

Their communitarian ideals may have been fantasies. Their insurrectionary conspiracies may have been foolhardy. But they lived through these times of acute social disturbance, and we did not. Their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experience; and, if they were casualties of history, they remain, condemned in their own lives, as casualties.

Our only criterion of judgement should not be whether or not a man's actions are justified in the light of subsequent evolution. After all, we are not at the end of social evolution ourselves. In some of the lost causes of the people of the Industrial Revolution we may discover insights into social evils which we have yet to cure. Moreover, the greater part of the world today is still undergoing problems of industrialization, and of the formation of democratic institutions, analogous in many ways to our own experience during the Industrial Revolution. Causes which were lost in England might, in Asia or Africa, yet be won.

Finally, a note of apology to Scottish and Welsh readers. I have neglected these histories, not out of chauvinism, but out of respect. It is because class is a cultural as much as an economic formation that I have been cautious as to generalizing beyond English experience. (I have considered the Irish, not in Ireland, but as immigrants to England.) The Scottish record, in particular, is quite as dramatic, and as tormented, as our own. The Scottish Jacobin agitation was more intense and more heroic. But the Scottish story is significantly different. Calvinism was not the same thing as Methodism, although it is difficult to say which, in the early nineteenth century, was worse. We had no peasantry in England comparable to the Highland migrants. And the popular culture was very different. It is possible, at least until the 1820s, to regard the English and Scottish experiences as distinct, since trade union and political links were impermanent and immature.

### Notes

1. An example of this approach, covering the period of this book, is to be found in the work of a colleague of Professor Talcott Parsons: N.J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959).
2. R. Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959), pp. 148–9.

## THE YOUNG AUDIENCE

*Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel*

We have no delinquent generation of young people; we have a most selfish generation of young people. We have a materialistic generation of young people. We have a greedy generation of young people; having been given so much on a plate they expect the lot for the taking.

(*Teachers' World* editorial, 8 December 1961)

Go for the youngsters, go for as much sex as you can, go for as much violence as you can – and we are going to succeed.

(Mr J. Goodlatte, Managing Director of ABC: reported in the *Daily Cinema*, April 1963)

The main emphasis in this book is on the content and forms of mass communication and the popular arts, rather than the sociology of audiences. But when we come to deal with 'teenage' entertainments and culture, the distinction between media and audience is difficult to maintain. For one thing, the postwar spurt in the growth of the media and the change in adolescent attitudes have gone hand in hand – apparently two aspects of the same social trend. Secondly, we are dealing with a whole culture from one specialized point of view: in our study particular weight is given to the nature and quality of popular entertainment for young people, whereas a full account of the culture would place more emphasis on other aspects of life – such as work, politics, the relation to the family, social and moral beliefs, and so on. Thirdly, we are dealing with the complex interaction between the attitudes of the young and what is provided for their consumption by the world of commercial entertainments. The picture of young people as innocents exploited by the sharp merchants of Denmark Street has some truth in it, but is over-simplified. We have a situation in some ways more similar to that of television, where the use intended by the provider and the use actually made by the audience of the particular style never wholly coincide, and frequently conflict. This conflict is particularly marked in the field of teenage entertainments, though it is to some extent common to the whole area of mass entertainment in a commercial setting. Our main purpose here is to show how these two aspects of the culture interact, and then to attempt

an evaluation of the quality of the culture itself. Thus, in looking at the field of pop music, we shall have to consider the boom in teenage music, but also the role of the performers, their social biographies, the quality of their popular appeal, the music industry which promotes them to stardom, the publications, depending on the teenage reader, which support them, and the attitudes and feelings which are caught up and transposed by the beat of the music, the words of the lyrics and the vocal texture of the performers.

[...]

For many young people, Britain in the fifties and sixties has been a society in transition, a society throwing out a number of confusing signals. Teenage culture is, in part, an authentic response to this situation, an area of common symbols and meanings, shared in part or in whole by a generation, in which they can work out or work through not only the natural tensions of adolescence, but the special tensions of being an adolescent in our kind of society.

[...]

