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POPULAR CULTURE

Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas,* London, Methuen, 1985; 176 pp; £11.95 and £4.95

Iain Chambers, *Popular Culture: the urban experience,* London, Methuen, 1986; 244 pp; £i3-95 and £5.95

Colin MacCabe (ed.), *High Theory/Low Culture: analysing popular television and film,* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1986; 171 pp; £6.50.

Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacott (eds), *Popular Culture and Social Relations,* Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1986; 243 pp; £7-95-

David Punter (ed.), *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies,* London, Longman, 1986; 400 pp; £7.95.

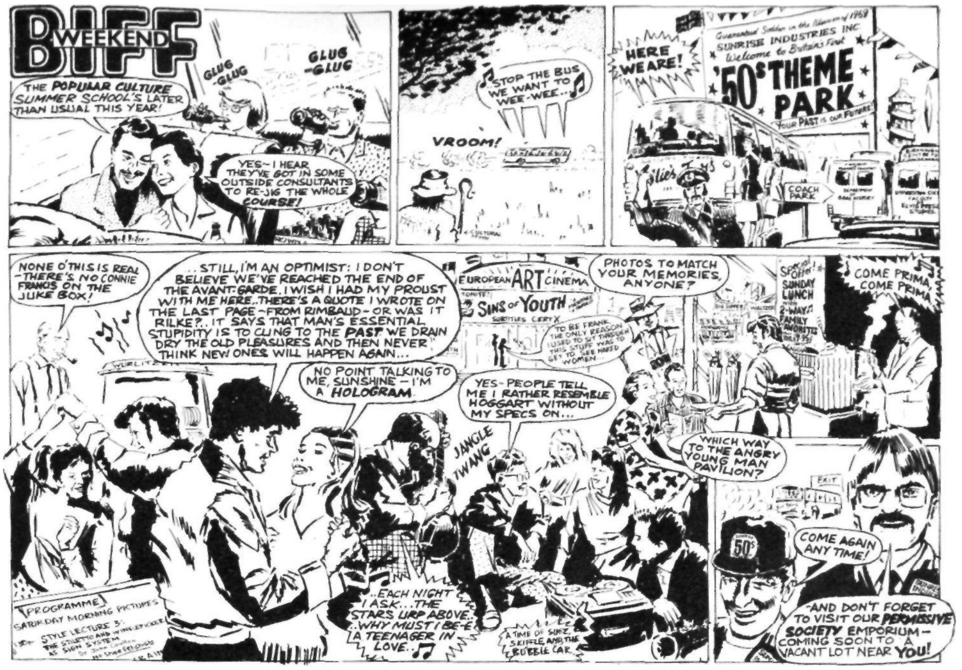
To be involved in film is also to be involved, willy nilly, in questions to do with popular culture. These questions have to be faced because film is a popular medium. Economically, films have always had to attract a large public; sociologically, this public has been drawn in large measure from the popular classes; artistically, cinema has drawn massively from popular traditions. Even people whose concern is non-popular film have to face the problem of how to be viable if you are not in a position to attract the popular audience. But dealing with questions of popularity in this sense does not necessarily entail an engagement with a concept of popular culture as such, and for someone involved, as I am, mainly in things to do with cinema (and, to a lesser extent, television) it can come almost as a shock to see familiar things - films or programmes - encased in the popular culture rubric.

The five books under review here all address themselves self-consciously to questions relating to the popularity of cultural forms, generally under the heading of popular culture. Ien Ang, in writing about the television serial *Dallas*, has the initial problem of defending both the format (the serial) and the mode (melodrama) from the contempt of high-culturists with their traditional preferences for fully achieved works of art in a classical and realist mode. (She occasionally refers to this high-cultural and anti-melodrama tradition as literary, which suggests that she hasn't been reading Balzac or Dickens lately, or if she has, that she has read them with spectacles provided by Lukacs or Leavis, but this is a minor quibble with an otherwise very sophisticated book.) Iain Chambers is concerned with modern popular culture as an overall phenomenon, embracing popular art forms on the one hand and aspects of popular (particularly youth) life-styles on the other. He sees this popular culture as a product and expression of industrialism and the modern city, which have created the technology, the public and the imagery for cultural forms which denizens of more primitive cultures can only regard with wonderment.

The other three books, being anthologies, do not present unitary positions, but in each case the editors attempt explanations of what the book sets out to do and what concept of culture is implied by the title. Colin MacCabe even contributes an introductory essay to his collection under the challenging title 'Defining popular culture'. This essay contains some tantalizingly interesting remarks but as far as defining popular culture in more than a dictionary sense is concerned, it does little more than paraphrase (inaccurately) an article of a few years back by Tony Bennett. It is left to John Caughie, in a postscript entitled 'Popular culture: notes and revisions', to do a proper editor's job in trying to make sense of the field. Meanwhile Tony Bennett, introducing the collection of which he is a co-editor, produces a substantial revision of his earlier position, but still very much within the same framework - a nominally Gramscian one. For his part, David Punter seems very shy of the word popular and extremely inclusive in his notion of culture; the framework in which he is operating is different from the other books and is also alarmingly elastic (a point to which I shall want to return).

