

SYMBOLISM & PRACTICE: THE SOCIAL MEANING
OF POP MUSIC

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SP13

20p.

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A Theory for the Social Meaning of Pop Music

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I THE MEANINGS OF CULTURE

Rather than approach the cultural behaviour of young people in this country through an empirical listing of new techniques, activities and forms I have chosen in this paper to confront some of the theoretical questions behind the whole category of culture, and to suggest a theory about the relation of social practise and expressive symbolism. Without such a theoretical stance, in my view, there is the danger of our analysis degenerating into a descriptive listing of new phenomena which has no explanatory power at the social plane at all. After establishing the elements of a theory of cultural relation I shall proceed to empirical evidence. This will not, however, constitute anything like a full presentation of the patterns of cultural activity in this country, and will have no quantitative reliability. Furthermore, though the theoretical analysis is applicable to any expressive form, I shall be concerned only with pop music and its surrounding complex of symbolic values and activities. The central assumption of the concluding section, that for most young people in this country, and especially for working class youngsters, the received expressive forms such as theatre, ballet, opera, novels are irrelevant, and that pop music is their only major expressive outlet, will go uncontested. Though it may upset the positivist, such a proposition is taken for granted, and the purpose of the analysis is to investigate the nature and meaning of the connection between the mass of young people and a widely disseminated, commercially mediated musical form.

First, I would like to examine some of the unspoken theories and theoretical sets behind our discourse on 'culture'. This is the most treacherous of words, and its ambiguous shiftings conceal the precise nature of theories and epistemologies which go under its name. For the use of 'culture' always implies a theory about the role of expressive artefacts in social existence. One inflection of the term, pulls with it the meaning of several other terms and categories, so that an apparently isolated and common sense use of the word in fact fixes the whole perspective of an argument, often in a way which passes unnoticed to the reader.

In our current debate there seem to me to be two dominant 'sets' or 'perspectives' lying behind the innocent use of the word 'culture'. Both are damaging to what I take to be a truly social analysis.

Culture as Serious Art

In the first case culture is used to mean the best of those serious activities separated from everyday life which are meant to express absolute values about the nature of human existence in a medium which is disciplined, self conscious and often difficult to master. This view of culture is a direct descendant of, sometimes even the same as, so-called High Art and its classical Greco-Roman tradition. Even in the more experimental and progressive areas, though the content of the great tradition has been democratized somewhat, and though the scope for experimentation has been widened, and though there is often a self conscious concern with contemporary feelings, the essential assumptions are those of High Art. Art is away from life, judged for itself, autonomous in its functions and values, and ultimately based on detached logo-centric meaning.

The crippling thing about this view of culture, which is also a view of appropriate cultural activity, and a view of the proper scope for cultural analysis, is that it remains analytically blind to its own social placement. From this flows a totally re-ified view of cultural transmission and from this a perpetually outdated perspective on organic or grass root developments in expressive forms.

The integrating belief of culture as separated, heightened, serious activity is the unquestioned value of artistic forms and activities - the supreme placing of Art above the shiftings of whatever social relations exist beneath it. For the adherents of this view Art is classless, timeless and the ultimate touchstone for what is just, human and beautiful. Through shifting sands of circumstance and fortune Art is the only guarantor of worth. Art is the only repository of quintessential human values, the only absolute benchmark in a world of relativism and moral duplicity.

This is a tempting and comforting view of Art, particularly to those for whom the social systems they live under do indeed repress and distort basic human potentiality. Though we may salute these noble cries to heaven we must distrust in serious art any principle which seems to offer an absolute route from bondage and misery. For serious art does not constitute an objective,

supra-social, matrix from which poor humans can plot their social development to a more advanced society. For serious art, just as our misery, is a social category. It is constituted, reconstituted and made meaningful at all by a social group. And in all societies this group is the elite. What look like the autonomous all-time absolute values embodied in Art, are in fact chosen quite relativistically by the elite. The great tradition⁽¹⁾ does not select itself, nor autonomously offer its absolute values to save new generations from themselves. Contemporary values select the serious art rather than the reverse, and the selective values are those of the elite. It is true that tradition offers artefacts from the past that are therefore undetermined by the moment, and also true that the moment cannot freely choose to value what does not yet exist in the world. But tradition does not determine the content of serious art, it supplies only the range that contemporary taste can choose from and interpret in its own way. In all the sleeping libraries are ten thousand possible presents. The moving finger is not the value of what exists, but the choice of the living.

It is unimaginable then that a serious art can maintain its own trajectory without being related to a quite specific group. We should be wary of Art as a deus ex machina come to right our puny world. All things of this world are ultimately the product of man. But the adherents of the view of culture as serious art fail to recognize operationally their art is at bottom an aspect of the **social existence** of the elites. They see only the salvatory absolutism of the artistic artefact - they re-ify Art. In the sacredness of their abeyance to Art, they miss the profanity of real relations. They spirit away the real nature of serious art - the conflation of an elite with received symbolic values - in their enthusiasm for what they take to be the intrinsic quality of Art.

This re-ification of certain qualities of serious art, the refusal to see the ultimate social base for what they take to be an internal aesthetic, leads to a potential deadness at the heart of cultural activity. The model of cultural transmission is that serious and worthwhile art somehow carries on by itself, and any dialectical connection of form and content to contemporary concerns and feelings is denied. There is the continuous danger of taking what is only the cultural expression of the social position of the elite at one stage in a developing society as the absolute contours of Art, and maintaining this configuration artificially long after its true social congruence to the real living concerns of a group has disappeared.

The elite of course is able to do itself this disservice all the more efficiently because of its privilege and control over resources and Institutions. Parallel, though subordinate, cultural configurations amongst the working class have neither the same tendency to internal reification, nor the relevant power, to maintain themselves beyond the point of strict, living relevance. In certain respects then working class cultural formations may enjoy real advantages over elitist bourgeois formations. One must not exaggerate this however. The elitist culture is the dominant culture and despite its weaknesses can impress itself across large areas. Besides if the proposition concerning the social basis of cultural forms is right, then it would hold sway even over the reification of serious art, so that through sudden jumps and vastly uneven developments serious art, even despite itself, becomes progressively updated. We can expect in this process though, strange and irrelevant displacements, and outdated forms being worked to their last point of decadence and meaningless posture, before being pushed aside by new though still lagged expressive forms.

At bottom serious art is finding it tremendously difficult, if not impossible, to break with its long roots in the meaning and logo-centricity of its greco-roman tradition. In an age whose wealth, developing social relations, superb technical mastery of nature, might offer qualitatively different and hugely relevant expressive forms, serious art even in its non-classical dimensions is still struggling, albeit at its outer infringes, with essentially anachronistic bourgeois expressive forms. Proletarian and mass forms of cultural expression though subordinated and in no sense a true form of mature development, may show us the kindlings of a new and relevant mode of expressing unreified modern concerns and feelings.

If this line of reasoning has any validity at all we should be particularly alerted by new mass youth cultural forms of expression. In the modern industrial age, where physical and mental maturity occurs long before induction in to the bureaucratic/welfare/industrial complex, the teenage interlude is the most important and most problematical period for the reproduction of conventional attitudes, values and practices. In distorted, displaced, exploited and manipulated forms we may see fleetingly the elements of new expressive forms, before the dominant processes of social reproduction at this stage of development close in. A 'cultural' perspective based ultimately though covertly in the perspective of serious art can never hope to pick up these flickers.

The argument here then is that a method of cultural analysis grounded in the unspoken theory of 'culture' as the activities surrounding serious art, is badly equipped to uncover the social meaning of new grass roots cultural

activity. Implicitly such a position denies the possibility of the inner social connection of an art form to any social group, it restricts the epistemology of enquiry to the modus operandi of elitist culture, it is inherently blind to the possibilities of new and relevant expressive forms. In short such a perspective can only consider modern non-elitist expressive forms as if they were elitist serious forms. It should surprise no one that a shortfall is always found, it has no other measures.

