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‘The Sound of Advertising’  
International symposium at Aalborg University, June 1. 2006

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Location: Aalborg University, Kroghstraede 3, 9220 Aalborg Oest, Denmark  
Room 1.104

### Brief outline

Music plays an important role in advertising in the electronic media. It may contribute to increase the viewer’s general awareness of the message, to emphasize certain aspects of this message and even to creating a more distinct brand profile. Advertising is full of music. Moreover, it could be argued that the use of music by the advertising industry becomes more sophisticated.

Considering both the prevalence of music in advertising and the communicative potentials of music in advertising contexts, it seems safe to say, that music in advertising has been rather neglected by researchers within the fields of communication studies and musicology. Research in consumer behavior has had a more continuous research interest. But this tradition to a certain degree builds on flawed assumptions - regarding the musical object, its often multimodal embeddings and its relationship to human responses – which have typically prevented the production of satisfactory knowledge.

By bringing together a range of hermeneutical and semiotic perspectives this international symposium represents an attempt to come closer more adequate understandings on the implications of music in contexts of advertising. The symposium will discuss different types of media – i.e. television, radio, and internet – involving case analyses, broader surveys and discussions on theoretical and methodological issues and cultural implications of music in advertising.

The international symposium is organized by the research group on Aesthetics of Market Communication (MÆRKK), and hosted by the Department of Communication, Aalborg University. The event is funded by a grant from the Danish Research Council on the Humanities (SHF/FKK).

### Program

Time	Speaker	Subject
9:00-9:15	Christian Jantzen	Welcome
9:15-10:15	Nicolai Graakjær	Music in television commercials – categories, frequencies, and tendencies
10:15-11:15	Erkki Pekkilä	Ideology and myth: Some thoughts on the relationship between popular music, music video and television commercial
11:15-11:30	---	<i>Coffee break</i>
11:30-12:30	Anahid Kassabian & Markus Wyrwich	Blackness and the Apple i-Pod ads
12:30-13:15	---	<i>Lunch</i>
13:15-14:15	Alf Björnberg	Music in Swedish radio commercials

14:15-14:30	---	<i>Coffee break</i>
14:30-15:30	Martin Knakkegaard	Ready mates? Here come the ready-mades
15:30-15:45	---	<i>Coffee break</i>
15:45-16:45	Matthias Bode	Making sense of music. A semiotic analysis of meaning potentials in ad music

## Speakers and abstracts

*Nicolai J. Graakjær, Ph.D. student*  
*Department of Communication, Aalborg University*

**Title:** Music in television commercials – categories, frequencies, and tendencies

**Abstract:** Television commercials have been broadcasted on national Danish television, TV2, since 1988. As it has been the case with earlier and different forms of commercials (e.g. in cinema), music has had a widespread appearance in these commercials. The importance of music and sounds in television commercials cannot easily be overstated, when recognizing, among other things, the attention attracting and referential potentials of music. So far, however, this has not resulted in an impressive number of investigations, and especially questions concerning the prevalence of music and possible general tendencies and developments in the appearances of music are typically either non existing or flawed by the lack of references to larger samples of television commercials.

The purpose of this presentation is to provide some insights into these questions. Samples from TV2 have been selected for analysis. Based on these samples certain categories, frequencies, and tendencies in the appearances of music shall be presented, discussed and exemplified.

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*Erkki Pekkilä, Professor*  
*University of Helsinki, Finland*

**Title:** Ideology and myth: Some thoughts on the relationship between popular music, music video and television commercial

**Abstract:** Television commercials are audiovisual texts that are both related to films and music videos. A common facet with the film is the narration and with the music video the quick montage. Like films, music videos operate simultaneously on several planes. Music, if there is any, interrelates with song lyrics, speech (dialogue and voice over), visuals and graphics (written text on the screen). There are sometimes cases where a well-known rock star appears in a TV commercial, sometimes even using some "pre-existing" music from his recent album. Here the commercial works in two ways, the star advertising the product and the TV commercial, in turn, advertising the star. These kinds of commercials are interesting in the sense that they help us to understand how the mythology behind popular music and advertising works. In my presentation, I shall discuss two television commercials of this type. The first is George Michael's Diet Coke commercial and another Steve Winwood's Michelob beer commercial. The latter case is especially interesting since the commercial is based on Winwood's previous song and music video. Even though the music is the same, the setting and story lines in these two are totally different. Television commercials are persuasive communication and created with a special goal in mind. Much of the information in the commercials is there to evoke different kinds of connotative meanings, these based on ideologies and myths. However, the commercials might still be regarded as "producerly texts" (Fiske) in that

they often consists of fragmentary information on the basis of which the viewer has to produce his or her own reading of the text. The reading is often based on the seeking of pleasure, this being a typical characteristics of popular aesthetics and popular culture in general.