The positions put forward not just in these books but in other recent and recentish writings seem to me to reflect a current conventional wisdom, in which the definition of popular culture centres around an image of a group of art forms and leisure activities which have an important presence in the life of ordinary people but are not accepted as part of the world of culture proper. In dealing with contemporary culture the art forms tend to be rock music, television, Hollywood movies, while the leisure activities could include anything from holiday camps to post-punk fashions; but if one goes further back in time, the concept of popular culture proves to be more expansive, taking in wider aspects of popular consciousness and experience. Definitions of this type suppose the prior existence of some other culture which is not popular but which, mysteriously, is real culture, or just is culture. This other culture is at the heart of the school and university curriculum, from nursery to PhD; it is featured in serious newspapers and intellectual magazines; and it is the object of massive private and state patronage. Polemically this culture is often referred to as high or elite in order to deflate its pretensions to universality and contrast it with the pullulating world of popular culture below. Popular culture is not in the curriculum; it is not in the posh papers; it is not supported by rich private patrons or by the state.

In the last twenty-five years or so the cultural situation in Britain has changed radically and with this has come the need, widely felt, to change the conventional definitions to meet the new situation. It is not that the objects grouped under the heading of popular culture have ceased to exist, ceased to be cultural, or ceased to be popular - far from it. Rather, what has happened is that popular cultural forms have moved so far towards centre stage in British cultural life that the separate existence of a distinctive popular culture in an oppositional relation to high culture is now in question. The main agent of change has been television, which now offers the British public a homogenized culture for all to share; but change has been abetted by a chorus of democratic intellectuals who have attacked the elitism of official culture and have fought for the recognition of popular forms as a legitimate part of national cultural life. Popular culture is


BIFF WEEKEND
THE POPULAR CULTURE SUMMER SCHOOL'S LATER THAN USUAL THIS YEAR!
GLUG -GLUG
GLUG -GLUG
YES - I HEAR THEY'VE GOT IN SOME OUTSIDE CONSULTANTS TO RE-JIG THE WHOLE COURSE!
STOP THE BUS WE WANT TO WEE-WEE...
VROOM!
HERE WE ARE!
Guaranteed Sodden in the Illusion of 1958
SUNRISE INDUSTRIES INC
Welcome to Britain's First
'50s THEME PARK
YOUR PAST IS OUR FUTURE!
COACH PARK
NONE O'THIS IS REAL - THERE'S NO CONNIE FRANCIS ON THE JUKE BOX!
... STILL, I'M AN OPTIMIST: I DON'T BELIEVE WE'VE REACHED THE END OF THE AVANT-GARDE. I WISH I HAD MY PROUST WITH ME HERE.. THERE'S A QUOTE I WROTE ON THE LAST PAGE - FROM RIMBAUD - OR WAS IT RILKE?.. IT SAYS THAT MAN'S ESSENTIAL STUPIDITY IS TO CLING TO THE PAST WE DRAIN DRY THE OLD PLEASURES AND THEN NEVER THINK NEW ONES WILL HAPPEN AGAIN...
EUROPEAN ART CINEMA
SINS OF YOUTH
SUBTITLES CERT X
TO BE FRANK THE ONLY REASON I USED TO SIT THROUGH THIS STUFF WAS TO GET TO SEE NAKED WOMEN...
PHOTOS TO MATCH YOUR MEMORIES, ANYONE?
Special Offer! SUNDAY LUNCH WITH 2-WAY FAMILY FAVORITES
COME PRIMA, COME PRIMA
WURLITZER
NO POINT TALKING TO ME, SUNSHINE - I'M A HOLOGRAM.
YES - PEOPLE TELL ME I RATHER RESEMBLE HOGGART WITHOUT MY SPECS ON...
JANGLE TWANG
WHICH WAY TO THE ANGRY YOUNG MAN PAVILION?
EXIT
50s
COME AGAIN ANY TIME!
PROGRAMME SATURDAY MORNING PICTURES
STYLE LECTURE 3: THE STILETTO AND WINKLEPICKER AS SIGN SYSTEM
..EACH NIGHT I ASK... THE STARS UP ABOVE.. ..WHY MUST I BE-E A TEENAGER IN LOVE..
A TIME OF SUEZ, SKIFFLE AND THE BUBBLE CAR
-AND DON'T FORGET TO VISIT OUR PERMISSIVE SOCIETY EMPORIUM - COMING SOON TO A VACANT LOT NEAR YOU!

now finding its way into the curriculum, at all levels; it has successfully infiltrated the posh papers; it is even becoming the object of cautious official patronage.