Culture as Quantitative Relations

The second major perspective lazing innocently behind the use of the word 'culture' is very different. It is a sub-discipline of the much larger and all pervasive academic ideology of positivism. The essential integrative belief of this perspective is that measurement of surface qualities, and correlation of measurements, can reveal real connections. In the field of cultural research this approach is certainly free from elitist overtones, and certainly recognizes the possibility of the connection between social structure and cultural activity. The specific theories are multiform and well represented in the publication from the last conference⁽²⁾. American and English media research, statistical breakdowns of audiences, time budgeting research, content analysis of artefacts, are all grouped under the general heading of positivistic research.

Though the role of such work cannot be denied, and though there is still much of a 'factual' nature to be learnt, I want to suggest that such studies can only ever 'point to' a phenomenon. They can chart the extent of particular activities, draw our attention to particular co-variations and connections, expand in the fullest way our essentially descriptive knowledge of modern cultural phenomena. What such work cannot do however is to explain the significance, meaning or subjective experience of these phenomena.

Positivism in research allows the fullest possible mapping of a culture, but for all that, the culture is still a strange land; we are still no nearer to understanding what it is like to live in, or to understanding why it is like that.

One of the central failings of positivism in social enquiry is its failure to penetrate symbolic, layered systems⁽³⁾. A group or a person is never related to a culture in a simple one to one fashion, or in a direct linear fashion. A teenager does not listen to one record in a vacuum, and then to another record, he is not affected by so many degrees immediately by one

exposure to a record, or even a type of record. Experience is not atomized in that way, and people live their expressive lives as a symbolic whole. The youth is related at any one time to the whole intricate and complex phenomenon of youth culture. He lives inside this world, is immediately part of this world, lives out its meaning at several levels at different moments. Any one piece or type of music, any one set of experiences, any set of activities, is always taken in the light of his subjective and usually non-verbal understanding of the whole complex of the pop world scene, and its surrounding attitudes, values and symbolic systems. The 'use' made of any particular element in this symbolic whole depends on the rest of the system, and the individual's or group's self recognition of their position within this system. An outside view of the manifest meaning of any particular aspect of this symbolic system, may miss altogether the latent meanings, the reinterpretations, the accepted unspoken meanings that the actors involved may locate in that aspect.

What we are confronted with is a whole way of life interpenetrated by a whole symbolic system, not a series of discrete bits of behaviour alongside a series of discrete cultural artefacts. The meaning of any particular elements of behaviour, or of any isolated expressive work, rests totally on its intricate relations with other parts of the whole integrated cultural system. Even all the constituent parts, assuming one could isolate them, taken separately and only for their manifest qualities, would never amount to the actual culture - they would just be a meaningless random collection of human pieces. In order to see the spirit move in those pieces one has to reach for the central unifying symbolic concepts that are deposited in no single artefact or activity, but only in the dialectical relation of all parts to each other. Positivism, limited as it is, to the surface of things, the manifest and the misleading, can never do this, it can only give us the shapes of all the jig saw pieces, never the picture on them.

Another crucial failure of positivism is its inability to reconstruct, or even register the subjective experience of social actors. Surely a theoretical/intellectual perspective on human behaviour requires a capacity, a potential which need not necessarily be realized, to respond to the raw material of human experience in commensurate terms. Though we may readily agree that a truly social explanation of human activity needs to go beyond the subjective accounts rendered by participant actors, a theory which has no way of accrediting the primary level of human experience - subjective experience - proceeds with a missing centre. The focus of enquiry surely must always be man and his sense of his relationships to the world. Without this non-quantifiable discipline of human relevance - a very much more demanding

master than mathematical discipline - our studies may as well concern atoms on Mars as humans on Earth.

Looking more closely at the field of rock, those studies which give us the quantitative dimensions of the phenomenon, though useful as a first stage to other kinds of enquiries, for themselves give only a longwinded statement of the obvious, or as they become more ambitious, a huge tautology. We are told in effect that most kids like pop, and they like it because they like it. Without any kind of cutting edge in to the subjective plane, and crucially differences between various groups, there is no way of avoiding the view of pop as, both a great monolithic entity - the thing that all those kids like - and, as a totally shallow epiphenomenon - kids like pop because it is simple, bright, colourful or whatever. Only by coming at the subjective experience of real individuals and real groups involved in the music can we break out of these massive simplicities to suggest some of the real and complex bases of connection between the music and the lives of the young people. If we understand some of the central concerns of particular groups, if we have an insight in to what they expect from the music, if we can penetrate the symbolic and expressive dimensions of an integrated life experience, then we shall have a base from which to assess the role of pop as a living and dialectically interrelated element of a whole life style. It may well be, of course, that we continue to look at more structural and 'objective' factors in order to come to an appreciation of the totality of the phenomenon, but unless we have proceeded through the located and subjective moment we can never do more than juxtapose life and artefact in a way which is essentially random, and external to the inner connections which should be the business of social enquiry.

Another related weakness of positivistic enquiry is its trust in the immediate verbal response. In the general way we should bear in mind C. Wright Mills' injunction about the discrepancy between 'talk and action' - people's actions often belie their words. In the area of pop music - and cultural phenomenon in general - we should be wary even more than usually of the verbal response. I have argued that cultural configurations ought properly to be considered as complex symbolic systems, rather than as atomized conjunctions of bits of behaviour and 'bits of culture' deposited in artefacts. If this is correct, then we should expect the symbolic meanings to be manifested at several levels of social activity, from interaction to bodily expressivity to clothes styles and fashion. There are good reasons to suppose that the self conscious verbal level of expressivity is one of the least favoured modes for the expression of these symbolic values. Self conscious articulate awareness is a characteristic of the dominant strata of

society, and is the main instrument of its cultural hegemony⁽⁴⁾ over the less powerful groups. Now young people involved in pop culture are excluded from this dominant order in two ways. Firstly the vast majority of young people involved with pop music are working class, and share along with the rest of their class, an inability to articulate their meanings in an abstract verbal manner. Even those individuals and groups with the advantages of a traditional privileged education refuse to mobilise it in the youth cultural context for reasons we shall see in a moment. Secondly, young people are separated off in to something like a class which is excluded from the privileges and modes of expression of the dominant class, simply by age. Even though young people are maturing earlier today, the point at which they are being allowed in to adult relations of work and consumption is being delayed longer and longer. We should be clear that 'youth' is much more of a social than a biological category. The years, then, between the achievement of adult tastes and motives, and the achievement of the normative and structural outlets for these impulses, represent to some extent a time of cultural oppression and exclusion.

Part of the class and age oppression, as it bites on the young person's world, is the suppression of articulate self consciousness. The symbolic meanings at the heart of the relationship with pop are therefore forced to other media for their expression.

This displacement is not, however, totally the result of coercion, or deprivation. In so far as young people form a distinctive group, whether bounded by age or class, they share common concerns and interests which are, to some extent, antagonistic to those of the dominant order. The symbolic expression of their position which achieves any cultural resonance whatsoever will therefore reflect this opposition - it will to that extent be subversive. The dominant order and its modes of cultural control have no reason, of course, to tolerate subversion. Though we need not point to any individual malice or conspiracy there are clear processes (often under capitalism related to commercial rationality) which act either to suppress or to incorporate challenging new forms of cultural expression. Certainly there are those who argue that the process of incorporation of pop is now complete, and that the original spark of rebellion has been inducted as an element of fashion in to a highly successful industry of cultural consumption. At any rate youth cultural forms, in fact any oppositional cultural forms, which can protect their internal workings from the vision of the dominant cultural interests will survive very much longer. Hence we should suspect that the most trenchant and important meanings of youth culture are buried well out of the reach of conventional language - the mode par excellence by which the dominant culture

penetrates and takes over other cultures. We may expect that really crucial meanings are embodied at non-verbal levels, 'coded' so to speak in such a way that outsiders are unable to interpret. Nor is this coding simply the same message being printed off at another level, it is the symbolization of a totality of experience at several levels - a view of life embedded in a way of life that defies the extraction of its symbolic heart as ratio-scientific meaning.

Positivistic techniques, verbal enquiries, questionnaires, aimed at the verbal level are therefore inadequate. The skill to articulate central meanings does not usually exist in the respondents and even where they do they are not used. There is every reason for the respondent to deny the invitation to take their experiences out of the totality of their life situations and render them in a diminished and only too appropriable a form.

