On Popular Music.

By T. W. Adorno.

With the assistance of George Simpson.

I. THE MUSICAL MATERIAL.

The two spheres of music.

Popular music, which produces the stimuli we are here investigating, is usually characterized by its difference from serious music. This difference is generally taken for granted and is looked upon as a difference of levels considered so well defined that most people regard the values within them as totally independent of one another. We deem it necessary, however, first of all to translate these so-called levels into more precise terms, musical as well as social, which not only delimit them unequivocally but throw light upon the whole setting of the two musical spheres as well.

One possible method of achieving this clarification would be an historical analysis of the division as it occurred in music production and of the roots of the two main spheres. Since, however, the present study is concerned with the actual function of popular music in its present status, it is more advisable to follow the line of characterization of the phenomenon itself as it is given today than to trace it back to its origins. This is the more justified as the division into the two spheres of music took place in Europe long before American popular music arose. American music from its inception accepted the division as something pre-given, and therefore the historical background of the division applies to it only indirectly. Hence we seek, first of all, an insight into the fundamental characteristics of popular music in the broadest sense.

A clear judgment concerning the relation of serious music to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization.[1] The

[1]The basic importance of standardization has not altogether escaped the attention of current literature on popular music. "The chief difference between a popular song and a standard, or serious, song like Mandalay, Sylvia, or Trees, is that the melody and the lyric of a popular number are constructed within a definite pattern or structural form, whereas the poem, or lyric, of a standard number has no structural confinements, and the music is free to interpret the meaning and feeling of the words without following a set pattern or form. Putting it another way, the popular song is 'custom built,' while

(footnote continued on next page)

whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization. Standardization extends from the most general features to the most specific ones. Best known is the rule that the chorus consists of thirty-two bars and that the range is limited to one octave and one note. The general types of hits are also standardized: not only the dance types, the rigidity of whose pattern is understood, but also the "characters" such as mother songs, home songs, nonsense or "novelty" songs, pseudo-nursery rhymes, laments for a lost girl. Most important of all, the harmonic cornerstones of each hit—the beginning and the end of each part—must beat out the standard scheme. This scheme emphasizes the most primitive harmonic facts no matter what has harmonically intervened. Complications have no consequences. This inexorable device guarantees that regardless of what aberrations occur, the hit will lead back to the same familiar experience, and nothing fundamentally novel will be introduced.

The details themselves are standardized no less than the form, and a whole terminology exists for them such as break, blue chords, dirty notes. Their standardization, however, is somewhat different from that of the framework. It is not overt like the latter but hidden behind a veneer of individual "effects" whose prescriptions are handled as the experts' secret, however open this secret may be to musicians generally. This contrasting character of the standardization of the whole and part provides a rough, preliminary setting for the effect upon the listener.

The primary effect of this relation between the framework and the detail is that the listener becomes prone to evince stronger reactions to the part than to the whole. His grasp of the whole does not lie in the living experience of this one concrete piece of music he has followed. The whole is pre-given and pre-accepted, even before the actual experience of the music starts; therefore, it is not likely to influence, to any great extent, the reaction to the details,

---

the standard song allows the composer freer play of imagination and interpretation." (Abner Silver and Robert Bruce, *How to Write and Sell a Song Hit*, New York, 1939, p. 2.) The authors fail, however, to realize the externally super-imposed, commercial character of those patterns which aims at canalized reactions or, in the language of the regular announcement of one particular radio program, at "easy listening." They confuse the mechanical patterns with highly organized, strict art forms: "Certainly there are few more stringent verse forms in poetry than the sonnet, and yet the greatest poets of all time have woven undying beauty within its small and limited frame. A composer has just as much opportunity for exhibiting his talent and genius in popular songs as in more serious music" (pp. 2-3). Thus the standard pattern of popular music appears to them virtually on the same level as the law of a fugue. It is this contamination which makes the insight into the basic standardization of popular music sterile. It ought to be added that what Silver and Bruce call a "standard song" is just the opposite of what we mean by a standardized popular song.

except to give them varying degrees of emphasis. Details which occupy musically strategic positions in the framework—the beginning of the chorus or its reentrance after the bridge—have a better chance for recognition and favorable reception than details not so situated, for instance, middle bars of the bridge. But this situational nexus never interferes with the scheme itself. To this limited situational extent the detail depends upon the whole. But no stress is ever placed upon the whole as a musical event, nor does the structure of the whole ever depend upon the details.

Serious music, for comparative purposes, may be thus characterized:

Every detail derives its musical sense from the concrete totality of the piece which, in turn, consists of the life relationship of the details and never of a mere enforcement of a musical scheme. For example, in the introduction of the first movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony the second theme (in C-major) gets its true meaning only from the context. Only through the whole does it acquire its particular lyrical and expressive quality,—that is, a whole built up of its very contrast with the *cantus firmus*-like character of the first theme. Taken in isolation the second theme would be disrobed to insignificance. Another example may be found in the beginning of the recapitulation over the pedal point of the first movement of Beethoven's "Appassionata." By following the preceding outburst it achieves the utmost dramatic momentum. By omitting the exposition and development and starting with this repetition, all is lost.

Nothing corresponding to this can happen in popular music. It would not affect the musical sense if any detail were taken out of the context; the listener can supply the "framework" automatically, since it is a mere musical automatism itself. The beginning of the chorus is replaceable by the beginning of innumerable other choruses. The interrelationship among the elements or the relationship of the elements to the whole would be unaffected. In Beethoven, position is important only in a living relation between a concrete totality and its concrete parts. In popular music, position is absolute. Every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine.

The mere establishment of this difference is not yet sufficient. It is possible to object that the far reaching standard schemes and types of popular music are bound up with dance, and therefore are also applicable to dance-derivatives in serious music, for example, the minuetto and scherzo of the classical Viennese School. It may be maintained either that this part of serious music is also to be

comprehended in terms of detail rather than of whole, or that if the whole still is perceivable in the dance types in serious music despite recurrence of the types, there is no reason why it should not be perceivable in modern popular music.

The following consideration provides an answer to both objections by showing the radical differences even where serious music employs dance-types. According to current formalistic views the scherzo of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony can be regarded as a highly stylized minuetto. What Beethoven takes from the traditional minuetto scheme in this scherzo is the idea of outspoken contrast between a minor minuetto, a major trio, and repetition of the minor minuetto; and also certain other characteristics such as the emphatic three-fourths rhythm often accentuated on the first fourth and, by and large, dance-like symmetry in the sequence of bars and periods. But the specific form-idea of this movement as a concrete totality transvaluates the devices borrowed from the minuetto scheme. The whole movement is conceived as an introduction to the finale in order to create tremendous tension, not only by its threatening, foreboding expression but even more by the very way in which its formal development is handled.

The classical minuetto scheme required first the appearance of the main theme, then the introduction of a second part which may lead to more distant tonal regions—formalistically similar, to be sure, to the "bridge" of today's popular music—and finally the recurrence of the original part. All this occurs in Beethoven. He takes up the idea of thematic dualism within the scherzo part. But he forces what was, in the conventional minuetto, a mute and meaningless game-rule to speak with meaning. He achieves complete consistency between the formal structure and its specific content, that is to say, the elaboration of its themes. The whole scherzo part of this scherzo (that is to say, what occurs before the entrance of the deep strings in C-major that marks the beginning of the trio), consists of the dualism of two themes, the creeping figure in the strings and the "objective," stone-like answer of the wind instruments. This dualism is not developed in a schematic way so that first the phrase of the strings is elaborated, then the answer of the winds, and then the string theme is mechanically repeated. After the first occurrence of the second theme in the horns, the two essential elements are alternately interconnected in the manner of a dialogue, and the end of the scherzo part is actually marked, not by the first, but by the second theme which has overwhelmed the first musical phrase.

