

● Antoine Hennion  
Paris (France)

Requested: 10-07-08 / Received: 24-09-09  
Accepted: 28-10-09 / Published: 01-03-10

DOI: 10.3916/C34-2010-02-02

# Loving Music: from a Sociology of Mediation to a Pragmatics of Taste

Gustos musicales: de una sociología de la mediación a una pragmática del gusto

## ABSTRACT

This contribution provides an account of musical taste as a meaningful accomplishment and a situated activity, with its tricks and bricolages, instead of reducing it to a game of social difference and identity. Taste is a problematic modality of attachment to the world. In such a pragmatist conception it is analyzed as a reflexive activity, corporeal, framed, collective, equipped, depending on places, moments and devices, which simultaneously produces the competencies of a music lover and a repertoire of objects. To be explained, it needs the sociologist to concentrate on gestures, objects, bodies, media, devices and relations engaged. Taste is a performance. Playing, listening, recording, making others listen..., all those activities amount to more than the actualization of a taste «already there». They are redefined during the action, with a result that is partly uncertain. Thus amateurs' attachments and ways of doing things both engage and form subjectivities, and have a history, irreducible to that of the works. Understood in this way, as reflexive work performed on one's own attachments, the amateur's taste is no longer considered an arbitrary election to be explained by hidden social causes. Rather, it is a collective technique, whose analysis helps to understand the way we make ourselves sensitized, to things, to ourselves, to situations and to moments, while simultaneously reflexively controlling how those feelings might be shared and discussed with others.

## RESUMEN

Esta contribución ilustra el gusto musical como un logro significativo y una actividad situada, con sus trucos y artimañas, en lugar de reducirla a un juego de identidad y diferenciación social. El gusto es una modalidad problemática de vinculación al mundo. En esta concepción pragmática, se analiza como una actividad reflexiva, corpórea, estructurada, colectiva, equipada, dependiente de los sitios, los momentos y los dispositivos; lo que simultáneamente produce las competencias de un amante de la música y un repertorio de objetos. Explicar el gusto exige que el sociólogo se concentre en los gestos, los objetos, los cuerpos, los medios, los dispositivos y las relaciones involucradas. El gusto es un comportamiento. Reproducir, escuchar, grabar, hacer que otros escuchen música... todas esas actividades vienen a ser algo más que la realización de un gusto que «ya existía». Todo ello se redefine durante la acción y el resultado es, en parte, incierto. Así, la vinculación de los aficionados y la forma de hacer las cosas se combinan, forman subjetividades y tienen una historia que no se puede reducir a la de las obras. Entendido de esta manera, como trabajo reflexivo conducido sobre la base de las vinculaciones propias, el gusto del aficionado ya no se considera una elección arbitraria que es explicada por razones sociales ocultas. Más bien, es una técnica colectiva, cuyo análisis ayuda a entender la manera en la que nos hacemos sensibles a las cosas, a nosotros mismos, a las situaciones y los momentos, mientras en paralelo controla reflexivamente la forma en que esos sentimientos pueden ser compartidos y discutidos con los demás.

## KEY WORDS / PALABRAS CLAVE

Music, amateur, taste, attachment, pragmatism, reflexive activity.  
Música, aficionados, gusto, vinculación, pragmatismo, reflexividad.

◆ Ph.D. Antoine Hennion, Research in the sociology of music and Professor of the Centre for the Sociology of Innovation, in Paris (France) (antoine.hennion@mines-paristech.fr).

### 1. Introduction: Giving the amateur back his place

This text presents the challenges and first results of an ethnographic investigation in progress into the music fans of today. This study is particularly focused on the theoretical and methodological problems that accompany an investigation of this type if it is not conceived as the only explanation of external determinants that direct the analysis towards the social origins of the fan or the aesthetic properties of the songs. On the contrary, the objective is to focus on the gestures, objects, media, devices and relationships included in a listening or a playing that are not limited to the forming of a taste already there, but which are redefined in the process of the action, and produce a more uncertain result. What has been constituted thanks to the media and the invention of the listener throughout the slow «discomorphosis» (Hennion & al., 2000) of music in the 20th century, joined today by «internetization», is that the sheet music of places and centuries past has been transformed into a repertoire that is available here and now for those who want it. The analysis of the music fan and taste need to be placed within this double transformation: that of the music which becomes a repertoire and that of the participant who becomes purchaser-listener-releaser.