The lack of articulate response from youth cultural groups has often been taken as proof of the inherent inadequacy and meaninglessness of the culture surrounding pop music. Certainly to the dominant canons of logo-centric meaning, there is very little to pick up, and the cultural forms are not trying to present themselves as parallel or assimilable forms - to the traditional bourgeois mind much of youth culture really is meaningless. However rather than take this as evidence of the non-viability of these cultural forms, we should take it as the primary condition for their social viability.

I should like now to suggest a theory of 'culture', and an approach to the social meaning of culture, which is based neither on the terms of 'High Art' nor in terms of positivism.

The Indexical Level of Cultural Relations

The indexical level of analysis, and of cultural relations, concerns the degree to which pop music is related to a social group in a general quantitative sense, i.e. for how long a group listens to pop music, where and how often, how much the group spends on pop, what their specific tastes are. The analysis is indexical precisely because the interest is in assessing how the artefact is 'indexed' to the life style, how far it is located in a natural human context - a contextualization that the indexical stage of the analysis simply presupposes and records without an interpretative stage intervening to combine the issue, or to

The heart of what I understand to be 'culture', is in the relation of man's consciousness, individual and collective, to the objects, and artefacts, both functional and expressive, around him. The study of either of these areas alone will not constitute a study of human culture. It does not matter theoretically whether we understand the objects in this relation to be expressive or functional, or indeed whether they are natural or manmade. The essential and defining feature of culture I take to be the relationship of man to all the objects and artefacts he is consciously involved with. The whole culture of a society or group is the sum of all such relationships. Here we are concerned with the relationship of young people to pop music. I suggest that this cultural relation can be understood, and analysed at three levels:-

- (a) The INDEXICAL
- (b) The HOMOLOGICAL
- (c) The INTEGRAL

This approach represents an attempt to honestly recognize, and bridge, the different levels in an interpretative analysis. The indexical level of analysis is the least interpretative of all the levels, and can be taken independantly of all the other levels. The homological and integral levels are progressively more interpretative, and progressively further from simple 'objective proof'. They bear witness to the fact that the more explanatory an analysis becomes, the less sure is the empirical grounding of the approach.

1. The Indexical Level of Cultural Relation

The indexical level of analysis, and of cultural relation, concerns the degree to which pop music is related to a social group in a general quantitative sense, i.e. for how long a group listens to pop music, where and how often, how much the group spends on pop, what their specific tastes are. The analysis is indexical precisely because the interest is in assessing how the artefact is 'indexed' to the life style, how far it is located in a natural human context - a contextualization that the indexical stage of the analysis simply recognises and records, without an interpretative stage intervening to confuse the issue, or to

decontextualize the music. This level of analysis can often be presented in the words of the actors themselves and can be uncovered at a verbal level, though clearly observation is an important adjunct to verbal accounts. Positivistic techniques have their greatest appropriateness here.

The indexical level of analysis therefore presents in the simplest possible way the minimum case for the existence of a cultural relation between a life style and an artefact. The indexical formation of culture is to be seen wherever a human group is in contact with a particular artefact or object. Clearly most of us have an indexical cultural relationship with many, many artefacts and objects from houses and cars, to pop music, to Coronation Street, to natural landscapes. The variation of the indexical level is a quantitative one. It can record differences in duration and frequency of exposure to music but cannot explain the significance of these variations.

2. The Homological Level of Cultural Relation

This level of analysis is concerned with the type and quality of the relationships which the indexical stage of the analysis has identified for us. Essentially it is concerned with how far, in its structure and content, the music parallels and reflects significant values and feelings of the particular social group involved with it. Such analysis is homological because it investigates what are the correspondences, the similarities of internal relation, between a style of life and an artefact or object. Basic homologies are best understood in terms of structure and style, though it may be possible at times to identify homologies of content. The essential base of a homological cultural relation is that an artefact or object has the ability to reflect, resonate and sum up crucial values, states, and attitudes for the social group involved with it. The artefact or object must consistently serve the group with the meanings, attitudes and certainties it wants, and it must support and return, and substantiate central life meanings. One can understand this partly as communication, but much more profoundly it should be understood as a process of cultural resonance, and concretization of identity.

Homological analysis of a cultural relation is synchronic, that is the analysis takes a cross section of the nature of the relationship at one period in time. The homological notion itself is not equipped

to account for changes over time, or to account for the creation, or disintegration of homologies; it records the complex qualitative state of a cultural relationship as it is observed in one quantum of time.

An homological relationship occurs where a particular group is deeply involved with an artefact or object, and clearly takes meaning at some level from the artefact or object, and clearly pursues involvement with the artefact or object rather than coming in to random contact with it. We are all related to several artefacts and objects at an homological level, but it is likely that we will only be significantly related to a few of them, and a meaningful relation is more likely with an expressive artefact, than with a functional artefact or a natural object, though this is by no means a consistent rule.

There are two stages of homological analysis, a study of the social group and a study of the music.

(i) The Social Group

It is here principally that non-positivistic qualitative techniques are required⁽⁵⁾. The aim is to construct the symbolic patterns, attitudes and values embedded in the life style of a group. This task is best approached through a cluster of methodologies. A process of 'triangulation' of the evidence from the different sources gives the maximum possibility of the final phenomenal account of the group's subjective reality being as free from bias as possible. I list the elements of this cluster⁽⁶⁾ below and give a brief explanation of what each entails:

CLUSTER OF METHODS

1. Participant Observation

The act of observing whilst participating in the normal round of social and work contacts of the group under study.

2. Observation

The distinction between this and the previous technique is that in some situations it is impossible to 'participate' in the full sense of the word, although detailed and careful observation is certainly possible. Simple observation is a crucial adjunct.

to other methods because only a limited number of meanings are articulated by social groups at a verbal level. Verbal approaches alone to the social group are very limited, and produce evidence only of a verbal kind. Observations of behaviour, style and appearance can go both to cross-check evidence received at a verbal level and to suggest completely new areas of the actor's meaning system which are opaque to verbal questioning.

3. Just Being Around

This is the more general process where the researcher, whilst not actually participating in social interaction, is all the same importantly immersed in it. It is not only useful but vital in the early stages of the research, where the researcher is concerned to get a sense of the new frame of reference, without letting his own preconceptions obscure the field. It is only after this process of immersion that the researcher can move on to the more detailed, in-close techniques. In many areas it is also the only feasible method of data collection. More generally, the atmosphere and quality of the entire research depends on how well the researcher has felt the whole social ambience of the group he is studying.

4. Group Discussions

Since the group presence is likely to act as a check on the distortion of feelings and experiences, the group discussion is likely to be a privileged source of evidence about group feelings. Furthermore, the most useful data in this kind of research comes from unsolicited statements from subjects, and where a group discussion can proceed without the prompting of the researcher, open-ended discussions can 'take off' and provide data of an unsolicited kind. Discussions constitute the most useful source of detailed and available data about the actor's attitudes and opinions as expressed in the verbal mode.

5. Recorded Discussions

This has the same advantages as (4) plus the obvious extra advantage of yielding the fullest possible written data about the actors' attitudes and values expressed at the verbal level. The major disadvantage with this technique is that the physical presence of the tape recorder may bring an artificiality to the situation, which disrupts the normal ongoing social process. It may also lend an air of formality to proceedings which are basically informal, and need to be informal, for the generation of the kind of data we are interested in. With careful management and appropriate use, however, these dangers can be minimized. The main essentials are that the tape recorder is introduced only when the situation is developing naturally towards some kind of group discussion and is withheld no matter with what impatience, if its introduction would unnaturally affect the course of events.

6. Informal Interviews

Individual actors are not always involved in ongoing interaction with social groups. During such times, by way of 'just talking', the researcher can gain valuable information about the subject's basic feelings and attitudes. Such data can be used in an important comparative way; it can be placed alongside data covering similar grounds gained in other ways, such as in the

group discussion. The course of such interviews should be totally open, and responsive to whatever situation or problem is confronting the subject at the time.

7. Use of Existing Surveys

Wherever possible it is always best to make maximum possible use of existing surveys and reports concerning the specific phenomenon under study, no matter what their theoretical perspective, to 'map the field' and 'cross check' other sources of evidence.

