Antoine HENNION, *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*

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of several men among the group she considered. The book closes with a short chapter in which Gilman reflects on dimensions of her research experience, contemplations through which we might contextualize her entire perspective on this research:

“I was especially interested in reflecting on the important role that music can play in war where troops have access to so little to enable them to cope with multiple demands. Yet ultimately, the project has been as much about personal experience narratives, very intimate and personal stories of life, war, war’s aftermath.” (188)

The book shines in chapters 5 and 7, in which Gilman makes her most insightful and original contributions to the topic. Her handling of gender and the “paradox of masculinity” in the military is impressive, and she devotes the most space of any chapter to this topic. Of special note is how she navigates thorny theoretical terrain with clarity in her writing, breaking the all-too-often academic practice of unfolding needlessly complex theory through equally impenetrable writing and explanation. She carefully navigates the reader through “doing gender,” its relationship to music and identity, power and hierarchies, and heterosexual interaction and normativity all within the context of military life. Likewise, chapter 7 is one of the book’s strengths. She goes into fine detail on music, memory, and post-combat experiences, revealing the struggles, coping, and healing that music was a pivotal part of. The reader should find these chapters illuminating.

The eighth chapter on music and political transformation was the least resounding to me. Organizationally speaking, it felt awkward to spend an entire chapter focusing on the transformative processes of political

viewpoint of a small subset of her interviewees. Moreover, the topic seemed misplaced within the framework of the book’s other focuses. The chapter described music’s involvement in supporting transformative political experiences—a chronicling of experience with music in the antiwar movement. However, the topic was ripe for engagement with music and social movement literature, something that never happened. We shifted domains into the realm of music, protest, and social movements, and were lacking an analysis that should have framed such discussions.

Notwithstanding, the book is an important, even indispensable, study that resists broad mischaracterizations about U.S. troops at war, in particular, that they can be represented through a single identity or that those who suffer from PTSD are somehow “broken” by their experiences and cannot re-assimilate into society after combat experience. Overall, it is a well-researched, clearly presented, and strongly argued work of scholarship.

Antoine Hennion, *The Passion for Music: A Sociology of Mediation*, Surrey (UK), Ashgate, 2015

By Thomas M. Kitts

An English edition of Antoine Hennion’s *The Passion for Music* has been long overdue. A prominent sociologist at the Centre de

Sociologie de l'Innovation and a former visiting professor at Princeton and Columbia universities, Hennion has been cited widely by cultural critics and musicologists around the globe as his essays have been translated into several languages, including English. Rather curiously, *La Passion musicale*, one of his seminal works, however, has eluded attempts at English translation over the years—until now. First published in 1993, revised and republished in Spanish in 2003, and revised for a new French edition in 2007, the text has been revised once again by Hennion for this English debut of any of his books. Margaret Rigaud and Peter Collier are to be congratulated for their painstaking attention to detail and their efforts to produce a clear and vibrant text. Their work can only escalate Hennion's influence and authority.

From a sociological perspective, as Hennion notes, studying music is different from studying other arts. A painting, for example, is a fixed object, and can be

considered from any number of perspectives: Is it a symbol? Does it reflect a social reality? Is it a snare or delusion? Music, however, is amorphous, “always on the verge of permutation” (291), and cannot be located in matter. It always needs to be remade, which leads to a proliferation of infinite intermediaries, interpreters, and re-producers. Even a recording is a remake—a CD, for example, may be solid and enduring, but it does not stabilize music as much as we may suppose. “Music is event and advent,” Hennion writes, “which means that it is perpetually transformed by any contact with its public, on whose listening it inevitably depends [...]. It is a performance: it acts, engages, transforms and is felt” (268). His theory of mediation seeks to explain music's reproduction, its appeal, its effects on the culture and on listeners and their passions.

Through his theory, Hennion attempts to unravel the influence of mediators, which can be institutional, technical, economic, social, political, or individual, including, to be specific, universities, musicians, instruments, politicians, promoters, patrons, and on and on. Mediation focuses more on the construction and presentation of music than on its artistic quality or on an analytical study of the art object itself. It moves toward a reinstatement of the resources which create music and ensure its duration, allowing us to navigate among the various mediators in a circular or discursive approach, and even encouraging us to shift our method and perspective. It also helps us understand how our passion for music develops: “We do not spontaneously love music we know nothing about,” writes Hennion. “We love the music we are ready to love, or indeed the music we already love to love” (173).

While the statement is not inconsistent with Adorno's concept of standardized and "pre-digested" pop music, Hennion has none of the Marxist rancor of Adorno who blames the profit-mongering labels and consumer unawareness (Adorno, 1941: par. 16-20).