The British situation is now in many respects similar to that of the United States - the main difference being that in the US the continuum between popular and high culture is broader, more longstanding, and has developed in a more diffuse and (to use a favourite expression of Gramsci's) 'molecular' way. American popular music, genre fiction, movies and TV shows have throughout the twentieth century become a more or less naturalized part of popular culture in Britain. But until recently they have retained a quasi-exotic aspect, visibly different from (and competing with) native traditions whether high or low. The past two decades have seen the erosion of many formerly impassable barriers so that there are now quite fluid frontiers between popular cultural forms (British or American) and traditional high culture. This is in contrast to European countries where American movies and American (or Brito-American) music are still equally popular but where high culture and traditional folk culture have stood their ground more successfully. It is striking that in France or Italy, for example, the popular movie has long been accepted as a legitimate part of (high) culture, but rock music is still somehow exotic and locked in conflict with native traditions of popular song;

The theorization of popular culture which underlies most writing on the subject since the 1960s emerged in response to a situation which seemed without precedent but in which certain constants were presumed to operate. What was new was the insistence of popular culture, the sheer quantity of culture-goods on offer in the popular arena and their hold on young people in particular. What was thought to be permanent was the class division of society and the reflection of this division in differential cultures. The terms 'popular culture' and 'mass culture', already current, were pressed into further service to designate on the one hand a set of culture-goods and on the other hand the culture (in a broader sense) of the mass of the people. (Popular culture was the good term: mass culture smacked of elitism and was avoided by populists.) Two assumptions managed to insinuate themselves into most orthodox theorizations and were rarely subjected to the deserved level of criticism. One was that the divide that seemed to exist between popular cultural forms and those of high culture was a permanent feature of the modern world. And the other was that this divide could be mapped sociologically and made to correspond to divisions in society at large. Two cultures had to exist, and they had to be the cultures of the dominant and dominated classes respectively.

The combined effect of these assumptions has been a number of confusions and conflations and the obliteration of many significant differences between and within cultures. If they have a theoretical source (or if their theoretical source is what matters), this source must be sought for in the totalizing Marxism which attempted to read every social phenomenon as an effect of economic relations. Against such Marxism it is important to assert the rule of no necessary correspondence. There is no reason to assume a priori that what happens at one level of the social formation has necessary correspondences elsewhere. The structure of economic relations may sometimes be faced with a mirror image at the ideological level and may sometimes directly cause changes at that level. But equally it may not, and when it seems that it does not, it is worth facing the possibility directly, rather than devising Ptolemaic reasons why hidden correspondences should be held to be secretly in operation in order to explain the apparent anomaly.

Gramsci is the Marxist theorist most often invoked in attempts to get round the dilemma of cultures whose correspondence with underlying class forces seems at best mediated, at worst almost invisible. Both the search for mediations and the enlisting of Gramsci in support of them seem to me mistaken endeavours. MacCabe, I think, is right to voice a suspicion of theories of culture in which 'the meanings of texts . . . are always finally anchored in a class struggle which is not to be understood in cultural terms' *(High Theory,* p. 4), and right to suspect Bennett of a kind of nostalgia for such an anchorage. But Bennett has probably misled MacCabe here (not a difficult task) by constructing a 'Gramscian' theory of culture which is an extrapolation from Gramsci's abstract theories and pays relatively little attention to the way Gramsci concretely related questions of art and culture to politics and history.'

British culture in and around the 1960s was in fact not particularly typical of western cultures in general, and certainly not typical enough to be allowed to stand, consciously or unconsciously, as a prototype for analyses of 'popular culture' in general. Two exceptional features are especially worth remarking on. One is the extraordinary degree of stratification in British culture, which followed class stratifications far more closely than in most other countries - though perhaps not quite so closely as is sometimes claimed. There is (or there was until recently, since it appears to be in decline) a particular urban working-class culture in Britain of a type not encountered elsewhere, severed on the one side from any trace of rural folk culture and relatively impervious to middle-class influence on the other. And, secondly, there was the cataclysmic impact of rock 'n' roll in the late 1950s, which coincided with the arrival of commercial television. Rock 'n' roll was far less easily assimilated into the cultural mainstream than previous waves of American popular music, but it could not be ghettoized as jazz had been. Rock 'n' roll broke - definitively, it seemed - the comfortable continuum that stretched from symphonic music via tin-pan alley and dance-band music to the swing-influenced popular song. The idea that rock and country guitar styles were going to provide staple accompaniments to BBC children's programmes in the 1980s or that the leading lights of British rock music would shortly be asked to perform before the Princess of Wales must have seemed a crazy pop-culturist's dream in 1956, but this is what has happened.