(ii) The Music

Broadly there seem to be three possibilities in the analysis of the music appreciated by the social group. It could be argued that the 'value' of the music is totally socially given. That is, that the music itself is a cipher, without inherent structures of meaning and value, and that it is the group that reads value into it. There is extreme difficulty, of course, in explaining why it should be pop music, and not some other form, that is specifically taken as the receptacle of socially created meanings and values. One could only explain this in terms of historical accident, by which at a certain point in time in the past the art form is fused with certain values by a certain group. It could be that a certain group is naturally exposed to certain music, so that proximity breeds a relationship which is, in the beginning, accidental in the sense that there is nothing intrinsic in the art form which makes it, and no other form, suitable for a certain group. Once this original point of contact is made, through what I called historical accident, then the process becomes more straightforwardly understandable. Because the original group value the art form, later groups take over what they imagine to be established ways of looking at it and appreciating the form. Accumulation and substantiation through time could develop into what looks like a fully-blown 'aesthetic' of the art form, so that group members themselves would assume values and meanings to be located within the art form rather than in their perceptions of it. Other art forms may be rejected on the apparent basis of their intrinsic inferiority. Values held to be within the art form may be defended as having a substantial and autonomous existence. In fact, those values, and those imagined superiorities, would be nothing more than the accumulated, located reflections of a particular way of life 'read' into the music. In this sense, an art form would be a complex mirror linked to a memory bank, holding, but without an intrinsic grasp, valued and significant images, derived in the first place from society.

Such a theory has many advantages of course. It gets over the problem of having to analyse the internal aesthetic of the art form. There would be no reason to attempt an analysis of the internal structure and quality of pop music, and the analysis could proceed totally in terms of the qualities ascribed to the artefacts from the outside. That is, the interest would not be in the art form per se, but in how the art form is received and acknowledged by the significant group. The interest would then be social and cultural; rather than aesthetic; it would fit into other aspects of our analysis without the problems of comparing like with unlike.

This is clearly one extreme approach. At the other extreme would be the view, derived from the 'High Art' perspective, that the value of the art form is totally intrinsic and autonomous. This notion would suggest that an art form would always consist of the same immanent qualities, and would keep its integrity no matter what social group was responding to it. The first approach would suggest that different social groupings could see totally different things within the same art form, at least in so far as they had no knowledge of, or no influence upon, each other's tastes. To this extent, the art form would be different in itself, to different groups. The second view, then, would see the art form and the social group as totally independent. An analysis of the relationship would proceed through two stages. First, there would be the attempt to evaluate the internal aesthetic of the art form, in its own terms: an aesthetic which would be assumed to be universal. Secondly, there would be the attempt to place this against the life style of the particular group. Such an analysis would assume that the art form would be the same, although the profile may alter, no matter what vantage point the critic adopted. In our first approach, the vantage point of the observer would totally determine the art form. In the second case the art form would not mirror back the social and cultural interests of the group related to it, but would stand in its own ground, with a universal, and unchangeable internal relation of parts and feelings. In some senses, it is easier to imagine an art form as having an independent objective existence, quite apart from its social location. This is a common sense view that recognises the obvious physical separability of cultural artefacts, and accords the artist a distinctive and recognizable role as the creator of something specific, unique and valuable in the world. It would save us from the bottomless relativism of interdependencies, a course which, once started, threatens to challenge common sense meaning. However, there are tremendous problems in the

delineation of such a wholly internal aesthetic. The divergence of critical opinions, over time, and even within the same period, demonstrates that immanent qualities are less autonomous and 'there' in the artefact, than this pure theoretical position might seem to suggest. Furthermore, the currency of this analysis is intrinsically set in aesthetic terms. What is assumed to be an intrinsic aesthetic is clearly impenetrable by cultural and social concepts, terms generated from the outside. It can only be penetrated by terms generated from within, which can carry like meaning. Thus, the analysis of the art form producing terms of internal significance may be extremely difficult to place against the non 'external' terms of a social analysis. The two may never meet, except in the kind of spurious generalization that characterise so much writing in the field of cultural criticism.

Finally, one could approach the art form at some point between these two extreme views. This is the position I adopt. My position is that the value and meaning of an art form is given socially, but within objective limitations imposed internally by the art form. Instead of an 'aesthetic' I refer to objective possibilities within the art form. Instead of totally socially given meanings I suggest that social meanings are returned within certain parameters - fixed by the art form. Thus particular art forms are not seen as having inherent and unchangeable meanings and values; rather they are seen as having the potential to hold and return a range of meanings which are, in the first place, socially given. The art form has a certain chameleon quality; it can change according to which group is looking at it, and from where. However, there are limits to the ways it can be perceived, and these are not determined solely by social location and interests of the audience. Some kinds of social meanings for a particular art form will be held and reflected fully within it, others partially, and still others not at all. This kind of limitation will depend crucially on internal structures within the art form; but these internal parameters are not, as it were, always alive and fully operational. They only come alive and become capable of holding meaning when they are rubbed against the real life experience of a particular group. If this life experience is beyond the range of scope of these parameters, then very little will be returned and made socially significant. If the life experience falls within the parameters provided by the internal structures of this mark, then the social meanings are held, perhaps importantly modified, in a creative relationship with these parameters, and returned to the social group. The

parameters themselves, then, do not have meaning in the sense of a fully prescribed content. They both stake out the field of potential meaning and create an ambience in which certain types of meaning from the outside can flourish. The objective possibilities are best understood as belonging more to the structure than the content of an artefact. It is the notion that in the design and fundamental orientation of the text certain categories or kinds of feeling are allowed a scope for meaningful development. (In a sense the objective possibilities are the crude outline of a particular 'world view' which can supply the underpinning for more specific context-based meanings.) The notion of an 'aesthetic' places much too unique a construction upon this complex field of forces and would attach the status of meaning to that which is better understood as being capable of holding several potential meanings. The notion of 'totally socially given meanings', on the other hand, ignores the objective existence of the artefact with its internal structures, which whilst not capable of generating fully formed meanings, all the same can prevent or encourage certain types of meaning.

These objective possibilities can be placed against the life style of the groups, or more exactly against the researcher's 'organizing perspective' derived from the empirical evidence of the life style, and the musical tastes of the groups. This comparison is the vital step in homological analysis and is the basis for the assessment of the type and quality of the cultural relation between a group and its preferred music.

3. The Integral Level of Cultural Relation

This level of analysis is concerned with the degree to which the two elements in a cultural relationship directly influence and modify one another. Integral analysis is likely to apply most fully to human relationships to expressive artefacts and least fully to relationships with natural objects. It is aimed at explaining both the historical generation of basic homologies, and the manner of their continued development in the present. Where the homological analysis was synchronic, the integral level of analysis is diachronic, or more exactly has a theoretical capacity to be diachronic. This third level is integral because it investigates the life style and activities of the group, and the music, as they form a whole, or as the elements fundamentally condition each other as part of a tight unitary system.

Firstly, the analysis would investigate the degree to which the music exerts and has exerted a direct creative influence on a life style, that is the way it not only reflects central attitudes, values and activities, but actually takes a part in determining the nature of these things. The ways in which the music is capable of this include: the direct intervention of music in to action or emotion, i.e. being the stimulus of something new in the behaviour or experience of the listener which would not have occurred without the music; the ability to express blocked personal emotion in a unique way; the ability based on these previous two to directly exert an influence on the shape and form of an individual's or group's sensibilities.

Secondly this analysis would investigate the degree to which a social group exert and has exerted a determining force on the creation of the music it enjoys and has been able to change the objective possibilities of such music. Simply, this would occur where the creative base of the music is, and was in the social group, or the extended version of the social group, that the listener is part of.

Now if both these elements were present historically, that is that the music exerted an influence on consciousness, and the social group exerted an influence on the form of the music, then it can readily be seen that a dialectical process will have occurred in which life and music were continually brought closer together in to basic homologies. It can also be readily seen that where both of these elements exist in the contemporary situation there will be a continuing tightening and substantiation of basic homologies.

If determinations flow in only one direction then it can also be seen that the process is very much more limited, and is not capable of continually developing fuller basic homologies. The obvious example here is in the cultural relation of a life style and consciousness to a natural object. There may well be determinations flowing from the object to the life style, but it is difficult to see determinations flowing in the other direction whilst the object is still 'natural'.