Furthermore, the repetition of the scherzo after the trio is scored

so differently that it sounds like a mere shadow of the scherzo and assumes that haunting character which vanishes only with the affirmative entry of the Finale theme. The whole device has been made dynamic. Not only the themes, but the musical form itself have been subjected to tension: the same tension which is already manifest within the two-fold structure of the first theme that consists, as it were, of question and reply, and then even more manifest within the context between the two main themes. The whole scheme has become subject to the inherent demands of this particular movement.

To sum up the difference: in Beethoven and in good serious music in general—we are not concerned here with bad serious music which may be as rigid and mechanical as popular music—the detail virtually contains the whole and leads to the exposition of the whole, while, at the same time, it is produced out of the conception of the whole. In popular music the relationship is fortuitous. The detail has no bearing on a whole, which appears as an extraneous framework. Thus, the whole is never altered by the individual event and therefore remains, as it were, aloof, imperturbable, and unnoticed throughout the piece. At the same time, the detail is mutilated by a device which it can never influence and alter, so that the detail remains inconsequential. A musical detail which is not permitted to develop becomes a caricature of its own potentialities.

Standardization.

The previous discussion shows that the difference between popular and serious music can be grasped in more precise terms than those referring to musical levels such as "lowbrow and highbrow," "simple and complex," "naive and sophisticated." For example, the difference between the spheres cannot be adequately expressed in terms of complexity and simplicity. All works of the earlier Viennese classicism are, without exception, rhythmically simpler than stock arrangements of jazz. Melodically, the wide intervals of a good many hits such as "Deep Purple" or "Sunrise Serenade" are more difficult to follow *per se* than most melodies of, for example, Haydn, which consist mainly of circumscriptions of tonic triads, and second steps. Harmonically, the supply of chords of the so-called classics is invariably more limited than that of any current Tin Pan Alley composer who draws from Debussy, Ravel, and even later sources. Standardization and non-standardization are the key contrasting terms for the difference.

Structural standardization aims at standard reactions. Listening to popular music is manipulated not only by its promoters, but as it

were, by the inherent nature of this music itself, into a system of response-mechanisms wholly antagonistic to the ideal of individuality in a free, liberal society. This has nothing to do with simplicity and complexity. In serious music, each musical element, even the simplest one, is "itself," and the more highly organized the work is, the less possibility there is of substitution among the details. In hit music, however, the structure underlying the piece is abstract, existing independent of the specific course of the music. This is basic to the illusion that certain complex harmonies are more easily understandable in popular music than the same harmonies in serious music. For the complicated in popular music never functions as "itself" but only as a disguise or embellishment behind which the scheme can always be perceived. In jazz the amateur listener is capable of replacing complicated rhythmical or harmonic formulas by the schematic ones which they represent and which they still suggest, however adventurous they appear. The ear deals with the difficulties of hit music by achieving slight substitutions derived from the knowledge of the patterns. The listener, when faced with the complicated, actually hears only the simple which it represents and perceives the complicated only as a parodistic distortion of the simple.

No such mechanical substitution by stereotyped patterns is possible in serious music. Here even the simplest event necessitates an effort to grasp it immediately instead of summarizing it vaguely according to institutionalized prescriptions capable of producing only institutionalized effects. Otherwise the music is not "understood." Popular music, however, is composed in such a way that the process of translation of the unique into the norm is already planned and, to a certain extent, achieved within the composition itself.

The composition hears for the listener. This is how popular music divests the listener of his spontaneity and promotes conditioned reflexes. Not only does it not require his effort to follow its concrete stream; it actually gives him models under which anything concrete still remaining may be subsumed. The schematic build-up dictates the way in which he must listen while, at the same time, it makes any effort in listening unnecessary. Popular music is "predigested" in a way strongly resembling the fad of "digests" of printed material. It is this structure of contemporary popular music, which in the last analysis, accounts for those changes of listening habits which we shall later discuss.

So far standardization of popular music has been considered in structural terms—that is, as an inherent quality without explicit

reference to the process of production or to the underlying causes for standardization. Though all industrial mass production necessarily eventuates in standardization, the production of popular music can be called "industrial" only in its promotion and distribution, whereas the act of producing a song-hit still remains in a handicraft stage. The production of popular music is highly centralized in its economic organization, but still "individualistic" in its social mode of production. The division of labor among the composer, harmonizer, and arranger is not industrial but rather pretends industrialization, in order to look more up-to-date, whereas it has actually adapted industrial methods for the technique of its promotion. It would not increase the costs of production if the various composers of hit tunes did not follow certain standard patterns. Therefore, we must look for other reasons for structural standardization—very different reasons from those which account for the standardization of motor cars and breakfast foods.

Imitation offers a lead for coming to grips with the basic reasons for it. The musical standards of popular music were originally developed by a competitive process. As one particular song scored a great success, hundreds of others sprang up imitating the successful one. The most successful hits, types, and "ratios" between elements were imitated, and the process culminated in the crystallization of standards. Under centralized conditions such as exist today these standards have become "frozen."[1] That is, they have been taken over by cartelized agencies, the final results of a competitive process, and rigidly enforced upon material to be promoted. Non-compliance with the rules of the game became the basis for exclusion. The original patterns that are now standardized evolved in a more or less competitive way. Large-scale economic concentration institutionalized the standardization, and made it imperative. As a result, innovations by rugged individualists have been outlawed. The standard patterns have become invested with the immunity of bigness—"the King can do no wrong." This also accounts for revivals in popular music. They do not have the outworn character of standardized products manufactured after a given pattern. The breath of free competition is still alive within them. On the other hand, the famous old hits which are revived set the patterns which have become standardized. They are the golden age of the game-rules.

This "freezing" of standards is socially enforced upon the agen-

[1]See Max Horkheimer, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. VIII, 1939, p. 115.

cies themselves. Popular music must simultaneously meet two demands. One is for stimuli that provoke the listener's attention. The other is for the material to fall within the category of what the musically untrained listener would call "natural" music: that is, the sum total of all the conventions and material formulas in music to which he is accustomed and which he regards as the inherent, simple language of music itself, no matter how late the development might be which produced this natural language. This natural language for the American listener stems from his earliest musical experiences, the nursery rhymes, the hymns he sings in Sunday school, the little tunes he whistles on his way home from school.—All these are vastly more important in the formation of musical language than his ability to distinguish the beginning of Brahms' Third Symphony from that of his Second. Official musical culture is, to a large extent, a mere superstructure of this underlying musical language, namely the major and minor tonality and all the tonal relationships it implies. But these tonal relationships of the primitive musical language set barriers to whatever does not conform to them. Extravagances are tolerated only insofar as they can be recast into this so-called natural language.

In terms of consumer-demand, the standardization of popular music is only the expression of this dual desideratum imposed upon it by the musical frame of mind of the public,—that it be "stimulatory" by deviating in some way from the established "natural," and that it maintain the supremacy of the natural against such deviations. The attitude of the audience toward the natural language is reinforced by standardized production, which institutionalizes desiderata which originally might have come from the public.

Pseudo-individualization.

The paradox in the desiderata—stimulatory and natural—accounts for the dual character of standardization itself. Stylization of the ever identical framework is only one aspect of standardization. Concentration and control in our culture hide themselves in their very manifestation. Unhidden they would provoke resistance. Therefore the illusion and, to a certain extent, even the reality of individual achievement must be maintained. The maintenance of it is grounded in material reality itself, for while administrative control over life processes is concentrated, ownership is still diffuse.

In the sphere of luxury production, to which popular music belongs and in which no necessities of life are immediately involved, while, at the same time, the residues of individualism are most alive there in the form of ideological categories such as taste and free

choice, it is imperative to hide standardization. The "backwardness" of musical mass production, the fact that it is still on a handicraft level and not literally an industrial one, conforms perfectly to that necessity which is essential from the viewpoint of cultural big business. If the individual handicraft elements of popular music were abolished altogether, a synthetic means of hiding standardization would have to be evolved. Its elements are even now in existence.