This is why the fan's attachments and modes of action can be articulated and form subjectivities (not only responding to social labels), and have a history that is irreducible to that of the works. Therefore, it is necessary to conceive a more pragmatic sociology that is closer to what the actors think and do, as opposed to the critical conception that the culture of sociology has got us used to. The question of cultural inequalities and uneven access to the works has hidden the very production of the works as an accessible repertoire. In terms of music fans, this has led us to adopt a broader definition that includes all the practices of music. There is no reason to endorse the idea that some are but a passive consumption (attending a concert or listening to a record) and would not be worthy of appearing in a study of music fans. A highly active form of listening to music exists, in the sense of an enthusiastic development of competence (a no less traditional acceptance of the word fan, but more usual if we speak of cigars, wine or coffee). Undoubtedly, it is also wise to abandon the use of a single word, like taste for example, with so many connotations and mainly referring to the consumption of a precious object. Love, passion, taste, practices, habits, obsessions: there is an abundance of vocabulary that better defines the variety of configurations that link to music. It is not so important to determine it a priori; above all it is not

necessary to measure it only by the standard of taste for an object whose appreciation requires an erudite learning. It is not just about the choice of an over-selective social format but about not making premature hypotheses on the meaning of these practices, in which the place and status of the music itself are very far from being determined. Music is made, we like it, we listen to it, we like this genre or that music. The verbs are more adequate as they force less a collective practice with the objects to enter a substantive category directed towards an object.

In terms of the method, the sociologist cannot just observe taste from the outside, which is how he/she believes an amateur observes a work of art: as an object that can be contemplated and not as an effect that can or cannot emerge. Taste, pleasure or the effect of things are neither exogenous variables nor automatic attributes of the objects<sup>1</sup>. They are the result of an action performed by the taster, an action based on technique, bodily entertainment and repeated sampling, and which is accomplished over time, simultaneously because it follows a regulated development and because its success largely depends on moments. Taste is a bodily practice that is collective and instrumented, regulated by methods that are incessantly argued over, and that centres around the appropriated perception of uncertain effects. Thus, we prefer to talk about «attachments»<sup>2</sup>. This beautiful word destroys the opposition that accentuates the dualism of the word «taste», between a series of causes that come from outside and the «hic et nunc» of the situation and the interaction. In terms of music fans, there is less emphasis on labels and more on states, less on self-proclamations and more on people's activity; regarding the objects that motivate taste, their right to reply and their ability to coproduce what is happening, what arises from the contact, remains open.

### 2. Taste as a reflexive activity

So, another way of presenting this text would be to say it aims at articulating the musical taste in the act, the situation, with its tricks and traps, far removed from the space of public justification, focusing only on its own success. The practices of the music fan studied produce a marked variance in the base elements of taste that our study has elucidated (Hennion, 2004): the relationship to the object, the support on a collective, the entertainment of oneself, and finally the constitution of a technical device (understood in the broad sense of a more or less organized set of favourable conditions for the development of the activity or of the appreciation). Taste is neither the consequence (auto-

matic or induced) of the objects that provoke taste by themselves, nor a mere social arrangement projected onto the objects or the simple pretext of a ritual or collective game. It is a reflexive, instrumented arrangement to test our sensations. It is not a mechanical process, it is always «deliberate»; it is an «accomplishment», as expressed by English-speakers, who use Latin better than we, Latin languages-speakers, do...