Where there is mutual determination I call this a process of integral circuiting. At a theoretical level I also want to suggest that where there is integral circuiting between a life style and an artefact, the power of the relationship will be sufficient to 'drag in' other elements and strongly influence the form of their relation to the central life

style of the group. I call this whirl pool effect integral mediation, so that for instance the powerful integral formation of the motor bike to the motor bike boys powerfully mediates many other aspects of the boys' relationship with artefacts and objects, and especially their relationship with pop music. The same is true of drugs in the 'hippie' culture. A total cultural understanding then would take in to account all the relationships between a social group and the objects and artefacts around them, and the manner in which particularly potent integral circuits mediate other relationships, and indeed each other.

Just finally, from a theoretical point of view an integral circuit should continue to a final and unimaginable collapse of art and life. In fact this point is never reached because of what I call integral disintegration. This is where, for one reason or another, the integral circuit goes into reverse and basic homologies are slowly unwound. This might be caused by a decisive move of the creative locus of the artefact from the social group which appreciates it, or it might be caused by some kind of collapse of the objective possibilities of the music. To generalize, integral disintegration would occur, as it were, when one of the poles in the dialectic becomes unresponsive or even repellant to the other.

Clearly this final part of the analysis is the most interpretative of all the modes of analysis I have described. It cannot be approached through the verbal accounts of the actors involved, and has to make the fullest possible use of every mode of observation and interaction with the groups the researcher has open to him.

III POP MUSIC IN ENGLAND

Before attempting to apply these theoretical concerns to a concrete example I would like to deal briefly and generally with two important areas that impinge directly on pop music and its culture - technology and commerce.

Technology

Firstly as to the role of technology in the production of pop. In terms of the music itself, technical processes have been used as musical resources. The electrification of the guitar was the single most important development for pop, and the pop explosion of the late fifties would have been impossible without it. Amplification of sound generally has been crucial, and some of the more recent groups such as the Who and the Jimmi Hendrix Experience have used extreme sound as a musical resource in its own right. In other ways what were once thought of as the costs of using electrified instruments - the best example is feedback - have been creatively adapted to become an internal and intended element of the internal musical structure. At the most extreme, such groups as the Pink Floyd make use of electronic equipment almost to the point of leaving behind the traditional instruments altogether. Even during a 'live' performance, of something like 'Atom Heart Mother', the group spend much time at great consoles manipulating sound effects and playing back prerecorded material, as well as 'playing' instruments in the traditional way. In the last few years there has also been an expansion of the media outlets in live performances, particularly in to the visual with the so-called 'light show'. Recent developments have been to synchronize the movement of the music precisely with the form and development of the light show. In sum then, pop music is increasingly becoming dependant on certain technological forms, and is moving further from traditional notions of the 'band' playing instruments in a straight forward manner.

Technology is also vastly important on the production side of pop in the way that it has allowed recording of material, and the provision of ready forms of reproduction of the music. It is only fairly recently, with the advent of the 45 rpm. single record, and the 33 rpm. long playing record, that recordings and reproductions have been made of a quality to vie with, and in some cases surpass, the original. It is these developments which have of course allowed the formation and expansion of the vast market for records. The replacement in mass

circulation of sheet music by recorded music was one of the crucial stages in the development of pop, and marked the point at which the unique stylistics of particular singers, and the manner of their vocal 'personality', became an important factor in the music - no musical notation could ever reproduce the distinctive brooding quality of Elvis Presley's voice, in the way that a reproduction can instantly. More recently of course with the advent of sixteen track tape recorders, sophisticated echo effects and stereo recording, the recorded version of a song can be vastly superior (in terms of range and exploitation of effects and resources) to the 'live' version, that no parallel 'live' version is possible. The Beatles' 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' took several hundred hours to record, and for the most part could not be successfully reproduced live. The most progressive bands would now regard the recorded artefact as their main medium of expression, and would not attempt to duplicate their sounds in a totally 'live' medium. In this sense then a new technological form has virtually displaced traditional forms, and certain examples of modern music could be said to owe their distinctive internal and aesthetic nature to modern technology.

On the consumption side it is no less clear that technological developments in the mass media have played a powerful part in what we now regard as the phenomenon of youth culture and its involvement with pop music. To sum up many important strands in the telecommunications 'revolution', we can point to a simple phenomenon - the incredible popularity of Elvis Presley in England, a country in which he has never been present. Individuals were known about outside their own countries in times before the tele-communications revolution, but never in terms which rested totally on the precise configuration of their personal presence. Millions of fans in England have the most precise knowledge of Elvis from the particular timbre of his voice, to the oddly self-regarding intensity of his eyes. In a crucial sense the tele-communications systems now available to us have transported all but the smell of a man across the Atlantic. Without this incredible technological 'miracle' youth culture and pop music as we know it could never have developed.

The importance of these technological considerations for our theoretical approach is that a new medium of expression can always be appropriated by an underprivileged group, and it can offer new elements of coding in which to express subversive meanings in a way not comprehended by the dominant group. The existing mediums of expression are likely to be controlled and 'policed' by the dominant culture, and are unlikely to provide the basis of

a really meaningful cultural dialectic with an oppressed group. New mediums of expression are of course most likely, under normal circumstances, to be taken up by the powerful group, but in certain circumstances the dominant group may not realize the potential of new forms, and may indeed be altogether unaware of the expressive function of the new forms. In such circumstances culturally oppressed groups have a rare opportunity to take possession of a new medium, and of a new code, and to develop them as the basis for their own integral circuits. In this way the developing cultural dialectic of those oppressed groups which can appropriate a new form of expression and coding, based on modern technological developments, can be said to be more truly the product of its age, and more truly attuned to underlying social movements than is the dominant cultural dialectic.

Commercial Production of Pop Music

Basically I suggest that where the commercial system of production, advertising, promotion, distribution, market research, intervenes most between the music and the 'consumer' there is least chance of a genuine cultural dialectic developing. Fundamentally this is because the direction of change in the objective possibilities of the music will be determined, not by the interests of a living social group, but by the marketing techniques of extrapolation and smoothed averaging. Bureaucratic, mass production commercial bodies don't produce, but only reproduce. Thus, although there might be some dialectical influence of the music on consciousness, there is unlikely to be any meaningful dialectical influence of the life style back on to the music, except as mediated through market research techniques at the service of very different interests. The scope for the development of commercially mediated music is therefore limited by, so to speak, the 'deadening' of one pole of the cultural dialectic.

The case must not be exaggerated here. These comments about the commercial system of production must not be taken as synonymous with the traditional argument about commercial manipulation. Music cannot be 'foisted' upon a group through commercial manipulation alone. There is still the important level of the homological cultural relation. Unless commercially provided music has the capacity to hold and return certain values and concerns of its audience it can never be really successful - this condition sets a rigid limit on how far manipulative theories can be taken. Of course the music does,

as I have said, have a determining force on life style and consciousness, and it could be argued that this force over time may act to debase sensibility in a manner which makes music, of no matter what standard, acceptable. The case would need to be argued here, but very quickly, I would argue that the determining effect of the music only comes in to real dialectical operation, when the consciousness is already in the grip of a basic homology, and that this basic homology must, in the first instance, come from the authentic life interests of the actors.

However, in the general case, my argument is that commercial intervention between the performer and his audience is likely to act in the direction of limiting the growth of integral circuits. This separation of the performer and his audience is also likely to have other consequences. There is likely to be a pressure on performers to repeat established and well known successes, and the mode of the performer's relation to his audience is likely to be of the star system kind. The performer will be distanced from his public, and will be perceived to be from a different and more privileged social group. He will also be packaged and publicised by the commercial interests in the way that any other commodity might be. The sum total of these things would be the creation of a 'star', unapproachable and untouchable, though summing up a lot, for his audience.