The necessary correlate of musical standardization is *pseudo-individualization.* By pseudo-individualization we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself. Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them, as it were. Pseudo-individualization, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or "pre-digested."

The most drastic example of standardization of presumably individualized features is to be found in so-called improvisations. Even though jazz musicians still improvise in practice, their improvisations have become so "normalized" as to enable a whole terminology to be developed to express the standard devices of individualization: a terminology which in turn is ballyhooed by jazz publicity agents to foster the myth of pioneer artisanship and at the same time flatter the fans by apparently allowing them to peep behind the curtain and get the inside story. This pseudo-individualization is prescribed by the standardization of the framework. The latter is so rigid that the freedom it allows for any sort of improvisation is severely delimited. Improvisations—passages where spontaneous action of individuals is permitted ("Swing it boys")—are confined within the walls of the harmonic and metric scheme. In a great many cases, such as the "break" of pre-swing jazz, the musical function of the improvised detail is determined completely by the scheme: the break can be nothing other than a disguised cadence. Hence, very few possibilities for actual improvisation remain, due to the necessity of merely melodically circumscribing the same underlying harmonic functions. Since these possibilities were very quickly exhausted, stereotyping of improvisatory details speedily occurred. Thus, standardization of the norm enhances in a purely technical way standardization of its own deviation—pseudo-individualization.

This subservience of improvisation to standardization explains two main socio-psychological qualities of popular music. One is the fact that the detail remains openly connected with the underlying scheme so that the listener always feels on safe ground. The choice

in individual alterations is so small that the perpetual recurrence of the same variations is a reassuring signpost of the identical behind them. The other is the function of "substitution"—the improvisatory features forbid their being grasped as musical events in themselves. They can be received only as embellishments. It is a well-known fact that in daring jazz arrangements worried notes, dirty tones, in other words, false notes, play a conspicuous role. They are apperceived as exciting stimuli only because they are corrected by the ear to the right note. This, however, is only an extreme instance of what happens less conspicuously in all individualization in popular music. Any harmonic boldness, any chord which does not fall strictly within the simplest harmonic scheme demands being apperceived as "false," that is, as a stimulus which carries with it the unambiguous prescription to substitute for it the right detail, or rather the naked scheme. Understanding popular music means obeying such commands for listening. Popular music commands its own listening-habits.

There is another type of individualization claimed in terms of kinds of popular music and differences in name-bands. The types of popular music are carefully differentiated in production. The listener is presumed to be able to choose between them. The most widely recognized differentiations are those between swing and sweet and such name-bands as Benny Goodman and Guy Lombardo. The listener is quickly able to distinguish the types of music and even the performing band, this in spite of the fundamental identity of the material and the great similarity of the presentations apart from their emphasized distinguishing trade-marks. This labelling technique, as regards type of music and band, is pseudo-individualization, but of a sociological kind outside the realm of strict musical technology. It provides trade-marks of identification for differentiating between the actually undifferentiated.

Popular music becomes a multiple-choice questionnaire. There are two main types and their derivatives from which to choose. The listener is encouraged by the inexorable presence of these types psychologically to cross-out what he dislikes and check what he likes. The limitation inherent in this choice and the clear-cut alternative it entails provoke like-dislike patterns of behavior. This mechanical dichotomy breaks down indifference; it is imperative to favor sweet or swing if one wishes to continue to listen to popular music.

II. PRESENTATION OF THE MATERIAL.

Minimum requirements.

The structure of the musical material requires a technique of its own by which it is enforced. This process may be roughly defined as "plugging." The term "plugging" originally had the narrow meaning of ceaseless repetition of one particular hit in order to make it "successful." We here use it in the broad sense, to signify a continuation of the inherent processes of composition and arrangement of the musical material. Plugging aims to break down the resistance to the musically ever-equal or identical by, as it were, closing the avenues of escape from the ever-equal. It leads the listener to become enraptured with the inescapable. And thus it leads to the institutionalization and standardization of listening habits themselves. Listeners become so accustomed to the recurrence of the same things that they react automatically. The standardization of the material requires a plugging mechanism from outside, since everything equals everything else to such an extent that the emphasis on presentation which is provided by plugging must substitute for the lack of genuine individuality in the material. The listener of normal musical intelligence who hears the Kundry motif of "Parsifal" for the first time is likely to recognize it when it is played again because it is unmistakable and not exchangeable for anything else. If the same listener were confronted with an average song-hit, he would not be able to distinguish it from any other unless it were repeated so often that he would be forced to remember it. Repetition gives a psychological importance which it could otherwise never have. Thus plugging is the inevitable complement of standardization.[1]

Provided the material fulfills certain minimum requirements, any given song can be plugged and made a success, if there is adequate tie-up between publishing houses, name bands, radio and moving pictures. Most important is the following requirement: To be plugged, a song-hit must have at least one feature by which it can be distinguished from any other, and yet possess the complete conventionality and triviality of all others. The actual criterion by which a song is judged worthy of plugging is paradoxical. The publisher wants a piece of music that is fundamentally the same as all the other current hits and simultaneously fundamentally different from them. Only if it is the same does it have a chance of being

[1]As the actual working of the plugging mechanism on the American scene of popular music is described in full detail in a study by Duncan MacDougald, the present study confines itself to a theoretical discussion of some of the more general aspects of the enforcement of the material.

sold automatically, without requiring any effort on the part of the customer, and of presenting itself as a musical institution. And only if it is different can it be distinguished from other songs,—a requirement for being remembered and hence for being successful.

Of course, this double desideratum cannot be fulfilled. In the case of actual published and plugged songs, one will generally find some sort of compromise, something which is by and large the same and bears just one isolated trade-mark which makes it appear to be original. The distinguishing feature must not necessarily be melodic,[1] but may consist of metrical irregularities, particular chords or particular sound colors.

Glamor.

A further requirement of plugging is a certain richness and roundness of sound. This requirement evolves that feature in the whole plugging mechanism which is most overtly bound up with advertising as a business as well as with the commercialization of entertainment. It is also particularly representative of the interrelationship of standardization and pseudo-individualization.

It is musical glamor: those innumerable passages in song arrangements which appear to communicate the "now we present" attitude. The musical flourishes which accompany MGM's roaring lion whenever he opens his majestic mouth are analogous to the nonleonine sounds of musical glamor heard over the air.

Glamor-mindedness may optimistically be regarded as a mental construct of the success story in which the hardworking American settler triumphs over impassive nature, which is finally forced to yield up its riches. However, in a world that is no longer a frontier world, the problem of glamor cannot be regarded as so easily soluble. Glamor is made into the eternal conqueror's song of the common man; he who is never permitted to conquer in life conquers in glamor. The triumph is actually the self-styled triumph of the

[1]Technical analysis must add certain reservations to any acceptance of listener reactions at their face value in the case of the concept of melody. Listeners to popular music speak mainly about melody and rhythm, sometimes about instrumentation, rarely or never about harmony and form. Within the standard scheme of popular music, however, melody itself is by no means autonomous in the sense of an independent line developing in the horizontal dimension of music. Melody is, rather, a function of harmony. The so-called melodies in popular music are generally arabesques, dependent upon the sequence of harmonies. What appears to the listener to be primarily melodic is actually fundamentally harmonic, its melodic structure a mere derivative.

It would be valuable to study exactly what laymen call a melody. It would probably turn out to be a succession of tones related to one another by simple and easily understandable harmonic functions, within the framework of the eight bar period. There is a large gap between the layman's idea of a melody and its strictly musical connotation.

business man who announces that he will offer the same product at a lower price.

