

Chapter 1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF POPULAR CULTURE

This chapter was written to be provocative, by one who has been engaged in empirical research for a considerable number of years and who has recently been charged with the administration of a large-scale research program. The author has taken it upon himself to act as the spokesman for an approach to popular culture which some will call "social theory" and others "obsolete, abstract criticism." Specifically, this chapter deals with aspects of the historical and theoretical frame of reference which seem to me to be a basic requirement for the study of mass communications and yet a blind spot in contemporary social science. I know of no better statement with which to highlight this blind spot in contemporary analyses of mass phenomena than De Tocqueville's remarks on the fact-finding obsession of the American mind a century ago:

The practice of Americans leads their minds to fixing the standard of their judgment in themselves alone. As they perceive that they succeed in resolving without assistance all the little difficulties which their practical life presents, they readily conclude that everything in the world may be explained, and that nothing in it transcends the limits of the understanding. Thus they fall to denying what they cannot comprehend; which leaves them but little faith for whatever is extraordinary and an almost insurmountable distaste for whatever is supernatural. As it is on their own testimony that they are accustomed to rely, they like to discern the object which engages their attention with extreme clearness; they therefore strip off as much as possible all that covers it; they rid themselves of whatever separates them from it, they remove whatever conceals it from sight, in order to view it more closely and in the broad light of day. This disposition of mind soon leads them to condemn forms, which they regard as useless and inconvenient veils placed between them and the truth.¹

My plea on behalf of these "veils" takes the form of five rather unsystematic groups of observations: (1) I shall indicate that the discussion of popular culture has a century-old tradition in modern history; (2) the

historical locus of popular culture today will be fixed; (3) an attempt will be made to evaluate the over-all approach of empirical research to the social function of contemporary popular culture; (4) the current philosophical, qualitative, nonresearch analysis of popular culture will be summarized briefly; and (5) some programmatic notes will be offered on the relationship between social criticism and social research.

POPULAR CULTURE—AN OLD DILEMMA

In a survey recently undertaken of radio-listening habits in a foreign country, one of the respondents remarked:

Radio is the companion of the lonely. It has made gigantic strides for almost half a century. Women in particular, especially those with small pensions and without other resources, who are completely isolated, are now in touch with the whole world thanks to the radio. They have undergone a regular transformation; they have found a kind of second youth. They are up-to-date and they know the stars of the headlines, of the theatre, the movies, the world of sports, etc. I have heard village people, discussing the merits of Mozart and Chopin, refer to what the radio had said.

In quite the opposite vein another woman revealed that she did not have a radio set in her home. Asked to explain why, she answered: "Because once there is a set in the house, one cannot resist. Everybody listens idiotically, the kids and the others too. When we stay with my friend G., my husband plays with the radio all the time." Her view was supported by a male respondent, who also refuses to permit a radio in the house. He believes that studies, conversation, and activity around the house provide enough interest, that the indiscriminate outpouring of music and talk over the radio lowers everyone's intellectual level.

These spontaneous remarks reveal two leitmotifs which have run continuously through the modern era: on the one hand, a positive attitude toward all instrumentalities for the socialization of the individual; on the other hand, a deep concern about the inner fate of the individual under the impact of the leveling powers of institutional and other organized forms of leisure activity. This basic dilemma concerning man's existence beyond the requirements of biological and material survival, the vital question of how to live out that stretch of life which is neither sleep nor work, can be said to have found its classic intellectual expression in a philosophical dialogue that never took place. Montaigne in the sixteenth century took stock of the situation of the individual after the breakdown of medieval culture. He was particularly struck by the phenomenon of loneliness in a world without faith, in which tremendous

pressures were being exerted on everyone under the conditions of a postfeudal society. To escape destruction by these pressures, to avoid becoming lost in the horrors of isolation, Montaigne suggested distraction as a way out:

Variety always solaces, dissolves, and scatters. If I cannot combat it, I run away from it; and in running away I double and change my direction. By changing place, occupation, company, I escape into the crowd of other thoughts and diversions, where it loses my trace, and leaves me safe.