In the converse case where the commercial system intervenes least between the performer and his audience, there is likely to be the maximum possibility for the growth of integral circuits. Real innovation always occurs outside the great commercial blocks. Fundamentally this is because the direction of change of the objective possibilities of the music in such outside areas are set, not by marketing techniques, but by the artistic integrity of the performer, who would either know his audience very well, or be from the same social group as his audience, and would therefore shape the music progressively to fit the active and dynamic concerns of his audience. Assuming then that the audience is in its turn subject to determinations flowing from the music, we can readily see that the conditions are set for the development of a cultural dialectic to bring basic homologies in to a tighter relation, and to strengthen cultural identity and confidence. Such processes rely very little on any social category of the 'animateur culturel'. In England the nearest there is to this category, would be the record producer, d.j., or sounds system d.j., who recognises the importance of a new style or form and gives it wider commercial exposure. As we have seen this may be

considered as the beginning of a process of re-ification and stultification of the form.

There is a somewhat special use of the term 'commercial system' here. The suggestion is not that music can be produced totally independantly of the 'commercial system'. In a highly complex, post industrial mixed economy, such as in England, it would be virtually impossible to produce and distribute a record on a significant scale without the reliance on some aspects at least of the commercial system. The point at issue is this: to what extent has the commercial system, which must always be involved at some level, enter in to the very nature of the music? My suggestion is that where the artists have a free hand in designing their own music, and where they have a better notion of the listening group - because they come from it - than the commercial controllers have, the music though handled, financed, and distributed through a commercial system can be authentically free from that biggest contaminant of commercialism - an internal design determined by quantitative consumerism. Briefly, where the product of a commercial system is responsible to the real needs and feelings of its audience, it has escaped total commercial determination, and can enter into integral circuits implicitly critical even of the very system by which it was produced. There is a grave danger in regarding the commercial system as a single headed monster with an integrated malicious will. Certain parts of its operation can well be disadvantageous for other parts, and different parts of the system are differentially exploitable.

IV A CASE STUDY⁽⁷⁾

The essence of this approach to the social meaning of pop music is the identification of a clear social group and the music it enjoys. The group could be as large as the whole of the teenage population of England. However there are severe problems here, and one of the really significant things this approach should alert us to is the danger of referring to 'Youth Culture' as a monolithic entity. Within so-called 'Youth Culture' are several groupings, and each of these is related to its own strand of pop music. Though all of the groups share some common attitudes and feelings, and though all the variant forms of music deserve the common term 'pop music', an analysis of the macro level would deal only in very basic common denominators. Our task should be to differentiate within 'youth culture' and to begin to build up the contours of its complex internal map, rather than limit ourselves to generalizations.

I would like to present an analysis of one group in England - the motor bike boys. The following is a much condensed version of a section of my Ph.D. thesis.

It should be remembered that the motor bike boys had very clear tastes in music, they liked early rock'n'roll - Chuck Berry, early Elvis, Buddy Holly and the latter music of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in as far as it was in the same tradition. The Indexical and Integral levels of an analysis were very much less important than the Homological. For convenience here, I'll present only the Integral.

The Social Group

The world of the motorbike boys was above all else concrete and unequivocal. Values and attitudes were so deeply entrenched as to form part of an obvious commonsense reality. There was no abstract dimension to the world, only a straightforward physicality and confidence in things. The touchstone of this world were manliness, toughness and directness of interpersonal contact.

Frankness and directness characterised the modes of group interaction. Formal structures, or considerations of politeness, were not allowed to distract normal on-going life. In this sense, group life

was very informal.

This lack of formal respect, and continuous pressure to judge and award status in the here and now, and within the boundaries of their own culture, is also demonstrated by their extreme attitude to the Royal Family. Respect is clearly not given on the basis of a formal, received social deference:

PW The Queen.

Joe Oh that silly old cunt... She's only there to fucking... You know I don't think we ought to have her there really, she only an ornament, she's an ornament... it's all wrong.

June It doesn't bother me.

Joe It's all wrong. She's taking all our fucking money.

Fred I can't see why people should have to pay.

PW Prince Charles and the Investiture?

Fred Load of rubbish, they ought to have had a Welshman for it, not a bleeding renegade.

Joe Yeah, I mean to say, he's fucking Welsh.

Fred She's German, he's a bleeding renegade, and he's made Prince of Wales - it's a load of rubbish, they hadn't ought to come over here.

Joe I was gonna say, none of them are fucking English, it should have been all fucking English, the bastards, the Prince ain't fucking English is he?

Fred No, no his old woman's a German, and he's a Greek. He can't go back to his own country.

This shouldn't be interpreted as iconoclasm, still less as any kind of revolutionary consciousness. It is simply that meanings and values were located in the concrete and lived situations. Formal meanings, or status within an outside hierarchical structure were rejected. They lived in the unalienated world of the present and immediate relations, and would not allow these to be distorted or challenged by definitions from the outside.

Another element of the informality and directness of the world in which they lived was the widespread use of nicknames. These nicknames were partly given by the group and partly adopted by the individual. Once the nicknames were coined they were used universally, and it was difficult to find out what real names were.

Their belief in the strength and control of one's own agency was demonstrated by our group's attitudes towards drugs. They did not see drugs (for instance, as they saw motorbikes) as an access to excitement or glamorous new experiences. They saw them as a threat to the integrity of one's own agency. There is a clear pride in ability to act and make decisions autonomously, and the drug pusher is seen as a threat to this autonomy; it is almost an element of honour, a code of living that distinguishes the motorbike boy; the essential element of this code is self-reliance.

PW Drugs?

Joe Oh, fucking drugs, that's stupid...

Several Yeah, it's stupid... yeah.

Voices

Joe I've never taken a drug in my fucking life, I'd push the fuck out of the kid who offered me one.

PW Would you?

Joe Yeah, I would.

Fred And I would.

John They can't be men if they take drugs... there must be something wrong with them.

June Stupid, ain't it?

Joe If I knew anyone that took them I'd fucking do 'em.

Fred If I couldn't do anything without a drug in me I wouldn't want to do it at all.

Joe If I took something to make me fucking do it I wouldn't want to know.

Fred It's the same as beer isn't it. I mean you get a lot of people, they've got to have a drink before they'll bleeding hit anybody. If I couldn't hit anybody without any beer or drugs... I wouldn't be much.

Joe I know a lot of kids, they go and have a lot of booze, before they go and have a tattoo or something, they're scared of having it, I mean without beer, it's a drug that is, isn't it.

June It's ridiculous, it's Dutch courage.

Drugs are seen as loosening up the strict relationship between consciousness and reality, between decision and action in the world, between thought and concrete expression. They had never tried 'drugs' apart from alcohol and would not have begun to understand the difference between depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens, and so had no experiential basis for their extreme views. Rather the basis of their feeling was an insubstantial kind of fear. Feeling would have probably been much less intense had soft drugs such as cannabis been tried. Perhaps one can understand the nature of this insubstantial fear as a displaced recognition of a complex truth about themselves. The commonsense and obvious nature of the physical and social world was at once the basis of their reality and the source of ultimate importance in their lives. In the here and now at least they bulked a meaningful presence, they had a dignity. More dissociated views of the world would have threatened not only the way they thought, and the status of their common sense reality, but also their sense of identity and importance within that world. Extinction, or dissolution, of the concrete world was not a matter of philosophic or abstract interest, it was also the dissolution of personality. Of course this is to pitch the argument at too theoretical a level, but the group's violent distrust of drugs, and their rejection of abstract or uncertain, ways of looking at the world, does not suggest a form of recognition of, and avoidance of, zones which were potentially self-destructive to their highly unequivocal concrete world.

The motorbike was a crucial element in their strength of personal identity. Their interest in the motorbike might have been taken as signifying a morbid fascination with death paralleling, in a sense, the search for excitement through drugs in other youth cultural groups. In my view, this would be to misunderstand their relationship to the motorbike. Firstly, it was not the case that they had a simple death wish which the motorbike could efficiently administer to. The notion of skill and experience on the motorbike, which was widely valued, was precisely about avoiding unnecessary accident. They did not have a submissive attitude to the motorbike, but an assertive attitude that

stressed the importance of control over the machine; if the machine won't be subject to the dictates of their will, then it was to be distrusted, not valued:

Joe No... the motorbike don't frighten you.

Jeff If the bike handles well, the bike will never beat you, if it handles bad, it frightens you, that's all.

