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A study of social relations in the recording  
of popular music.

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for William

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## ABSTRACT

The production of recordings is examined from a social production perspective. It is argued that "conventional sociology of art" presents a partisan view of creative activity which prevents it acknowledging the reality of cultural production today as exemplified by the recording of popular music. Some recent developments in related intellectual traditions show how "art" and "artists" are social constructions and lead towards a more inclusive, phenomenologically influenced, "social production" perspective.

It is argued that the production of recordings takes place in the shadow of earlier work, within a structure of aesthetics and concepts of creativity created by the various institutions of the "art world", especially those of the cultural market-place.

The development of recording as a business in the U.K. is traced and contexted within the contemporary development of both national and international entertainment and cultural industries. The impact of business arrangements on the production and distribution of recordings is examined.

Wider social concerns are shown to be assimilated into the finished recording through the structure of the work organisation responsible for its production. This incorporates both the characteristic capitalist division of labour and the related artistic division of labour, which affect the finished recording through the impact of specific working relations and practices on the distribution of opportunities for decision making on aesthetic matters amongst recording personnel.

Similarly, the technology of recording which has a profound effect on the shape of the finished artifact is shown to mediate the priorities of capitalist organisations. Differing aesthetics adopted by recording personnel are shown to be related to the dominant technology of the time.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the social relations of the production of recorded popular music from the point of view of what has been called a "social production" perspective within the sociology of art. We propose to answer such questions as: What are recordings? How are they made? Who makes them? Why do they sound as they do?

We shall argue that only such a social production perspective recognises that creative work is essentially a social phenomenon. All work, "creative" or otherwise, is carried out within a social context which frames and structures production. It is as a result of socially constructed definitions that certain activities become described as "work", and some of these as "artistic" or "creative". We shall argue that the imagination acts in relation to stimuli, some of which are themselves social, within a conceptual framework that is socially constructed. All such cultural production is unavoidably shaped by social factors in the context in which it is made, for example, the financial arrangements of the various agencies involved, the structure of the work organisation in which production takes place, and the technology which is used.

To argue this is not to negate the role of individuals concerned, but to acknowledge that those individuals who contribute do so in relation to a number of socially constructed factors. Bourdieu has summed up the stance we are taking ". . . The sociology of intellectual and artistic creation must take as its object the creative project as a meeting point and an adjustment between determinism and determination."<sup>1</sup>

## Sociology of Music

There is a much less extensive literature on the sociology of music than there is of cultural production in general, and of other specific cultural forms. Although music should, after all, be catered for by sociologies that purport to cover cultural production in general, relatively little attention has been devoted exclusively to it. The principal exceptions to this rule, Adorno, Blacking, Frith, Silbermann and Weber<sup>2</sup> are remarkably few in number in comparison to literature, for example.

The content of a specific sociology of music, presents unique difficulties which make greater than normal demands on sociological analysis if it is to have any value. As Willener has commented "The manifest underdevelopment of the sociology of music is due, we feel, to reasons which are alien neither to the nature of music itself, nor to the various sociological approaches which, though well adapted to many situations, are nevertheless inadequate to capture mercurial musical phenomena."<sup>3</sup>

The main difficulties from the sociologist's viewpoint, the nature of music itself, the problematic definition of "music" and "musician", and the varieties of collective production are too prominent to be overlooked or brushed aside.

Music's ephemeral and audial quality is not easily related to social phenomena, and its interpretation must be largely subjective. Most sociologists, indeed most people, are likely to be ill at ease with musical meaning and may lack confidence in manipulating musical concepts as evidence. There are difficulties in distinguishing music from non-music. Even within what is generally agreed to be music,

there are different musics, varying so profoundly in social and musical origins, execution and aims, that an attempt to embrace all of them in one sociological analysis is fraught with problems. The term "musician", too, may present problems of definition.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, there may be uncertainty about when music becomes music; must it be played, or can musical indications be usefully analysed even though they may be expressed in different ways to create the object music?<sup>5</sup>

A further difficulty for sociologists derives from the characteristically collaborative nature of musical production. Most musical performance requires the joint efforts of a number of people, and an adequate sociology of music must also be able to cope with this collective activity.

It is our belief that a "social production" approach has the scope to overcome some of these difficulties. For this reason it is potentially valuable not only in the case of music, but also for other cultural forms.

The next chapter explores the limitations of what we shall call "conventional sociology of art", practised within a positivist framework; while Chapter Three draws on some recent advances in Marxism, Art History, feminism and interactionism to suggest a basis for the more satisfactory, sociologically founded social production analysis that is followed in the remaining chapters.

### Terminology.

#### a) "Art"

Williams has traced the development of the term "art"<sup>6</sup> from its origins in the Latin "artem", meaning skill in general, a use which is

still active in English, to the more familiar, contemporary use which is now dominant, referring to particular non-utilitarian skills such as painting, drawing, sculpture, music, which emerged in the 19th century. At about the same time, he notes, the abstract, capitalised "Art" with its own internal but general principles associated with creativity and imagination, entered into general use.

The term "cultural product" is preferable, if unwieldy, as it does not imply any aesthetic pre-judgement in distinguishing "art" from "non-art" and encompasses both.

#### b) "Artist"

An "artist" is one who makes "art". The term has developed in a similar way to its parent form from its 16th century usage referring to any skilled person it has become more specific, as first "artisan" which referred to a skilled manual worker, and later "scientist" and in this century "technologist" developed as separate categories and further restricted the range of intellectual and imaginative skills attached exclusively to the concept of "artist". The concept of "art" and "artist" are discussed further in the next chapter.

#### c) "Artiste"

Within the contemporary recording industry the person(s) featured singing or playing musical instruments as "authors"<sup>7</sup> on a recording are also usually referred to as "artist(s)", although other similar individuals who are not featured are referred to as singers or musicians. The term seems to be a corruption of the French form "artiste" which has been used in the entertainment industry since at least the mid 19th Century as a preferred term to distinguish performers, individuals such as actors, entertainers, singers and

musicians, from those concerned with the "Fine Arts" who write, paint or sculpt.<sup>8</sup> In the account that follows we shall use the term "performer" to refer to the featured singer or musician where the recording industry would use the term "artist".

d) "Popular music."

"Popular" is preferred to "rock" or "pop" as a general term that encompasses these without being encumbered by aesthetic judgements. Harker<sup>9</sup> reminds us that in this use, "popular" means "liked by" or "suited to" a particular person or group which, in a market economy, is reduced to a commercial transaction.

Sources

Primary source information on social relations in the production of recordings was obtained by carrying out tape-recorded focussed interviews<sup>10</sup> with twenty-one recording personnel professionally engaged as producers, performers, musicians, arranger/musical directors and recording engineers. The interviews were subsequently transcribed. The first subjects were contacted using trade directories, subsequent contacts were made by following up personal contacts. Additionally, the writer spoke informally on the same matters to a number of other recording and music business personnel, and observed recording sessions taking place.

Footnotes to Introduction.

1. Bourdieu, 1971, p185
2. see Adorno, 1941, 1945, 1976; Blacking; Frith, 1982; Silbermann, 1963; Weber, 1958
3. Willener, p233
4. Bird, p40
5. Willener, p235
6. Williams, 1976, p32-6
7. see Chapter Six
8. Williams, 1976, p32-6
9. see Harker
10. see Merton and Kendall

## CHAPTER TWO

### Sociology and the concept of the artist.

A sociological analysis of the production of recorded popular music presents a number of special problems for much of what has been presented as the sociology of art. We shall argue that these difficulties derive from the positivist premises on which that sociology is based, and that these premises and assumptions prevent the sociology of art from properly contextualising creativity within wider social relations.

In this chapter, therefore, we propose to consider some of the maxims of what we shall call "conventional sociology of art", looking particularly at those that have a special relevance to a sociological analysis of the production of recorded music. We aim to pinpoint a number of fundamental limitations of post-war writings on the sociology of art, largely, but not exclusively, American. We shall do this by exploring the problems they have in analysing atelier-type production of works of art, and of coming to terms with recent changes in the technology of making art-works, and the commoditisation of cultural production.