The crucial point is the way in which taste depends on the returns of the object tasted, on what it does and what it makes people do. This is no paradox, except for sociologists, who consider everything within the relationship of taste, except the presence and effects of the product that causes taste. Speaking of «returns» is not to say either that the object contains its effects but that it is discovered precisely at the point of non-determination, variance and the deepening of the effects that the product produces; effects that are not due only to the product but to its momentums, unfoldings, and to circumstances. Also it is the idea of mediation (Hennion, 2007). The

very media we give ourselves to capture the object (the record, song, dance or collective practice) form part of the effects that this can produce. Our research consequently centres on the analysis of taste as a collective, instrumented and reflexive activity, with the underlying idea that sociology has a lot of work to do if it wants to give an account of attachments, firstly on itself, in terms of its supposed theories and perhaps, fundamentally, on its means of investigation and the type of relationship it has with what it observes. If one has to get involved, in time and with its body, in commerce with the object in question, it is that relationship that imposes itself, also for the analyst. Listening is a challenge that the sociologist is confronted with. What can we say about music without involving our own love for it and, in the first instance, without listening? Therefore, the word listening is perfect because it avoids the duality of the relationship with the object (whether it is known or unknown, loved or unloved, «let yourself be deceived», believing in it or showing up taste as being just belief...), to bring together a wide range of varied aspects of musical activity: the attention of an I, the presence of others or the reference to them, the headphones, the instruments of sound production, the bodily reaction and the reflexive development of sensitivity.

## 2.1. You keep loving but what you have been...

But it would be selfish to reduce the problem to questions about the sociologist's situation towards what he/she observes. Sociology itself has long affected tastes, influenced the amateur. When we ask somebody about what he/she likes, today the answer comes with an excuse: his/her family was upper class, a brother played the violin, of course not everyone has the money to buy the best Bordeaux wines... We have reached the ultimate extreme, paradoxical, of criticism, where criticism becomes the doxa and not the paradox and makes the very reality of what it criticises disappear inside the actors it wishes to analyse. This vulgarization of its thesis determines the reception the sociologist receives henceforth: the amateur feels guilty or an object of suspicion, feels ashamed of what he/she likes, decodes and anticipates the meaning of what he/she says, stands accused of a practice that is too elitist, accepts the ritualistic nature of his/her rocking nights, wine tastings among friends or his/her love of opera.

**The aim is to pay special attention to the gestures, objects, media, mechanisms and relationships of a game of listening that is not restricted to the production of a taste already there but which is redefined in the process of the action in order to present a result that is partly uncertain.**

And what is worse, the amateur does not dare any longer speak of neither the objects, the gestures, the feelings he/she experiences, nor his/her uncertainties. Instead of that, the amateur places him/ herself within those cases presumably assigned to him/her and only has one concern: that he/she does not seem to be ignorant of the fact that his/her taste falls into the domain of sociology. Far from revealing the hidden social character of tastes that the amateur would consider personal, irreducible and absolute, from now sociology is for some amateurs the first repertoire available to talk about them, and they put up no resistance, on the contrary, on presenting (among other registers, it is true, according to the circumstances and the speakers) their objects of attachment as arbitrary signs determined by social origin that they consider to be relative, historic and pretexts for various rituals.

A curious paradox: it is the turn of the sociologist to de-sociologize the amateurs so that they can talk not

about their determinisms but about ways of doing things, less about what they love. How can we make them stop warning the sociologist they know that their choices are determined, and speak again about ways of listening, drinking and playing, and about pleasure, of what overwhelms them, of the forms their practices take, of the surprising techniques they develop as amateurs to gather the conditions of their happiness, without any guarantee that it will be achieved? Far from being an agent manipulated by unknown forces, the amateur is a virtuoso of aesthetic, social, technical, mind and body experimentation. He/she is not the last one to argue the effects of belief and of distanciation: the amateur also wonders if excessive proximity to the object can blind him/her. Taking up a curious chal-

lenge, the truth about his/her tastes, the amateur is sparing, according to the moments, of participation and withdrawal, of enthusiastic immersion and resorting to mechanisms of objectivising, analysis, guides and references. Put into another way, there is no debate that is so inherent in sociology that it escapes to the reflexive activity of the amateurs.