*Anahid Kassabian & Markus Wyrwich*

*James and Constance Alsop Professor*

*School of Music, University of Liverpool, England*

Title: Blackness and the Apple i-Pod ads

Abstract: In this presentation we will consider the recent apple iPod advert with the music of Wynton Marsalis. The ad-campaign has raised questions of race from its outset, using silhouettes and performing and dance styles meant to signify African-Americans and their musical practices and culture. This particular ad, however, puts such questions front and centre in densely layered ways. We will analyze the aural and visual tropes of race in this ad, which has had extensive internet and tv exposure.

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*Alf Björnberg, Professor*

*Department of Culture, Aesthetics and Media, Göteborg University, Sweden*

Title: Music in Swedish radio commercials

Abstract: The history of commercial radio broadcasting in Sweden comprises just under 50 years: the earliest commercial broadcasts directed at Swedish listeners were produced by the pirate radio stations of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The most succesful of these pirates, Radio Nord, was the direct cause behind the radical change of radio formats in Swedish public service radio in 1961. Pirate radio enjoyed only a brief period of existence, but with the broadcasting deregulation of 1993, commercial broadcasting once more became a regular part of the Swedish mediascape.

The purpose of this presentation is to analyse and discuss some general characteristics of the use of music in Swedish radio commercials from the early 1960s and the early 2000s, respectively. Changes in the general features of music use in radio commercials are discussed in relation to changes in dominant views as regards both the role of music in broadcasting and the general functions of radio for its listeners as a time-structuring device in the flow of everyday life.

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*Martin Knakkegaard, Associate Professor  
Department of Communication, Aalborg University, Denmark*

**Title:** Ready mates? Here come the ready-mades! **Abstract:** This presentation discusses to what extent it is advisable to talk of music in movies and commercials aiming to question the relevance of applying a concept of musical understanding towards sound in movies at all. It is the writer's understanding that the use of musical means of expression in relation to any kind of moving pictures is generally to be considered as part of the sound space of the movie and not as genuine musical expressions no matter if the music is diegetically motivated or not. Music is present as a sort of objet trouvé or ready-made. In far the most cases music accompanying moving pictures appears as a means not as purpose. Even when considering movies made to picturize music this presentation suggests that the expression of the music is forced to the back by the tendency of synaestheticism to emphasise the narrative and quite simply also by the predominance of vision: the preferred sensorial supplement to the struggle of gaining access to the story: a domain outside the reach of music.

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*Matthias Bode, Assistant Professor  
Lehrstuhl Marketing und Konsum, Universität Hannover, Germany*

**Title:** Making sense of music. A semiotic analysis of meaning potentials in ad music  
**Abstract:** The experimental psychological approach of confounding acoustic stimuli with music has been widely criticized in advertising research. Alternative reference points in semiotics have been limited. The problem of a semantic vagueness in the music sign could not be solved by a framework based on sign typologies or syntactic relations. One reason is the strong linguistic bias in semiotics. This presentation will introduce a semiotic framework for analyzing the auditory sign system in advertising, acknowledging music as the cultural and social structuring of sound. Rather than the received view of music as a pure, abstract artifact, this presentation starts with the assumption of a unique auditory semiosis with music as an "unconsummated sign", that becomes meaningful when it is understood as a living aesthetic phenomenon. This leads to a model of music as a nexus of acoustic, verbal and visual contextualization cues. It will be shown how this model can advance research on music in advertising in two ways: First, the relevant auditory sign system depends on the code level of the encoding and decoding process. Second, the contextualization model of music allows conceptualization of the interaction effects of the verbal, visual and acoustic levels of a commercial in a new way, aiming for a multi-modal advertising semiotics.

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