I want to argue that the situation in Britain in the 1980s, although new and different in many ways, is also in certain key respects more typical of the general condition of modern cultures than the situation that prevailed in the 1960s. The present situation is one in which it is possible to say that there is one culture (albeit with divisions in it) or several cultures (overlapping and rubbing up against each other) but no longer that there are two cultures, high and popular, divided from each other. If pressed, I would probably opt for the view that there is one (multiply divided) culture and that within this culture the dominant position is occupied by forms traditionally designated as popular. The popular forms which dominate are middle-of-the-road forms, and many of the most vital parts of popular culture are - inevitably - excluded from the new consensus. MoR popular culture rules, but not OK.

Two remarkable facts culled recently from the radio: the most popular piece of music called for by the bereaved at crematoria to accompany the coffin's final plunge is Rod Stewart's 'I am sailing'; and the largest sums paid out to authors under Public Lending Right are to the novelist Catherine Cookson. If I remember correctly, five of her books are in the PLR top ten for 1985-6. (Further evidence of her popular status is offered by the signs on the A19 near Washington, Tyne and Wear, saying: 'You are now entering Catherine Cookson country'; though this is admittedly tame stuff compared with the 'You are now entering Apache country' to be found in Arizona.)

For Rod Stewart to have ousted J. S. Bach in the crematorium top of the pops is gruesome, but not altogether surprising. Like it or not, Rod Stewart is now part of everyone's culture and, though some of us might still prefer a toccata and fugue at our funeral, the appeal of that particular singalong number is fairly obvious. Roland Barthes would have enjoyed it.

The Catherine Cookson phenomenon deserves more commentary and forces a consideration of the way the cultures of different art forms are differently ordered and of the role of economic factors in maintaining this difference. Catherine Cookson is not part of everybody's culture. A profile of her readership would show that she is a regional author, read more by women than men, and read hardly at all by the intellectuals. She is not normally reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement, Books and Bookmen* or *London Review of Books* or even in the *Observer* or *Sunday Times.* Her books are not marketed as blockbuster bestsellers, but there are lots of them, they sell very well and they are very widely borrowed. What this points to is the continuing existence of a novel-reading culture that has only tenuous links with the world of Booker or Pulitzer prizewinners, let alone refined literature. In this respect, the world of books has changed relatively little over the past hundred and more years. It remains a world of subtle and not-so-subtle cultural gradations and subtle and not-so-subtle marketing distinctions (not unlike those that obtain in the pop music market). Since the mid-nineteenth century there has been a mass market for fiction, but it has not been served homogeneously. Publishers have launched different kinds of book into different markets - which doesn't just mean to different groups of people but means to different or the same groups of people in different situations. Thus there has been a public library market, a railway market, an academic market, as well as a women's market, a youth market, a working-class market or whatever. There has also been a variety of genres whose categories overlap with market categories; there have been popular genres not read by the intellectuals or the middle class, popular genres read by the intellectuals, middlebrow fiction read mainly by the middle class, literary novels that were widely read, literary novels read only by a tiny minority. There has also been a powerful machinery for getting books noticed, through advertising or by way of review, and reviews in turn have been divided into ordinary press notices and those in which the top literary honchos hand down their opinions in opinion-forming journals. This machinery has generally been weighted towards the top, so that genre fiction has largely been left to sell itself, or has been marketed within the trade rather than in the public arena.

What is remarkable in the 1980s is that the promotional machinery continues to operate so heavily at the upper end of the market - the market of small-circulation novels which the publishers hope will be turned by a major literary prize such as the Booker or the Whitbread into large-circulation novels. If there has been a change, it is that this machinery is now regularly exposed on television, so that more people now watch the Booker award ceremony on TV than read all the short-listed novels put together. This exposure of the literary world at play serves to create the impression that there still exists a strong literary culture in this country, that there are still powerful pundits who know good from bad and are keeping alive values to which the humble readers of Cookson and Wilbur Smith (another PLR favourite) may not aspire. This is an illusion, though the truth is not far different.

In the last resort, what keeps the world of literature going is the relatively low level of investment necessary to produce a book. Though there are other reasons as well, the principal reason why literary culture in the 1980s seems so closely to resemble that of the 1930s is that changes in technology and in the structure of capital have been far less drastic in literature than elsewhere. Printing and publishing is a technological and capitalist business, which in recent years has undergone major restructuring and has come more and more under the control of big media conglomerates. But the technological changes that mattered and the concentration of capital that mattered all took place in the nineteenth century. Linotype at one end and W. H. Smith at the other helped make popular literature big business a hundred years ago, but neither they nor any subsequent developments were sufficient to squeeze out businesses in the middle. It has remained economically possible to produce books for minority as well as majority readership and therefore keep a central part of traditional culture in place - provided that writers and readers exist to take advantage of this economic condition. 'Good books' are barely profitable and the survival of *belles-lettres* depends on a precarious combination of factors, ranging from the existence of a captive higher-education market to the preparedness of cranky old-fashioned booksellers to tolerate low profit margins. Another round of education cuts, or a change in the tastes of the reading public which made the literary novel unmarketable in large quantities, or even just the death or retirement of a few old booksellers, could be enough to disturb the present equilibrium irreversibly.