The sociology of art has tended to overlook the problems caused by these factors, partly because it is unable to accommodate them, and partly because, ironically, despite its claim to be value-free, it has incorporated a number of aesthetic assumptions. Most importantly, it assumes an idealistic definition of creativity as the prerogative of a special individual.

We will argue that sociologists of art working within this conventional tradition have tended to generalise the characteristics

of the fine artist as the "measure" of creativity. They have also tended to assume that concepts of art and non-art are static and have failed to acknowledge that art is not a "transhistorical category" <sup>1</sup> but, as Walter Benjamin,<sup>2</sup> for example, has shown, is shaped and defined by its economic, social and technological environment. Inevitably, these change over time and from place to place.

Although we will argue later that all art is social, we propose to consider the particular case of what might be termed "atelier" production, where the special problems for a sociology of art conceived in positivist terms are exposed. We would include under this heading film-making, certain kinds of print-making, the making of radio and television programmes, and record production, amongst others.

As Becker<sup>3</sup> has rightly reminded us, art-works, like other knowledge and cultural products, can be conceived as the products of the activity of a number of people.

The common thread running through atelier type of production is that in each case a number of people contribute to the work in such a way that there appears not to be a distinguishable "artist" who is an originator of all creative input. Even those who do claim the title of "artist", which may be disputed, may be entirely dependent on the specialist skills of others. This raises the question of "creativity" and the definition of the roles of individuals involved, especially of those who may not be sanctioned or acknowledged as creative either at the level of production or in the public domain.



## "Conventional sociology of art"

Bird has identified in the literature of the sociology of art a set of positivist premises which, she maintains, have been held to constitute a distinctly sociological way of examining art.<sup>4</sup> We shall refer to this perspective as "conventional sociology of art."

The positivist perspective in sociology seeks to establish and contribute to a "science of society" that is based on social facts and is complementary to what is thought to be the procedures of natural science. It assumes that reality is constituted of phenomena which are causally linked to one another, and whose existence can be established empirically. Hence, "universal" scientific laws may be constructed which offer explanations of events.

The perspective includes as relevant only what it regards as "objective", value-free facts, rather than accounts that are factually meaningful to the actors concerned. It must, therefore, rely for its account of behaviour on the categories of the observer. Inevitably, its ability to offer sociological explanations of events and its view of what constitutes a legitimate sociological problem will be affected by the availability and accessibility of data, and this may tend to colour its perception of the problems it regards as suitable for sociological investigation.

Bird's first premise of conventional sociology of art is "the formulation of general laws regarding the production of art - under what conditions and circumstances do certain types of art appear - and the testing of these laws against the facts of the production of art, in the past, present and future."<sup>5</sup> To this end, systematic studies have been undertaken to assist in the formulation of general laws.

The second premise that Bird identifies is a belief in the necessity of aesthetic neutrality. It is assumed that the sociologist should not be concerned with the value (i.e. the impact or effect) of the artistic product, as such a value can only be subjective, but should be limited to finding out the objective facts of production and consumption. However, we would argue that this overt neutrality obscures a covert endorsement of a particular aesthetic. Bird argues that the aim of aesthetic neutrality, which is an extension of the principle of ethical neutrality, has, by its public emphasis on "objective facts", inhibited many sociologists from considering the art-work itself for fear of compromising their neutrality.

Bird notes that when content analysis, which is an exception to this rule, has been undertaken, a stance of strict aesthetic neutrality has been adopted. Such content analysis is essential to any developed sociology of culture for, according to Williams, it has been particularly useful in areas of analysis of types of content and of the selection and portrayal of certain social figures.<sup>6</sup>

Bird's third premise, the socio-economic model, which she derides as "fact gathering", has been responsible for the majority of the literature of what is known as the sociology of art. It attempts to reconstitute the reality within which artistic production has taken place and assumes that the objective facts are to be found in the relations governing the production of art in the social structure.

Many studies within this model have been primarily concerned with problems of consumption, a tendency that may be related to the ready availability of statistical information about its differing aspects. In most areas of cultural production, there are business agencies such

as market or audience research companies who provide information of this sort, while organisations such as film distributors, paperback publishers or booksellers who make or provide products for sale in the market place, depend on reliable information about consumption for their existence. It is therefore to be expected that, as H. S. Bennett writes, "The owners and operators of popular culture . . . know how many of what kind of units are sold in what regions during what time periods."<sup>7</sup> This does not, however, necessarily make the figures suitable for sociologists and, as we are cognisant of the limitations official statistics have for sociologists, so we should treat the "official statistics" of the recording industry, with caution.<sup>8</sup>

Other studies have concentrated on descriptive analysis of the role of participants, intermediaries and supporting institutions and personnel in the art process, but without, as Bird points out, penetrating the process of production, the means by which ideas become concretised and emerge out of this context.

Bird concludes, arguing from her review of the literature and her own experience of participation in a research project founded on these premises, that the disappointing results obtained by sociologists following these principles are evidence that the premises themselves are inappropriate to a proper understanding of the creative process. She is led to argue that sociologists must differentiate between art, between artists, and between art-consumers if they are to cope with the mass of facts which are potentially infinite, even for an historical study where they might be expected to be finite.

We would argue, notwithstanding Bird's view, that underlying this apparent aesthetic neutrality, which regards all art works as equal, there is a "deeper" aesthetic partisanship which enables "art" to be distinguished from non-art. Indeed, the very idea of a "Sociology of Art" presupposes a prior definition of "art". Furthermore, we would suggest that certain characteristics that are ascribed to "art", such as its being regarded as "personal expression", lead to unsubstantiated assumptions about its production.

### Art and craft

Conventional sociology of art incorporates into its analysis assumptions about that cultural activity it chooses to call "artistic". It assumes that cultural products described as "art" are qualitatively and recognisably different from "non-art". Indeed, as we have just suggested, the very idea of a separate "sociology of art" presupposes these distinctive qualities.

The distinction that the conventional sociology of art makes is between the aesthetic and the utilitarian, between "art" and "craft"; a differentiation whose existence is taken for granted and which is made on the grounds of end-use between one kind of finished product and another, for conventional sociology of art offers no evidence for arguing that the procedure of production is any different for the two types of product. Becker has noted, in considering this differentiation, that "the same activity using the same materials and skills in what appear to be similar ways may be called by either title, as may the people who engage in it."<sup>9</sup> The fact that the boundary between the two categories is negotiable, means that the distinction between them

is socially ascribed.

In everyday use, "craft" and "art" refer to what Becker calls "ambiguous conglomerations of organizational and stylistic traits,"<sup>10</sup> which are nevertheless regarded by the public and the practitioners involved as being distinct. Sociologists of art working within the conventional framework appear to share these beliefs.

Becker identifies two major and one intermittent definitional strands in "craft", firstly, the knowledge and skill to produce something that is useful; secondly, virtuoso skill in carrying that out; and thirdly, in some but not all cases, that it should be thought to be beautiful.

The first factor, utility, "is measured by a standard which lies outside the world that is or might have been constructed around the activity itself."<sup>11</sup> Measurement by external standards is an important feature of "craftness". Usefulness implies the existence of a person or organisation who can define both a use for something and aesthetic standards. In general, craftsmanship is carried out as work for an employer, using the skills of the worker, but subject to the final approval of the employer.

The second feature, virtuosity, varies according to the work being done, but in each case involves "an extraordinary control of materials and techniques."<sup>12</sup> Most crafts are difficult, and require a long "apprenticeship" to master the physical and mental skills necessary to become a first class practitioner.

In some crafts, it is thought necessary that some aesthetic standards should be upheld, and a third criterion, beauty, is introduced. It is a small step from this to the concept of an artist-

## Artistic expression and the role of the artist

The use, as a defining quality of art, of the notion that it is the creative expression of a special individual, circumscribes and prejudices considerations of its production. The commitment of conventional sociology of art to regard art as the creative personal expression of an "artist" leads it to support a division of artistic labour, and to distinguish the role of artist from that of others involved. It is a division between, on the one hand the artist who has a considerable degree of freedom, and on the other, those who use their skills to make practical objects and/or who assist the artist.

