Citation

Music and Society-1

'Serious' Music — an 'A-social' Phenomenon?

THIS ARTICLE IS THE FIRST of a series in which authors with different backgrounds and outlooks will examine the complex web of relationships that exists in the modern world between 'music' and 'society'. This series cannot, of course, hope to be comprehensive. It will therefore seek to highlight some of the more interesting areas with a view to instigating further thought and discussion.

Although it is not universally the case, there has been an unmistakable tendency in the modern world to think of 'serious' music (and, consequently, the entire musical process) as an 'a-social' phenomenon. It therefore seems appropriate that the first article in a series which stresses the social nature of music should examine this attitude and seek out some of the reasons for its existence. As a result, it will also be possible to gain some insight into the reasons for the many different types of music that exist in society today (I am thinking here of 'serious' music, 'jazz' and 'rock' and the many other kinds of music to be found within these rather unsatisfactory categories).

Surface reasons for the scant attention given to the sociology of *music* (as opposed to the sociology of musical life) are not hard to find. Few sociologists are competent in music, and those that are find music problematic in terms of existing modes of social and symbolic analysis. Musicologists, on the other hand, repelled by unending waves of pseudo-scientific jargon, have decided, perhaps wisely, that the area should be left well alone. But reasons for the area's neglect go deeper than sociologists' lack of musical knowledge, or musicians' healthy scepticism for social 'science'. Evidence for this assertion is to be found in the undoubted link which exists between the sociology and the aesthetics of music. For if musical style is understood to reflect its 'social background' in some way, and if it is accepted that style has something to do with our aesthetic response, then the question of musical significance must be faced in order to understand fully the relationship between 'music' and 'society'. Conversely, any serious consideration of musical aesthetics inevitably brings one face to face with the necessity of sociological analysis.[1]* The ultimate suggestion, therefore, is that the sociology of music has consistently been avoided as an area of academic enquiry because it contains within itself one of the more intransigent epistemological problems confronting modern scholarship. This problem may best be summarised by asking: how can we know that music has significance?

Insights into this problem and its causes may only be gained by considering areas of thought traditionally foreign to musicology. Some of the ideas in this article might therefore seem strange, difficult to grasp and at times unconventional. They are not, however, put forward with the purpose of confusing the reader, but in a genuine attempt to highlight for future discussion a central but neglected area of the discipline, namely, the theory underlying musical criticism.

The first idea to be put forward is that the knowledge or commonly shared reality of a group or society is *constructed* by its members. This idea is central to the sociology of knowledge, and has been argued with great lucidity elsewhere.[2] All that will be done here, therefore, is to indicate briefly the core of the idea by reference to the role played by words (man's most important symbolic mode) in the construction of social reality.

As any reference to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles* will illustrate, words are created by individual people to cope with the many varied situations in which they find themselves. But once a word has been created in such a situation, it retrospectively colours it. When people look back at events, they do so by means of and through the words created to define them. Furthermore, new words may be used in other situations. Since the words are not specifically created for these other situations, they bring to them meanings which although not necessarily 'irrelevant' or 'wrong' are obviously coloured by previous usage. The reverse is equally true, for new situations modify the meanings fo the already existing words used to denote such situations. To summarise: situations, meanings, words — and indeed all symbols — have a mutually interdependent, but not determinant, relationship crucial to the dynamics of the social process.

Words, of course, are not created merely to denote situations and meanings, but also to communicate those situations and meanings to other people. The world we live in has meaning for us because we

*Notes at end of article.

linguistically — and thus symbolically — mediate the events that take place in it with those other people. Reality — often conceived as an objective fact which cannot be changed by people, only misconstrued — is constructed by people through the mutual agreement by words and other symbols on experiences they undergo. This process is clarified by Walter J. Ong:

> "world-view" is an elusive term, but when we speak of someone's world-view in any sense, we do not simply mean the world impressing itself upon his passive receptors, sensory or intellectual. A person does not receive a world-view, but rather takes or adopts one. A world-view is not a datum, a *donne*, but something the individual himself, and the culture he shares partly constructs; it is the person's way of organising from within himself the data of actuality coming from without and within.[3]

The social process is therefore a symbolic process. That is to say, collective outlooks on the world, and the commonly agreed meanings essential to those outlooks, are created and maintained in and through people's symbolic utterances. Every perception made and every symbol uttered is done so as a contribution to and in the context of the symbolically mediated reality peculiar to any group or society.