The conditions for this function of glamor are entirely different from those of frontier life. They apply to the mechanization of labor and to the workaday life of the masses. Boredom has become so great that only the brightest colors have any chance of being lifted out of the general drabness. Yet, it is just those violent colors which bear witness to the omnipotence of mechanical, industrial production itself. Nothing could be more stereotyped than the pinkish red neon lights which abound in front of shops, moving picture theatres and restaurants. By glamorizing, they attract attention. But the means by which they are used to overcome humdrum reality are more humdrum than the reality itself. That which aims to achieve glamor becomes a more uniform activity than what it seeks to glamorize. If it were really attractive in itself, it would have no more means of support than a really original popular composition. It would violate the law of the sameness of the putatively unsame. The term glamorous is applied to those faces, colors, sounds which, by the light they irradiate, differ from the rest. But all glamor girls look alike and the glamor effects of popular music are equivalent to each other.

As far as the pioneer character of glamor is concerned, there is an overlapping and a change of function rather than an innocent survival of the past. To be sure, the world of glamor is a show, akin to shooting galleries, the glaring lights of the circus and deafening brass bands. As such, the function of glamor may have originally been associated with a sort of advertising which strove artificially to produce demands in a social setting not yet entirely permeated by the market. The post-competitive capitalism of the present day uses for its own purposes devices of a still immature economy. Thus, glamor has a haunting quality of historic revival in radio, comparable to the revival of the midway circus barker in today's radio barker who implores his unseen audience not to fail to sample wares and does so in tones which arouse hopes beyond the capacity of the commodity to fulfill. All glamor is bound up with some sort of trickery. Listeners are nowhere more tricked by popular music than in its glamorous passages. Flourishes and jubilations express triumphant thanksgiving for the music itself—a self-eulogy of its own achievement in exhorting the listener to exultation and of its identification with the aim of the agency in promoting a great event. However, as this event does not take place apart from its own celebration, the triumphant thanksgiving offered up by the music is a self-betrayal. It is likely to make itself felt as

such unconsciously in the listeners, just as the child resents the adult's praising the gifts he made to the child in the same words which the child feels it is his own privilege to use.

Baby talk.

It is not accidental that glamor leads to child-behavior. Glamor, which plays on the listener's desire for strength, is concomitant with a musical language which betokens dependence. The children's jokes, the purposely wrong orthography, the use of children's expressions in advertising, take the form of a musical children's language in popular music. There are many examples of lyrics characterized by an ambiguous irony in that, while affecting a children's language, they at the same time display contempt of the adult for the child or even give a derogatory or sadistic meaning to children's expressions ("Goody, Goody," "A Tisket a Tasket," "London Bridge is Falling Down," "Cry, Baby, Cry"). Genuine and pseudo-nursery rhymes are combined with purposeful alterations of the lyrics of original nursery rhymes in order to make them commercial hits.

The music, as well as the lyrics, tends to affect such a children's language. Some of its principal characteristics are: unabating repetition of some particular musical formula comparable to the attitude of a child incessantly uttering the same demand ("I Want to Be Happy");[1] the limitation of many melodies to very few tones, comparable to the way in which a small child speaks before he has the full alphabet at his disposal; purposely wrong harmonization resembling the way in which small children express themselves in incorrect grammar; also certain over-sweet sound colors, functioning like musical cookies and candies. Treating adults as children is involved in that representation of fun which is aimed at relieving the strain of their adult responsibilities. Moreover, the children's language serves to make the musical product "popular" with the subjects by attempting to bridge, in the subjects' consciousness, the distance between themselves and the plugging agencies, by approaching them with the trusting attitude of the child asking an adult for the correct time even though he knows neither the strange man nor the meaning of time.

Plugging the whole field.

The plugging of songs is only a part of a mechanism and obtains its proper meaning within the system as a whole. Basic to the system

[1]The most famous literary example of this attitude is "Want to shee the wheels go wound" (John Habberton, *Helen's Babies*, New York, p. 9 ff). One could easily imagine a "novelty" song being based upon that phrase.

is the plugging of styles and personalities. The plugging of certain styles is exemplified in the word swing. This term has neither a definite and unambiguous meaning nor does it mark a sharp difference from the period of pre-swing hot jazz up to the middle thirties. The lack of justification in the material for the use of the term arouses the suspicion that its usage is entirely due to plugging —in order to rejuvenate an old commodity by giving it a new title. Similarly plugged is the whole swing terminology indulged in by jazz journalism and used by jitterbugs, a terminology which, according to Hobson, makes jazz musicians wince.[1] The less inherent in the material are the characteristics plugged by a pseudo-expert terminology, the more are such auxiliary forces as announcers and commentaries needed.

There is good reason to believe that this journalism partly belongs immediately to the plugging mechanism, insofar as it depends upon publishers, agencies, and name bands. At this point, however, a sociological qualification is pertinent. Under contemporary economic conditions, it is often futile to look for "corruption," because people are compelled to behave voluntarily in ways one expected them to behave in only when they were paid for it. The journalists who take part in the promotion of a Hollywood "oomph-girl" need not be bribed at all by the motion picture industry. The publicity given to the girl by the industry itself is in complete accord with the ideology pervading the journalism which takes it up. And this ideology has become the audience's. The match appears to have been made in heaven. The journalists speak with unbought voices. Once a certain level of economic backing for plugging has been reached, the plugging process transcends its own causes and becomes an autonomous social force.

Above all other elements of the plugging mechanism stands the plugging of personalities, particularly of band leaders. Most of the features actually attributable to jazz arrangers are officially credited to the conductor; arrangers, who are probably the most competent musicians in the United States, often remain in obscurity, like scenario writers in the movies. The conductor is the man who immediately faces the audience; he is close kin to the actor who impresses the public either by his joviality and genial manner or by dictatorial gestures. It is the face-to-face relation with the conductor which makes it possible to transfer to him any achievement.

Further, the leader and his band are still largely regarded by the audience as bearers of improvisatory spontaneity. The more

[1]Wilder Hobson, *American Jazz Music*, p. 153, New York, 1939.

actual improvisation disappears in the process of standardization and the more it is superseded by elaborate schemes, the more must the idea of improvisation be maintained before the audience. The arranger remains obscure partly because of the necessity for avoiding the slightest hint that popular music may not be improvised, but must, in most cases, be fixed and systematized.

III. THEORY ABOUT THE LISTENER.

Recognition and acceptance.

Mass listening habits today gravitate about recognition. Popular music and its plugging are focused on this habituation. The basic principle behind it is that one need only repeat something until it is recognized in order to make it accepted. This applies to the standardization of the material as well as to its plugging. What is necessary in order to understand the reasons for the popularity of the current type of hit music is a theoretical analysis of the processes involved in the transformation of repetition into recognition and of recognition into acceptance.

The concept of recognition, however, may appear to be too unspecific to explain modern mass listening. It can be argued that wherever musical understanding is concerned, the factor of recognition, being one of the basic functions of human knowing, must play an important role. Certainly one understands a Beethoven sonata only by recognizing some of its features as being abstractly identical with others which one knows from former experience, and by linking them up with the present experience. The idea that a Beethoven sonata could be understood in a void without relating it to elements of musical language which one knows and recognizes—would be absurd. What matters, however, is what is recognized. What does a real listener recognize in a Beethoven sonata? He certainly recognizes the "system" upon which it is based: the major-minor tonality, the inter-relationship of keys which determines modulation, the different chords and their relative expressive value, certain melodic formulas, and certain structural patterns. (It would be absurd to deny that such patterns exist in serious music. But their function is of a different order. Granted all this recognition, it is still not sufficient for a comprehension of the musical sense.) All the recognizable elements are organized in good serious music by a concrete and unique musical totality from which they derive their particular meaning, in the same sense as a word in a poem derives its meaning from the totality of the poem and not from the everyday use of the word, although the recognition of this everydayness of the word

may be the necessary presupposition of any understanding of the poem.

