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Book Review

Review of Cohen, Sara, Line Grenier, and Ros Jennings, eds. *Troubling Inheritances: Memory, Music and Aging*. New York, USA: Bloomsbury Publishing. 2023. pp. 222. Price: $189.95 (Hardback); $58.50 (Paperback); $52.65 (eBook)

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The volume *Troubling Inheritances: Music, Memory, and Aging,* edited by Sara Cohen, Line Grenier, and Ros Jennings, presents a compelling exploration of the intricate relationships between music, memory, and aging. All the contributors of the book including the editors have been largely involved with the concepts of music and media for their research works. However, it was Ros Jennings who pioneered the exploration of "Inheritance Tracks" to describe how music becomes intertwined with people's memories and life experiences. Drawing inspiration from BBC Radio 4's Saturday Live (2006), where guests shared one song they inherited and another they wished to pass on, Inheritance Tracks forms a central theme woven throughout the book's chapters. It refers to musical tracks that individuals might have inherited over the course of their lives and would like to pass down to future generations. This book emerges from the fusion of Inheritance Tracks techniques with storytelling, collective listening, and memory mapping. In each of the book's studies, the respondents share emotions and anecdotes connected to specific tracks, highlighting how these songs have become invaluable in their personal memories. Through a wide range of international case studies, not confining to formal therapeutic contexts, this collection highlights the centrality of music in our everyday experiences as well as the ways we understand and narrate our lives. The term "troubling" in the title reflects the complex nature of musical inheritance, as it is not always voluntary or joyful. Inheritance is portrayed as a conduit for forging bonds and legacies transcending temporal and spatial boundaries. This shift from the individual to the collective, where individual experiences are shared to foster solidarity, broadens the scope of the book to encompass a spectrum of "troubling inheritances." It also centres the role of those who came before and those who will follow, making rich connections between music, memory, solidarity and intergenerational relations.

In an autoethnographic contribution (Chapter one), Ros Jennings reflects upon her experiences, conversations and diary journals from the workshops where she applied the Inheritance Tracks method with women-only groups. One of them was a UK network for women called "Growing Old Disgracefully" comprising women who were aged from mid-fifties to eighty. Another workshop was conducted at a summer school in 2017 by Centre for Women, Aging and Media, where 14 women aged between their late twenties and late sixties participated. Jennings highlights the power of music in eliciting memories from the past and stresses how music provides these women tools to reflect upon their identities. She finds that memories prompted by music are affectively charged and can take women on a journey she calls "trans-aging" (Moglen 2008), forging relations between one's younger and older selves. For instance, women born in the post-war periods came of age in the 1960s and were influenced

by songs like "Que Sera Sera" and albums like "Carousel" as it provided a sense of liberation. Songs from The Beatles worked as "a horizontal bridge" (29) creating bonds between generations, opening them to notions of resistance and value formation.

Andy Bennett (Chapter two) also explores the connection between music, affect and trans-aging, but focuses on the role music plays in creating memories. The notion of "soothing sociality" is introduced to elucidate how sharing musical memories, such as the favourite songs of one's deceased father or grandmother, generates atmospheres of empathy and trust among participants. This practice supports people in coping with personal loss and trauma and creates situations of "collective self-therapy" (53). Borderscape challenges related to national, regional, class-based and religion-related issues are highlighted through participants' narratives by Helmi Jarviluoma, Elena Hytonen-Ng, and Sonja Pollanen in Eastern Finland (Chapter three) and Abigail Gardner in Palermo, Sicily (Chapter four). With the concept "song worlds" (83), Gardner refers to the interplay between a song and its role in a particular life world shared through the acts of storytelling in the workshop. As both the cities had their own political and historical struggles after the second World War, songs played on the radio with lyrics such as "my country, so lovely and lost" (67) rekindles memories of one's social and national identities and evoke emotions of unity among the participants.

Based on the Trinidad Islands, Jocelyn Guilbault (Chapter five) explores the influence of music and age on "the doing of memory" (105). Guibault highlights that memory is not only emplaced, but also gendered. She discusses how aging does not change the types of songs people love, nor the criteria they use to select songs deemed fit for passing on to younger generations. The next two chapters go on to describe the innate, beneficial bond between people and music. Based on a study in Liverpool, Sara Cohen, Lisa Shaw and Jacqueline Waldock (Chapter six) document the unique ways in which age and aging are performed, lived and understood through music, and music inheritance (130). The authors investigate the viability of digital multimedia reminiscence tools tailored for individuals with early-stage dementia and age-related memory loss. They found that, following the presentation of musical films, participants successfully traced their life stages through music, which in turn provided them a sense of agency and control over their memories and lives (147). Line Grenier and Vero Leduc's work with the deaf communities in Montreal (Chapter seven) brought together a group of deaf adults, who were willing to share their ideas and experiences with musical tracks (162). The participants shared the different ways of 'doing music,' which the authors call "musicking" (161), as taken from Christopher Small (1998). For instance, for one of the participants, music meant the rhythm in bed-time stories represented by signs of galloping horses and moving heads, some understood it by feeling the vibrations on playing a piano or violin, while for others dancing and watching music videos was a way of doing music. Lastly, Murray Forman (Chapter eight) emphasizes themes related to sharing, embodiment, location and affect in how different authors apply Inheritance Tracks across various contexts within the book.

Much of the earlier scholarship that examines music in relation to aging and memory is informed by biomedical approaches and interventionist approaches to music as therapy, memory prompt, or as a tool for regulating movement and behaviour. This book presents an alternative view to this tradition. The editors of the book argue that memory is not some universal human faculty or to the content stored in one's brain, rather, it is a situated, affective practice: remembering. When facilitated by music, affective remembering can bring moments of sadness, joy, epiphany or despair. It is embedded not only in the everyday but also in the social-cultural frameworks that define what is appropriate to remember and how to remember it. Music offers people a meaningful map through which they can locate themselves in relation to people, times, spaces, practices and technologies.

While this volume includes research from various regions in Europe, North America, and Australia, it notably lacks perspectives and findings from the Global South, specifically South America and South-east Asia. The book's strength lies in its ethnographic method and the rich narratives of the participants provided by all the authors. The use of Inheritance Tracks as a method to explore a varied range of phenomena such as gender, affect, bordering, aging and even deafness provides the readers with new ideas and insights into creative approaches to conducting research. The book will likely benefit not only anthropologists and sociologists, but also practitioners and health care providers who work in the field of aging and care. By providing a unique perspective on reflecting upon memories, it serves as a source of encouragement for older individuals. The contributing authors show how music's power to evoke memories often lies not in a single song, but in the rich tapestry of experiences, sensations, and contexts that surround its original encounter. Over time, as we grow older with the soundtrack of our lives, what once seemed like mere background music can reveal profound connections to our identity and relationships. This book should be read by all music lovers as well, to know the impact of music in our lives more closely.

References

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