

*Consuming Music in the Digital Age: Technologies, Roles and Everyday Life.* By Raphaël Nowak. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 167 pp. ISBN 978-1-137-49255-5

Raphaël Nowak's first monograph emerges from a sense of lack. Despite a rich profusion of music delivery mechanisms in contemporary society—digital, analogue, mobile, static—the sociology of music retains, he argues, its historical tendency of neglecting these material technologies in its analyses. *Consuming Music in the Digital Age* attempts to incorporate a richer understanding of the material objects that comprise and facilitate our everyday musical lives within the frame of existing scholarship by the likes of Antoine Hennion and Tia DeNora (both formative influences here). Nowak's project seeks a more holistic appreciation of the utilitarian, symbolic, and aesthetic functions of these devices, nuancing discussions about digital consumption practices by bridging between the sociology of music and more technologically literate scholarship.

*Consuming Music in the Digital Age's* five chapters proceed in concentric fashion, each complicating rather than linearly proceeding from the last. Following a survey of the technologies and consumption practices that comprise the 'digital age' in chapter one, Nowak systematically widens the parameters of his investigation, first annexing the context of everyday life, then the role of affect (or the self-regulation of affect), the notion of taste, and finally the capacity for music consumption habits to help establish a sense of identity. The empirical backbone of the book is comprised of a series of interviews conducted in Australia over two periods: with twenty-four participants between 2010-11, and a further eleven in 2014 (several of whom represent repeat encounters). Every one of these encounters involves individuals identified as members of 'generation U,' a limitation rationalised through an assumption that this group are both 'acquainted with music downloading... while also knowing other music formats such as CDs, cassettes and eventually vinyl discs' (p. 9). As problematic as this self-imposed restriction may be—the

relationship between one's age and music consumption preferences arguably more corollary than causal—it quickly emerges that Nowak's essential assumption is correct. In the main, his participants each embrace a variety of consumption mechanisms in their everyday musical lives, and for a variety of different reasons: digital and analogue, functional and symbolic, at home and on the move.

Nowak's study puts forward a number of useful theoretical concepts, with the author's triptych of technological affordance types (p. 28) perhaps proving its most essential. Here, he argues that the functional roles performed by music technologies in contemporary society fall within one of three categories: utilitarian (e.g., playlist integration on a mobile device), aesthetic (the experience of dropping a needle in a groove), and symbolic (the personal memories that become etched into an album sleeve). Also insightful is the related notion of 'role-normative modes of listening' (p. 78), a concept designed to encapsulate the entangled associations drawn by listeners between music, its functions, and the material technologies which facilitate these uses. One might exploit, for instance, the utilitarian function of mobile streaming in listening to a higher-tempo dance music playlist during a workout, while the aesthetic function of a one's favourite vinyl record might be to evoke a state of focus or relaxation. Each of these theoretical contributions arises through a strategic refinement of the ideas of other scholars, a service carried out frequently and skilfully throughout the book. That said, this intellectual manoeuvre does threaten to become staid: one quickly feels that an ability to identify opposing theoretical positions only to consistently occupy the middle-ground comes at the expense of more polemic reasoning. We see this time and time again: between the poles of Hesmondhalgh (listening is a social experience) and Zangwill (listening cannot be social), Nowak finds Frith and Born (group listening represents an aggregation of individual psychological responses). In resisting the bleak conclusions of Bourdieu's model of taste (taste is simply a marker of social distinction), Nowak admires the more moderate

framework presented by Lewis (taste emerges at the intersection of three dimensions: demographics, aesthetics, and politics). Moreover, there are one or two theoretical avenues left tantalisingly under-explored. Throughout the third chapter, for instance, there is the lingering and intriguing presence of a theoretical manoeuvre which delineates between affective responses to music and emotionally reflexive responses to that affect—how one feels about how this or that music makes them feel. This is never confronted head-first, although it is arguably a rabbit hole which leads well beyond Nowak's intended scope.

*Consuming Music in the Digital Age* is a useful, timely study: mediating technologies perform a central role in everyday listening practices, and the likelihood of either their diversity or their centrality receding in this regard seems slim-to-none. There is, as Nowak is ardent to point out, a requirement for the sociology of music to incorporate this fact in its work, and in this sense he takes necessary and successful first steps towards this goal. So too, the monograph represents a worthy primer for any scholar seeking a grounding in the topic music in everyday life, drawing on and summarising a wealth of material in this area with an admirable degree of transparency. Ultimately, while *Consuming Music in the Digital Age* seeks to integrate the missing technological variable into the sociology of music in everyday life, it is more than a simple box-ticking exercise. In a study of the ostensibly mundane, everyday instances of musical engagement, Nowak arrives at a conclusion of subtly profound significance: music 'may not be crucial in some individuals' [self-]identification strategies... but it is a way of going by in the world' (pp. 134–135).

Sam Cleeve

Birmingham City University

sam.cleeve@mail.bcu.ac.uk