The musical sense of any piece of music may indeed be defined as that dimension of the piece which cannot be grasped by recognition alone, by its identification with something one knows. It can be built up only by spontaneously linking the known elements—a reaction as spontaneous by the listener as it was spontaneous by the composer—in order to experience the inherent novelty of the composition. The musical sense is the New—something which cannot be traced back to and subsumed under the configuration of the known, but which springs out of it, if the listener comes to its aid.

It is precisely this relationship between the recognized and the new which is destroyed in popular music. Recognition becomes an end instead of a means. The recognition of the mechanically familiar in a hit tune leaves nothing which can be grasped as new by a linking of the various elements. As a matter of fact, the link between the elements is pre-given in popular music as much as, or even to a greater extent than, the elements are themselves. Hence, recognition and understanding must here coincide, whereas in serious music understanding is the act by which universal recognition leads to the emergence of something fundamentally new.

An appropriate beginning for investigating recognition in respect of any particular song hit may be made by drafting a scheme which divides the experience of recognition into its different components. Psychologically, all the factors we enumerate are interwoven to such a degree that it would be impossible to separate them from one another in reality, and any temporal order given them would be highly problematical. Our scheme is directed more toward the different objective elements involved in the experience of recognition, than toward the way in which the actual experience feels to a particular individual or individuals.

The components we consider to be involved are the following:

a) Vague remembrance.
b) Actual identification.
c) Subsumption by label.
d) Self-reflection on the act of recognition.
e) Psychological transfer of recognition-authority to the object.

a) The more or less vague experience of being reminded of something ("I must have heard this somewhere"). The standardization of the material sets the stage for vague remembrance in practically every song, since each tune is reminiscent of the general pattern and of

every other. An aboriginal prerequisite for this feeling is the existence of a vast supply of tunes, an incessant stream of popular music which makes it impossible to remember each and every particular song.

b) The moment of actual identification—the actual "that's it" experience. This is attained when vague remembrance is searchlighted by sudden awareness. It is comparable to the experience one has sitting in a room that has been darkened when suddenly the electric light flares up again. By the suddenness of its being lit, the familiar furniture obtains, for a split second, the appearance of being novel. The spontaneous realization that this very piece is "the same as" what one heard at some other time, tends to sublate, for a moment, the ever-impending peril that something is as it always was.

It is characteristic of this factor of the recognition experience that it is marked by a sudden break. There is no gradation between the vague recollection and full awareness but, rather, a sort of psychological "jump." This component may be regarded as appearing somewhat later in time than vague remembrance. This is supported by consideration of the material. It is probably very difficult to recognize most song hits by the first two or three notes of their choruses; at least the first motif must have been played, and the actual act of recognition should be correlated in time with the apperception—or realization—of the first complete motifical "Gestalt" of the chorus.

c) The element of subsumption: the interpretation of the "that's it" experience by an experience such as "that's the hit 'Night and Day.'" It is this element in recognition (probably bound up with the remembrance of the title trade-mark of the song or the first words of its lyrics[1]) which relates recognition most intimately to the factor of social backing.

The most immediate implication of this component may be the following: the moment the listener recognizes the hit as *the* so and so

[1]The interplay of lyrics and music in popular music is similar to the interplay of picture and word in advertising. The picture provides the sensual stimulus, the words add slogans or jokes that tend to fix the commodity in the minds of the public and to "subsume" it under definite, settled categories. The replacement of the purely instrumental ragtime by jazz which had strong vocal tendencies from the beginning, and the general decline of purely instrumental hits, are closely related to the increased importance of the advertising structure of popular music. The example of "Deep Purple" may prove helpful. This was originally a little-known piano piece. Its sudden success was at least partly due to the addition of trade-marking lyrics.

A model for this functional change exists in the field of raised entertainment in the nineteenth century. The first prelude of Bach's "Well Tempered Clavichord" became a "sacral" hit when Gounod conceived the fiendish idea of extracting a melody from the sequel of harmonies and combining it with the words of the "Ave Maria." This procedure, meretricious from its very inception, has since been generally accepted in the field of musical commercialism.

—that is, as something established and known not merely to him alone—he feels safety in numbers and follows the crowd of all those who have heard the song before and who are supposed to have made its reputation. This is concomitant with or follows hard upon the heels of element b). The connecting reaction consists partly in the revelation to the listener that his apparently isolated, individual experience of a particular song is a collective experience. The moment of identification of some socially established highlight often has a dual meaning: one not only identifies *it* innocently as being this or that, subsuming it under this or that category, but by the very act of identifying it, one also tends unwittingly to identify *oneself* with the objective social agencies or with the power of those individuals who made this particular event fit into this pre-existing category and thus "established" it. The very fact that an individual is capable of identifying an object as this or that allows him to take vicarious part in the institution which made the event what it is and to identify himself with this very institution.

d) The element of self-reflection on the act of identification. ("Oh, I know it; this belongs to me.") This trend can be properly understood by considering the disproportion between the huge number of lesser-known songs and the few established ones. The individual who feels drowned by the stream of music feels a sort of triumph in the split second during which he is capable of identifying something. Masses of people are proud of their ability to recognize any music, as illustrated by the widespread habit of humming or whistling the tune of a familiar piece of music which has just been mentioned, in order to indicate one's knowledge of it, and the evident complacency which accompanies such an exhibition.

By the identification and subsumption of the present listening experience under the category "this is the hit so and so," this hit becomes an object to the listener, something fixed and permanent. This transformation of experience into object—the fact that by recognizing a piece of music one has command over it and can reproduce it from one's own memory—makes it more proprietable than ever. It has two conspicuous characteristics of property: permanence and being subject to the owner's arbitrary will. The permanence consists in the fact that if one remembers a song and can recall it all the time, it cannot be expropriated. The other element, that of control over music, consists in the ability to evoke it presumably at will at any given moment, to cut it short, and to treat it whimsically. The musical properties are, as it were, at the mercy of their owner. In order to clarify this element, it may be appropriate to point to one of its extreme though by no means rare manifestations. Many people,

when they whistle or hum tunes they know, add tiny up-beat notes which sound as though they whipped or teased the melody. Their pleasure in possessing the melody takes the form of being free to misuse it. Their behavior toward the melody is like that of children who pull a dog's tail. They even enjoy, to a certain extent, making the melody wince or moan.

e) The element of "psychological transfer": "Damn it, 'Night and Day' *is* a good one!" This is the tendency to transfer the gratification of ownership to the object itself and to attribute to it, in terms of like, preference, or objective quality, the enjoyment of ownership which one has attained. The process of transfer is enhanced by plugging. While actually evoking the psychic processes of recognition, identification, and ownership, plugging simultaneously promotes the object itself and invests it, in the listener's consciousness, with all those qualities which in reality are due largely to the mechanism of identification. The listeners are executing the order to transfer to the music itself their self-congratulation on their ownership.

It may be added that the recognized social value inherent in the song hit is involved in the transfer of the gratification of ownership to the object which thus becomes "liked." The labelling process here comes to collectivize the ownership process. The listener feels flattered because he too owns what everyone owns. By owning an appreciated and marketed hit, one gets the illusion of value. This illusion of value in the listener is the basis for the evaluation of the musical material. At the moment of recognition of an established hit, a pseudo-public utility comes under the hegemony of the private listener. The musical owner who feels "I like this particular hit (because I know it)" achieves a delusion of grandeur comparable to a child's daydream about owning the railroad. Like the riddles in an advertising contest, song hits pose only questions of recognition which anyone can answer. Yet listeners enjoy giving the answers because they thus become identified with the powers that be.

It is obvious that these components do not appear in consciousness as they do in analysis. As the divergence between the illusion of private ownership and the reality of public ownership is a very wide one, and as everyone knows that what is written "Especially for You" is subject to the clause "any copying of the words or music of this song or any portion thereof makes the infringer liable to prosecution under the United States copyright law," one may not regard these processes as being too *unconscious* either. It is probably correct to assume that most listeners, in order to comply with what they regard as social desiderata and to prove their "citizenship," half-humorously

"join" the conspiracy[1] as caricatures of their own potentialities and suppress bringing to awareness the operative mechanisms by insisting to themselves and to others that the whole thing is only good clean fun anyhow.