The sociologization of the actors themselves also functions in another way, as a pragmatic resource to work on the tastes. A chance example came to my mind that is independent of our investigations. In an argument between some rockers (that I, the sociologist, had not provoked), one evening I heard one say to the other : «You keep loving but what you have been». I didn't give it much thought but I think that comment made an impression on me. I recalled it some time later when discussing this subject. What could be more reflexive than this...reflection? On the one hand, this reflection mobilizes a sociology of social determinisms:

your tastes are your past in sediment (family, school, social...), it forms your identity. Once liberated from the temptation to declare that the social is a hidden dimension that determines everything, we can recognize that the fact that some people's micro-statement on taste carries immediate social identifications forms part of everyone's broad common knowledge. But this mobilization by people themselves completely changes the state of such a knowledge: first, it is not that unconscious; and, most importantly, this initial determination is not the end of the matter: it can be put to work (or not), it can be considered a support to go further or simply as a sign, it can be reinforced or surpassed. In sum, it is part of taste itself, as is its availability for debate with those that are closest. If the rocker in question offers this reflection to his friend, it is because he also thinks that tastes are negotiated in the exchange with others. This leads us quite far from a vision of taste as a game played by actors just considered as «believing» in the object of their taste and being blind to its social determinisms.

They select one from all the possible determinisms. Here, on our rocker's case, it was the history of taste as a definition of oneself, considered by the rest of his friend's as a type of highly stereotyped repetition; but by reproaching him his perpetual return to the rock of the 70s, they are not determinist: on the contrary, they make their assertion active, performing. They would not point it out without having in mind the uncertain hope that this might help him move a little forward...

In short, we are obliged to make a curious redress. It consists of giving back to the amateur the competences of a sociologist, and to the sociologist his/her right and duty to be an amateur as well. But the effort is worth it. The speaker who was distrustful is now in a position to talk about his/her tastes and becomes somebody who is incredibly ingenious in describing what he/she does, referring less to what he/she likes and more to how he/she likes it, with whom, how he/she does it, what carries him/her away, more or less according to the moments or given circumstances.

## 2.2. Philippe: the music library as imaginary harem

One of the first amateurs I questioned at the start

of the investigation provided me with a caricature of a good interview for a postgraduate student. He talked of his family background, his sister played the violin, his uncle took him to concerts as a young lad, the first time he went to the opera (an unforgettable experience), his current job (doctor), his tastes (opera and chamber music).

By chance, as he is a friend of mutual friends of ours, I had the chance to converse with him again, not in a second interview, but in a different kind of meeting, two years later, at a dinner for friends at his house. After dinner, he took me to the music room he had built himself, to which his wife, children and even his dog were forbidden access. There, with all the objects and places of his passion, in front of another amateur, it was another man who revealed himself to me. He didn't try to show the sociologist that an interviewee is no less intelligent than the interviewer, nor that he could politely display the series of determinisms of his own taste. Neither did he begin to recite a boring list of his favourite classics, anticipating my answers according to amateurs' ritual when first meeting. What he did was show me what he does, his gestures, his obsessions, his things, his installation. He also showed me how he experienced his moments of pleasure, the choice of his uncountable records, the ways in which he acquired them, even his critical notes (taken from magazines but never followed up when he is in a store) or the way in which he characterizes his states of mind and translating his fatigue into the terms of a possible repertoire.

He had two walls filled to the ceiling with shelves of records, CDs and cassettes. Then, laughing, he showed me how he sorted his objects; like everybody else, he had ordered them chronologically and alphabetically, which makes home record shelves look like a mini-Fnac. He is an overworked doctor and buys a lot. He had left some shelves empty on the lower right side where his latest purchases were piled up awaiting «classification». But they were also there as priority listening because they were new. And that is how he got the idea of transforming into a criteria of order this «lack of classification». So, he places the recordings he has just listened to on the lower right side of his record shelves, and so lets them pile up inside his library according to how much he likes each one over a period of time. He began with boxed sets of opera, his favourite genre, and he liked this system so much that he generalized it. His record collection gradually became a photograph in which his gestures pile up by strata. The physical space of the record library has become a trail of the amateur's personal history.

He uses it as such, knowing that he has to turn to the right to listen to new music or music he wishes to hear again, and on the left he will find rarer objects or music he has forgotten he had. He himself made me aware that had invented an absolutely idiosyncratic form of classifying music: Who, apart from him (and sometimes it was hard work...) would know where a specific record was kept? But most importantly, the amateur asserts himself over the musicologist. His taste is what determines classification, not the history of music. Between the pleasure of so keeping up a memory of what he has listened to, the satisfaction of being wrong, of evaluating his false impressions about the last time he listened to a record, the pleasure of forcing himself to step out of his own routine thanks to his ingenuity, or when he must bend down to pick up a record he has put to one side, it is easy to see an expression of happiness that says he has not wasted his time with his invention.