Is it reasonable that even the arts should take advantage of and profit by our natural stupidity and feebleness of mind? The barrister, says Rhetoric, in that face they call pleading, will be moved by the sound of his own voice and his feigned emotion, and will suffer himself to be cozened by the passion he is acting. He will affect a real and substantial grief in this mummery he is playing, to transmit it to the jury who are still less concerned in the matter than he. Like those men who are hired at funerals to assist in the ceremonial of mourning, who sell their tears and grief by weight and measure; for, although they are stirred by borrowed emotions, it is certain that, through the habit of settling their countenance to suit the occasion, they are often quite carried away and affected with genuine melancholy.²

It is significant that quite a few basic concepts which we have been accustomed to regard as very modern emerge as early as the sixteenth century: escape, distraction, entertainment, and, last but not least, vicarious living.

The reply to Montaigne came a century later. Commercial culture had developed in the meantime, and the waning influence of religion, pre- or post-Reformation, had made itself felt much more strongly in the average way of life. Restlessness, the search for relief everywhere and anywhere, had become a major social phenomenon. It was then that Pascal spoke up against the complete surrender of man to self-destroying restlessness:

Men are entrusted from infancy with the care of their honor, their property, their friends, and even with the property and the honor of their friends. They are overwhelmed with business, with the study of languages, and with physical exercise; and they are made to understand that they cannot be happy unless their health, their honor, their fortune and that of their good friends be in good condition, and that a single thing wanting will make them unhappy. Thus they are given cares and business which make them bustle about from break of day.—It is, you will exclaim, a strange way to make them happy! What more could be done to make them miserable?—Indeed! what could be done? We should only have to relieve them from all these cares; for then they would see themselves: they would

reflect on what they are, whence they came, whither they go, and thus we cannot employ and divert them too much. And this is why, after having given them so much business, we advise them, if they have some time for relaxation, to employ it in amusement, in play, and to be always fully occupied.

How hollow and full of ribaldry is the heart of man!

Again and again he warned against what he called "diversion" as a way of life which could lead only to permanent unhappiness:

When I have occasionally set myself to consider the different distractions of men, the pains and perils to which they expose themselves at court or in war, whence arise so many quarrels, passions, bold and often bad ventures, etc., I have discovered that *all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber.*

They have a secret instinct which impels them to seek amusement and occupation abroad, and which arises from the sense of their constant unhappiness.⁴

Thus the attitude toward leisure which, for Montaigne, guarantees survival means self-destruction to Pascal. And the controversy is still going on. Each side has its partisans on all intellectual levels in everyday life, as illustrated in the study on radio as well as in learned treatises. On one side there is the benevolent analyst of a mass medium who seems to say that, while everything is not yet wonderful, it is getting better every day:

For in the old days the artists and writers and craftsmen were not writing at the behest of the people, but to please small powerful groups, the kings and lords and chieftains, who drew the talent of the time inward towards them and kept it circumscribed within the bounds of their castles and baronies. Much of the fine art of today remains alive only through a similar connection.

Yet, taking civilization as a whole, this ancient process is now in reverse. There is an outward movement. Pictures, entertainment, fun, are beginning to be seen as the rightful possession of all, and the comics join in and reflect this spreading democratization. And if the people's standards are at present lower than those which were set by workers around the seats of the mighty, the people's artists will have the satisfaction of knowing that they are identified with a vast and forward movement, which is giving to everyday folks their right to laugh and flourish under the sun.⁵

On the other hand, we find the nonconformist social critic who connects the loneliness of modern man with his interest in mass media as a setup of utter frustration:

The conditions of earning one's bread in this society create the lonely modern man.

Such conditions help explain the need, sometimes feverish, for an entertainment that so repetitively presents the same reveries, the same daydreams, the same childish fables of success and happiness. So much of the inner life of men is dried up that they tend to become filled with yearnings and to need the consolation of these reveries about people who are happy, healthy, and always successful.

Hence, parallel to the retrogression of consciousness in, say, the Hollywood writer, there is a more widespread and also more pernicious retrogression of consciousness in the motion-picture audience. Social and economic conditions have established the basis for this; the motion picture further enforces it.⁶

The differences in the verbalization of the dilemma are obvious. The language of the sixteenth and seventeenth century philosophers is still deeply steeped in religious terminology; that of the modern writers in sociological terms; that of the nonprofessional radio listeners or nonlisteners in the ordinary words of everyday life. But beneath these differences in nomenclature the dilemma remains the same: perhaps it could be called a conflict between the psychological and the moral approaches to popular culture.