The second idea is that the form or structure any particular outlook on the world adopts will be influenced to a very high degree by the media predominant in its construction. It is perhaps easier to understand that the form a reality takes depends to some extent on the way that a society's symbols categorise and denote what we might *imagine* to be a previously undifferentiated world. Many people have the experience of trying to understand, even in closely related European languages, words for which there are no direct equivalents in English. A true understanding of these words involves a change in their outlook on the world, however slight. What is being suggested here, on the other hand, is rather different. That is, that the way people communicate in constructing their reality (whether the face-to-face oral-aural situation of spoken discourse, the visuality of handwriting and typography, or the aural-visual immediacy of electronic forms of communication) affects their outlook on the world at a very deep level. It is not so much what is conveyed that is important, but how it is conveyed. This idea has, of course, received its most 'notorious' formulation at the hands of Marshall McLuhan. It is worth noting, however, that the idea was simultaneously put forward by other writers in more accessible forms.[4]

In view of these first two ideas, it is possible to put forward a third. On the one hand, the outlook of pre-literate man is, by definition, mediated almost totally in an oral-aural and face-to-face situation. On the other, although music is now mediated to a large extent through visual notation, it is still an essentially 'oral-aural' phenomenon. Furthermore, music seems to possess an immediacy and 'power' not totally dissimilar to that experienced in face-to-face situations. Since modern industrial man's outlook is mediated to a very high degree through vision (that is, through the written and above all the printed word), it seems reasonable to speculate that pre-literate man's world-view is inherently more suited to an understanding of music than industrial man's.

To some people, this idea may seem to verge on the ridiculous. Our whole upbringing has led us to believe that modern Western society is the most advanced form of civilisation that has ever existed, and that pre-literate or 'primitive' man lives in a world which is vastly inferior. Social anthropology has, over the last century, thankfully led us away from such an ethnocentric position, and it appears more than likely that pre-literate societies are, in their own way, as 'mature', as developed and as 'complex' as industrial society. This being the case, it does not seem so ridiculous to look at some of the features of pre-literate man's outlook on the world, and see if we can learn anything from them as regards the musical process.

Firstly, however, it needs to be established that the question of musical significance is problematic for Western man. On the surface, this would seem to be so. For although many theories for the significance of music have been put forward, none has met with unqualified agreement. Moreover, while the statement that a representational painting or a piece of writing conveys a certain meaning or significance is likely to go unchallenged (providing, of course, that the statement represents a 'correct' indication of the pertinent content), the statement that a piece of music conveys a certain significance is more likely to meet with discussion — often heated. To put it more abstractly: music, unlike pictures and words, has no referents in the world of objects and ideas.

This problem seems to centre on the one hand round a distinction between form and content, and on the other round a distinction between physical and mental, outer and inner, and (by implication) non-human and human. The problem is well known and may be summarised as follows. Music has no obvious 'content'. Because of this 'lack', it seems unlikely that music refers to anything outside itself. Consequently, the significance of a piece of music must thus be sought in its internal structure. However, a strict interpretation of this position itself becomes problematic, as Leonard B. Meyer indicates:

> The absolutists have contended that the meaning of music lies specifically, and some would assert exclusively, in the musical processes themselves. For them musical meaning is non-designative. But in what sense these processes are meaningful . . . they have been unable to state with either clarity or precision . . .[5]

Susanne Langer has put it this way: the absolutists 'seem to feel that if musical structures should really be found to have significance, to relate to anything beyond themselves, those structures would forthwith cease to be musical.'[6]

Both Langer and Meyer have tried to get round this conundrum by assigning significance in music to 'psychological laws of "rightness" '[7] or 'psychological constants'.[8] Broadly speaking, what they seem to be suggesting is that since all music originates in the human mind, and since all minds are assumed to possess similar psychological characteristics, it is taken that there will be a certain conformity of patterning or structure between all music and all minds. Consequently, all minds are presumed to be suitably predisposed for the 'superimposition' of the particular structure that constitutes a piece of music. Music has meaning, in other words, because that meaning already has potential existence within the human mind.