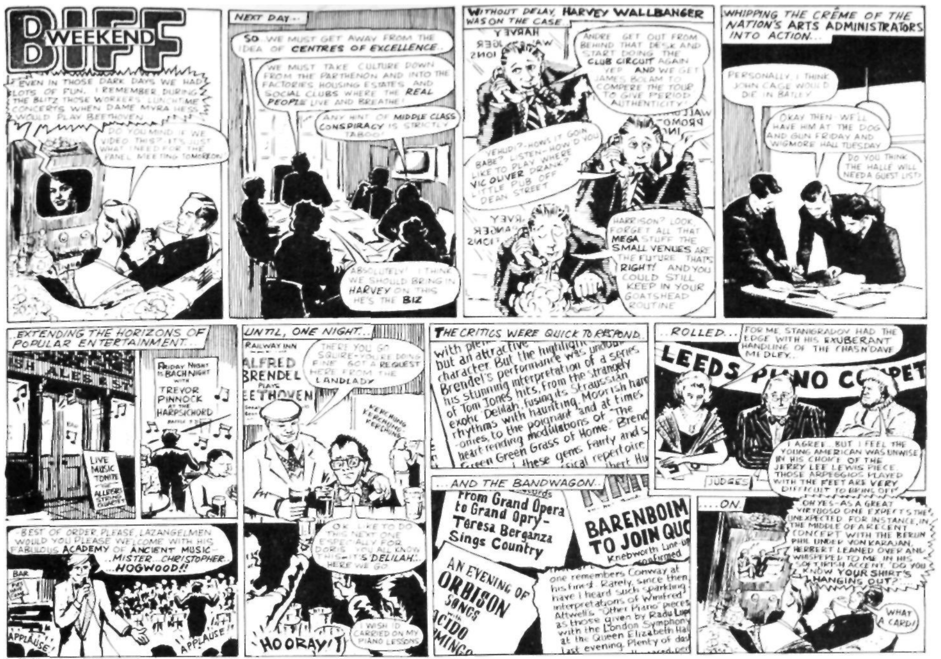
Unlike literature, the world of music, drama and spectacle has been totally overturned in the past hundred years by technology and capital. Cinema and television are, by definition, technological media. Furthermore they are part of monopoly capital - with the state monopoly television systems of western Europe providing only a partial exception to the rule. The role of monopoly capital in the development of the cinema industry is marked from the moment of its birth, when the Lumiere brothers applied to George Eastman for the supply of his patented Kodak film to run in their experimental moving-picture camera. (Chambers, incidentally, confuses (p. 81) the invention of celluloid film, which was American, with the invention of cinema, which, in so far as cinema had a single inventor, is generally accepted to be French.) From then on the history of the cinema is a history of trusts and combines, of monopoly equipment suppliers, monopoly producers and above all monopoly distributors and exhibitors (property owners).

The high point in the process of monopolization was probably reached about 1930, when the introduction of sound at the hands of conglomerates headed by Westinghouse, General Electric and A.T.&T. killed off the last vestiges of live entertainment in picture houses throughout America. The development, in capitalist countries, of minority film cultures separate from that fed by the Hollywood machine has therefore been very difficult indeed. High culture has had either to ignore the cinema entirely (which in Britain it did quite successfully for a long time) or to grapple with the popular film, since the space for non-popular film has always been very restricted.

Television is similarly monpolized. It is a high-tech business (much more so than cinema), equipped by a few monopoly manufacturers (mostly American or Japanese); it is organized into networks with monopoly rights to airwaves; ownership is partly by state monopoly but more often by capitalist conglomerates (the same ones as own most of the press, the cinema and the music business). Programmes can, however, be supplied to the networks by independent producers, and the advent of Channel Four in Britain has created a situation a bit like book publishing (or, more accurately, that aspect of publishing known as packaging) in that small companies can keep in business in the interstices of the system. Although there was a lot of fanfare a couple of years ago about how the new delivery systems such as cable would increase consumer choice and the availability of low-cost programmes for minority audiences, the actual trend of development continues to be towards maximization of the audience for each single programme; at the moment this tends to mean internationalization, with the same megashows being broadcast to as many countries as possible. In theory television technology could be used pluralistically, but its actual capitalist use is to increase the circulation of the same.