Listening is not only an instant, it is also a history. Its reflexivity is also its ability to build itself as the framework of its own activity. This time we no longer consider it in the present of a contact with the sounds that happen, but in the improbable duration of a slow invention, that of an art and a technique of listening for the sake of listening. The production of its own spaces and duration, of dedicated scenarios and mechanisms, the progressive evolving constitution of a repertoire, the entertainment of the body and spirit, the formation of a media of professionals, of a trade of criticism and a circle of amateurs, this is the other side of its reflexivity: music as a delegation of the power to move our emotions to a set of works converted into the objective of a privileged listening. This historic aspect of music listening is extremely awkward due to its false evidence. The very fact of listening to music is a strange position of which it is difficult to perceive the paradoxical nature once we occupy it and it becomes something natural<sup>3</sup>. To stand before an identified object, which must be listened to (consequently, for this object we have equipped the perception with techniques, words and all necessary prostheses) and which is able to rise to this expectation, is at the same time the most fundamental, the gesture that makes the music just as we perceive it, and the least visible part of our musical operations. At least, when we are with so-called serious or learned musicians: it is enough to move away from their tight circles and drift towards other musics, be them ethnic or popular, to get back to finding the heterogeneous multiplicity of mixed relations, «events» (in the sense of producers of shows), from which it is hard to pull away between the pleasure of the collec-

tive, bodily sensations, the formats of an organized moment and the musical elements of a performance<sup>4</sup>.

### **2.3. Benoît: where must I stand to hear music?**

«I was trained in music by singing in a choir. Many young people involved find it banal but I mean it a very technical sense, if you will. I don't know if it is my secret but it is there where I learned to listen to music specifically following a voice from the middle. And now I do the same, I listen to the music from the middle! What I mean to say is I had never taken singing lessons before, I was lost...so much so that I simply followed other tenors, slightly behind them, being eclipsed by the main singer, the soprano. I didn't understand anything. And then one day, I don't know, for fun or because it sounded good, I followed the voice of the contraltos, with me singing as a tenor and I was amazed. Now, I could hear everything, as if in a space of many dimensions, half inside me, half outside, like in stereo!

Later, I perfected it and learned those intermediate voices, and I searched for them on record. I experienced an intense enjoyment. Now I do it less often but I remember being absolutely enchanted by those records, that way of going over fragments of something we had sung starting off from a single voice, mine, or better still, the other, but a voice in the middle, or sometimes the voice of a low bass, but I don't hear that voice bass so well. I recall the great choral works of Händel, a motet by Bach, but also less well-known works, and the polyphonic works of the Renaissance, of course. Yes, all this made me love music. And also to bear the choir!».

Before resorting to records, Benoît used the medium at his disposal, the great choir of his provincial Catholic school, to make his attachment to music<sup>5</sup>. We can already read all the elements of attachment inside that secret of his: making use of others, the adaptation of his ear and the musical entertainment that it provided him, the return of the object in itself, in effect more predisposed to being domesticated and to reveal its richness to Benoît by this means than through a global listening without differentiation, eclipsed by the soprano, as he correctly puts it. And afterwards comes the self-satisfying happiness of this discovery, and the access to the normal world of classical music, that of concerts, records and the radio, which up to then were out of Benoît's reach despite the fact that he himself was a singer.

### **2.4. Ahmed and the high-speed train: music in movement**

«I bought a good-quality CD player and case for

24 CDs, and for three years I made the Paris-Lyon, Lyon-Paris train journey twice a week. When I finally realized I would never get to work on the high-speed train after the classes, I began to listen to music systematically. In the beginning I listened to things I knew, dance music, Brazilian, Arab-Andalusian, potpourris, but later I got into music I was unfamiliar with. I asked Annie, more and more for classical music, and now for me this music is definitively linked to the high-speed train. I followed the landscape associated to the music. It is what happens, not hearing anything around me other than seeing the landscape pass while listening to the band march by. I read the rhythms of the valleys, the changes of light...I say this poetically but in truth it is simpler than that. I am an architect, and perhaps for this reason I finally found the way to read music in a space and understand it. That is it, I fabricated my own screen.