PW Frightens, what does 'frightens' mean?

Jeff No, scared, I mean. Like if I've got a bike and I don't handle well, I won't go fast on it, but if it'll do everything you want it to, well that's it you know.

Thus the motorbike was not a random source of danger and excitement, but was located well within the commonsense world, and was responsive to ability and coordination in the physical world. I argued earlier that the motorbike was symbolically appropriated into the motorbike world, and this ability to control and master an impersonal technological force was a crucial part of the process. It is precisely the confidence in identity and the controllability, the unequivocality, of the physical world which expands to envelope and control the ferocity of the motorbike. This is quite contrary to the subjective vulnerability of a drug experience. Not only is the ontological security of the motorbike boys demonstrated in their mastery of such an apparently alienative object as the motorbike, but the qualities of the motorbike itself are developed to express crucial aspects of this confidence in identity and unarguable reality. The motorbike responds inevitably and concretely to a subjective will and skill, it accelerates to the point of blowing the rider off at the twist of a wrist. Control decisions are met immediately by the physical consequences of rushing air. The sheer mechanical functioning of the motorbike, with the hardness of metal against metal, the controlled explosion of gases, the predictable power from the minutely engineered swing of machined components, underwrites a positive and durable view of the physical world. The boldness dash and intimidation of the machine enhance the boisterous confidence in the identity of the rider. In several ways, in its image, in its difficulty of mastery, in its precise functioning, in its predictable response, the motorbike puts beyond doubt the security and physicality of the motorbike boy's world. In its ferocity, and undeniable presence, it contradicts the more abstract and formal structuring of the world.

This care, and ability on the motorbike, did not, of course, eradicate risk. There was danger, and this was accepted, even relished as we saw before. However, it was important that the danger did not come from the capricious tyranny of the motorbike as an object but was the ultimate extension of the qualities of the motorbike into the human zone, and the transcendental symbolic affirmation of those qualities. Danger was accepted for what it was in the scope of a fully-connected consciousness. Death and accident on the motorbike was the culmination of activities that were precisely confident and secure in the tangible world. It was not psychedelic, mind-changing experience, a mystical denouement which undershot the previous existence of things. It was the normal world, with its concrete range of responses pushed to a climax, pushed to the limits but within a secure consciousness, until the sudden bursting through into a transcendence which didn't dissipate identity but substantiated identity even more fully than before, only at a higher and more universal level. At no point is consciousness, of the incontrovertibility of material things, challenged; even in the prospect of death, the risk is met in the confidence and expectation of full consciousness. Death is not an anodyne, but paradoxically, the quintessential recognition of awareness and personality. The motorbike, at several levels, sums up the confidence and sureness of being-in-the-world of the motorbike boys. In this sense, it was the opposite of what they understood 'drugs' to be, and of what they so violently disliked.

The Music

One of the interesting things about the motor bike boy's use of pop music was their overwhelming preference for 'singles'. Even here it's possible to see the objective potential of the musical artefact! Singles were responsive to the listener in the sense that they only lasted for two and a half minutes. If a particular record was disliked, at least it lasted for only a short time. It could also be rejected from the turntable more quickly without the difficulty of having to pick the needle up to miss a track on the LP and replace it a little further on. Exact selection could also be made so that the order of records was totally responsive to individual choice. To play an LP was to be committed (unless you were prepared to go to a great deal of trouble) to someone else's ordering of the music. By and large, LP's are more popular with an audience which is prepared to sit and listen for a considerable period, and

with a certain extension of trust so that unknown material can be appreciated and evaluated. LP's are a cheap way (as distinct from singles) of building up a large collection of songs within particular traditions. Often there will be tracks on an LP, which have never been very popular but which are of interest to the expert, or the devotee, or the technician. LP's tend to serve the interest more of the 'serious' listener, who is concerned to appreciate all the aspects of a particular field, and not simply those to which he is already attracted. Of late, LP's have also been produced which have been conceived as a unit, parallel in a way to the opera or extended musical piece. Dating from approximately 'Sergeant Pepper' by the Beatles, the progressive groups particularly have been concerned to produce LP's imaginatively conceived as a whole in this way, which are meant to be taken as a whole at one sitting. All this implies an audience which is stationary, sitting, not engaged in other activities, and prepared to devote a substantial length of time to the appreciation of the music alone. Of course, there are many exceptions to this, and the whole field of LP's is tremendously varied. An LP of 'Elvis's Golden Hits' for instance is specially produced as a cheap collection of Elvis's singles; the attraction here is specifically based on the attraction of a group of popular singles. However, generally, and especially in contrast to singles, it holds true that the LP audience is stationary and mono-channelled towards the music. This kind of situation is clearly inappropriate to the Double Zero boys. They are usually moving, engaged in other activities, and responsive to music only when it is not boring. Their preference for singles was overwhelming, to the point that, quite apart from inherent musical qualities, the absence of a single version of a song was held as prima facie evidence of its inferiority. One can only understand this by appreciating that the connotations of the LP were quite contrary to the fundamental elements of their life style. Here is Joe questioning the value of a Chuck Berry version of a record, which they had just heard and liked by the Rolling Stones on a single, simply because it was 'only on an LP'.

John The Stones are, well ok, it's not as good as Chuck Berry's then. Have you heard Chuck Berry's?

Joe Yeah, but it's only on an LP, it ain't on a single.

Jeff It ain't as good as Chuck Berry's, no.

This might be taken as a clottish, obstinate, inflexibility, typical of an uneducated refusal to accept new advances until it is realised that, in fact, the experience of listening to the same track on an LP (as on a single) would not have been so enjoyable for the Double Zero boys precisely because they would have felt a lack of control, an implied seriousness, which would have inhibited the free flow of response. Their preference for singles was simply an honest, logical extension of a coherent set of attitudes, not the random obstinacy of the unimaginative.

Beat and Movement

One of the most noticeable things about the kind of music liked by the motorbike boys was the prominence of its beat. It is music for dancing to, for moving to, and clearly has the ability to reflect and resonate a life style based on confidence and movement. Elvis Presley was consistently best in his fast-moving beat songs. With his gyrating hips, outflung arms and coy angling of the head, he altogether did away with the image of the stationary singer. Almost every early record cover shows him moving, and of course, his stage name will always be Elvis the Pelvis. Buddy Holly's style too, relied on a strident beat, and the alert quality of his voice was enhanced and projected by the clear beat. For the period and for his colour (white) he was very strongly influenced by black Rhythm and Blues music; this is one of the reasons why he was the only white singer seriously to influence Mick Jagger. The driving dancing rhythm of more traditional Rhythm and Blues comes through in his records time and again. Sometimes, as in 'Not Fade Away', the music is virtually taken over by beat and rhythm, with the melody totally subjugated to a transfixing rhythm pattern. The Beatles, in their early days played a kind of up dated rock'n'roll, which again relied on a fundamental big beat.

In the pre-recording days of the Beatles in Liverpool and Hamburg the big beat was supremely important for two reasons. Firstly, it was vital to provide good dancing music so that people enjoyed themselves and would come again. Secondly, a loud moving beat was likely to pull people off the streets in the first place into the club or bar. The early Beatles records were exact reproductions of their live performances without the aid of any of the studio effects that other singers were using at the time. Consequently they reproduced exactly the same loud clear beat, essentially simple harmonious dancing music, on record,

as they did in the live club scene. It was the biggest loudest beat in the pop scene since early rock'n'roll. The progress of the Beatles could be described simply in terms of the loss of this big beat. They became more sophisticated, using melodic asymmetry and complex rhythm pattern. The latter music became very much harder to dance to, especially in the concrete, direct, bopping-to-the-rhythm dance patterns of the early rock era - a style of dancing which had none of the 'freaky' free form movements that later styles developed to match the asymmetry of progressive music. The motorbike boys ranked the early Beatles very highly; they became progressively cooler about the later Beatles; they despised some of their 'really stupid stuff'. To simplify, the process of the motorbike boys' disillusionment was commensurate with the disappearance of the big beat from the Beatles. The Rolling Stones, much more consistently than the Beatles, kept to the strong simple beat of Rhythm and Blues. Of all post-early-rock-music the Stones have kept closest to the elemental function of pop - providing music to dance to. Mick Jagger in performance, with his outlandish talent for movement, mime and gesture, personified in action the movement-potential of his music.