The final component in the recognition process—psychological transfer—leads analysis back to plugging. Recognition is socially effective only when backed by the authority of a powerful agency. That is, the recognition-constructs do not apply to any tune but only to "successful" tunes,—success being judged by the backing of central agencies. In short, recognition, as a social determinant of listening habits, works only on plugged material. A listener will not abide the playing of a song repeatedly on the piano. Played over the air it is tolerated with joy all through its heyday.

The psychological mechanism here involved may be thought of as functioning in this way: If some song-hit is played again and again on the air, the listener begins to think that it is already a success. This is furthered by the way in which plugged songs are announced in broadcasts, often in the characteristic form of "You will now hear the latest smash hit." Repetition itself is accepted as a sign of its popularity.[2]

Popular music and "leisure time."

So far the analysis has dealt with reasons for the acceptance of any particular song hit. In order to understand why this whole *type* of music maintains its hold on the masses, some considerations of a more general kind may be appropriate.

The frame of mind to which popular music originally appealed, on which it feeds, and which it perpetually reinforces, is simultaneously one of distraction and inattention. Listeners are distracted from the demands of reality by entertainment which does not demand attention either.

The notion of distraction can be properly understood only within its social setting and not in self-subsistent terms of individual psychology. Distraction is bound to the present mode of production, to the rationalized and mechanized process of labor to which, directly or indirectly, masses are subject. This mode of production, which engenders fears and anxiety about unemployment, loss of income, war, has its "non-productive" correlate in entertainment; that is,

[1]Cf. Hadley Cantril and Gordon Allport, *The Psychology of Radio*, New York, 1935 p. 69.

[2]The same propaganda trick can be found more explicitly in the field of radio advertising of commodities. Beautyskin Soap is called "famous" since the listener has heard the name of the soap over the air innumerable times before and therefore would agree to its "fame." Its fame is only the sum-total of these very announcements which refer to it.

relaxation which does not involve the effort of concentration at all. People want to have fun. A fully concentrated and conscious experience of art is possible only to those whose lives do not put such a strain on them that in their spare time they want relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously. The whole sphere of cheap commercial entertainment reflects this dual desire. It induces relaxation because it is patterned and pre-digested. Its being patterned and predigested serves within the psychological household of the masses to spare them the effort of that participation (even in listening or observation) without which there can be no receptivity to art. On the other hand, the stimuli they provide permit an escape from the boredom of mechanized labor.

The promoters of commercialized entertainment exonerate themselves by referring to the fact that they are giving the masses what they want. This is an ideology appropriate to commercial purposes: the less the mass discriminates, the greater the possibility of selling cultural commodities indiscriminately. Yet this ideology of vested interest cannot be dismissed so easily. It is not possible completely to deny that mass-consciousness can be molded by the operative agencies only because the masses "want this stuff."

But why do they want this stuff? In our present society the masses themselves are kneaded by the same mode of production as the articraft material foisted upon them. The customers of musical entertainment are themselves objects or, indeed, products of the same mechanisms which determine the production of popular music. Their spare time serves only to reproduce their working capacity. It is a means instead of an end. The power of the process of production extends over the time intervals which on the surface appear to be "free." They want standardized goods and pseudo-individualization, because their leisure is an escape from work and at the same time is molded after those psychological attitudes to which their workaday world exclusively habituates them. Popular music is for the masses a perpetual busman's holiday. Thus, there is justification for speaking of a pre-established harmony today between production and consumption of popular music. The people clamor for what they are going to get anyhow.

To escape boredom and avoid effort are incompatible—hence the reproduction of the very attitude from which escape is sought. To be sure, the way in which they must work on the assembly line, in the factory, or at office machines denies people any novelty. They seek novelty, but the strain and boredom associated with actual work leads to avoidance of effort in that leisure-time which offers the only chance for really new experience. As a substitute, they crave a

stimulant. Popular music comes to offer it. Its stimulations are met with the inability to vest effort in the ever-identical. This means boredom again. It is a circle which makes escape impossible. The impossibility of escape causes the wide-spread attitude of inattention toward popular music. The moment of recognition is that of effortless sensation. The sudden attention attached to this moment burns itself out *instanter* and relegates the listener to a realm of inattention and distraction. On the one hand, the domain of production and plugging presupposes distraction and, on the other, produces it.

In this situation the industry faces an insoluble problem. It must arouse attention by means of ever-new products, but this attention spells their doom. If no attention is given to the song, it cannot be sold; if attention is paid to it, there is always the possibility that people will no longer accept it, because they know it too well. This partly accounts for the constantly renewed effort to sweep the market with new products, to hound them to their graves; then to repeat the infanticidal maneuver again and again.

On the other hand, distraction is not only a presupposition but also a product of popular music. The tunes themselves lull the listener to inattention. They tell him not to worry for he will not miss anything.[1]

The social cement.

It is safe to assume that music listened to with a general inattention which is only interrupted by sudden flashes of recognition is not followed as a sequence of experiences that have a clear-cut meaning of their own, grasped in each instant and related to all the precedent and subsequent moments. One may go so far as to suggest that most listeners of popular music do not understand music as a language in itself. If they did it would be vastly difficult to explain how they could tolerate the incessant supply of largely undifferentiated material. What, then, does music mean to them? The answer is that the language that is music is transformed by objective processes into a language which they think is their own,—into a language which serves as a receptacle for their institutionalized wants. The less music is a language *sui generis* to them, the more does it become established as such a receptacle. The autonomy of music is replaced by a mere socio-psychological function. Music today is largely a social cement. And the meaning listeners attribute to a material, the

[1]The attitude of distraction is not a completely universal one. Particularly youngsters who invest popular music with their own feelings are not yet completely blunted to all its effects. The whole problem of age levels with regard to popular music, however, is beyond the scope of the present study. Demographic problems, too, must remain out of consideration.

inherent logic of which is inaccessible to them, is above all a means by which they achieve some psychical adjustment to the mechanisms of present-day life. This "adjustment" materializes in two different ways, corresponding to two major socio-psychological types of mass behavior toward music in general and popular music in particular, the "rhythmically obedient" type and the "emotional" type.

Individuals of the rhythmically obedient type are mainly found among the youth—the so-called radio generation. They are most susceptible to a process of masochistic adjustment to authoritarian collectivism. The type is not restricted to any one political attitude. The adjustment to anthropophagous collectivism is found as often among left-wing political groups as among right-wing groups. Indeed, both overlap: repression and crowd-mindedness overtake the followers of both trends. The psychologies tend to meet despite the surface distinctions in political attitudes.

This comes to the fore in popular music which appears to be aloof from political partisanship. It may be noted that a moderate leftist theatre production such as "Pins and Needles" uses ordinary jazz as its musical medium, and that a communist youth organization adapted the melody of "Alexander's Ragtime Band" to its own lyrics. Those who ask for a song of social significance ask for it through a medium which deprives it of social significance. The use of inexorable popular musical media is repressive *per se*. Such inconsistencies indicate that political conviction and socio-psychological structure by no means coincide.

This obedient type is the rhythmical type, the word rhythmical being used in its everyday sense. Any musical experience of this type is based upon the underlying, unabating time unit of the music, —its "beat." To play rhythmically means, to these people, to play in such a way that even if pseudo-individualizations—counter-accents and other "differentiations"—occur, the relation to the ground metre is preserved. To be musical means to them to be capable of following given rhythmical patterns without being disturbed by "individualizing" aberrations, and to fit even the syncopations into the basic time units. This is the way in which their response to music immediately expresses their desire to obey. However, as the standardized metre of dance music and of marching suggests the coordinated battalions of a mechanical collectivity, obedience to this rhythm by overcoming the responding individuals leads them to conceive of themselves as agglutinized with the untold millions of the meek who must be similarly overcome. Thus do the obedient inherit the earth.