Conventional sociology of art does not regard the location of this division as a problem, because the role of artist as a special individual is thought to be qualitatively different from the role of other participants, as it is the determining influence on the finished work, and is, by definition, the source of the expression that causes the work to be artistic.

One reason why the artist is not seen as problematic is that conventional sociology of art generally assumes that, like the art work itself, being artistic is a quality intrinsic to the individual. The artist's role is derived from this authority rather than from the circumstances in which art works are made. Again, we can see this demonstrated in Barnett's paper. Thus, he writes, ". . . from the standpoint of sociology, the artist is born into a society possessing a particular culture. He is socialised by his society in ways that affect his personality and, in particular, his attitudes toward and entrance into the art world via formal training, apprenticeship or his individual efforts. Once the individual artist is committed to art as

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a career . . ."16 Being an artist is, therefore, removed from the social relations of the production of art to the qualities of the individual.

Hauser has written eloquently of the emergence of the ideology that is the basis of this view: "the fundamentally new element in the Renaissance conception of art is the discovery of the concept of genius, and the idea that the work of art is the creation of an autocratic personality, that this personality transcends tradition, theory and rules, even the work itself, is richer and deeper than the work and impossible to express adequately within any objective form . . . the idea of genius as a gift of God, as an inborn and uniquely personal individual creative force, the doctrine of the personal and exceptional law which the genius is not only permitted to but must follow, the justification of the individuality and wilfulness of the artist of genius - this whole trend of thought first arises in Renaissance society . . ."17 Bourdieu has referred to this as the ideology of the gift.<sup>18</sup>

The articulation of the ideology of the "artist as genius", that Hauser identifies, was not a causal factor in the separation of artists as special individuals but has provided a legitimation and justification of one aspect of wider social relations that have developed for quite separate reasons. The "rise" of the "artist", for example, is a manifestation of a more fundamental characteristic of developing capitalism, the increasing separation of mental and manual labour, and the subordination of the latter to the former.

The distinction between artist and non-artist is not simply one of mental or manual labour. There are, for example, image makers such



as painters working on canvasses who are in some respects manual workers, but who are conventionally regarded today as "artists", with the privileges and status associated with that title. Other image makers, such as engravers have not always been described as "artists" and do not enjoy the accoutrements.

Frequently, underlying the division between artist and non-artist are contrasted employment relations. Painters, working for speculative sale in the market place and described as "artists" are, in practice, minor capitalist entrepreneurs. Their artistic freedom is the freedom of the small businessman working within the constraints of the market and the state legal system. On the other hand, illustrators, who are also image-makers, tend to be employee members of work organisations. Their role of worker in a creative project, a subordinate member of a productive work unit who has discretion to take decisions on small immediate matters only, is not described as artistic.

Within organisational units involved in cultural production, there is a clear correlation between being in a dominant employment role and the chances of being recognised as "creative", although there are other art institutions such as academies, colleges, galleries and journals for whom the distribution of "artistic life-chances" is a key function<sup>19</sup>.

Although Barnett acknowledges that the role of artist craftsman may be different in pre-literate societies, he does not generally expect difficulties in distinguishing the contemporary artist's role. Thus, he confidently urges the sociologist to make a systematic inquiry into the "social relations, social structures, norms and roles

which characterise the vocation of the artist"<sup>20</sup>. He recognises only a difference in degree between artists suggesting that, although the precise position of the artist may differ between arts, there is, unchanging at the centre of any art-work, always a distinguishable artist. Hence, he is able to make him<sup>21</sup> the central pivot of his views of the proper concerns of the sociology of art.

Where the identity of the individual artist responsible for a work may be obscure because production is overtly collaborative, conventional sociologists of art have tended to focus on one individual for their analysis, identifying him as the "artist" at the centre of the production of the work. This, then, enables them to pursue their "psychologism".

Barnett cites two American studies of music, by Mueller and by Nash<sup>22</sup> which illustrate this process at work, and show its arbitrariness. Orchestral music directly requires the work of a number of people in composing, conducting and playing musical instruments for it to take place, yet Mueller chooses to concentrate on the conductor in his study of the impact of social factors on American symphony orchestras, while Nash looks at creativity in music by considering only the composer.

In the cinema, the development of an "auteur theory"<sup>23</sup> may be seen as an attempt both to assume and to identify an "artist", one individual who is able to stamp sufficient personal taste on the films with which he has been associated so that they can be regarded as suitable for analysis as his "art". Cases have also been made out for the screenplay writer to be regarded as the "real" artist for example<sup>24</sup>, but whichever individual is chosen, what remains unchanging is the

assumption that an individual endowed with special qualities is at the heart of any artistic content. The existence of an "artist" would legitimise the claim of certain types of film to be regarded as "art", and incidentally improve the status of film reviewers and critics. Huaco adopts a similar approach in his Sociology of Film Art where, in attempting to generalise about the social genesis of film waves, he acknowledges the crucial role of the availability of a cadre of film-making technicians, yet uses biographical data on film directors to help account for the ideology of the films in question. Thus, he covertly regards them as "artists", who use their work to make an individual comment on the social world and regards the films they have been responsible for as vehicles for these views.

#### The genesis of creativity

Bird comments that conventional sociology of art does not, curiously, enquire at length into the sources of artistic creativity, or how art is made.<sup>25</sup> It is now apparent that it does not need to, because while assuming that certain individuals are intrinsically artistic, it assumes that the source of creativity lies in the artist's imagination. By being taken out of the social arena, and placed in the imagination, the problem of the genesis of creativity becomes a psychological rather than a sociological problem.

In common with others working from this perspective, Barnett sees creativity as the outcome of the tempering of the artist's imagination by social constraints. He argues that the artist has a free hand in choosing the medium in which to work, and can choose which techniques, traditions, values and materials to use from those already preselected by society, which he has to regard as "given".<sup>26</sup> Fischer, too, looks

for the source of creativity in the artist's imagination. He does not concern himself with possible difficulties in identifying either art, or the artist, stating clearly his general theoretical position that "a very important determinant of the art-form is social fantasy; that is, the artist's fantasies about social situations".<sup>27</sup>

Thus, a romanticised view of creativity still prevails in recent conventional sociology of art as a core assumption that is taken for granted; its central concept of the "artist" as a uniquely gifted individual may be seen as related to a historically specific period.

#### The "Fine Art" Tradition.

Fuller has identified the same view of "art" as the creative expression of a special individual, as a central theme in what he calls the "Fine Art Tradition"<sup>28</sup>; it is our argument that conventional sociology of art has, ironically and unwittingly, assimilated this aesthetic stance.

Fuller carefully distinguishes between the Fine Art Tradition, which is a set of ideas and beliefs about the production of images, and the reality of the production of images. He points out how the "historicist funnel of 'Art History'" attempts to incorporate into one lineage images produced in various materials for a variety of purposes. The specific images produced by Fine Art professionals in the circumstances of 19th Century capitalism, free-standing works for an open-market, and the particular ideology of individual genius which sustained them, are thus presented by the Fine Art Tradition as universals, and hence as "the apotheosis or consummation of an evolutionary tradition "Art" . . . extending back in an unbroken claim

to the Stone Age."<sup>29</sup>

However, as he demonstrates, the reality of the production of images has only resembled the mythical Fine Art Tradition when free-standing oil paintings were the dominant form of visual work during the limited period of entrepreneurial capitalism in Britain in the 19th Century. Then, "fine art" served the ruling class by using pictorial conventions on their behalf to present their view of the world. To suggest that the Fine Art Tradition represents the major form of the production of images, either before or after that period is, as Fuller suggests, to "distort" history and to condone a mythical account of production practice.

Furthermore, it is particularly inappropriate to apply concepts of art developed for painting, indiscriminately to other cultural products. It is a testimony to the strength of the myth enveloped in the Fine Art Tradition that it has been assimilated into everyday "commonsense" thinking, not only about the production of paintings, but also about all other areas of cultural production including the production of recordings. When the circumstances of production have been obviously different, as in the production of artifacts such as feature films, television programmes, or magazines, it may be suggested that this inconsistency in their production is sufficient reason for regarding these cultural products as something other than art, and therefore inappropriate for an analysis of the sociology of art.