Of course, there is always a gap between the generations and it is difficult to judge whether the gap is now wider than it has been in the past. The conflict between generations is really one form of the maturing process in adolescence, and should trouble us only when it is so wide that the maturing process itself is disrupted. But it does seem likely that when we have, on the one hand, parents occupied with making the adjustment to a new tempo of life, and, on the other, a young generation which is itself the product of those changes to which adults are adjusting, the gap in social experience and feeling between the generations can become dangerously wide. Parents are always one generation behind their children: today they seem to be two generations behind. Naturally, there are many young people who don't experience these tensions at all, and one must be constantly aware of how varied the pattern is. But there is something like a majority feeling, even if the trends are really set by a small minority, and in the age of the mass media these tensions communicate themselves much more rapidly from place to place, group to group. One of the special features of this is the role of the media in speeding up the fashion-cycle among the young.

This helps to isolate teenagers as a distinct grouping from the rest of society. Paul Goodman suggests that youth is the only subculture which behaves as if it were a class. And this isolation is often stressed and validated by the media themselves. Some teenagers are genuinely 'misunderstood': Dr Winnicott has suggested that at this stage of adolescence they don't really want to be understood. But many more learn to feel misunderstood because they are told so often that they are. One could cite a host of articles, features and reports which, without trying to probe to the heart of the problem, loosely glamorize this feeling of group isolation. As an example of the trend in journalism, one selects almost at random an early edition of the magazine *Today*, still during this period in search of a new audience and format (12 March 1962; *Today* used to be *John Bull*).

A rather jazzed-up 'Teenage Report to the Nation' ends with a familiar warning to adult squares: 'We're interesting people when you get to know us. Only you never will.' Earlier in the same article, in the section on teenage slang, we find the same emphasis: 'I'm giving all this knowledge away, but it will do you no good.' (Incidentally, judging from the jiving couple on the cover, this whole issue of *Today* was angled at the younger generation, but the list of contents provides a very strange glimpse of the composite editorial image of its audience: Today's Post - 'Anybody Want a Dream Home?'; How to Play the Stock Market - 'Hitch your wagon to the big-money boys, the takeover bid specialists, who know where the profits are to be found'; 'The Snobs Who Come to My Parties' - by the Duke of Bedford; the Teenage Report; a feature entitled 'Look at the Accidents Pedestrians Cause'; 'Of Course I Believe in Luck' - by Gilbert Harding; a colour spread on the film *Can-Can*; 'When the Killer Strikes . . .'; and a story by Nevil Shute entitled 'Departure into Danger'. James Bond was promised for the following issue.)

The isolation of the subculture also becomes a major emphasis in the songs, lyrics, interviews with pop stars, teenage films, comics and stories. The culture provided by the commercial entertainment market therefore plays a crucial role. It mirrors attitudes and sentiments which are already there, and at the same time provides an expressive field and a set of symbols through which these attitudes can be projected. But it also gives those attitudes a certain stress and shape, particularizing a background of feelings by the choice of a certain style of dress, a particular 'look', by the way a typical emotion is rendered in a song or depicted in a drawing or photograph.

Teenage entertainments, therefore, play a cultural and educative role which commercial providers seem little aware of. Their symbols and fantasies have a strong hold upon the emotional commitment of the young at this stage in their development, and operate more powerfully in a situation where young people are tending to learn less from established institutions, such as the family, the school, the church and the immediate adult community, and more from one another. They rely more on themselves and their own culture, and they are picking up signals all the time, especially from the generation just ahead.

Teenage culture is a contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured: it is an area of self-expression for the young and a lush grazing pasture for the commercial providers. One might use the cult figure of the pop singer as an illustration. He is usually a teenager, springing from the familiar adolescent world, and sharing a whole set of common feelings with his audience. But once he is successful, he is transformed into a commercial entertainer by the pop-music business. Yet in style, presentation and the material he performs, he must maintain his close involvement with the teenage world, or he will lose his popularity. The record companies see him as a means of marketing their products - he is a living, animated, commercial image. The audience will buy his records if they like his performances, and thus satisfy the provider's need to keep sales high: but they will also regard the pop singer as a kind of model, an idealized image of success, a glamorized version of themselves.

[...]