Yet, if one looks at the serious compositions which correspond to this category of mass listening, one finds one very characteristic fea-

ture: that of disillusion. All these composers, among them Stravinsky and Hindemith, have expressed an "anti-romantic" feeling. They aimed at musical adaptation to reality,—a reality understood by them in terms of the "machine age." The renunciation of dreaming by these composers is an index that listeners are ready to replace dreaming by adjustment to raw reality, that they reap new pleasure from their acceptance of the unpleasant. They are disillusioned about any possibility of realizing their own dreams in the world in which they live, and consequently adapt themselves to this world. They take what is called a realistic attitude and attempt to harvest consolation by identifying themselves with the external social forces which they think constitute the "machine-age." Yet the very disillusion upon which their coordination is based is there to mar their pleasure. The cult of the machine which is represented by unabating jazz beats involves a self-renunciation that cannot but take root in the form of a fluctuating uneasiness somewhere in the personality of the obedient. For the machine is an end in itself only under given social conditions, —where men are appendages of the machines on which they work. The adaptation to machine music necessarily implies a renunciation of one's own human feelings and at the same time a fetishism of the machine such that its instrumental character becomes obscured thereby.

As to the other, the "emotional" type, there is some justification for linking it with a type of movie spectator. The kinship is with the poor shop girl who derives gratification by identification with Ginger Rogers, who, with her beautiful legs and unsullied character, marries the boss. Wish-fulfillment is considered the guiding principle in the social psychology of moving pictures and similarly in the pleasure obtained from emotional, erotic music. This explanation, however, is only superficially appropriate.

Hollywood and Tin Pan Alley may be dream factories. But they do not merely supply categorical wish-fulfillment for the girl behind the counter. She does not immediately identify herself with Ginger Rogers marrying. What does occur may be expressed as follows: when the audience at a sentimental film or sentimental music become aware of the overwhelming possibility of happiness, they dare to confess to themselves what the whole order of contemporary life ordinarily forbids them to admit, namely, that they actually have no part in happiness. What is supposed to be wish-fulfillment is only the scant liberation that occurs with the realization that at last one need not deny oneself the happiness of knowing that one is unhappy and that one could be happy. The experience of the shop girl is related to that of the old woman who weeps at the wedding services

of others, blissfully becoming aware of the wretchedness of her own life. Not even the most gullible individuals believe that eventually everyone will win the sweepstakes. The actual function of sentimental music lies rather in the temporary release given to the awareness that one has missed fulfillment.

The emotional listener listens to everything in terms of late romanticism and of the musical commodities derived from it which are already fashioned to fit the needs of emotional listening. They consume music in order to be allowed to weep. They are taken in by the musical expression of frustration rather than by that of happiness. The influence of the standard Slavic melancholy typified by Tchaikowsky and Dvorak is by far greater than that of the most "fulfilled" moments of Mozart or of the young Beethoven. The so-called releasing element of music is simply the opportunity to feel something. But the actual content of this emotion can only be frustration. Emotional music has become the image of the mother who says, "Come and weep, my child." It is katharsis for the masses, but katharsis which keeps them all the more firmly in line. One who weeps does not resist any more than one who marches. Music that permits its listeners the confession of their unhappiness reconciles them, by means of this "release," to their social dependence.

Ambivalence, spite, fury.

The fact that the psychological "adjustment" effected by today's mass listening is illusionary and that the "escape" provided by popular music actually subjects the individuals to the very same social powers from which they want to escape makes itself felt in the very attitude of those masses. What appears to be ready acceptance and unproblematic gratification is actually of a very complex nature, covered by a veil of flimsy rationalizations. Mass listening habits today are *ambivalent.* This ambivalence, which reflects upon the whole question of popularity of popular music, has to be scrutinized in order to throw some light upon the potentialities of the situation. It may be made clear through an analogy from the visual field. Every moviegoer and every reader of magazine fiction is familiar with the effect of what may be called the obsolete modern: photographs of famous dancers who were considered alluring twenty years ago, revivals of Valentino films which, though the most glamorous of their day, appear hopelessly old-fashioned. This effect, originally discovered by French surrealists, has since become hackneyed. There are numerous magazines today that mock fashions as outmoded, although their popularity dates back only a few years and although the

very women who appear ridiculous in the past styles are at the same time regarded as the peak of smartness in present-day fashions. The rapidity with which the modern becomes obsolete has a very significant implication. It leads to the question whether the change of effect can possibly be due entirely to the objects in themselves, or whether the change must be at least partly accounted for by the disposition of the masses. Many of these who today laugh at the Babs Hutton of 1929 not only admire the Babs Hutton of 1940 but were thrilled by her in 1929 also. They could not now scoff at the Barbara Hutton of 1929 unless their admiration for her (or her peers) at that time contained in itself elements ready to tilt over into its opposite when historically provoked. The "craze" or frenzy for a particular fashion contains within itself the latent possibility of fury.

The same thing occurs in popular music. In jazz journalism it is known as "corniness." Any rhythmical formula which is out-dated, no matter how "hot" it is in itself, is regarded as ridiculous and therefore either flatly rejected or enjoyed with the smug feeling that the fashions now familiar to the listener are superior.

One could not possibly offer any musical criterion for certain musical formulas today considered tabu because they are corny—such as a sixteenth on the down beat with a subsequent dotted eighth. They need not be less sophisticated than any of the so-called swing formulas. It is even likely that in the pioneer days of jazz the rhythmical improvisations were less schematic and more complex than they are today. Nevertheless, the effect of corniness exists and makes itself felt very definitely.

An adequate explanation that can be offered even without going into questions that require psychoanalytical interpretation is the following: Likes that have been enforced upon listeners provoke revenge the moment the pressure is relaxed. They compensate for their "guilt" in having condoned the worthless by making fun of it. But the pressure is relaxed only as often as attempts are made to foist something "new" upon the public. Thus, the psychology of the corny effect is reproduced again and again and is likely to continue indefinitely.

The ambivalence illustrated by the effect of corniness is due to the tremendous increase of the disproportion between the individual and the social power. An individual person is faced with an individual song which he is apparently free either to accept or reject. By the plugging and support given the song by powerful agencies, he is deprived of the freedom of rejection which he might still be capable of maintaining toward the individual song. To dislike the song is no longer an expression of subjective taste but rather a rebellion against

the wisdom of a public utility and a disagreement with the millions of people who are assumed to support what the agencies are giving them. Resistance is regarded as the mark of bad citizenship, as inability to have fun, as highbrow insincerity, for what normal person can set himself against such normal music?

Such a quantitative increase of influence beyond certain limits, however, fundamentally alters the composition of individuality itself. A strong-willed political prisoner may resist all sorts of pressure until methods such as not allowing him to sleep for several weeks are introduced. At that point he will readily confess even to crimes he has not committed. Something similar takes place with the listener's resistance as a result of the tremendous quantity of force operating upon him. Thus, the disproportion between the strength of any individual and the concentrated social structure brought to bear upon him destroys his resistance and at the same time adds a bad conscience for his will to resist at all. When popular music is repeated to such a degree that it does not any longer appear to be a device but rather an inherent element of the natural world, resistance assumes a different aspect because the unity of individuality begins to crack. This of course does not imply absolute elimination of resistance. But it is driven into deeper and deeper strata of the psychological structure. Psychological energy must be directly invested in order to overcome resistance. For this resistance does not wholly disappear in yielding to external forces, but remains alive within the individual and still survives even at the very moment of acceptance. Here spite becomes drastically active.