The major assumptions of conventional sociology of art about the nature of artistic activity have, therefore, apparently been derived from the aesthetic stance of the Fine Art Tradition. Our argument,

then, is that conventional sociology of art has a distorted and limited view of the true range of the social relations of cultural production which curtails its ability to provide a satisfactory analysis.

We now propose to consider some aspects of cultural production which are of especial relevance for our study of the production of recorded music, and which pose particular problems for conventional sociology of art, and highlight its limitations. We shall consider, in turn, financial developments in cultural production, atelier and collaborative production, and then technical developments in the production of cultural works.

#### The art market

A further set of assumptions derived from the Fine Art Tradition that conventional sociology of art very often makes are that works of art are destined for a market place, that the artist's livelihood depends on at least a modicum of success there, and that the intermediaries familiarly associated with a market are a "natural" accompaniment to the production of works of art. Barnett, typically, writes, "If he is to make a living as an artist, the work of art he creates, whether in literature, music or the visual arts must . . . elicit a favourable response for some public . . . This necessitates contact with a body of institutionalised machinery in the form of art galleries, publication houses and boards of directors of symphony orchestras . . ."30

Albrecht, too, in his account of the "proper" course of sociological analysis of the art process, makes the same assumption

about social relations in the production of art works. The eight elements he commends for study in the whole complex of art include "Disposal and reward systems, including agents and patrons, museums . . . distributors, publishers and dealers . . . "; "Art reviewers and critics"; and "Publics and Audiences."<sup>31</sup>

One factor in this emphasis on market exchange may be the ready availability of relevant information in an accessible form. The factors of any exchange are routinely measured and provide tangible data in a familiar form. Records of exhibitors and sale prices of paintings, for example, may have survived for a century or more and may seem more reliable than an account of production pieced together from various sources.

The accounts of conventional sociology of art of the arrangements of intermediaries tend to give a gloss of "naturalism" and inevitability to what we would argue is both arbitrary and historically specific.

A secondary consequence of the emphasis on the role of the market-place is to reinforce the tendency to regard as true art, only those cultural products such as paintings that are portable and saleable in public, and dismissing as merely minor arts, as Greer comments, the "massive" cultural forms of architecture and gardening.<sup>32</sup>

Conventional sociology of art's concentration on idealised market relations with its assumption of a "perfect" market for freely expressed creative work, clearly displays the limitations of this perspective in providing a proper sociological analysis of cultural production. Firstly, the support and sustenance of art creation by

successful exchange of finished products in the market place is only a limited part of the possible range of social relations within which cultural production takes place, and secondly, it fails to take into account the effect on cultural production and cultural products of the market itself.

Williams<sup>33</sup> has outlined a classification of the greatly varying social relations and institutional arrangements by which cultural production has taken place which underlines the limitations in the range of relations considered by this perspective. He distinguishes four major types, each of which contain further variations and subdivisions; firstly, "instituted artists" where a cultural producer is recognised as such as an integral part of the general social organisation; secondly, relations of patronage, which includes financial support of aristocratic households, commercial organisations or the state, general social support, and sponsorship by intermediaries in the market; thirdly, market relations which are highly variable and include the "artisanal" independent worker supported in an immediate market, "post artisanal" relations where the producer sells indirectly to the market via an intermediary, and the market and corporate professionals based on a contract for specialist cultural services; and fourthly "post market" relations where producers are members of governmental or quasi-governmental departments. There is a great deal of both historical and contemporary diversity, and although a tendency towards a general historical sequence of development may be discerned, the different relations can coexist contemporaneously within and between different arts. Thus within painting, for example, patronal relations have persisted side by side with both artisanal and post-



artisanal market relations.

### Commoditisation

It is ironic that in criticism of conventional sociology of art we would also cite its failure to acknowledge contemporary effects on art of the market in extremis, namely the effects of commoditisation. Simultaneous with the changes caused in the nature of art by technological developments to which we shall refer later, and partly consequent upon them, have been those caused by the developing capitalist environment. The consequence of commoditisation is that cultural products are shaped in ways that incorporate the priorities of selling and profitability over aesthetic or expressive elements. There is a good deal of evidence to support the view that cultural production in advanced capitalist societies has become progressively commoditised.<sup>34</sup>

Jameson has summarised this view: "In a world in which exchange-value takes precedence over use-value (such is, essentially, the definition of a commodity) it is not surprising that the making of works of art would also be governed by this dominant structure which reaches down to influence everything in our daily world, our relationship with other people just as much as our relationships with objects."<sup>35</sup>

The technological advances that have transformed art by mechanical reproduction have also had important implications for commoditisation. Indeed, Buck-Morss quotes Benjamin as commenting that "technology serves society solely for the production of commodities,"<sup>36</sup> because, developed under capitalism, the uses and shape of technology were

inevitably determined by capitalist priorities. She notes that "Benjamin maintained that . . . the industrialisation of artistic production had structural parallels to factory production. (Art works had become commoditised and) . . . intellectuals had become wage labourers."<sup>37</sup> Benjamin believed that mass production and mass distribution had led to a structural convergence between art and industry, which transformed artworks into commodities whose value derived from their exchange potential, and transformed artists and factory workers into technicians. The writer's relationship with the client was no longer one of patronage, but was based on an exchange value in the market. The artist was a producer of commodities, as the pre-eminence of the market meant that most cultural products are created to sell.

Adorno, who acknowledges Benjamin's work on technology and commoditisation as being the basis of his own, suggests that commoditisation of art is the culmination of an historical trend. He claims responsibility for the term "Culture Industry" as a short-hand term to describe the commoditisation of cultural products and the network of commercial organisations that are both its cause and its effect.<sup>38</sup>

The Culture Industry is characterised by the determining of consumption by the planned manufacture of products intended for a mass market, a feature of almost all consumer goods industries. Hence, the culture industry "integrates" its consumers from above; regarding them as malleable objects controlled by the industry, rather than dominating it in any way. An important characteristic is that separate areas of cultural activity develop into divisions of one integrated system. We shall note in Chapter Seven the extent to which this

situation already prevails in the recording industry, as a result of both technical capabilities as well as economic and administrative concentration. The one system has immense power over the consumer. Adorno writes "the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation, an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would like to have us believe, not its subject but its object."<sup>39</sup>

He argues that the cultural products of the Cultural Industry "are no longer also commodities, they are commodities through and through."<sup>40</sup> As such, profitability becomes built into the form of the commodity. One manifestation of this is the way in which "the incessantly new which it (the Culture industry) offers up, remains a disguise for an eternal sameness."<sup>41</sup> This sameness is the result of standardisation which arises out of competition for profit. Adorno has described this in connection with popular music, where standardisation is, as in other cultural products of this sort, a "fundamental characteristic".<sup>42</sup>

We have shown, therefore, that the idealised notion of the art market of conventional sociology of art seriously understates the range of social relations within which cultural production takes place, and, particularly, fails to take into account the effects of commoditisation. Analysis based on these ideals will, therefore, be limited.

### Atelier production

Conventional sociology of art also experiences difficulty in accommodating into its analysis the production of artworks

recognisably made by more than one person. These various forms of collective production might be brought under the general heading of "atelier production". In each case, a number of individuals are clearly perceived to be collaborating, to a greater or lesser extent, in the finished work.

Consideration of atelier production enables us to bridge the conceptual dualism of art and society that conventional sociology of art creates, and to see how the one is integral to the other.

The term "collective production of art" has itself, as Wolff has noted<sup>43</sup>, been used in two distinct, though overlapping ways. Firstly, it has been used to refer to "social production", where all facets of the social world are regarded as being contributory factors of production, and therefore would include both the actors and the structural constraints and facilitations of the broader social context. It is to a consideration of the collective production, in the sense of social production, of recorded music that this thesis is addressed.

Secondly, "collective production" has also been used in a more specific, interactionist way, that might more exactly be referred to as "collaborative production", (and which Becker<sup>44</sup>, as we shall see, calls "collective action"). In this meaning, it is assumed that production is by actors in interpersonal communication, understood to mean face to face contact, although with the added possibility of some limited non-immediate and non-interpersonal interaction<sup>45</sup>, but not strongly influenced by any broader social context. The social conditions that are introduced are facilitative and essentially meaningful to the actors concerned.

