

H-France Review Vol. 4 (May 2004), No. 58

Hugh Dauncy and Steve Cannon, Eds., *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno: Culture, Identity and Society*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. xii + 282 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$79.95 U.S. ISBN 0-7546-0849-2.

Review by Susan Weiner, Yale University.

As French departments have struggled to redefine their identity and mission in the American university system over the past decade or so, the study of modern and contemporary French popular culture has found a good home in the United Kingdom.[1] This does not come as a surprising development: scholars in the UK have taken their own popular culture seriously ever since Richard Hoggart's *Uses of Literacy* and Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society: 1750-1950* (1957 and 1958 respectively). In its early stages, British cultural studies identified "authentic" popular culture as the long-standing local traditions of the working classes, and the mass products of the culture industry as a threat to popular authenticity.[2] With the rise of consumerism and its gendered, generational, and racial identities, British theorists turned their attention to those very mass products which had become the de facto popular culture.[3] The field of inquiry evolved methodologically as well, with the work of French thinkers such as Althusser, Bourdieu, De Certeau, and Foucault coming to inform the study of life-practices in post-industrial British society. Despite shifts in the economic and intellectual fields, the British cultural studies endeavor has always been a political one: to analyze the relations of individual and groups to a dominant culture is to reveal the workings of dominance and enable social transformation.

The post World War II years in France saw Roland Barthes working from a similar premise in his *Mythologies* (1957). Barthes is safely ensconced in American French departments as a "theorist," along with the poststructuralists of the seventies. But popular culture studies have never really taken off. This may be in part the result of French departments' generally depoliticized state. A point of contrast is provided by English departments, which routinely offer courses in theories and practices of popular culture, and often house activist scholars. Another possible reason for the minimal presence of popular culture in French departments is the question of intellectual legitimacy. Rare are the tenured scholars of popular culture in reputable French departments.[4] The British university system may be in crisis, but the crisis is financial, not intellectual. Even when French departments are reduced to sections under the Modern Languages umbrella in the U.K., they embrace the legitimacy of popular culture alongside traditional literary studies in undergraduate curriculum, in the kind of training offered to graduate students, and in their faculty hiring. As a result, British scholars have made a distinctively greater contribution to the study of French popular culture than their American counterparts, with a few notable exceptions.[5] This imbalance in intellectual production, it must be noted, overwhelmingly concerns the post World War I period. Legitimacy is conferred with historicity in the study of French popular culture in the US, which happens to be the case in France as well.[6] Tellingly, some of the best critical writing in French on popular culture today is found in the popular press: in *Les inrockuptibles*, a weekly whose journalistic practice continues and redefines the French tradition of the public intellectual.

The only American contributor to the volume edited by Steve Cannon and Hugh Dauncy on the history of French popular music in the twentieth century is Robyn Stillwell, who teaches in the music department at Georgetown University. *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno* is as significant as a statement on the *état des lieux* in Anglo-American French departments as it is for its contribution to the study of contemporary popular culture in France. The essays examine the economic, social, esthetic, and political aspects of popular music, from the nineteenth-century poetics and practice of *chanson* and the 1851 founding of SACEM (*Société des auteurs, compositeurs, et éditeurs*), the first agency for intellectual property in the field of music, to the recognition of techno as an artistic form by the Ministry of Culture. For those who are interested in everyday life in France, the significance of this book is not to be underestimated: Dauncy cites a 1996 survey identifying popular music as the principle non-elite leisure activity in France, over television, sports, and cinema (p. 41). A cultural studies approach

to the question of popular music in France is thus highly appropriate: less a sociology of music than a “musicology of society,” as musicologist Richard Middleton writes in his introduction (p. 3).

The strongest essays in the volume succeed in the kind of thick description that the project of a musicology of society would require. David Looseley, author of what is to my knowledge the best monograph in English on French popular music, traces the history of public singing and the commodification of public listening from the early nineteenth century to the present.[7] The influence of Bourdieu is apparent in Looseley’s interest in artistic legitimacy in France. The singer must play up his literariness, must dissimulate the fact that his is a commercial endeavor. He must instead present the face of the “solitary, disinterested poet” (p. 31). Music counts less than words in the world of French popular music. As Looseley points out, the Seghers anthologies of texts of *chansonniers* such as Brassens, Brel, and Ferré do not even include musical notation. Christopher Lloyd analyzes songs from the World War II period, originating in both the Resistance and in Vichy, and comes to the surprising conclusion that in general they are ideologically neutral. A song like “Le chant des partisans” only came to shape and reflect national identity after the Liberation, when it fit into the Fourth Republic agenda to promote a positive image of the Resistance abroad. As an observer of the current scene, Philippe Teillet describes the process of integration of rock music into the French cultural field through its intellectualization in two iconoclastic magazines: *Rock et Folk* from the late 1960s through 1990 and *Les inrockuptibles* from the mid-1980s on. Unlike the carefree cheer of fan magazine *Salut les copains* and its counterparts in the 1960s, *Rock et Folk* and *Les inrocks* engaged with popular music in the terms of a value that had nothing to do with market forces--and this without reproducing the “scholastic forms of recognition” operative in the French intellectual field.