The approach of both Langer and Meyer remains problematic, however. Briefly, Langer suggests that, unlike the written word, music expresses that which is essentially unutterable. But although her approach is undoubtedly of some insight, it ignores the fact that much analysis of tonal music successfully parallels the aesthetic experience. Meyer, for example, has been able to generalise in a most convincing manner about the way in which tonality works. Yet even he admits that analysis cannot reveal the psychological constants that he believes to be the ultimate source of musical meaning.[9]

There are two logical possibilities here, of course. Either Langer is right, and music genuinely does express that which is *ultimately* unutterable, or both authors are mistaken in their views on the significance of music. On balance, the latter possibility seems more likely. For although both Langer and Meyer assign music some significance or 'content' over and above music's 'mere existence' as form, that significance is restricted to the inner and mental worlds. And since the form and content distinction is closely related to that between inner and outer, and mental and physical (that is, content involves the notion of something *outside* the form of a symbol to which that symbol refers), it would seem that the inability to transcend this latter, inner-outer, distinction would almost necessarily involve an inability truly to transcend that between form and content. Langer appears to be implicitly conscious of this possible deficiency in her theory when she assigns a lower 'rational priority' to music, and thereby adopts a position perilously close to that of the absolutists:

Music is a limited idiom, like an artificial language, only even less successful; *for music at its highest, though clearly a symbolic form, is an unconsummated symbol.* Articulation is its life, but not assertion; expressiveness, not expression. The actual function of meaning, which calls for permanent contents, is not fulfilled; . . .[10]

But it still remains to be firmly established that Langer and Meyer do in fact fail properly to transcend the inner and outer, and mental and physical distinction. It could, for example, be argued that because music refers outside itself to psychological constants, the distinction is no longer problematic. However, as a symbol may only have meaning because it has a content outside itself, so a thought or feeling might only exist because it too has some 'content' located in the outside world. More specifically, there exists an equivalence between the inner-outer distinction as it applies to both symbols and consciousness: a symbol may only refer outside itself to something because a thought (itself having the same external referent) gave that symbol its meaning; conversely, a thought may only exist because it possesses an external referent implanted by a symbol (itself having the same external referent).

Now although there is little doubt that people possess deep-seated desires which are genetically programmed, there is equally little doubt that a high proportion of the way we relate to the world results from symbolic interaction with other people (who, as far as each of us is concerned, exist 'out there' in 'objective reality'). If, therefore, it is maintained that there is no need to transcend the inner-outer distinction as it applies to the mind (because all psychological constants or psychological laws of rightness are genetically programmed, thereby making reference to the outside world unnecessary), then that is something the aesthetician or music theorist needs to argue explicitly. Symptomatically, Langer appears to doubt, as does Meyer, 'that the explanation of musical practice needs to be pushed back this far'.[11] The question of musical significance, in other words, remains problematic.

It is extremely interesting that pre-literate man does not seem to place very much importance on the distinctions around which the discussion of musical aesthetics in the modern world revolves. First of all, the distinction between physical and mental, outer and inner, non-human and human in such societies is weak, as Mary Douglas points out:

In all the cosmologies mentioned so far, the lot of individual humans is thought to be affected by power inhering in themselves or in other humans. The cosmos is turned in, as it were, on man. Its transforming energy is threaded on to the lives of individuals so that nothing happens in the way of storms, sickness, blights or droughts except in virtue of these personal links. So the universe is man-centred in the sense that it must be interpreted by reference to humans.[12]

Concomitantly, little distinction is made between symbol and meaning, or form and content. Words in pre-literate societies 'become icons, they do not represent things, they are themselves things'.[13] J. C. Carothers illustrates this phenomenon by reference to his non-literate son:

Some years ago my little son said: "Is there a word 'pirates', Daddy?" When I replied in the affirmative, he asked "Are there pirates?" I said, "No, not now, there used to be." He asked, "Is there a word 'pirates' *now?*" When I said, "Yes", he replied, "Then there must be pirates now". This conversation, which might have come straight from Parmenides' doctrine of twenty-four centuries earlier, is a reminder that, for a child, a thing exists by virtue of its name; that the spoken or even imagined word must connote something in the outer world.[14]