The world of music offers a different paradigm. If the two cultures thesis has a surviving application it is here. On the one side stands the classical repertoire of mainly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music which continues to be performed, in a manner unaffected by changes all around, with twentieth-century music occupying a restricted and uncomfortable place on the fringe; and on the other side is the frenetically innovatory world of the pop business. In the world of the classics technology is kept resolutely at bay; music is played without amplification and recorded as discreetly and naturalistically as possible with a minimum of sound enhancement or overdubbing. Fidelity rules, and the day when Itzhak Perlman slips a mike under the bridge of his violin while Vladimir Ashkenazy steps up to the electronic keyboards to accompany him is far in the nightmare future. By contrast modern popular music is deeply technological. Even the most traditional popular music tends to be played in public with amplification, while more modern styles are built around the use of electric instruments and are unthinkable without extensive use of electronics. Recording is a creative process in itself and there is no way that records (even those from live concerts) can be held to be mere reproductions of the music as played. More importantly, the recording business is in the hands of the big combines, so that even music that is produced independently has to pass through the same distribution machinery. But classical music is also to a greater degree than is generally acknowledged under the control of the record companies, even if it remains musically intact, with its own public and its own rituals. Where the classical and pop worlds rejoin each other is at the level of casual consumption, on occasions when some music, any old music, is needed as background sound to keep silence or noise at bay. There is also an enormous amount of middle-of-the-road or middle-of-nowhere music, neglected by critics of all persuasions. Although Simon Frith contributes an interesting article to *High Theory* on film music, much of this middle area remains unexplored (who wants to do musical analyses of James Last?); and yet it is middle music that provides the bread and butter for most classically trained musicians, just as television does for actors.

The uneven development of popular artistic forms, and the related unevenness of audiences and markets, means that attempts to deal with the field as a whole must either acknowledge contradiction or fall into contradiction themselves. Chambers, for example, inveighs against 'tin-pan alley' for serving up dull old middlebrow staff that impeded the explosion of genuinely live forms of popular music, but seemingly fails to note the positive role played by the same tin-pan alley in popular cinema. The Hollywood musical, one of the most self-consciously popular forms of cinema, is pure tin-pan alley, utterly middle-


BIFF WEEKEND
...EVEN IN THOSE DARK DAYS WE HAD LOTS OF FUN. I REMEMBER DURING THE BLITZ THOSE WORKERS' LUNCHTIME CONCERTS WHEN DAME MYRA HESS WOULD PLAY BEETHOVEN...
DO YOU MIND IF WE VIDEO THIS? - IT'S JUST WHAT I NEED FOR THE PANEL MEETING TOMORROW!
NEXT DAY..
SO..WE MUST GET AWAY FROM THE IDEA OF CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE..
WE MUST TAKE CULTURE DOWN FROM THE PARTHENON AND INTO THE FACTORIES HOUSING ESTATES AND SOCIAL CLUBS WHERE THE REAL PEOPLE LIVE AND BREATHE!
ANY HINT OF MIDDLE CLASS CONSPIRACY IS STRICTLY TABOO!
ABSOLUTELY! I THINK WE SHOULD BRING IN HARVEY ON THIS HE'S THE BIZ
WITHOUT DELAY, HARVEY WALLBANGER WAS ON THE CASE..
ANDRE GET OUT FROM BEHIND THAT DESK AND START DOING THE CLUB CIRCUIT AGAIN YEP AND WE GET JAMES BOLAM TO COMPERE THE TOUR TO GIVE PERIOD AUTHENTICITY!
YEHUDI? - HOWS IT GOIN BABE? LISTEN - HOW'D YOU LIKE TO PLAY WHERE VIC OLIVER DRANK? LITTLE PUB OFF DEAN STREET
HARRISON? LOOK, FORGET ALL THAT MEGA STUFF THE SMALL VENUES ARE THE FUTURE THAT'S RIGHT! AND YOU COULD STILL KEEP IN YOUR GOATSHEAD ROUTINE
WHIPPING THE CRÈME OF THE NATION'S ARTS ADMINISTRATORS INTO ACTION...
PERSONALLY, I THINK JOHN CAGE WOULD DIE IN BATLEY
OKAY THEN - WE'LL HAVE HIM AT THE DOG AND GUN FRIDAY AND WIGMORE HALL TUESDAY
DO YOU THINK THE HALLÉ WILL NEED A GUEST LIST?
..EXTENDING THE HORIZONS OF POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT...
ALES
LIVE MUSIC TONITE THE ALLEGRI STRING QUARTET
FRIDAY NIGHT IS BACH NIGHT WITH TREVOR PINNOCK AT THE HARPSICHORD
BEST OF ORDER PLEASE, LAZANGELMEN WOULD YOU PLEASE WELCOME WITH HIS FABULOUS ACADEMY OF ANCIENT MUSIC - ..MISTER...CHRISTOPHER ...HOGWOOD!!
BAR
APPLAUSE!
APPLAUSE!!
UNTIL, ONE NIGHT...
RAILWAY INN
ALFRED BRENDEL PLAYS BEETHOVEN
THERE YOU GO SQUIRE - YOU'RE DOING FINE GOT A REQUEST HERE FROM THE LANDLADY
KERCHUNG KERCHUNG KERCHUNG
OK LIKE TO DO THIS NEXT ONE ESPECIALLY FOR DORIS YOU ALL KNOW THIS - IT'S 'DELILAH'.. HERE WE GO
HOORAY!
I WISH I'D CARRIED ON MY PIANO LESSONS
THE CRITICS WERE QUICK TO RESPOND..
but an attractive character. But the highlight Brendel's performance was undoubt his stunning interpretation of a series of Tom Jones hits, from the strangely exotic 'Delilah', fusing its Straussian rhythms with haunting Moorish harm -onies, to the poignant and at times heart rending modulations of 'The Green Green Grass of Home'. Brend these gems fairly and s sical repertoire
..ROLLED...
FOR ME, STANIGRADOV HAD THE EDGE WITH HIS EXUBERANT HANDLING OF THE CHAS N' DAVE MEDLEY..
LEEDS PIANO COMPET
JUDGES
I AGREE...BUT I FEEL THE YOUNG AMERICAN WAS UNWISE IN HIS CHOICE OF THE JERRY LEE LEWIS PIECE. THOSE ARPEGGIOS PLAYED WITH THE FEET ARE VERY DIFFICULT TO BRING OFF
...AND THE BANDWAGON..
From Grand Opera to Grand Opry - Teresa Berganza Sings Country
BARENBOIM TO JOIN QUO Knebworth Line-up confirmed
AN EVENING OF ORBISON SONGS with PLACIDO DOMINGO
one remembers Conway at his finest. Rarely, since then, have I heard such sparkling interpretations of Winifred Attwell's 'Other Piano' pieces as those given by Radu Lupu with the London Symphony at the Queen Elizabeth Hall last evening. Plenty of dash
....ON.
OH YES - AS A GREAT VIRTUOSO ONE EXPECTS THE UNEXPECTED. FOR INSTANCE, IN THE MIDDLE OF A RECENT CONCERT WITH THE BERLIN PHIL UNDER VON KARAJAN, HERBERT LEANED OVER AND WHISPERED TO ME IN HIS SOFT IRISH ACCENT 'DO YOU KNOW YOUR SHIRT'S HANGING OUT?'....
WHAT A CARD!