Other essays offer a good deal of information and useful insights, but ultimately disappoint. Phil Powrie undertakes the study of the “fluctuations and tensions...between French and American culture” as exemplified in music on screen. In French cinema of the 1930s, he observes, song has the diegetic function of imagined community, bringing together the actors on screen (with the spectators in the theatre, I might add) through a shared language. The hypothesis is a fascinating one, but the attempt to cover too much ground in too few pages results in superficial treatment. The reference to American popular forms appears again in Robyn Stillwell’s essay on the musicals of Jacques Demy. She provides welcome musicological insights on melody and rhythm, but does not do the work of contextualization that would substantiate the comparative approach. To describe Demy’s reinvention of the musical at a time when the genre was in decline in the US, she writes, “the key relationship between France and America, the nostalgic and the new, is a fraught one” (p. 137). But she never tells us how or why, beyond a summary mention of the ambiguity of modernization in *Les parapluies de Cherbourg*. The impressive research in Mat Pires’s essay on music magazines and their ideological affiliations is undermined by awkward prose and too little analysis. Pires shares a wealth of often mind-boggling quotations from popular magazines linked to the French Communist Party and the Catholic Church, but does not tease out for his reader the ideological implications of the rhetoric these magazines wield so blithely.

Despite these weaknesses, *Popular Music in France* is an immensely valuable collection of essays, enriched by a jewel of a bibliography that will surely inspire scholars in the interdisciplinary field of French cultural studies, where history and sociology come together with high, low, and middlebrow forms of expression.

LIST OF ESSAYS

- Richard Middleton, “Introduction: Music, Modernization and Popular Identity.”
- Philippe Le Guern, “The Study of Popular Music between Sociology and Aesthetics: A Survey of Current Research in France.”
- David Looseley, “In from the Margins: *Chanson*, Pop and Cultural Legitimacy.”
- Hugh Dauncey, “The French Music Industry: Structures, Challenges and Responses.”
- Geoff Hare, “Popular Music on French Radio and Television.”
- Mat Pires, *The Popular Music Press*.”
- Phil Powrie, “The Disintegration of Community: Popular Music in French Cinema 1940-Present.”
- Robyn J. Stilwell, “Le Demy-monde: The Bewitched, Betwixt and Between French Musical.”
- Chris Tinker, “*Chanson engagée* and Political Activism in the 1950s and 1960s: Léo Ferré and Georges Brassens.”

- Christopher Lloyd, "Divided Loyalties: Singing in the Occupation."
- Philippe Teillet, "Rock and Culture in France: Ways, Process and Conditions of Integration."
- Steve Cannon, "Globalization, Americanization and Hip Hop in France."
- Keith Reader, "Flaubert's Sparrow, or the Bovary of Belleville: Edith Piaf as Cultural Icon."
- Philippe Birgy, "French Electronic Music: The Invention of a Tradition."
- Hugh Dauncey and Steve Cannon, "Conclusion: French Popular Music, Cultural Exception and Globalization."

NOTES

[1] A good indication is the 1990 creation and ongoing publication of the British journal *French Cultural Studies*, a well-respected forum for scholarship on francophone popular culture. In the US, the long-languishing *Contemporary French Civilization* was recently adopted by Larry Schehr in the French department of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; its place in the intellectual field remains to be determined.

[2] For a history of cultural studies in the U.K., see Simon During, "Introduction," *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 1-25.

[3] For the first wave, see Dorothy Hobson, *Crossroads: the Drama of a Soap Opera Queen* (London: Methuen, 1982); Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava, eds., *Gender and Generation* (London: Macmillan, 1984); Meaghan Morris, "Things to Do With Shopping Centres," in Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 295-319, Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

[4] Kristin Ross in the Department of Comparative Literature at N.Y.U. is one such scholar. Leah Hewitt teaches a course in popular culture at Amherst College; Columbia relegates the study of popular culture to its Reid Hall program in Paris. Institutions that grant Ph.Ds. in French Studies include N.Y.U.'s Institute for French Studies, Penn State, the University of Illinois, and the University of Virginia.

[5] The study of postwar French culture by Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), is the book that will come to most readers' minds--but can they name another? For an introduction to the history, methodologies, and concerns of the field, see, for example, *French Cultural Studies. Criticism at the Crossroads*, ed. Marie-Pierre Le Hir and Dana Strand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000); *French Cultural Studies*, ed., Jill Forbes and Michael Kelly (London: Oxford University Press, 1996); Mike Kelly, "The Stranger's Gaze: The Emergence of French Cultural Studies," in Jan Baetens and José Lambert, eds., *The Future of Cultural Studies: Essays in Honour of Joris Vlasselaers* (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 2000); Nelly Furman, "French Studies: Back to the Future," *Profession* (1998): 68-80.

[6] See, for example, Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: popular culture and politics, 1787-1799* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

[7] David Looseley, *Popular Music in France: Authenticity, Politics, Debate* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003).

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ISSN 1553-9172