THE HISTORICAL LOCUS OF POPULAR CULTURE

This section of my discussion will be somewhat dogmatic in character, partly for the sake of brevity but also because it ought to be permissible to pause from time to time in our sociological routine and to speculate about the secular trend in which we, together with our objects of research, find ourselves.

The counterconcept to popular culture is art. Today artistic products are losing the character of spontaneity more and more and are being replaced by the phenomena of popular culture, which are nothing but a manipulated reproduction of reality as it is; and, in so doing, popular culture sanctions and glorifies whatever it finds worth echoing. Schoenhauer remarked that music is "the world once more." This philosophical aphorism throws light on the unbridgeable difference between art and popular culture: it is the difference between an increase in insight through a medium possessing self-sustaining means and mere repetition of given facts with the use of borrowed tools.

A superficial inventory of the contents and motivations in the products of the entertainment and publishing worlds in our Western civilization will include such themes as the nation, the family, religion, free enterprise,

individual initiative, and in the Eastern orbit, higher production achievements, national cultures, the moral corruption of the West. The topical differences are not very decisive and, in any case, considerably smaller than the political differences which keep these two worlds apart. Saint-Simon, the great French pre-Marxian socialist philosopher, whose life extended from the *ancien régime* through the Revolution and the Napoleonic era into the days of the reactionary Bourbon restoration, once remarked that, while he had experienced the most contradictory political systems, he realized that consistent, deeply rooted social tendencies which were completely impervious to political change made themselves felt in those decades. The very concept of society rests in this insight. Rigidly and consistently different as political systems are from one another today, there is also a complete inconsistency in the content of popular culture within a given political system—and popular culture is an element of society of the first order. The yardstick is expediency, within the total social situation, of course, and particularly the distribution of power.

Nietzsche, who may be called the discoverer and matchless critical analyst of modern popular culture, has formulated its relativism with respect to content:

Modern counterfeit practices in the arts: regarded as necessary—that is to say, as fully in keeping with the needs most proper to the modern soul.

Artists harangue the dark instincts of the dissatisfied, the ambitious, and the self-deceivers of a democratic age: the importance of poses. . . . The procedures of one era are transferred to the realm of another; the object of art is confounded with that of science, with that of the Church, or with that of the interests of the race (nationalism), or with that of philosophy—a man rings all bells at once, and awakens the vague suspicion that he is a god.

Artists flatter women, sufferers, and indignant folk. Narcotics and opiates are made to preponderate in art. The fancy of cultured people, and of readers of poetry and ancient history, is tickled.⁷

What Nietzsche expressed in the general terms of the philosopher of culture has its spokesmen today. In an analysis of cartoon films a modern writer has pointed to the criterion of social expediency in the selection of their materials:

It is just Disney's distinguishing characteristic that he is uncritical of what he reflects. He is quite artless. If the values by which the society lives are still serving, if the prevailing outlook is relatively brightfaced and aggressive, he will improvise from that—and give us Mickey Mouse. If the time is

one of crisis, and these values will no longer serve but are in conflict and in question, if the prevailing state of mind is a deep bewilderment, he will improvise with equal lack of inhibition. His particular talent is that he does not embarrass himself. This makes his dreams sometimes monstrous. But it gives them a wide reference.⁸

It may be noted in passing that in the present postwar period disillusionment over the lack of definitive cultural and moral solutions has become prevalent. It finds expression in an artificial permeation of entertainment products with religion. In the average movie the pursuit of love almost invariably means the appearance of the clergyman. Nietzsche had already commented on the artificial respiration administered to religion in an era of decadence and nihilism. When he said, "God is dead," he meant that the frenzied activities of modern life produce popular culture in an attempt to fill a vacuum which cannot be filled. Nietzsche linked the precarious role of religion with the pressure of civilization and its neuroticizing influence on people:

In the Neighborhood of Insanity.—The sum of sensations, knowledge and experiences, the whole burden of culture, therefore, has become so great that an overstraining of nerves and powers of thought is a common danger, indeed the cultivated classes of European countries are throughout neurotic, and almost every one of their great families is on the verge of insanity in one of their branches. True, health is now sought in every possible way; but in the main a diminution of that tension of feeling, of that oppressive burden of culture, is needful, which, even though it might be bought at a heavy sacrifice, would at least give us room for the great hope of a *new Renaissance*.⁹

With this quotation we return to the differences between popular culture and art, between spurious gratification and a genuine experience as a step to greater individual fulfillment (this is the meaning of Aristotle's catharsis). Art lives on the threshold of action. Men free themselves truly from the mythical relation to things by stepping back, so to speak, from that which they once worshiped and which they now discover as the Beautiful. To experience beauty is to be liberated from the overpowering domination of nature over men. In popular culture, men free themselves from mythical powers by discarding everything, even reverence for the Beautiful. They deny anything that transcends the given reality.¹⁰ This is exactly what De Tocqueville meant, I think, in our opening quotation. From the realm of beauty man walks into the realm of entertainment, which is, in turn, integrated with the necessities of society and denies the right to individual fulfillment:

Under the absolute sway of one man the body was attacked in order to subdue the soul; but the soul escaped the blows which were directed against it and rose proudly superior. Such is not the course adopted by tyranny in democratic republics; there the body is left free, and the soul is enslaved. The master no longer says: "You shall think as I do or you shall die"; but he says: "You are free to think differently from me and to retain your life, your property, and all that you possess; but you are henceforth a stranger among your people. You may retain your civil rights, but they will be useless to you, for you will never be chosen by your fellow citizens if you solicit their votes; and they will affect to scorn you if you ask for their esteem. You will remain among men, but you will be deprived of the rights of mankind. Your fellow creatures will shun you like an impure being; and even those who believe in your innocence will abandon you, lest they should be shunned in their turn. Go in peace! I have given you your life, but it is an existence worse than death."¹¹

Men no longer surrender to illusions.

SOCIAL RESEARCH AND POPULAR CULTURE

The problem is whether, and to what extent, modern social science is equipped to deal with modern social culture. The instruments of research have been brought to a high degree of refinement. But is this enough? Empirical social science has become a kind of applied asceticism. It stands clear of any entanglements with foreign powers and thrives in an atmosphere of rigidly enforced neutrality. It refuses to enter the sphere of meaning. A study of television, for instance, will go to great lengths in analyzing data on the influence of television on family life, but it will leave to poets and dreamers the question of the actual human values of this new institution. Social research takes the phenomena of modern life, including the mass media, at face value. It rejects the task of placing them in a historical and moral context. In the beginning of the modern era, social theory had theology as its model, but today the natural sciences have replaced theology. This change in models has far-reaching implications. Theology aims at salvation, natural science at manipulation; the one leads to heaven and hell, the other to technology and machinery. Social science is today defined as an analysis of painstakingly circumscribed, more or less artificially isolated, social sectors. It imagines that such horizontal segments constitute its research laboratory, and it seems to forget that the only social research laboratories that are properly admissible are historical situations.

This has not always been the case. Popular culture, particularly as represented by the newspapers, has been a subject of discussion for about a hundred and fifty years. Before the naturalistic phase of social science

set in, the phenomena of popular culture were treated as a social and historical whole. This holds true for religious, philosophical, and political discussions from the time of Napoleon to Hitler. Our contemporary social science literature seems completely void of any knowledge of, or at least of any application and reference to, the voluminous writings produced on both the left and the right wings of the political and cultural fronts in the nineteenth century. It seems to ignore Catholic social philosophy as well as Socialist polemics, Nietzsche as well as the great, but completely unknown, Austrian critic, Karl Kraus, who tried to validate the notion of the crisis of modern culture by a critique of popular culture. Kraus focused attention on the analysis of language. The common denominator of his essays is his thesis that it is in the hollowing-out of language that we can see the disintegration, and even the disappearance, of the concept and existence of the autonomous individual, of the personality in its classical sense.