Hennion divides *The Passion for Music* into two parts. In the first part, comprised of five chapters and two brief "transitions" or connecting sections, he responds to and builds off other theorists. He turns to the beginnings of sociology with Émile Durkheim's model of belief, which Hennion maintains, "has remained the basis for the sociological perspective on cultural objects" (3). Durkheim's model provides a means to study the relationship between the principles of the collective and the role of objects while paving the way for a sociological perspective of art that formulates the relationship between the art object and all the mediators that affect their production and their reception. While this approach uncovers the mediators, it tends either to demystify the art object by reducing it into a mere fetish of society or to mystify the art object further by suggesting that art objects are produced outside the social sphere, perhaps as the work of genius, which Arthur Danto (1981: 206)⁵ suggests is the absence of mediation.

Similarly, Hennion responds to the reductionist and regressive approaches of Girard, Baudrillard, and Bourdieu who denounce the object as an illusory belief. Baudrillard argues, for example, that

objects are only signs which lose their referent as they proliferate, becoming simulacra. Hennion's theory of mediation does not reduce art objects to a fetish or to the "empty mechanics of desire" (34). The art object, Hennion counters, is not static but is produced through an operation that "fills the world with hybrid, irreducible, composite objects" (34). He seeks to bridge the gap between "an erudite internal analysis, unconcerned with society" and the social interpreter, "who thinks nothing of selling off the works in order to achieve his aims." For a more complete understanding of the art object and its operation, we need to adapt "a social theory which respects the mediation of the objects it interprets—or [...] an aesthetic theory which knows to what extent the art object is a mediator" (59).

In the second part of the book, beginning with chapter 6, Hennion provides a series of case studies to explore his theory of mediation, demonstrating that without intermediaries we would not hear the music as we hear it. In chapter 7, "'What Can You Hear?': An Ethnographic Study of a Solfège Lesson," he considers the teacher, the classroom dynamic, parents, and more, in an effort to determine how music is learned. Other chapters focus on the rock concert, opera, a classical music concert, and, perhaps most interestingly, on the resurgence of Baroque music and Bach in the 1970s and 1980s. In chapter 6, "The Baroque Case: Music Upheavals," he looks at the rival reinterpretations and presentations of Baroque music and Bach. On the one hand, the Baroque saw early music as an object from the past to be played as close to its original presentation as possible, confident that they could reconstitute the taste for the

5 Hennion contests Danto's "mystery of style," but praises it for being "beautifully written" (162).

vanished music. Conversely, the moderns took liberties with musical texts and sources, arguing that we may reclaim the repertoire of early musics according to our needs. This cultural war led to the production of two art objects or two types of music, both providing a contemporary appreciation and resuscitation of a three-centuries old music. However, as Hennion notes, the Baroques eventually “surrounded and defeated” the moderns who stubbornly ignored historical sources and played only what they wanted to hear (189). The moderns became less fashionable as a new audience was cultivated for Baroque through the mediation of radio, concert promoters, critics, and music schools, all of whom began to welcome the new/old repertoire. With this chapter, Hennion provides a fascinating glimpse into this cultural war and the development of an audience and the transformation of taste.

At times, Hennion turns to the individual to gauge how he or she responds to or participates in a musical experience. In chapter 7, he considers the “good pedagogue,” who through “the infectious impulse” of “good spirits” will defeat the indifference of his students and “mobilize his troops without drawing their attention to what he is doing” and thereby reverse the classroom dynamics in his favor (228). In one of his transitional chapters, “A Sociologist at the Zenith Concert Hall,” Hennion watches as the rock concert brings fan and performer together, transforming the former into the alter ego of the star on stage, and, later, in chapter 9, “Music Lovers: Taste as an Activity,” he recounts individuals’ idiosyncratic rituals as they prepare themselves for a musical performance which, hopefully, will lift them into the sublime and, paradoxically,

enable them to lose control and give way to their passion. “It is essential not to overtake the music,” he writes (278).

As indicated by these quotations, Hennion presents his theory of mediation in prose that, although richly dense, is nonetheless lucid, lively, and even entertaining. He describes Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* as an “odd mix of modernity and aristocratism [...] a monolith on a vaster scale than any other, a greater philosophical fresco which might have been painted by a Hegel who had decided to write in black ink only” (60). And he can be pithy, as when he considers our approach to Bach: “He made use of the aesthetic to reach God: we make use of the religious to reach Bach” (255), or his comparison of live rock music to an opera: “The body in motion versus the body stock still” (263).

In short, Hennion’s theory of mediation provides a comprehensive approach to the study of music, one which considers the training, production, and consumption of music, without dismissing its aesthetic dimension or the individual participant. Finally, we have this extraordinary work in English.

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