We shall argue in Chapter Three that a "collaborative production" approach, by itself, is insufficient for a full and proper sociological understanding of art as it tends to isolate the making of art works from the rest of society. That is not to deny its usefulness, but we would argue that it is embraced by a "social production" perspective as one of a number of contributory components. The difficulty for the conventional sociology of art arises because of the inconsistency between its assumptions about the genesis of creativity based as we have seen, on the psychologism of the "Fine Art Tradition", and the observed circumstances of the social genesis of creativity and the social construction of the artist in collaborative production.

Cultural works have been collaboratively produced under many different productive arrangements. Although more often associated with the well-documented cases of Hollywood film-making and television production in this century, with their dependence on a formal division of labour, collaborative production should not be thought of as a new development, for it has routinely been the basis of music-making, printmaking and engraving, and drama for the last hundreds of years.

The history of individual production of art is relatively recent, for as Hauser points out, for centuries collaborative production was the normal mode of production for works of art. In the middle ages, as part of the monastic movement, he notes that "The production of art proceeded within the framework of well-ordered, more or less rationally organised workshops with a proper division of labour . . ." <sup>46</sup> Writing and book illustration, for example, was carried out jointly by specialists in painting, calligraphy and painters of initials. <sup>47</sup> The

applied arts were produced by the same methods. Masons' lodges worked collaboratively on building projects in a way that subsequently fell into disuse as a method of production, until revived in the twentieth century in film production. He writes: "The mason's lodge (opus, oeuvre, Bauhuette) of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was a co-operative organisation of the artists and artisans engaged upon the building of a large church or cathedral under the artistic and administrative direction of persons appointed or approved by the body which had commissioned the building."<sup>48</sup> There was normally a manager or principal who was responsible for the provision of materials and labour, and a master mason or architect responsible for the execution of the work and the allocation and coordination of tasks and individuals.<sup>49</sup> Many of the craftsmen involved remained in the same network, working together on a number of projects over a period of time. The lodge was a solution to the problem of maintaining a disciplined and coordinated lay work force to replace monastically based arrangements that were not suited to the developing urban market and money economy in the building trade. The object was to achieve a division and integration of the available labour in a way that maximised both specialisation and the harmonisation of the work of individuals.<sup>50</sup>

In the Florentine society of the early Renaissance, painting was a craft carried out in studios "still dominated by the communal spirit of the mason's lodge and the guild workshop."<sup>51</sup> Master, assistants and pupils might work on the same paintings, sometimes because they specialised in the painting of different subjects, but also to deliberately dilute individual style and differences to make a

communal form.<sup>52</sup> Michaelangelo is described as the first "modern" artist who expected and was expected to exercise decisive personal influence over the finished work. Thereafter there was a gradual bifurcation of artistic labour, and with the rise of an independent bourgeois class in western Europe, some art workers were able to sustain an economic and ideological independence outside the former institutional framework, while others remained within it as craftsmen attached to guilds.

There is, then, a long history of collaboratively produced artworks. Appreciation of the social genesis of creativity has, to an extent, been obscured by the mythical ideal of the individual creative artist. As we have noted, conventional sociology of art has been forced to accommodate collaborative production either by suggesting that the product is not "art", and that as "work" or "entertainment" it is not appropriate for an analysis based on the sociology of art or, by attempting to identify one of the collaborators as the "artist" responsible for determining the shape of the production and ultimately the outcome of the work in hand which is seen as his personal artistic expression.

#### Some different types of collaborative production.

We have noted already how the conventional sociology of art's assumption of the presence of a special individual leads it inexorably to the imposition of a division of artistic labour between the "artist" and the "non-artist", working together on a cultural project. It is the attempt to distinguish between labour in this way that is at the heart of the difficulties for the conventional sociology of art in

analysing atelier production, for there the notion of "art" as the personal expression of an "artist" is clearly inappropriate.

Three different circumstances of collaborative production point to the weakness of conventional sociology of art which "naturalises" a particular division of artistic labour.

Firstly, where cultural production is dependent on elaborate technology, we see difficulties caused by specialisation of skills and expertise. For example, the making of a cultural product such as a feature film is dependent on technical skills to carry out essential lighting or camera work. Without this work there could be no film, so "artistic" and "technical" work are equally important as they are mutually dependent. Frequently, any such distinction between them is arbitrary, as technical work and decisions are intermeshed with aesthetic ones; certain techniques of camera focussing or film processing, for example, may be considered an important "artistic" element of the film.

A second type of collaborative production which is imperfectly incorporated into a conventional sociology of art analysis is an organisation of production in which a number of contributions, to a greater or lesser extent essential, are chosen and coordinated by one or more individuals. The role of this co-ordinator is generally one of selecting from other's creative work, or of directing others' work to his overall plan. In either case, his contribution will be at the level of ideas rather than the physical practice of the art in question. The most readily observable cultural producer in this category would be the film director who, as artistic arbiter, takes decisions about other workers' acting, screenwriting, or camera work.



He would, however, fit uneasily into the category of "artist" of the conventional sociology of art. The finished work may reflect his overall vision, but it also incorporates the expressive and creative work of others.

A third type of collaborative production that creates difficulties for conventional sociology of art is cultural production that is the end product of the joint action of a number of individuals.

We have already mentioned the problem caused by orchestral music, and the solution of conventional sociology of art of treating the composer as an "artist" and the music as his "art", the outcome of which is that the composer and his written symbols stand at the centre of analysis. We would argue that this is not satisfactory, the symbols can only exist as realised music, not solely because of the composer's work, but also as a consequence of the entrepreneurial skills and work of an organiser and the interactive and expressive skills of conductor and individual musicians, each one of whom makes a contribution, and without whom the final piece of music would not exist as it does, or would be diminished.

Each of these types of collaborative production illustrates the analytical weakness of conventional sociology of art based on a static conception of artistic activity, namely its failure to theorise the social relations underlying the notion of "artist". The search for, and identification of, an artist as the sole source of creative work is a weak basis on which to construct a sociology of art, when the arrangements of atelier production clearly show how cultural production may be socially constructed. Conceptions of what and who is considered to be creative are bound up in capitalist relations of

employment, subordination and control.

### Technical developments in art

Conventional sociology of art has also failed to address the problem of technical change in cultural production. It has not been seen as part of its role to investigate the implications of technical change in cultural production for, as we have noted, this perspective has a static, historically specific concept of its subject matter.

The development within cultural production of material systems of signification and of complex amplificatory, extending and reproductive technical systems has emphasised divisions in social relations.

It has been argued<sup>53</sup> that any art is socially divisive, as its perception and appreciation involves the ability to decipher the artistic codes it incorporates. Hence, art is only accessible to those such as the bourgeoisie who are in possession of education, the means of appropriating this cultural wealth. The appropriation of art by the bourgeoisie is completed by the school system, one of whose functions is to confer value and help define the hierarchy of valid cultural wealth.<sup>54</sup> Technical systems, however, have tended to increase social division, for whereas access to dance or listening to music was at least partially open, as all could see or hear, this is no longer true with material systems such as writing, which requires specialist training for both producers and receivers.<sup>55</sup> These extra constraints make the development of the technology of reproduction of cultural products sociologically significant.

According to Williams, the most significant sociological consequence of these changes is the appearance of complex asymmetries

in the relations between dominant and subordinated cultures.<sup>56</sup> There was, for example, a clear assymetry between the relatively rigid forms of social and cultural reproduction and the new diverse and mobile modes of cultural production and distribution offered by printing.

From very early times, reproduced symbolic visual images have been used as a mode of defining political and economic power in, for example, coinage. Subsequently, with the reproduction of cult and religious objects it became a major cultural mode. The reproduction of illustration led ultimately to the printing of texts as we know it in the 15th Century.

Williams suggests that assymetry is evident in three major areas of tension and struggle. Firstly, there is the struggle between the state's attempts to licence and control cultural products, and the producer's freedom of expression. Secondly, and crucially, in the market place assymetry is prominent in the conflicts involving profit-seeking commercial organisations which are usually of relatively recent origin, and the older established cultural and political authorities whose values their cultural products may oppose. There may also be tension between profit making and art in a commodity market; products must be potentially profitable if production is to continue, cultural innovation may be shaped by marketing exigencies.