Whereas we, in industrial society, focus on the 'hard informational content' that can be distilled from a message, and relegate the form or media to a position of neutral insignificance, pre-literate man senses the word as efficacious in *all* its aspects. For him, the word has a power and immediacy we find hard to understand. The following passage from a Papago Indian's autobiography provides one illustration of the phenomenon:

> Many, many songs the men sang but I, a woman, cannot tell you all. I know that they made the enemy blind and dizzy with their singing and that they told the gopher to gnaw their arrows. And I know that they called on our dead warriors who have turned into owls and live in Apache country to come and tell them where the enemy were.[15]

From such accounts David Riesman concludes that:

> We become aware of the emotional force that can be harnessed by the spoken or sung word in such a group — so powerful here that it can shatter the morale of a distant enemy and can bring alive the desert with its small creatures slipping like spies through the bush.[16]

If the parallel being suggested here between the musical process and pre-literate man's outlook on the world has any validity — and there is considerable evidence that it has[17] — what are the consequences for our understanding of the musical process in industrial society? Almost inevitably we should have to start looking for the significance of music within the social processes of its creation. That is, if the power and immediacy of the word in pre-literate societies is derived from the power and immediacy of its social context — and in this respect it should be remembered that in these societies words *cannot* be divorced from the face-to-face (i.e. social) situations in which they occur — then it seems reasonable to conclude that the similar power and immediacy imparted by music owes its existence to a *similar* set of circumstances. Support for this supposition may be derived from the fact that pre-literate man does not evolve an abstract aesthetic for his music, choosing rather to assign it a social significance unquestioningly.[18]

The obvious thing to do would be to follow this line of thought through to its logical conclusions. Unfortunately, there is insufficient space to do that here. Instead, it will be assumed that the intuition is basically correct, and the problem will be approached from the opposite direction. That is, it will be shown how the distancing from social context implicit in any form of literacy has allowed industrial man to think of music (or at least of 'serious' music) as an a-social phenomenon.

When words necessarily occur in the here-and-now (because they cannot be preserved independently of the here-and-now of their use), there is no way in which the people who utter and listen to them cannot at least be intuitively aware of the necessarily social nature of the knowledge they mediate. This assertion is substantiated to a large degree by Mary Douglas's statement above. Everything that affects pre-literate society would seem to be related in one way or another to the activities of its people. The situation in industrial society is very different. Although our knowledge inevitably results from the activities of individual people, we are quite capable of accepting that many occurrences in the 'natural' world happen completely independently of any form of human volition. Our ability to do this rests in no small measure on the possibilities inherent in literacy for permanently storing knowledge, not only apart from the social context of its creation, but apart from consciousness itself. In other words, man and his knowledge become separated or 'distanced' to such an extent that it is possible to think of knowledge as 'independently given', and of reality as 'objective fact'.

The supremacy of this 'independent' and 'objective' knowledge over that 'resulting from social mediation' was symbolically asserted through Plato's expulsion of the poets:

> Plato's banishment of the poets and his doctrine of ideas are two sides of the same coin. In banishing the poets from his *Republic,* Plato was telling his compatriots that it was foolish to imagine that the intellectual needs of life in Greek society could still be met by memorizing Homer. Rather than deal in this verbalisation, so much of a piece with the non-verbal life-world, one needed to ask more truly abstract questions.[19]

Thought and action, mind and body, self and environment were separated to such a degree that a considerable amount of importance was able to be given to the 'cerebrally derived' at the expense of the 'socially experienced':

> In classic Hegelian thesis-antithesis fashion Plato's ideas, the "really real" *were polarized at the maximum distance from the old oral-aural human life-world.* Spoken words are events engaged in time and indeed in the present. Plato's ideas were the polar opposite: *not events at all but motionless "objective" existence, impersonal and out of time.*[20]

All forms of knowledge thus tend to be isolated from the social context of their creation and come to be grounded in a scheme of absolutes:

> In oral culture words — and especially words like "God", "Justice", "Soul", "Good", may hardly be conceived of as separate entities, divorced both from the rest of the sentence and its social context. But once given the physical reality of writing, they take on a life of their own; and much Greek thought was concerned with attempting to explain their meanings satisfactorily, and to relate these meanings to some ultimate principle of rational order in the universe, to the *logos*.[21]

That this tendency has pervaded our understanding of music is undeniable, as the following passage from Zuckerkandl illustrates:

> It is not that the mind of the creative artist expresses itself in tones, words, colours, and forms as its medium; on the contrary, *tone, word, colour, form express themselves through the medium of the creative mind*. The finer that medium the better tone, word, colour, form can express themselves. The greater the genius, the less it speaks *itself*, the more it lends its voice to the tones, the words, the colours, the forms. In this sense, then, music *does* write itself — neither more nor less, by the way, than physics does. The law of falling bodies is no invention of the genius of Galileo. The work of the genius consists in bringing the mind, through years of practice, so into harmony with things, that things can express their laws through him.[22]

There can be no clearer expression than this of an a-social view of music, in which music is taken to have absolute and objective internal laws beyond the vagaries of human thought and creativity. But the theories of Langer and Meyer, although stressing the psychological aspect of the musical process, are no less absolute and objective in their conception. For the psychology of Langer's and Meyer's theories has nothing to do with the symbolic interaction of socially constructed reality. Thus, although social and political forces may be relevant to musical style, they cannot, for Meyer, become the focus of attention:

> Yet the explanations furnished by reference to political, social and cultural history tell only part of the story. For stylistic changes and developments are continually taking place which appear to be largely independent of such extramusical events. Although an important interaction takes place between the political, social, and intellectual forces at work in a given epoch, on the one hand, and stylistic developments, on the other, there is also a strong tendency for a style to develop in its own way. If this is the case, then the causes of these changes must be looked for in the nature of aesthetic experience, since for composer and listener style is simply the vehicle for such an experience.[23]

Because music has its own internal and objective laws independent of the social process, there is no need for the musicologist to go beyond the 'purely musical' in order to understand the musical process.

This 'intellectual' cause of an implicitly a-social view of music has an analogue in the social organisation of industrial society. It is useful, in this context, to refer to Berger and Luckmann's discussion of ideal-typical extremes as regards the scope and modes of institutionalisation in different societies. On the one hand:

> It is possible to conceive of a society in which institutionalisation is total. In such a society, *all* problems are common, *all* solutions to these problems are socially objectivated and *all* social actions are institutionalized. The institutional order embraces the totality of social life, which resembles the continuous performance of a complex, highly stylized liturgy. There is no role-specific knowledge, or nearly none, since all roles are performed within situations of equal relevance to all actors.[24]

On the other hand:

> The opposite extreme would be a society in which there is only *one* common problem, and institutionalization occurs *only* with respect to actions concerned with this problem. In such a society there would be almost no common stock of knowledge. Almost all knowledge would be role-specific.[25]

Examples of such societies do not exist. However, there are different types of society which tend towards either extreme, and one way of identifying them is through the degree of division of labour prevalent in any society. According to Berger and Luckmann, therefore, 'any society in which there is increasing division of labour is moving away from the first extreme type described above'.[26] Given the limited division of labour in pre-literate societies, 'it is . . . then possible to say that primitive societies approximate the [first] type to a much higher degree than civilised ones'.[27] Further, 'it may even be said that in the development of archaic civilizations there is a progressive movement away from this type'.[28]

Besides the development of a high degree of division of labour and of role-specific knowledge, there is one other phenomenon which needs to be mentioned in order to understand why the social organisation of industrial society has permitted and encouraged an a-social view of music. This phenomenon rests in the different attitudes that may be said to exist in pre-literate societies and industrial societies towards creativity. Because pre-literate man's knowledge is mediated in a completely oral-aural fashion, his control over that knowledge — and hence over his environment — is slippery and elusive:

> Man knows what he can recall — all else is so ephemeral as to be negligible. In an oral culture this means he knows what is cast in fixed thematic formulatory patterns. Anything else will seem unreal, nonknowledge,

reprehensible and dangerous. This is the noetic foundation for the traditionalism stemming from oral cultures. What is non-traditional . . . . is dangerous because it is slippery and unmanageable. Oral-aural man does not like the non-traditional because, beyond his limited means of control, it advertises the tenuousness of his hold on rationality.[29]