Concreteness and Clarity

The preferred music of our group was also hard and concrete, with a clarity of style that made them fairly instantly rememberable. Again, there was a congruence here with a culture that demanded concreteness, unequivocality and instant recognition. Elvis Presley in his early sings, sang in a straight and powerful way dealing with concrete situations. His style was utterly distinctive and one of his records could be recognised from the first syllable of his singing, if not from the atmosphere of the first bar of music. Buddy Holly was not so consistent. Some of his records (mainly on the Coral label) were soft with a kind of gentle wistfulness; but even here the voice was crystal clear, and the tune simple and rememberable. His records, mainly on the Brunswick label, were much faster and harder and concrete, with, again, the penetrating clear voice adding a distinctive resonance. The early Beatles' music was simple, and the lyrics direct and concrete about familiar situations. Later the Beatles moved into an exploration of mysticism, one of whose characteristics was the suspension of ordinary language, so that both lyrics and melodies became more abstract, complex and mystifying. It was

at this point that the motorbike boys withdrew their warm support of the Beatles, and accused them of deserting the holy torch (my phrase). The Stones, throughout their career dealt in elementary simple harmonics, strong simple rhythms and conventional chord patterns. Throughout, they were direct, forceful and concrete - exactly the objective potential that allowed the boys to gain so much significance from them.

Assertiveness

The aggressive and masculine assertiveness of the boys also found an answering structure in their preferred music. Elvis Presley's deep brooding voice was full of aggression, unspecified and enigmatic, though always powerful. In the atmosphere of his records, as well as the statement of his words, and his personal image, was a deep implication that he was a man not to be pushed around. His whole presence demanded that he should be given respect, though the grounds for that respect were disreputable and antisocial, by conventional standards. Buddy Holly's music was not so aggressive, but it was utterly secure in its own style; it insisted that its range and interests were important and deserving of recognition. The Rolling Stones' music and image has remained entirely 'unrespectable' in its opposition to the adult world, and its espousal of hooliganism and permissiveness. The music was harsh, angry and expressive of cruelty, the violence of the vocal delivery invested the lyrics with meaning far beyond the power of the cold words. There was also, in the Stones' music, an assumed superiority over women, and a denial to them of personal authentic action, which ran very close to the attitudes of the motorbike boys themselves. The Beatles were not aggressive in such an outright fashion, and did not symbolise hooliganism in the same way; but there was a vigorous release of feeling, and an utter confidence in their style of playing which gave the music considerable power and muscular control. In some ways the Beatles early songs were a 'celebration of youthful confidence', and gave voice to the expectation of being able to control an unalienating world. All this made their music particularly responsive to the special confidence, and rumbustious expectation of success, of the motorbike culture.

Informality

Generally, this music had an informality and frankness that answered to the informal quality of the boys' life style, with its refusal to let status be judged or imposed by outside hierarchical patterns of any kind. Elvis Presley's voice was spontaneous, informal and direct, there was a palpable sense of an emotional physicality trying to express itself through the music, and define its identity against, and despite of, wide authoritarian and hierarchical patterns and pressures. In this sense, and especially with the confiding tone of the rich voice, the music was very personal and direct, though it avoided the privacy of emotion by a denial of indulgence in the lyrics and an overriding strong, extrovert beat. Buddy Holly, in a different way, was extremely informal and direct in his delivery, particularly in the slower, more wistful numbers. He seemed to be speaking straight to the listener, across the gap of - at one level - promoters, commercial companies, show business glitter, at another level, authority, school, police, juvenile courts, bosses... The precise articulation of the voice, the frankness of tone, the simplicity, the emotional explicitness of the music, brought it straight through into the concrete everyday world of the young listener. The music was all the same public, and in the shared world, because of the confidence of the music in itself, and the basic dance rhythms present even in the slower tunes. The Beatles' early records, as I said, were exact reproductions of music played in the club situation, and although not so personal, had all the vibrancy of the spontaneous informal action of a lively dance hall. Listening to the early Beatles one can easily visualise figures bounding and shouting around on a packed dance floor.

The stylistic development in the music evidenced in the later Elvis Presley clearly changed the objective potential of the music for our group. The boys' rejection of the later material is entirely consistent. Towards the end of the fifties Elvis Presley became much more contrived, he dragged his vowels and wallowed in the beat, progressively losing the movement and drive that made his earlier records so distinctive. He tended to exaggerate the importance of himself, to the point of narcissism, and descended into the crooning style of popular songs. The process was confirmed by a record like 'It's now or never' (1960), and records after this date had no relevance for the boys. The Beatles after the production of 'Rubber Soul', and 'Revolver', and 'Sergeant Pepper' (1967), despite a few later flashbacks to an earlier style, progressively lost their

big beat, and their immediate contact with spontaneous emotion. Possibly this was through the pressure of production for a seller's market, possibly it was through an internal desire for experimentation in the group. Certainly their developing style was vastly technically superior to their earlier recordings. They manipulated studio effects with amazing virtuosity; but these things took them further from original rock'n'roll and the informality of the live performance. Their lyrics were witty, verbally intricate and allusive, and the music complex and nuanced in a way unknown to earlier pop music; but this later Beatles style had no appeal to the hard non-abstract tastes of our boys. Possibly it was frustration with this kind of development that moved John Lennon away from the Beatles and to the Plastic Ono Band the recovery of a big beat. Certainly, our boys accepted some of the Plastic Ono Band's music and in fact compared it appreciatively to the current Beatle music.

The motorbike boys preferred music, then, that had immanent qualities and internal dimensions which were homological to the particular interests and qualities of their life style. Perhaps most crucially, in terms of the inherent robustness of their culture, the music had an integrity of form and atmosphere as well as an immediate, informal, concrete confidence that celebrated movement and masculine assertiveness. It could hold both the claim to belong to the golden age of pop and the claim to be immediately responsive to living concerns, especially those concerns which were about movement, concreteness, confidence, and which were paralleled in the clarity, beat, and confidence of the music. Fundamentally it was because of this dual capacity to answer to the basic ontology, as well as the surface style, of the motorbike culture, that the music was such an important part of the boys' lives, and could form such a closely sprung homology with their life style.

V CONCLUSION

I am only too aware that this paper has not answered to the six items suggested by the conference organizers. Certainly it's partly through sheer ignorance that I have avoided giving an overall descriptive account of present national developments in England. However, it has also been my project to remind this seminar that a critical review of the terms and concepts we use is a vital preliminary to the empirical stage, and that we should be equipped with an approach to the nature and meaning of phenomena before plunging in to an analysis. I have attempted to show how one theoretical approach might be applied to a very small segment of the English terrain of 'pop music'. It may serve, however, as a guide to the interpretation and analysis of other areas in the culture of the young. Our long term project should perhaps be to gather work in as many located areas as possible, before launching out on major substantive statements at the macro level concerning new developments in cultural activity.

NOTES

- (1) See R. Williams discussion of the 'selective tradition' and elites in The Long Revolution, Penguin 1961.
- (2) Ed. I. Bentinck, New Patterns of Musical Behaviour, Universal Edition 1974.
- (3) For an extremely perceptive discussion of the limitations of positivism see H.P. Rickman, Understanding and the Human Studies, Heinemann, London 1967.
- (4) For a discussion of hegemony see A. Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1973.
- (5) The best discussion of Participant Observation occurs in Ed. J. Filstead, Qualitative Methodology, Markham, Chicago, 1971; Ed. G.J. McCall, J.L. Simmons, Issues in Participant Observation, Addison-Wesley, 1969; S.T. Brayn, The Human Perspective in Sociology, Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- (6) The notion of a 'cluster' of methodologies is advanced by B.A. Turner in Exploring the Industrial Sub-culture, Macmillan, 1971.
- (7) This is a much reduced version of a case study to be published soon by Chatto and Windus, London. Other edited versions of this study are to be found in; Ed. J. Bental, The Body as a Medium of Expression, Longmans, 1974; Ed. B. Jones, Working Papers in Cultural Studies 2, C.C.C.S., Birmingham 1972. New Society No.547, March 1973.

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