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of-the-road, and perilously close to classical music a lot of the time (think of Gershwin and Bernstein). At the same time the genre, as Jane Feuer has shown, is a celebration of popular culture in opposition to the high art tradition.[2]

It seems to me that the term popular culture retains its value when one is talking about the people who make it popular - that is, when one is talking about who the people are who keep a particular cultural form going by being the public for it or by being its producers. But in talking about the products that constitute so-called popular culture the word popular is often a distraction. Two propositions in particular need to be borne in mind when talking about cultural products today, whether popular or not.

i Modern culture is capitalist culture. It is not necessarily capitalist in ideology, but it is affected through and through by the fact that throughout the western world culture-goods have become commodities and the human producers of these goods are in a position of dependency on capitalist organization and technology.

2 Modern culture also takes the form of a single, intertextual field, whose signifying elements are perpetually being recombined and played off against each other. A dramatic example of this would be the recent Carling Black Label ads on British television, which parody the style of Levi's 501 ads and use the same music (Marvin Gaye's version of 'Heard it through the grapevine'), but the popularity of film music on record and the constant adaptation of novels for the screen and the novelization of films and programmes to make books point to a growing interchange of forms.

The idea of capitalist culture is resisted by many of the authors under review, not because it is descriptively false, but because to accept the description is to yield too much to cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt variety. Even Simon Frith, who does use the term capitalist culture, does so in the sense of the cultural experience of living under capitalism, rather than in that of the capitalist control of the means of cultural production. But stressing the capitalist character of modern cultural production is in itself neither optimistic nor pessimistic, nor does it necessarily lead to the particular conclusions drawn by Adorno; it could equally lead to the more positive conclusions drawn by Benjamin and Brecht. In general the Frankfurt position is so parodied as to be unrecognizable. Thus MacCabe, in his paraphrase of Bennett, manages to conflate it with some mish-mash of Ruskin and William Morris in which the new capitalist forms are contrasted with 'an older popular "folk" art in which there is no fundamental division between audience and performer and where meanings are democratically produced' *(High Theory,* p. 3).

Now it may be true that relics still exist of a nostalgia for folk cultures, but the theorists of mass culture were not so naive as to believe that the division between audience and performer was introduced by capitalism (nor did Bennett make such a claim). The point about capitalism is that it turns culture-goods into commodities (which can, if one wishes, then be understood, in a Lukacsian mode, as reification) but above all that, by bringing culture into the circuits of capital, it creates a mechanism for the extraction of surplus value. Art has to become profitable for the owners of capital, interchangeably with other branches of their business. This has different effects in different areas. On the one hand you have an art market auctioning goods with a built-in scarcity value, like Rembrandts, at ever more ludicrous prices; and at the other extreme a constant pressure to cut costs in the mass production of popular records or the replication of popular TV shows. Capital does not control this process, but capitalists struggle to do so as best they can. They do not, as Brecht and others have hypothesized, simply proletarianize artistic labour; of course there are plenty of proletarian jobs in the culture industry, but the most important positions, where irreplaceable talent is needed - directors, leading actors, singers - are held in a sort of partnership with capital, while at the other end there is a ruthless exploitation of the unpaid labour of young people who are waiting for their first break in the business.