This apparent self-sufficiency in teenage culture is not simply a matter of keeping adult experience at arm's length; it is also a by-product of the limited subject matter and emotions dealt with in commercial entertainments. A study of the lyrics of teenage songs and the situations dramatized in them shows the recurrence of certain set patterns. These all deal with romantic love and sexual feeling. The emotion is intensely depicted, but the set-ups recur with monotonous regularity and the rendered style stereotypes the emotion. They deal exclusively with falling in love, falling out of love, longing for the fulfilment of love, the magic of love fulfilled. Of course, this has been the typical subject matter of popular song throughout the ages. But one has then to compare the actual quality of the statement in pop music with, say, the folk song or the blues or even the pointed Johnny Mercer lyric of the twenties to appreciate the particular flavour, the generalized loneliness and yearning – a yearning of 'nobody in particular for anyone-at-all', as Philip Oakes one wrote.

Johnny An-gel

He doesn't even know I exist

. . . I pray someday he'll love me

And together we will see

How lovely Heaven will be.

These songs, and the romantic stories with which they have so much in common, portray what Francis Newton calls 'the condition, the anxieties, the bragging and uncertainty of school-age love and increasingly school-age sex'. They reflect adolescent difficulties in dealing with a tangle of emotional and sexual problems. They invoke the need to experience life directly and intensely. They express the drive for security in an uncertain and changeable emotional world. The fact that they are produced for a commercial market means that the songs and settings lack a certain authenticity. Yet they also dramatize authentic feelings. They express vividly the adolescent emotional dilemma. And since they are often written on behalf of the adult providers of the entertainment world by teenage stars and songwriters, who share the cultural ethos of their audiences, there is a good deal of interaction and feedback going on all the time.

These emotions, symbols and situations drawn off from the provided teenage culture contain elements both of emotional realism and of fantasy fulfilment. There is a strong impulse at this age to identify with these collective representations and to use them as guiding fictions. Such symbolic fictions are the folklore by means of which the teenager, in part, shapes and composes his mental picture of the world.

[ . . . ]

Because of its high emotional content, teenage culture is essentially non-verbal. It is more naturally expressed in music, in dancing, in dress, in certain habits of walking and standing, in certain facial expressions and 'looks' or in idiomatic slang. Though there is much to be learned from the lyrics of pop songs, there is more in the *beat* (loud, simple, insistent), the *backing* (strong, guitar-dominated), the *presentation* (larger-than-life, mechanically etherealized), the *inflections* of voice (sometimes the

plenty, plaintive cry, and later the yeah-saying, affirmative shouting) or the intonations (at one stage mid-Atlantic in speech and pronunciation, but more recently obviously northern and provincial). One can trace a whole line of development in popular music by listening to intonations – Louis Armstrong's gravelly rasp on the last line of 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Baby' becomes Elvis Presley's breathy, nasal invocation, 'Bab-eh' is then anglicized into Adam Faith's 'Boi-by', with a marked key twist (in 'What Do You Want If You Don't Want Money?') and provincial-sounding groups like The Beatles.

Certain attitudes seem not only to recur with emphasis in the provided culture, but have found some specially appropriate physical image or presence among teenagers themselves. This teenage 'look' can be partly attributed to the designers of mass-produced fashions and off-the-peg clothes and to the cosmetic advice syndicated in girls' and women's magazines. C & A's and Marks and Spencer's, by marketing fashionable styles at reasonable prices, have played a significant role here. But these styles have a deeper social basis. The very preoccupation with the image of the self is important and pleasing, though often taken to extremes. Dress has become, for the teenager, a kind of minor popular art, and is used to express certain contemporary attitudes. There is, for example, a strong current of social nonconformity and rebelliousness among teenagers. At an early stage these antisocial feelings were quite active – the rejection of authority in all its forms, and a hostility towards adult institutions and conventional moral and social customs. During this period, adult commentators often misread this generalized nonconformism as a type of juvenile delinquency, though it had little to do with organized crime and violence. The 'Teddy Boy' style, fashionable some years ago, with its tumbling waterfall hairstyle, fetishistic clothes, long jackets, velvet collars, thick-soled shoes, and the accoutrements which went along with them – string ties with silver medallions, lengthy key-chains, studded ornamental belts – was a perfect physical expression of this spirit. Contrary to expectations, this style did not disappear, but persisted in the dress of motorcycle addicts and 'ton-up' kids, and reappeared with the 'rockers'. A variant of this nonconformity could be found among 'ravers' or beatniks, with the trend to long hair, heavy sweaters, drainpiped jeans and boots or black stockings and high heels. The Teddy Boy look, an historical throwback, with its recall of Edwardian times, matched exactly the primitivism of the attitudes it expressed.