Thirdly, assymetry has occurred as a consequence of technological changes in cultural production. This is evident in the relatively simple technology of writing, which produced an assymetry between the power it gave the writer and his ordinary membership of society. However, in general, the assymetries of print technology were limited, as printing enabled a new form of stratification, based on

differential access to literacy to reinforce the earlier social forms. Printed knowledge and culture have acquired greater authority than comparable oral forms. Significant new asymmetries have now emerged with the new technologies, such as cinema, broadcasting, and sound recording which embody systems of direct access that do not require any form of selective cultural training,<sup>57</sup> and which, crucially, realign the imbalance between general oral culture and the selective technically transmitted culture.

#### Traditional and non-traditional art

One of Walter Benjamin's concerns was the way in which one particular aspect of the superstructure, the technology of mechanical reproduction, has overturned traditional concepts of art. An indication of his radical intent is contained in a remark on photography; "much futile thought has been devoted (in the 19th Century) to the question of whether photography is an art. The primary question - whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art was not raised."<sup>58</sup> Benjamin addresses this primary question about transformations in the nature of art, particularly those attributable to mechanical reproduction.

He argued that works of art can be categorised into two polar types, "traditional" art which originated in ritual where the emphasis is on cult-value, and "non-traditional" art which originates in commerce, is created to satisfy a potential market, and emphasises "exhibition" value. Art of this nature presupposes a wide market, already existing or easily created, as the sale of the finished product may be the only way of sustaining the costs of manufacture and distribution.

He argues that art-works developed out of magical instruments, and that a "creation with entirely new functions"<sup>59</sup> is developing out of these art-works as mechanical reproduction becomes an integral part of production. Hence "art" as we know it is a function we will later recognise as having been "incidental" and transitional; it is not, "transhistorical"<sup>60</sup>, but specific to a time and place. "There have not" says Benjamin "always been novels in the past, they do not always have to exist in the future; there have not always been tragedies, not always great epics. Commentaries, translations, even so-called forgeries have not always been divertissements on the borders of literature . . . All that should make you conscious of the fact that we stand in the midst of a powerful process of the transformation of literary forms . . ." <sup>61</sup>

However, the differences between traditional and non-traditional art also have a technical basis. Traditionally, according to Benjamin, art had a unique existence in time and in space, and each artwork had a unique history from which it derived its authority; that is, "the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced." <sup>62</sup>

#### Mechanical reproduction

Any art-work's historical existence is undermined by reproduction, as this "substantive duration", its unique life, ceases to be important. Successive developments in techniques leading to mechanical reproduction, reinforced by the developments of the market

economy, allowed "non-traditional" art to flourish at the expense of "traditional" art to the extent that a quantitative shift has turned into a qualitative shift. Benjamin notes that a transformation of this kind had occurred previously in pre-historical times when works of art themselves developed from instruments of magic.

The effect of the replacement of human perception by mechanical means, substituting and enhancing as a consequence of general technical invention, has been to make irrelevant what Benjamin described as the "outmoded" concepts of traditional art such as "creativity", "genius", "eternal value" and "mystery", replacing them with new and less familiar concepts.<sup>63</sup>

Although art has always been reproducible, as any man-made artifact can be copied, it is only in this century that techniques of mechanical reproduction have developed to the extent that it affects the original art work itself by eliminating its uniqueness and the qualities it derives from this. From its uniqueness, a work of art gains an "aura" and it is this which, in Benjamin's well known phrase, "withers in the age of mechanical reproduction."<sup>64</sup> It withers in the face of a multiplicity of reproductions in two respects, a plurality of copies replaces a unique existence, and reproductions take an art image out of its original context and into the environs of the person looking at or hearing it. Although this situation may not touch the actual work of art, it depreciates its presence, and contributes to the loss of aura.

Benjamin suggests that the film industry's use of a "star system" with its artificial "personality" is a response to this loss of aura and an effort to counterbalance it. He maintains that screen acting

is fundamentally different from stage acting because the film actor performs before an inanimate and unresponsive camera, removed from his audience, and therefore his performance must forgo any aura that would be derived from his presence.<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, he compares the work of the camera-man with that of the painter noting how the painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, while the camera-man "penetrates deeply into its web" like a surgeon who cuts into the patient's body. He notes also that the painter's picture is total, whereas the camera-man assembles a "picture" of multiple fragments. Benjamin suggests that once the criterion of authenticity is conceded, as it is with mechanical reproduction, then the work of art is emancipated from its "parasitical dependence" on ritual<sup>66</sup> and becomes based on politics. The entire function of art changes, for if its uniqueness derives from its place in history and tradition, then the loss of uniqueness or aura heralds the destruction of tradition and the cultural heritage that is bolstered by the bourgeoisie.

Benjamin's work on technology and technical change in cultural production is important in underlining the impermanence of the forms and purposes of cultural products; and in helping to explain some of the reasons for that impermanence. He argues particularly that technology has contributed to and reinforced changes in the nature and purpose of art which make redundant a number of the concepts we have seen to be associated with the Fine Art Tradition, and which have subsequently become incorporated as assumptions in analyses within the conventional sociology of art.

## Conclusion

In this chapter it has been argued that sociological analyses within the framework of what we have called "conventional sociology of art" are disabled by a number of presuppositions that perspective holds about creativity and creative activity which lead it towards a limited, one-sided view of art.

In particular, we have identified as the central point of its analysis, its privileging of an ideological and idealised notion of the "artist" as the source of creativity which, we suggested, derived from an historically specific set of social relations. The inherent limitations of this approach are brought into focus in the second half of the chapter by our consideration of some aspects of the reality of cultural production under capitalism, particularly the much wider range of economic relations than conventional sociology of art allows, the prevalence of varying forms of atelier-type production and the impact of technological changes.

In the next chapter we shall consider some recent approaches which suggest ways towards a more satisfactory sociology of art and cultural production.



Footnotes to Chapter Two.

1. see Fuller
2. see Benjamin, 1970c
3. see Becker, 1974
4. see Bird
5. Bird, p30
6. Williams, 1981, p18-19
7. H. S. Bennett, 1980, p216
8. see Frith, 1978; and Hindess
9. Becker, 1978, p863
10. Becker, 1978, p863
11. Becker, 1978, p864
12. Becker, 1978, p865
13. Becker, 1978, p866
14. Barnett, p631
15. Barnett, p632
16. Barnett, p629
17. Hauser, Vol 1 p326, quoted by Wolff, p26
18. Bourdieu, 1968, p605 n1
19. Fyfe, p39
20. Barnett, p630
21. see Chapter Three for the presumption that "artists" are male.
22. J.H. Mueller The American Symphony Orchestra, Bloomington, Ind.; Indiana Univ Press, 1951; and D.J. Nash The socialisation of an artist: the American composer. Social Forces, 1957, 35, 307-13.
23. see Wollen, p74 ff
24. see Corliss
25. Bird, p35
26. Barnett, p630
27. Fischer, p73
28. see Fuller
29. Fuller, p28
30. Barnett, p630
31. Albrecht, p7-8
32. Greer, p31
33. Williams, 1981, p46
34. see Benjamin, 1970a
35. Jameson, p392
36. Buck-Morss, p93 quoted from "Fuchs" p358 in One way street and other writings, London; NLB, 1979
37. Buck-Morss, p68
38. see particularly Adorno, 1975
39. Adorno, 1975, p12
40. Adorno, 1975, p13
41. Adorno, 1975, p14
42. Adorno, 1941, p23 also see Chapter Seven, below
43. Wolff, p32
44. Becker, 1974, p767
45. Layder, p101
46. Hauser, vol I p174-5
47. Hauser, vol I p176
48. Hauser, vol I p244
49. Knoop and Jones, p43

50. Hauser, vol I p246
51. Hauser, vol I p313
52. Hauser, vol I p312
53. see Bourdieu, 1968
54. Bourdieu, 1968, p609
55. see Williams, 1981
56. Williams, 1981, p98
57. Williams, 1981, p111
58. Benjamin, 1970c, p393
59. Benjamin, 1970c, p391
60. see Fuller
61. Benjamin, 1970a, p86
62. Benjamin, 1970c, p387
63. Benjamin, 1970c, p393
64. Benjamin, 1970c, p387
65. Benjamin, 1970c, p395
66. Benjamin, 1970c, p390

## CHAPTER THREE

### Recent approaches relating art to society.

In the previous chapter we argued that the predominant perspective in the Sociology of Art, which we called "conventional sociology of art" is limited by its own assumptions and is unable to give a satisfactory account of the reality of the genesis of creative work. In recent years there has been growing evidence of a major rethinking of the broader problems of relating art to society. This is manifest in a variety of attempts to rethink some established approaches, and in this chapter we shall consider in turn some advances made in Marxism, Art History, Feminism, and American interactionism, with particular emphasis on the latter.