Now, I no longer go to Lyon. When I travel by train I don't always remember to take my CDs, anyway it is not the same any more, regularity is required, I believe...Concerning my musical repertoires, this has provoked something strange: now I know many types of music, especially when I listen to Anne's CDs again, but I don't know what I am listening to because cases, names didn't stay in my mind and I really had no idea about anything. Although it is obviously baroque or ancient, chamber music or opera, I cannot differentiate between them. I know them by heart but I don't know whether it is Mozart or something modern».

A still less orthodox way of catching it opened Ahmed to an entire space of music that he was completely unfamiliar with up to then and which, on the verbal plane, by a kind of ironic loyalty to his past (he is both the son of Algerian immigrants and an acknowledged professional in his field, as is clear from the interview), he will continue to deliberately keep in original anonymity, which contrasts with the accuracy of his recollections as a traveller. This is a form of familiarization with a heritage by at the same time keeping it at a distance (in short, rejecting the christening). There is something of a challenge in this, difficult to measure with accuracy especially in terms of sociology, linked to his double social identity, to which he can assume (reflexivity again...) that his interviewer is particularly attentive. Ahmed has invented a kind of magical musical lantern. The highly personal expression he chooses to reveal his experience to us, the adopted dependence on the tastes of his companion, to whom he completely delegates the task of providing him with music, and the unusual aspect of an attachment to classical music achieved via this medium, all

this merely emphasises the way the internal screen works, as he puts it, which is favoured by the listening with the CD player under various formats.

## 2.5. Dora: the listening divan

«I often listen to music lying down. I like it that way now that I have got some good equipment, which I never had before and which I had always looked down on having. You hear things like «music is not in HiFi», etc, which is nonsense. The sound itself offers a lot but not in terms of the intellectual relation to the music. On the contrary, HiFi provides the physical part, corporal, it is super-physical, the sound, it makes you vibrate, you enter into the resonance, you listen to the music differently by letting yourself be carried along by the sound. I disconnect from everything, I do it when my husband is not at home, for example, when I get home late and am exhausted. I have a CD thing, I go to my racks of CDs and chose one on impulse, put it on, take it off and put on another one (now I buy more than before, sometimes at random, well, not at random but I do buy a lot of different things and like a bit of everything) and when I have loaded six CDs, I lie down with the remote control and listen, I jump tracks when I want to change or find an ambience I like, for me this is total happiness...»

Sometimes I am so relaxed that I fall deeply sleep, but not normally. I listen intently, much more than at a concert. This is what good sound gives you if you compare it with a normal music centre that gives you only the music, the score that just passes, it's fine from a musical point of view, the work, but... I don't know how to explain it, it is a monotonous sound, it passes you by...meanwhile on my divan, everything develops within you, you are inside. It is incredible how it envelops you. This makes me feel emotional. I feel sensitive, emotive, nervous. It is like a drug or therapy... I don't know. I also like going to concerts but it isn't the same. I go to see the musicians, the singers especially. I identify with them, I see them making music. I like that too, but it is not about listening: it is the concert, we are with them. Meanwhile my way of listening is different, it involves being completely alone with the music».

Here it is, expressed highly analytically (this from an amateur who never fails to raise the flag of anti-

intellectualism in music, especially in the presence of sociologist, to emphasise with a smile on the intimacy and sensuality of her relationship with music), a real manual about the way of using listening in HiFi, totally different to listening to music in concert. It is much more interesting that, without enquiring into their relationship, Dora also likes concerts and that there is nothing in her description of a general assertion in favour of music in tins with respect to live music: no, just the tale of a form of «demultiplying» the arrangements of the body and spirit, those most susceptible to the effects, sensory in the main, but also psychological and imaginary and, well, musical, of the works that are to hand, which is effectively a key element in the «discromorphosis» of music. Random or programmed selection, random listening or ordered with purpose, adjusting the volume, repetition if desired, going back, classifications and regrouping, insertion in the most unex-

**Taste is neither the consequence (automatic or induced) of the objects that alone cause the taste nor a pure social arrangement projected onto the objects or the simple pretext of a collective ritual game. It is a reflexive instrumented mechanism to test our sensations. It is not a mechanical process, it is always purposeful.**

pected activities<sup>6</sup>: closely linked to the music system and to its numeric developments, there is an authentic «function-listening» which reveals itself in many ways. From the availability of a repertoire to the importance of physical posture and a good music system which goes from the body to the sound that invades it, Dora seriously believes that listening is a state that must be installed in her place and time and, after, you must let yourself go. All the factors of this investment in the relationship between the record as recording and the record as producer of music are staged and are meticulously taken advantage of.