Industrial man, on the other hand, has the ability to store vast tracts of knowledge safely and permanently. His control over that knowledge and hence over the events of the world is thus much greater. Consequently, his hold on 'rationality' is extremely firm, and at no time was this better demonstrated than during the Enlightenment:

Seeing the beautiful demonstrations of Descartes and Newton as they explained the heavens with their co-ordinates, the great classical minds sought to rival this perfection on earth. Philosophers used the geometric method to arrive at moral and religious truth; social scientists reduced government to mechanics; the tragic muse imitated the tight deductive gate of Euclid; and I am not merely playing with words when I say that poetry itself adopted one common meter as if scientific accuracy depended on it. In all the imponderables of life, conduct, and art, the test was no longer the flexible, "is it good, true or beautiful for such and such a purpose?" but "Is it correct?"[30]

Now although pre-literate man dislikes the non-traditional, he must constantly be ready to react to a world which is essentially dynamic and unpredictable. To this extent he may be said intuitively to accept as necessary and even faintly desirable activities which we label as 'creative' or 'deviant'.[31] Industrial man, on the other hand, because he has such a good control over the events of the environment, might be said to find *true* creativity (that is, creativity which implicitly challenges the status quo in any area) largely unnecessary. To go one step further, it is likely that true creativity in industrial society is regarded in an ideologically suspect light.[32]

It is now possible to describe the different status ascribed to music in pre-literate and industrial societies. Because of the 'underdevelopment' of the division of labour and, consequently, of role-specific knowledge in pre-literate societies, the degree to which musical activity can be distanced from the central core of everyday reality is severely circumscribed. Moreover, because creativity has a higher degree of intuitive acceptance (and it is being assumed here that 'artistic' activity is inherently creative), there is no desire to remove music from the central concerns of the society.[33] In industrial society, on the other hand, the high development of role-specific knowledge allows music to be removed to a considerable distance from the central core of everyday reality. Further, because true creativity is so incompatible with the deterministic rationality which constitutes the overriding mythology of industrial society, the temptation to assign music (and music must surely be amongst the most 'irrational' of activities) a peripheral status in society is very strong indeed. Once again, music is implicitly 'removed' from the social conditions of its creation.

Up until now 'music' in industrial society has been discussed as if it were comprised only of 'serious' music (this because aestheticians and musicologists seldom consider any other kind), or as if it were one homogeneous entity. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Because of the high degree of social stratification that accompanies its high division of labour and highly developed role-specific knowledge, industrial society may be thought of as a composite of many different groups, all of whom 'create' and 'consume' different kinds of music. And because those who have traditionally been disadvantageously placed in society have comparatively recently gained greater economic power, many different forms of 'popular music' have increasingly become 'forces to be reckoned with' in the 'cultural world'.

Now although few people today would say that any type of music is of *fundamental* social importance, there is an undoubted tendency to think that 'popular' forms of music are of more social relevance than 'serious' forms. In order to understand why this should be, it is necessary to describe one final characteristic of industrial society. A high division of labour, a highly developed role-specific knowledge and the ability to commit new ideas to paper at various times in history inevitably results in the phenomenon of cultural lag. In pre-literate societies, on the other hand, where all knowledge must necessarily be mediated in the ongoing present of face-to-face situations, and where most people are aware of most of the society's knowledge most of the time, the possibilities for cultural lag are minimal. The phenomenon of cultural lag in industrial so\[c\]ieities is best described by Goody and Watt when they say that 'the content of the cultural tradition grows continually, and in so far as it affects any particular individual he becomes a palimpsest composed of layers of beliefs and attitudes belonging to different stages in historical time'.[34] A new piece of role-specific knowledge may, in other words, take a long time to filter through to the central core of everyday reality (or just to 'other people' in general) — if, indeed, it ever filters through at all.