All represent useful developments as each, in different ways, posit cultural production as a social construction arising out of and in interaction with the society in which they are made, rather than as something separate from it. Together, therefore, they lead us towards an analysis based on a social production perspective.

#### a.) Marxist analyses of art.

Within Marxist approaches to Art, three broad emphases can be distinguished; firstly, on the social conditions of art, defined as the study of situations and conditions of practices; secondly on social material in art works, sociologically manifest as the theory of "base" and "superstructure", the reflection in art works of the basic "facts" or "structure" of a given society; and thirdly on social relations in art works.

Some recent writers have reasserted the importance of a consideration of the specific circumstances of production to a proper understanding of literature, and by analogy, other cultural products.

Bennett<sup>1</sup> has argued, following Balibar and Macherey, that hitherto most Marxist criticism has not been truly Marxist, for in attempting to reconcile the historical and materialist premises of Marxism, the interrelations of base and superstructure, with the ideals of bourgeois aesthetics, it has compromised itself by incorporating them. This, of course, parallels one of our criticisms of the positivist sociology of art, namely that it has assimilated a specific aesthetic, and thus offers a one-sided analysis. Bennett suggests that the results have been unhappy because Marxism and traditional bourgeois aesthetics are, or ought to be, opposed to one another. For, on the one hand Marxism emphasises the differences between forms of writing, as a consequence of differing historical and ideological circumstances, while on the other hand, bourgeois aesthetics looks for those universal qualities which make written works Literature (or Art), and which transcend the concrete historically specific circumstances of their writing.

There has, however, been some recent work, largely inspired by Althusser, which has advanced on this impasse and suggests a way forward. Althusser has been interested in art only in passing, and even then uses the ideals of bourgeois aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his perspective on art is instructive, for he argues that art is a practice which works on and transforms the raw material provided by ideology to make visible the reality of the existing ideology and lead towards a full understanding of it.

Pierre Macherey has built on these ideas of transformation and practice to argue that the author is essentially a producer who transforms certain given materials into another product. There is no reason to regard this particular transformation as any more special than any other.<sup>3</sup> Like any worker, an author constructs his product from material that is already processed, in his case materials such as forms, values, myths, symbols, and ideologies. Macherey is therefore opposed to the Romantic notion of an author as a special creative individual, and he has suggested that it is not so much the author who produces the text, as that the text "produces itself" through the author.<sup>4</sup>

This emphasis on production is taken up by Eagleton,<sup>5</sup> who has recently directed attention back towards what he calls the "literary mode of production". Literary practice should be seen, he argues, as a process of production which transforms the raw materials constituted by literary traditions and conventions and the prevailing social ideology within a particular literary mode of production, that is, the material and social context in which literature is made, read and exchanged. Eagleton suggests that the literary text surely "bears the impress of its historical mode of production", in other words, that the external context of its production is imprinted on the literary text, and would be revealed by careful reading.

There is a clear lineage of thought from Althusser through Macherey to Eagleton. Similar ideas have been developed by Raymond Williams in his Marxism and Literature, on a parallel plane, but clearly not in ignorance of work proceeding elsewhere. He starts from a dissatisfaction with the wooden thinking about the concepts of

"base" and "superstructure" in which art is part of the super-structure. He draws attention to the way in which much thought has been limited by an obsessive concern with the literal meanings of words which were intended as metaphor and, in consequence, a tendency to regard both base and superstructure as fixed properties rather than dynamic and variable. He notes that a link between the two, between Society and "art", of determination, is not only a limiting concept, but "a complex interrelated process of limits and pressures."<sup>6</sup> He goes on then to reject the concepts of "reflection", and what he calls its sophisticated version, "mediation" because both imply a distinct separation of pre-existing areas or orders of reality between which mediating or reflection occurs. The direction of this argument has led Williams to call for a sociology of culture that analyses a "material social process" that comprises indissolubly all the elements that go into cultural production. Thus it would overcome and supercede the separation of content from context, "art" from "society", the separate artificial and misleading realms of bourgeois aesthetics and bourgeois sociology. He writes, "a sociology of culture in this new dimension, from which no aspect of a process is excluded and in which the active and formative relationships of a process, right through to its still active 'products' are specifically and structurally connected: (is) at once a 'sociology' and an 'aesthetics'"<sup>7</sup>.

#### b.) Art History

In the field of Art History, T.J. Clark, in particular, has developed some new approaches in much the same vein, attempting to

redefine its proper subject matter and approach. He has acknowledged that it is easier to proscribe those methods to avoid than to propose a new set for systematic use, but nevertheless has outlined his own scheme for a social history of art, and applied it to a consideration of Gustav Courbet's three major paintings, "Burial at Ornans", "The Stone-breakers" and "Firemen going to a fire."<sup>8</sup>

Clark characterises four approaches, frequently encountered in the social history of art, which he proposes to supercede. Firstly, the notion of works of art "reflecting" ideologies, social relations, or history; secondly, the representation of history as "background" to the work of art, as something which is essentially separate from the production of the work of art, but which occasionally intrudes; thirdly, the idea that the artist derives his sense of social being from the artistic community which mediates the values and ideas of society and their changes, which themselves are determined by historical conditions; and lastly, intuitive analogies between form and ideological content.

He is right to reject the dualism, the separateness of "art" and "society" that each of these approaches presupposes. In their place he offers a vision of a method that explains "the connecting links between artistic form, the available systems of visual representation, the current theories of art, other ideologies, social classes, and more general historical structures and processes."<sup>9</sup> The specific field of study of the Social History of Art, and by extension, the Sociology of Art should be what is taken for granted in the making of art works. Clark aims to discover the "concrete transactions . . . hidden behind the mechanical image of 'reflection', to know how

'background' becomes 'foreground'" and to ascertain the real and complex relations between form and content."<sup>10</sup>

"How 'background' becomes 'foreground'", how context becomes content is, we would argue, the proper domain for the sociology of art. Clark outlines two kinds of questions which he believes the sociology of art should be able to answer. Firstly, he suggests examining the relationship between the work of art and its ideology, that is, the beliefs and techniques by which social classes attempt to "naturalise" and make apparently inevitable their particular histories. Secondly, he suggests questions about the conditions and relations of artistic production in specific cases: "Just why were these particular ideological materials used and not others? Just what determined this particular encounter of work and ideology?"<sup>11</sup>

Clark argues that the two kinds of questions are not entirely separable for, he writes, he does not believe that a work's ideology can be identified without asking questions about the conditions of its production.

In our answers to these, we are led "towards a close description of the class identity of the worker in question, and the ways in which this identity made certain ideological materials available and disguised others, made certain materials workable and others completely intractable, so that they stick out like sore thumbs, unassimilated towards an account of how the work took on its public form - what its patrons wanted, what its audience perceived. To find that out we have to look for the wordless appropriation of the work that sometimes leaves its traces in the margins of the critics'



discourse, in the dealer's records, in the casual transmutation of a title as the picture passes from hand to hand."<sup>12</sup>

An approach of this sort clearly precludes regarding the genesis of creativity as unencumbered individual expression, and places it in a social context, for the imagination of any individual works within the constraints of a particular society. Clark acknowledges the antecedents of this approach in Marx's comments on the dependence of Raphael's existence as an artist on the social institutions and culture of his time. Marx wrote, "Raphael, as much as any other artist, was determined by the technical advances in art made before him, by the organisation of society and the division of labour in his locality, and, finally by the division of labour in all the countries with which his locality had intercourse."<sup>13</sup>

It is instructive to look at the particular factors Clark considers relevant in the case of Courbet, where "the real problem" is to describe and account for the specific matrix of these factors in the relevant period 1849-51, as it was these that made Courbet's paintings distinctive and effective at a particular time. These are, in Clark's own words, Courbet's "situation in rural society, and his experience of changes within it; the various representations - visual and verbal - of rural society available to him; the social structure of Paris in the 1840s; the iconography of Bohemia and his use of it; the nature and function of his notorious life-style in the city; the artistic ideas of the period; (and) the aspects of artistic tradition which interested him."<sup>14</sup>

It is not necessary for our purposes to review here the details of these points, but we should take note of the breadth (as well as

depth) that Clark explores as relevant and necessary to a proper understanding of Courbet's work, and to being able to answer the specific problem of the relation between background and foreground he sets himself.