[ . . . ]

In what terms is it possible to establish even rough standards of judgement about this kind of music? There are many forces at work which inhibit any judgement whatsoever: pop music is regarded as the exclusive property of the teenager, admission to outsiders reserved. In these terms, disqualification is by age limit. But, of course, this is nonsense. Like any other popular commercial music, teenage pop is light entertainment music, intended for dancing, singing, leisure and enjoyment. It differs in character, but not in *kind*, from other sorts of popular music which have provided a base for commercial entertainment since the advent of jazz, and before. If we are unable to comment on its quality and to make meaningful distinctions, it is largely because we

lack a vocabulary of criticism for dealing with the lighter and more transient qualities which are part of a culture of leisure. We need that vocabulary very much indeed now, since this is the area in which the new media are at play.

On the other hand, there are counter-forces at work which dismiss *all* pop music simply because of its teenage connections and its cult qualities. This reaction is just as dangerous since it is based upon prejudice. It springs in part from the inability of adults to establish their own points of reference in relation to popular culture – even though, lying behind the rejection of Elvis Presley, there is often a secret addiction to Gracie Fields or Vera Lynn or the Charleston or Al Jolson or Nelson Eddy. (One needs to listen carefully to the older Tin Pan Alley tunes which survive in the repertoire of any pub sing-song to detect the connections.) There must also remain the suspicion that pop music provides a sitting target for those who have, for some unaccountable reason, to work off social envy or aggression against the younger generation. From this point of view, contemporary pops could not be better designed, since they are basically loud, raucous, always played at full volume, an obvious affront to good taste. They are frankly sensual in appeal, with persistent themes of youth, love and sex (but then, look again at the lyrics in Reeves's *Idiom of the People*): and these themes are given a physical image in the pop singer himself, whose behaviour on and off stage is a challenge to British modesty and reserve. Worst of all, the music itself is an affirmation of a spirit of adolescent rebelliousness and independence, and therefore, it is supposed, symbolizes some sort of deep undermining of adult authority and tastes.

Pop music may well be all of these things, but that does not help us much at the end of the day. For it is more difficult to judge, keeping one's respect both for the lively qualities embodied and the standards of light entertainment generally, the quality of a music which is so entwined with the cult of its own presentation, so mixed in with the mystic rites of the pop singer and his mythology and so shot through with commercialism. It might be said, then, that the pops cannot be judged at all – but have rather to be seen as part of a whole subculture, and handled as one would the chants and ceremonies of a primitive tribe. Are these standards anthropological?

This method, too, has its pitfalls. It invites a slack relativism, whereby pop music of any kind is excused because it plays a functional role in the teenage world. Functional it is – but the relationship between what is authentically part of teenage culture and what is provided for that culture by an adult and organized industry is not a simple one. If we add the evidence of the first part of this chapter, which deals with authentic features of the culture, to the second part, which describes the organization of the industry, we see how necessary it is to view this phenomenon both from within and without teenage culture itself. And this consideration brings us back to one of the basic problems in popular culture – does the audience get what it likes (in which case, are those likes enough?) and needs (in which case, are the needs healthy ones?), or is it getting to like what it is given (in which case, perhaps tastes can be extended)? Nowhere in this whole field is it so true that the real answer lies in an understanding of how these two factors interact in contemporary popular culture.

[...]

Throughout we have constantly made comparisons between pop music and jazz. This is because, though there are many individual pop songs worth listening to, in general jazz seems an infinitely richer kind of music, both aesthetically and emotionally. The comparison this way seems much more rewarding than the more typical confrontation which is so frequently made between pop music and classical music. The reference to jazz helps us to make comparisons with another entertainment music, which nevertheless has legitimate uses and discernible standards. The point behind such comparisons ought not to be simply to wean teenagers away from the juke-box heroes, but to alert them to the severe limitations and the ephemeral quality of music which is so formula-dominated and so directly attuned to the standards set by the commercial market. It is a genuine widening of sensibility and emotional range which we should be working for – an extension of tastes which might lead to an extension of pleasure. The worst thing which we would say of pop music is not that it is vulgar, or morally wicked, but, more simply, that much of it is not very good.