supermarket's programming twists the artistic approach and the research involved into a simple market prop, as demonstrated by Walter Benjamin. But, at the same time, it opens music up to different audiences, if not new ones. The collective study on amateurs (Hennion & Maisonneuve & Gomart, 2000), notably the part led by Sophie Maisonneuve, dealing with the classical record, exposes briefly how music used in advertising contributes in some way to the discovery and purchase of classical music.

However, as the practices of users and protagonists involved in the production processes show, it is not so much this misappropriation itself that is open to criticism. Indeed, everyday uses of music contribute to its hybridisation. Moreover, is not art history itself constructed from misappropriations? What is open to criticism here is the misappropriation of cultural values and symbols for the benefit of economic prestige alone. Applying herself to these practices, Naomi Klein (2000) underlines the fact that they contribute, in the end, to the gradual loss of all freedom of artistic creation and aesthetic renewal. Functionalisation therefore must perpetuate musical hybridisations but it must also take care to respect music and enhance its status, by developing original works for example. The resulting individual and collective symbolism will be all the richer. If the above is lacking, it will lead to eternal repetition, to the "schizophonia" Schafer (1979) speaks of.

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