But the 'historical time' to which such knowledge belongs need not, from the point of view of the common stock of knowledge, be in the past. Indeed, for reasons already put forward, it is fairly safe to say that the more 'advanced' or 'consciously creative' a piece of knowledge is, the more likely it is to belong 'to the future' and to be seemingly irrelevant as far as the majority of society is concerned. This phenomenon undoubtedly applies to music. The latest technique in electronic or serial composition, for example, is a lot less likely to impinge on the 'collective consciousness' of society than, say, the latest antics of the Bay City Rollers.

It is this phenomenon of cultural lag, then, that finally ensures an a-social view of 'serious' music as against the social significance often assigned to 'popular' forms. For reasons already discussed, this distinction is one with which musicians and aestheticians are not entirely unhappy:

> The term *music* is taken to include as many aspects of the composer's work as fall under the heading *art-work*. An art-work is one which makes some claim on our serious attention. This implies a creative, unique purpose on the part of the composer, and an active response on the part of the listener; it implies that the composer possesses and uses both vision and technique, and that the listener in return is expected to bring to bear his full intelligence. This excludes non-art music, such as pop music, whose purpose is chiefly, if not entirely commercial. Pop groups are big business; they are socially significant; there is no question that they form a remarkable contemporary phenomenon — but this does not make the result into an art-work, and to consider it as if it were is an illogical affectation.[35]

This distinction is also the reason why many people instinctively think that the sociology of music has as its subject matter *only* 'popular' forms of music, most notably 'pop' and 'rock'. It would seem that a reassessment of this view, and the explicit and open discussion of the theory underlying critical method which would result, is long overdue.

NOTES:

[1] See John Shepherd, review of Meyer's *Explaining Music, Contact 13* (Spring 1976), pp. 42-43.

[2] See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1967).

[3] Walter J. Ong, 'World as View and World as Event', *American Anthropologist,* Vol.LXXI (1969), p. 634.

[4] See, for example, Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967) and Jack Goody and Ian Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* Vol.V (1962-63), pp. 304-345.

[5] Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 33.

[6] Susanne K. Langer (1942), *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 236.

[7] Ibid., p. 240.

[8] Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1973), p. 14.

[9] See ibid., pp. 245-246 and p. 267.

[10] Langer, op. cit., p. 240.

[11] Meyer, *Explaining Music,* p. 8.

[12] Mary Douglas (1966), *Purity and Danger* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 103-104.

[13] James W. Carey, 'Harold Adam Innis and Marshall McLuhan', *The Antioch Review,* Vol.XXVII (1967), p. 10.

[14] J.C. Carothers, 'Culture, Psychiatry and the Written Word', *Psychiatry,* Vol.XXII (1959), p. 309.

[15] Quoted in David Riesman, 'The Oral and Written Traditions', in Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, eds., *Explorations in Communication* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 109-110.

[16] Riesman, op. cit., p. 110.

[17] One may usefully compare, for example, pre-literate time sense [c.f. Edmund Leach, 'Primitive Time-Reckoning', in Charles Singer, E.J. Holmyard and A.R. Hall, eds., *A History of Technology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), Vol.I, pp. 115-120] with the sense of time that may be derived from a phenomenological analysis of the musical process [c.f. Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World,* trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956)].

[18] See Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 259-273, and Bruno Nettl, *Music in Primitive Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), p.20.

[19] Ong, *The Presence of the Word,* pp. 33-34.

[20] Ibid., p. 34.

[21] Goody and Watt, op. cit., p. 330.

[22] Zuckerkandl, op. cit., pp. 222-223.

[23] Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music,* p.65.

[24] Berger and Luckmann, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

[25] Ibid. p.98.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ong, 'World as View and World as Event', p. 640.

[30] Jacques Barzun, *Classic, Romantic and Modern* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1943), p. 40.

[31] See, for example, Merriam, op. cit., p. 134 ff. where the toleration of deviant behaviour in musicians in some pre-literate societies is discussed.

[32] Between about 1920 and 1940, jazz was under constant attack in the USA. Unlike in pre-literate soccieties, the behaviour of musicians which was seen to transgress the norms of society was regarded as intolerable. See Merriam, op. cit., pp. 241-244.

[33] C.f. foot-note 18 above.

[34] Goody and Watt, op. cit., p. 324.

[35] Francis Routh, *Contemporary British Music: the Twenty-five Years from 1945 to 1970* (London: MacDonald, 1972), pp. x-xi.