How to feel better, that the record, by offering something to listen to, has created a new music? Up to that moment, as she says spontaneously about the concert, music was something to do (audience included), and normally to do with other people. This first opposition between music as an object and music as a relationship is made here even more intense by means of another contrast (in the wake of the musical and

numerical revolution), between the solitude she looked for in her listening sessions and the social character of the public performance.

### 3. Conclusion: the object of the music...

To leave behind an objectivist conception of taste, as if it were no more than the consequence of the physical properties of the objects that cause taste, does not mean substituting it for a social, ritual or interactive analysis in which belief in the object replaces the role of first cause that the object itself had before. The previous analyses aimed to show the opposite: the awkward presence of the object in taste. It is definitively the agreed place, or not, for the returns of the music, for the answer of the objects, which makes the difference. By being socially constructed, the object does not cease to exist: on the contrary, thus it is more present. We cannot keep on alternating indefinitely between natural-linear interpretations (taste arises from things in themselves) and circular-cultural interpretations (the objects are what we make of them). It is necessary to get rid of this «zero-sum game» between the object and the social in order to show how taste comes to things thanks to its amateurs. Here we stick closely to the suppositions of pragmatism.

This is what takes us out of a dual world (on the one hand, autonomous but inert things and on the other, pure social signs) to let us into a world of mediations and effects in which they are produced together, one by the other, the body that experiences the taste and the taste for the object, the collective which loves and the repertoire of loved objects<sup>7</sup>. The attachments mean all this, the body and the collectives, the things and the mechanisms, all these are mediators. They are determinants and the determined at the same time: they determine the impositions and renew the course of the things.

This co-production, the co-formation of an object and of those things that make it possible demand a more balanced sociology of taste in which the amateur's have as much to learn from sociology as vice-versa<sup>8</sup>. The very objective of our research (the amateur's and more precisely the big amateur's) was somewhat controversial in terms of the sociology of culture. Research strategies have led to an absolute rejection of taste as an individual and collective experience, a deliberate activity that requires considerable commitment and which multiplies the invention of mechanisms and social and bodily techniques.

The highly productive development of an attachment through an object that is produced and shared is interpreted, paradoxically, as its exact opposite, a free

game determined by social labels in which the qualities and classifications of the object of appreciation only appeared as secondary or illusory. Meanwhile no interest was shown in the frameworks within which this taste or passion operated, nor in the mechanisms or the times and places that the amateur's invented to develop the collective and instrumented appreciation of their common object.

In conclusion, tastes, not as independent variables that gather together in order to guarantee a result but as uncertain mediations that support each other to make states arise, to bring about responses to objects, to transform beings, to make the moments that matter coherent. We can dream: and what if sociology was to cease fighting once and for all against the imaginary power that the objects supposedly hold over us? And what if, by listening to the amateurs, sociology was to recognize this power, or in other words, the art of a more intense and reflexive relationship which, through taste, humans slowly by surely establish with the objects, with others, with their bodies and with themselves?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The main interest of the DEP research into amateurs (Donnat, 1996) is to break with this model in order to focus on effective practices, like historians did, for example, with regard to collecting (Pomian, 1987) or reading (Chartier, 1987; 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Concerning the notion of attachment, see (Callon, 1999), (Gomart and Hennion, 1999) and (Latour, 1996; 2000).