Studies of the role of the press, even of such specialized problems as readership figures, would do well to go back to the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century analyses of the press in Germany. There they would find, in the different political and philosophical camps, illustrations of the fruitfulness of studying social phenomena in context—in the case of the press, the relationship of the modern newspaper to the history of the economic, social, and political emancipation of the middle classes. A study of the modern newspaper is meaningless, in the very exact sense of the word, if it is not aware of the historical framework, which is composed of both critical materials like those of Karl Kraus, writing at the end of an epoch, and optimistic attitudes like the following, from the work of the German publicist, Joseph Goerres, at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

What everybody desires and wants shall be expressed in the newspapers; what is depressing and troubling everybody may not remain unexpressed; there must be somebody who is obliged to speak the truth, candid, without reservation, and unfettered. For, under a good constitution the right of freedom of expression is not merely tolerated but is a basic requirement; the speaker shall be looked upon as a holy person until he forfeits his right by his own fault and lies. Those who work against such freedom leave themselves open to the charge that the consciousness of their own great faults weighs heavily upon them; those who act justly do not shun free speech—it can in the end lead only to "honor be to whom honor is due"; but those who are dependent on dirt and darkness certainly like secretiveness.¹²

This is not to say that the whole field of sociology has been given over to historical asceticism. Quite a number of leading scholars in social

theory and social history have kept alive the conscience of a historical civilization. It is worth our while to read again the following remarks by Robert E. Park:

In fact, the reason we have newspapers at all, in the modern sense of the term, is because about one hundred years ago, in 1835 to be exact, a few newspaper publishers in New York City and in London discovered (1) that most human beings, if they could read at all, found it easier to read news than editorial opinion and (2) that the common man would rather be entertained than edified. This, in its day, had the character and importance of a real discovery. It was like the discovery, made later in Hollywood, that gentlemen prefer blonds. At any rate, it is to the consistent application of the principle involved that the modern newspaper owes not merely its present character but its survival as a species.¹³

His point of view finds confirmation in an excellent study in the history of mass culture by Louis B. Wright: "If it is desirable to trace the pedigree of the popular culture of modern America, it is possible to find most of its ideology implicit in the middle-class thought of Elizabethan England. The historian of American culture must look back to the Renaissance and read widely in the forgotten literature of tradesmen."¹⁴

One of the difficulties which have occasionally arisen in intellectual intercourse between people of American and European backgrounds is perhaps due to the antihistorical allergy of the former and the historical oversensitivity of the latter. I can illustrate this point by a very recent example. When I received the first two volumes of the outstanding work by Samuel A. Stouffer and his staff, *The American Soldier*, I was curious to learn how the authors would place their research within the context of the social theories about the soldier that have been developed from Plato on. To my amazement, I could find no historical reference beyond a solitary quotation from Tolstoy, who wrote somewhere in *War and Peace*: "In warfare the force of armies is a product of the mass multiplied by something else, an unknown x." The authors added the following comment: "Thus for perhaps the first time in military history it is possible to present statistical evidence relating to the factor x described in the quotation from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* at the beginning of this chapter."¹⁵ They seem to have been fascinated by the mathematical symbolism of Tolstoy's sentence, but they successfully resisted the temptation to compare the social situation of armies in the time of Napoleon with modern conditions. In the face of such heroic restraint, it seems appropriate to quote the following flippant remark of a fellow-sociologist: "In this respect I speak of the failure of modern psychology. I firmly believe that one can learn more about the *ordre du coeur* from La Rochefoucauld and

Pascal (who was the author of this term) than from the most up-to-date textbook on psychology or ethics."¹⁶

It seems to me that the splendid isolationism of the social researcher is likely to reinforce a common suspicion, namely, that social research is, in the final analysis, nothing but market research, an instrument of expedient manipulation, a tool with which to prepare reluctant customers for enthusiastic spending. Only twenty years ago, social scientists were well aware of the dangers in the mass media, and they did not consider it beyond their duty to concern themselves with the negative, as well as the positive, potentialities of these mass media. In the pioneering article on "The Agencies of Communication," 1933, Malcolm M. Willey and Stuart A. Rice wrote:

The effects produced may now be quite unpremeditated, although the machinery opens the way for mass impression in keeping with special ends, private or public. The individual, the figures show, increasingly utilizes these media and they inevitably modify his attitudes and behavior. What these modifications are to be depends entirely upon those who control the agencies. Greater possibilities for social manipulation, for ends that are selfish or socially desirable, have never existed. The major problem is to protect the interest and welfare of the individual citizen.¹⁷

Today, manipulation is taken for granted as an end of social science. A publisher can now dare to praise an outstanding sociological work with the following blurb on the jacket of the book:

For the first time on such a scale an attempt was made to direct human behavior on a basis of scientific evidence, and the results suggest the opening of a new epoch in social studies and in social management.