It is the most conspicuous feature of the listeners' ambivalence toward popular music. They shield their preferences from any imputation that they are manipulated. Nothing is more unpleasant than the confession of dependence. The shame aroused by adjustment to injustice forbids confession by the ashamed. Hence, they turn their hatred rather on those who point to their dependence than on those who tie their bonds.

The transfer of resistance skyrockets in those spheres which seem to offer an escape from the material forces of repression in our society and which are regarded as the refuge of individuality. In the field of entertainment the freedom of taste is hailed as supreme. To confess that individuality is ineffective here as well as in practical life would lead to the suspicion that individuality may have disappeared altogether; that is, that it has been reduced by standardized behavior patterns to a totally abstract idea which no longer has any definite content. The mass of listeners have been put in complete readiness

to join the vaguely realized conspiracy directed without inevitable malice against them, to identify themselves with the inescapable, and to retain ideologically that freedom which has ceased to exist as a reality. The hatred of the deception is transferred to the threat of realizing the deception and they passionately defend their own attitude since it allows them to be voluntarily cheated.

The material, to be accepted, necessitates this spite, too. Its commodity-character, its domineering standardization, is not so hidden as to be imperceptible altogether. It calls for psychological action on the part of the listener. Passivity alone is not enough. The listener must force himself to accept.

Spite is most apparent in the case of extreme adherents of popular music—jitterbugs.

Superficially, the thesis about the acceptance of the inescapable seems to indicate nothing more than the relinquishing of spontaneity: the subjects are deprived of any residues of free will with relation to popular music and tend to produce passive reactions to what is given them and to become mere centers of socially conditioned reflexes. The entomological term jitterbug underscores this. It refers to an insect who has the jitters, who is attracted passively by some given stimulus, such as light. The comparison of men with insects betokens the recognition that they have been deprived of autonomous will.

But this idea requires qualifications. They are already present in the official jitterbug terminology. Terms like the latest craze, swing frenzy, alligator, rug-cutter, indicate a trend that goes beyond socially conditioned reflexes: fury. No one who has ever attended a jitterbug jamboree or discussed with jitterbugs current issues of popular music can overlook the affinity of their enthusiasm to fury, which may first be directed against the critics of their idols but which may tilt over against the idols themselves. This fury cannot be accounted for simply by the passive acceptance of the given. It is essential to ambivalence that the subject not simply react passively. Complete passivity demands unambiguous acceptance. However, neither the material itself nor observation of the listeners supports the assumption of such unilateral acceptance. Simply relinquishing resistance is not sufficient for acceptance of the inescapable.

Enthusiasm for popular music requires wilful resolution by listeners, who must transform the external order to which they are subservient into an internal order. The endowment of musical commodities with libido energy is manipulated by the ego. This manipulation is not entirely unconscious therefore. It may be assumed that among those jitterbugs who are not experts and yet are enthusiastic

about Artie Shaw or Benny Goodman, the attitude of "switched on" enthusiasm prevails. They "join the ranks," but this joining does not only imply their conformity to given standards; it also implies a decision to conform. The appeal of the music publishers to the public to "join the ranks" manifests that the decision is an act of will, close to the surface of consciousness.[1]

The whole realm of jitterbug fanaticism and mass hysteria about popular music is under the spell of spiteful will decision. Frenzied enthusiasm implies not only ambivalence insofar as it is ready to tilt over into real fury or scornful humor toward its idols but also the effectuation of such spiteful will decision. The ego in forcing enthusiasm, must over-force it, since "natural" enthusiasm would not suffice to do the job and overcome resistance. It is this element of deliberate overdoing which characterizes frenzy and self-conscious[2] hysteria. The popular music fan must be thought of as going his way firmly shutting his eyes and gritting his teeth in order to avoid deviation from what he has decided to acknowledge. A clear and calm view would jeopardize the attitude that has been inflicted upon him and that he in turn tries to inflict upon himself. The original will decision upon which his enthusiasm is based is so superficial that the slightest critical consideration would destroy it unless it is strengthened by the craze which here serves a quasi-rational purpose.

Finally a trend ought to be mentioned which manifests itself in the gestures of the jitterbug: the tendency toward self-caricature which appears to be aimed at by the gaucheries of the jitterbugs so often advertised by magazines and illustrated newspapers. The jitterbug looks as if he would grimace at himself, at his own enthusiasm and at his own enjoyment which he denounces even while pretending to enjoy himself. He mocks himself as if he were secretly hoping for the day of judgment. By his mockery he seeks to gain exoneration for the fraud he has committed against himself. His sense of humor makes everything so shifty that he cannot be put—or, rather, put himself—on the spot for any of his reactions. His bad taste, his fury, his hidden resistance, his insincerity, his latent contempt for himself, everything is cloaked by "humor" and therewith neutralized. This interpretation is the more justified as it is quite unlikely that the ceaseless repetition of the same effects would allow for genuine merriment. No one enjoys a joke he has heard a hundred times.[3]

[1]On the back of the sheet version of a certain hit, there appears the appeal: "Follow Your Leader, Artie Shaw."

[2]One hit goes: "I'm Just a Jitterbug."

[3]It would be worth while to approach this problem experimentally by taking motion pictures of jitterbugs in action and later examining them in terms of gestural psychology. Such an experiment could also yield valuable results with regard to the question

(footnote continued on next page)

There is an element of fictitiousness in all enthusiasm about popular music. Scarcely any jitterbug is thoroughly hysterical about swing or thoroughly fascinated by a performance. In addition to some genuine response to rhythmical stimuli, mass hysteria, fanaticism and fascination themselves are partly advertising slogans after which the victims pattern their behavior. This self-delusion is based upon imitation and even histrionics. The jitterbug is the actor of his own enthusiasm or the actor of the enthusiastic front page model presented to him. He shares with the actor the arbitrariness of his own interpretation. He can switch off his enthusiasm as easily and suddenly as he turns it on. He is only under a spell of his own making.

But the closer the will decision, the histrionics, and the imminence of self-denunciation in the jitterbug are to the surface of consciousness, the greater is the possibility that these tendencies will break through in the mass, and, once and for all, dispense with controlled pleasure. They cannot be altogether the spineless lot of fascinated insects they are called and like to style themselves. They need their will, if only in order to down the all too conscious premonition that something is "phony" with their pleasure. This transformation of their will indicates that will is still alive and that under certain circumstances it may be strong enough to get rid of the superimposed influences which dog its every step.

In the present situation it may be appropriate for these reasons—which are only examples of much broader issues of mass psychology—to ask to what extent the whole psychoanalytical distinction between the conscious and the unconscious is still justified. Present-day mass reactions are very thinly veiled from consciousness. It is the paradox of the situation that it is almost insuperably difficult to break through this thin veil. Yet truth is subjectively no longer so unconscious as it is expected to be. This is borne out by the fact that in the political praxis of authoritarian regimes the frank lie in which no one actually believes is more and more replacing the "ideologies" of yesterday which had the power to convince those who believed in them. Hence, we cannot content ourselves with merely stating that spontaneity has been replaced by blind acceptance of the enforced material. Even the belief that people today react like insects and are degenerating into mere centers of socially conditioned reflexes, still belongs to the façade. Too well does it serve the purpose of those

---

of how musical standards and "deviations" in popular music are apperceived. If one would take sound tracks simultaneously with the motion pictures one could find out i.e. how far the jitterbugs react gesturally to the syncopations they pretend to be crazy about and how far they respond simply to the ground beats. If the latter is the case it would furnish another index for the fictitiousness of this whole type of frenzy.

who prate about the New Mythos and the irrational powers of community. Rather, spontaneity is consumed by the tremendous effort which each individual has to make in order to accept what is enforced upon him—an effort which has developed for the very reason that the veneer veiling the controlling mechanisms has become so thin. In order to become a jitterbug or simply to "like" popular music, it does not by any means suffice to give oneself up and to fall in line passively. To become transformed into an insect, man needs that energy which might possibly achieve his transformation into a man.