<sup>3</sup> The social historian W. Weber posed the question, with regard to the concert, asking himself whether people did listen to music in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Weber, 1997). There is an anachronism in the use of the same words (listening, music, work) to describe situations that are so historically opposed, such as court music, the modern concert and the record. As P. Szendy points out, the ear has a history (Szendy, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> At this point we can ask ourselves, perhaps stretching the reasoning to the limit, whether today's technology and all-powerful music systems are not media that impede listening, or at least purposeful listening, to make music pass over to the side of the social techniques of emotion and collective fusion, tearing it away from the selective attention invented by classic mechanisms.

<sup>5</sup> (Bessy and Chateauraynaud, 1995). Is it necessary to point out that the interviewee does not go into a description of this type any more than if he deems that it makes sense to the interviewer? He must find the appropriate means to emphasise his interest in the practice in question and a minimum knowledge of choirs.

<sup>6</sup> From aerobics to the memories that departed, see various examples by T. DeNora (DeNora, 2000). Regarding the creation of the music industry's culture of music, see (Maisonneuve, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> The sociology of taste owes a lot here to the works on sciences and techniques of CSI and the Actor-Network Theory, for example, (Callon, 1986), (Latour, 1991) and (Law and Hassard, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Thus, I conclude a critical journey through the sociology of art and culture (Hennion, 2007) with an invitation to abandon its submission to what I call the theory of generalized belief. P. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1979) has radicalized a critical formulation in the sociology of culture but via the notion of convention, it is the same model

of belief that dominates the sociology of art as H.S. Becker's (Becker, 1988), even if in a much more liberal and closer to the actors mode.

## References

- BECKER, H.S. (1988). *Les mondes de l'art*. París: Flammarion.
- BESSY, C. & CHATEAURAYNAUD, F. (1995). *Experts et faussaires*. París: Métailié.
- BOURDIEU, P. (1979). *La distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. París: Minuit.
- CALLON, M. (1986). Some Elements for a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St-Brieuc Bay, in LAW J. (Ed.). *Power, Action and Belief: a New Sociology of Knowledge?* Londres (UK): Routledge & Kegan Paul; 196-229.
- CHARTIER, R. (1987). *Lecture et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Régime*. París: Seuil.
- CHARTIER, R. (1992). *L'ordre des livres: lecteurs, auteurs, bibliothèques en Europe entre le XIV<sup>e</sup> et le XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Aix-en-Provence: Alinea.
- DE NORA, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.
- DONNAT, O. (1996). *Les amateurs. Enquête sur les activités artistiques des Français*. París: DEP/Ministère de la Culture-DAG.
- GOMART, É. & HENNION, A. (1999). A Sociology of Attachment: Music Lovers, Drug Addicts, in LAW J. & HASSARD, J. (Ed.). *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford/Malden MA: Blackwell; 220-247.
- HENNION, A. (2007). *La passion musicale. Une sociologie de la médiation*. París: Métailié.
- HENNION, A. (2004). Pragmatics of taste, in JACOBS, M. Y HANRAHAN, N. (Ed.). *The Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Culture*. Oxford UK/Malden MA: Blackwell; 131-144.
- HENNION, A.; MAISONNEUVE, S. & GOMART, É. (2000). *Figures de l'amateur. Formes, objets, pratiques de l'amour de la musique aujourd'hui*. París: La Documentation Française.
- LATOUR, B. (1991). *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes. Essai d'anthropologie symétrique*. París: La Découverte.
- LATOUR, B. (1996). *Petite réflexion sur le culte moderne des dieux faitiches*. París: Les empêcheurs de tourner en rond.
- LATOUR, B. (2000). Factures/fractures. De la notion de réseau à celle d'attachement, in MICoud A. & PERONI, M. (Ed.). *Ce qui nous relie. La Tour d'Aigues*: Éds de l'Aube; 189-208.
- LAW J. & HASSARD, J. (Ed.) (1999). *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford/Malden MA: Blackwell.
- MAISONNEUVE, S. (2001). De la «machine parlante» à l'auditeur: le disque et la naissance d'une nouvelle culture musicale dans les années 1920-1930, in *Terrain*, 37; 11-28.
- POMIAN, K. (1987). *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux: Paris-Vénise, XV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. París: Gallimard.
- SZENDY, P. (2001). *Écoute. Une histoire de nos oreilles*. París: Minuit.
- WEBER, W. (1997). Did People Listen in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century?, in *Early Music*, nov.; 678-691.