It is the editor's hope that the value to social science will prove to be as great as to the military, for whom the original research was undertaken.

The problems were Army problems, for the most part peculiar to wartime. But the implications are universal.¹⁸

Expediency and the lack of a historical or philosophical frame of reference make a sorry marriage of convenience.

SOCIAL CRITICISM OF POPULAR CULTURE TODAY

No systematic body of theories is available. The situation has been characterized very aptly by Frederick Laws:

It will hardly be denied that the *condition of criticism today is chaotic, especially when it is applied to the products of these immense distributing machines, the new media*. Much reviewing is unselective in its enthusiasm and can with difficulty be distinguished from advertising copy. . . . *There is a lack of clearly expressed and generally recognized standards of value*. We believe that this confusion is partly due to a failure to realize or accept the fact that *the social framework in which works of art are produced and judged has changed fundamentally*. It is nonsense to suppose that the means of distribution or the size of social origin of the audience wholly determines the quality of art or entertainment, but it is stupid to pretend that they do not affect it.¹⁹

There is a literature on popular culture today which is thoroughly critical. I shall try to summarize the findings of this body of writings in a few brief generalizations. Some direct their critique against the product, but many turn it against the system on which the product depends. In special analyses, as in studies of a purely philosophical and sociological character, most authors concur in their final characterization of the products of popular culture.

The decline of the individual in the mechanized working processes of modern civilization brings about the emergence of mass culture, which replaces folk art or "high" art. A product of popular culture has none of the features of genuine art, but in all its media popular culture proves to have its own genuine characteristics: standardization, stereotype, conservatism, mendacity, manipulated consumer goods.

There is an interdependence between what the public wants and what the powers of control enforce upon the public in order to remain in power. Most students are of the opinion that the habit of advertisement is the main motivating force in creating receptivity to popular culture and that the products themselves eventually take on the character of advertising. There is no consensus on the taste of the populace. Whereas some have confidence in the people's instinct for the good, the prevailing view seems to be that only the bad and the vulgar are the yardsticks of their aesthetic pleasure.

There is considerable agreement that all media are estranged from values and offer nothing but entertainment and distraction—that, ultimately, they expedite flight from an unbearable reality. Wherever revolutionary tendencies show a timid head, they are mitigated and cut short by a false fulfilment of wish-dreams, like wealth, adventure, passionate love, power, and sensationalism in general.

Prescriptions for improvement run the gamut from naive proposals to offer aesthetically better merchandise, in order to create in the masses a taste for the valuable in life, to the theory that within the present

setup of social power there is no hope whatsoever for improvement and that better popular culture presupposes a better society.

Finally, there is considerable speculation about the relations between the product of mass culture and real life. The radio, the movies, the newspapers, and the best sellers are, at the same time, models for the way of life of the masses and an expression of their actual way of life.

THESES ON CRITICAL THEORY AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

In this section, I shall present some of the theoretical motivations which underlie contemporary philosophical speculation about mass media. They comprise some of the ideas which the staff of the Institute of Social Research, under the leadership of Max Horkheimer, has tried to apply in a number of writings.²⁰

1. The starting point is not market data. Empirical research, it is argued, is laboring under the false hypothesis that the consumers' choice is the decisive social phenomenon from which one should begin further analysis. We first ask: What are the functions of cultural communication within the total process of a society? Then we ask such specific questions as these: What passes the censorship of the socially powerful agencies? How are things produced under the dicta of formal and informal censorship?
2. We do not conceive such studies to be psychological in the narrow sense. They aim rather at finding out how the objective elements of a social whole are produced and reproduced in the mass media. Thus we would not accept the taste of the masses as a basic category but would insist on finding out how taste is fed to the consumers as a specific outgrowth of the technological, political, and economic conditions and interests of the masters in the sphere of production. We would want to investigate what "likes" or "dislikes" really mean in social terms. While it is true, for example, that people behave as if there were a large free area of selection according to taste and while they tend to vote fanatically for or against a specific presentation of popular culture, the question remains as to how such behavior is compatible with the actual elimination of free choice and the institutionalized repetition characteristic of all media. This is probably the theoretical area in which one would have to examine the replacement of taste—a concept of liberalism—by the quest for information.