The importance of capitalist organization of artistic production is generally recognized by the historians of particular art forms and branches of the culture industry, and *High Theory* contains an excellent contribution from Douglas Gomery on the economics of the film industry during the Depression which deals with such subjects as the introduction of air-conditioning and how exhibitors handled the popcorn franchise. The problem here is, crudely, that popcorn isn't culture and nor is the cost of a Panavision lens or the small print of a recording contract. These things enter into culture only in terms of popular cognizance of them and the role they can be held to play in popular experience. Cultural studies tends necessarily to focus on the appearance of things as part of culture and therefore on the way culture-goods are consumed rather than how they are produced. In so far as it attempts to relate to production it does so globally, in terms of the relations of production prevailing at a given time and underlying the state of culture at that time. This in my view is a weakness, but the alternative is worse.

An example of the dire things that can happen to cultural studies when it is not underpinned by an overall notion of determination is provided by David Punter's *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies.* The title is a bit cheeky, since it recalls the name of the famous Birmingham Centre for the study of the same, and the book even has an article in it by the centre's current director, Richard Johnson. But, title and the odd contribution apart, the book as a whole bears little relation to the pioneering work, radiating outwards from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which created cultural studies as an academic discipline in British polytechnics and universities. What characterized the CCCS work - and that of its most important successors, such as the compilers of the *Popular Culture* course at the Open University - was a concept of culture as a whole and of its place in the social formation, a place determined in the last instance by the relations of production. Remove this central concept and the rationale for cultural studies falls apart. Social life, patterns of thought, artistic forms, institutions - all these things can be regarded as culture from the standpoint of a unifying theory; but without such a theory there is no reason for studying them together. The name of the theory that has hitherto provided the impetus to enable them to be studied together is, of course, Marxism, and up to now it has not yet been superseded.

You don't have to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows, and you don't have to be a Marxist to make use of the useful bits of Marxism. Indeed Marxism and, worse, the sort of sociologism that often serves as a surrogate for it can be a source of confusion. Richard Middleton's article in *Popular Culture and Social Relations* on repetitive structures in popular music is a case in point. The article delivers a significant challenge to Adorno at the level of musical analysis, but what makes the challenge effective is that Middleton actually looks (as Adorno could never bear to do) at the structures present in particular popular musical forms - basically, jazz and rock. In order to do this, however, Middleton has first to liberate himself from a self-imposed obligation to look at various other forms of music which, sociologically, are no doubt popular but are not formally related to the sort of music on which he wants to base his analysis.

Ien Ang's book offers a heartening example of a refusal to succumb to the pieties of the genre. The core of her study is provided by the responses she received to a small-ad she placed in a Dutch women's magazine asking readers what they felt about *Dallas.* Orthodoxy would have demanded to know who the respondents were, by age, sex, race and class; but the respondents did not say who they were, except that most identified themselves as women. Fortunately the author did not allow herself to be deterred and has taken the risk of presenting an argument that is not dependent on sociometric information - though at a pinch it could be faulted for not containing it. What she has to say about the programme and its appeal to audiences could usefully be followed up by research into the responses of audiences belonging to identified social groups (and some fascinating research has in fact been done in Israel on group readings of *Dallas*).[3]

Popular culture awaits a new synthesis. The books under review here are packed with goodies. In addition to things already referred to, I would name: Chambers's sections on music and youth culture; Ang on the 'emotional realism' of *Dallas;* in *Popular Culture and Social Relations,* the essays by Catherine Hall on Jemima Bamford and Peterloo, by David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell on the BBC in wartime, and by Colin Mercer on entertainment; in *High Theory,* the essays by Tania Modleski and Jane Feuer; Bernard Sharratt in *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies.* Most of these eschew high theory (Mercer and Sharratt engage in it idiosyncratically and Feuer mercifully does not dabble in it for long) and in general there seems to be a move away from the theoretical high ground into the empirical flatlands. What seems to be missing is an implicit theory - one that does not have to be spelt out - of how the components of popular culture relate to each other. To me, the most striking absence in the plethora of writing on popular cultural themes is any sense of artistic production - the idea that films are made by film-makers, that music is composed and performed by musicians, and with this the idea that there is a relation between the skills and talents of these musicians and film-makers and the sort of pleasure that audiences get from music and cinema. When that comes in, or rather when it comes back, then the study of popular culture will have become the study of . . . culture.

NOTES

1 On the need for caution in interpreting Gramsci, see my introduction to the *Selections from Cultural Writings* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985).

2 Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982).

3 See Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes, 'Mutual aid in the decoding of *Dallas*', in Phillip Drummond and Richard Paterson (eds), *Television in Transition* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).