3. We would question certain more or less tacit assumptions of empirical research, as, for example, the differentiation into "serious" and "nonserious" written, visual, or auditory communications. We would say that the problem of whether we are faced with serious or nonserious literature is two-dimensional. One would first have to furnish an aesthetic analysis of qualities and then investigate whether the aesthetic qualities are not subject to change under the conditions of mass reproduction. We would challenge the assumption that a higher increase in so-called "serious" programs or products automatically means "progress" in educational and social responsibility, in the understanding of art, and so on. We would say that it is erroneous to assume that one cannot decide what is right and what is wrong in aesthetic matters. A good example of the establishment of aesthetic criteria will be found in the works of Benedetto Croce, who tries to show concretely that works of art have immanent laws which permit decisions about their "validity." It is neither necessary nor sufficient to supplement a study of the reaction of respondents by a study of the intentions of art producers in order to find out the nature and quality of the artistic products, or vice versa.
4. We are disturbed by the acceptance at face value of such concepts as "standardization." We want to know what standardization means in industry, in behavior patterns, and in popular culture. We think that the specifically psychological and anthropological character of popular culture is a key to the interpretation of the function of standardization in modern man.
5. In connection with the latter point, we are particularly interested in the phenomenon of psychological regression. We wish to know whether the consumption of popular culture really presupposes a human being with preadult traits or whether modern man has a split personality: half mutilated child and half standardized adult. We want to know the mechanisms of interdependence between the pressures of professional life and the freedom from intellectual and aesthetic tension in which popular culture seems to indulge.
6. As for the problem of the stimulus and its nature, here the connection with European philosophical heritage is particularly noticeable. Our thinking has its roots in the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) as it was established philosophically and historically by Dilthey and sociologically by Simmel. We are inclined to think that empirical research conceives the stimulus to be as devoid of content as a color stimulus in a psychological laboratory. We hold that the stimulus in popular culture is itself a historical phenomenon and that the relation between stimulus and response is preformed and prestructured by

the historical and social fate of the stimulus as well as of the respondent.

NOTES

1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Knopf, 1945), p. 4.
2. E. J. Trechmann, trans., *The Essays of Montaigne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), II, p. 291ff.
3. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London and New York: Everyman's Library, 1931), p. 44.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42.
5. Coulton Waugh, *The Comics* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), p. 354.
6. James T. Farrell, *The League of Frightened Philistines* (New York: Vanguard Press, n.d.), pp. 176-77.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, in *Complete Works*, II (London, 1910), pp. 265-66.
8. Barbara Deming, "The Artlessness of Walt Disney," *Partisan Review* (spring 1945): 226.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human All-Too-Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, in *Complete Works*, VII, p. 227.
10. For a comprehensive theory on myth and art see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1947), *passim*.
11. De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 264.
12. Joseph Goerres, *Rheinischer Merker*, July 1 and 3, 1814.
13. Helen MacGill Hughes, Introduction to *News and the Human Interest Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), pp. xii-xiii.
14. *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), pp. 659-69.
15. Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Adjustment during Army Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 8.
16. J. P. Mayer, *Sociology of Film* (London: Faber & Faber, 1945), p. 273.
17. *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, I (New York and London: McGraw-Hill, 1933), p. 215.
18. Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier*, jacket of vols. I and II.
19. Introduction to *Made for Millions: A Critical Study of the New Media of Information and Entertainment* (London: Contact Publishers, 1947), p. xvii.
20. For example, Max Horkheimer, "Art and Mass Culture," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX (1941); T. W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX; Leo Lowenthal, "Biographies in Popular Magazines," *Radio Research, 1942-43*, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (New York, 1944).