Clark makes clear the contribution of the social structure and the creator's place in it to the final work of art. He shows that Courbet's successful use of rural events and characters to make political points is highly significant in view of the political tension and social structure of the period. In the middle of the 19th century, the poverty and overcrowding in much of rural France was providing fertile ground for political agitation, fuelling the fears of the comfortably off of a repetition of 1789. At the same time, Paris, the centre of the Art World, and a large urban area, was not an urban society in the modern sense of the term. Its image as an urban, self-conscious, rich, spectacular society was a "fragile illusion."<sup>15</sup> Large-scale rural immigration was recent and continuing by the train load, so that first- or at least second-hand knowledge of rural life and current living conditions can be assumed amongst the Parisian population which flocked to the major art exhibitions. Knowledge of this background is essential to our understanding of both why Courbet chose to paint rural subjects (although it was, of course, what he himself knew most of), and why they were so immediately accepted by an apparently urban population.

There has been no attempt to make a similar detailed analysis for any particular musical work. Lloyd, in his study of English folk music,<sup>16</sup> is clearly cognisant of the place of material social conditions in cultural production. "The mother of folklore is poverty",

he writes, and castigates those whose idealism and preconceptions about "folk music" prevent them from acknowledging the importance of material means in its production, and in particular, their abhorrence of the idea that "hours, wages and conditions have anything to do with what and how a man sings."<sup>17</sup>

Laing has looked at the historical antecedents of recorded popular music and, sharing Clark's concept of cultural production taking place within and as part of a historically specific set of social relations, in which a number of separate factors impose on production, attempts to account for its present day form and style. His patchy historical account, which clearly owes much to Lloyd, leads him to review some of the technical, human and commercial "media" which have helped shape the nature of popular music.<sup>18</sup>

We see in these approaches, exemplified and articulated in Clark's view of Art History, a series of similar concerns to those expressed in some of the recent Marxist approaches we have reviewed. In each case, the art work and its instigator are located in their social and economic environment, and seen as a product of these. The idea of creation is demystified and is seen to be dependent on specific historical circumstances.

### c.) The Feminist Perspective

A third approach to Art History and the Sociology of Art which offers some useful insights into the social construction of art and artists has been the recently developed feminist perspective. In Fine Art there is abundant evidence that women are grossly under-reported in pantheons of established "great" painters. Although all feminist

art historians are concerned to address aspects of this phenomenon, there are, as Pollock reminds us, a number of different perceptions within that general framework.

On the one hand there is Greer, for example, who, in The Obstacle Race, claims to look at the sociology of art to answer, as she puts it, the "true" questions such as "What is the contribution of women to the visual arts?" and, "if there were any women artists, why were there not more?" contained in the "false" question "Why were there no great women painters?"<sup>19</sup> However, in offering an answer to these questions, she retreats into a form of psychologism. To the extent that she offers a conclusion to her study, she suggests that the major obstacles standing in the way of women painters are internal rather than external,<sup>20</sup> arguing that painting is quintessentially a masculine activity, the mythical ideal of artist being an anti-social although socially tolerated form of obsessive neurosis and, as such, at opposite poles from the "carefully cultured self-destructiveness of women"<sup>21</sup> with their damaged egos, and defective wills. Greer reminds us that female creative power has generally been expressed not in painting, but in "so called" minor arts.<sup>22</sup>

Pollock, by way of contrast, proposes a feminist Art History informed by Marxism requiring, she maintains, "the mutual transformation of existing Marxist and recent feminist art history" such as the essentially "bourgeois Art History" of Greer. She exposes the sexual divisions embedded in concepts of art and the artist as part of the cultural myths and ideologies of art history, and in addressing the same questions about the dearth of women artists as Greer, shows how art history, in adopting its mythical ideal of

artist, assumes he is male.

She argues that women have always produced paintings, but the recognition afforded that fact has varied according to changing definitions of the artist and conceptions of femininity. Before the 19th Century, the relationship between the two was uneasy, but not antagonistic, but with the establishment of bourgeois society, the discrepancy between the two concepts becomes greater, and eventually develops in opposition to each other. By the 20th Century, Pollock reports, "most art history systematically obliterated women artists from the record,"<sup>23</sup> regarding creativity as a male prerogative. Nevertheless, she argues, women artists and art do have a structural role in the discourse of art history, as a foil against which to assert the superiority of male artists and their art. In her own words, "the art made by women has to be mentioned and then dismissed precisely in order to secure this hierarchy."<sup>24</sup>

The feminist perspective advances our understanding of the sociology of art, by demonstrating how a further social element, the forms of sexual domination, are brought into cultural production. The feminist perspective has highlighted the social construction of creative roles, by showing how women have been systematically excluded from access to them by the patriarchal ideology of bourgeois-dominated society.

#### d.) Interactionism

A fourth instance of recent rethinking which has offered useful insights for the sociology of art has been developed by Howard S. Becker, informed by the perspective of social interactionism. He has

addressed the problem of a satisfactory sociological analysis of collaborative cultural production and has suggested an approach using the concept of the "Art World". He dissects this World to consider the division of artistic labour within it, the different statuses accorded this labour and the means used by the participants to enable them to work together. He suggests that an understanding of these is the proper focus of the Sociology of Art, as "a sociological analysis of any art . . . looks for that division of labour."<sup>25</sup>

Becker argues that artistic works result from "people doing things together",<sup>26</sup> the outcome of joint action. The notion of "joint action" was developed by Blumer from G. H. Mead's "social act"; he defined it as "the larger collective form of action that is constituted by the fitting together of the lines of behaviour of the separate participants."<sup>27</sup> As each participant necessarily occupies a different position and engages in a separate and distinctive act, it is the fitting together of these that constitutes the joint action. In order to act in an appropriate manner, each individual must share a common understanding of the objective, although this does not excuse them from interpreting and defining one another's ongoing acts.

Becker applies this idea to artistic production. He writes, "Think with respect to any work of art, of all the activities that must be carried on for that work to appear as it finally does. For a symphony orchestra to give a concert, for instance, instruments must have been invented, manufactured and maintained, a notation must have been devised and music composed using that notation, people must have learned to play the notated notes on the instruments, times and places for rehearsal must have been provided, ads. for the concert must have

been placed, publicity arranged and tickets sold, and an audience capable of listening to and in some way understanding and responding to the performance must have been recruited."<sup>28</sup>

He displays here a clear understanding of the social nature of artistic production, that artworks are not solely the work of an individual "artist", but are the outcome of work by a number of individuals, and further, that the content of the work is socially constrained in a number of important ways. Together, these contributing agents and agencies comprise the "Art World".

### The Art World

In Becker's scheme an "Art World" is where art is made, as it "consists of the people and organisations who produce those events and objects that world defines as art."<sup>29</sup> It therefore comprises "all the people whose co-operation is necessary in order that the (art) work should occur as it does."<sup>30</sup> Generally speaking, the necessary activities typically include "conceiving the idea for the work, making the necessary physical artifact, creating a conventional language of expression, training artistic personnel and audiences to use the conventional language to create and experience, and providing the necessary mixture of these ingredients for a particular work or performance."<sup>31</sup> Becker maintains that it is sociologically both "sensible and useful" to regard the coordinated activity of those people comprising the Art World as being responsible for the "joint creation" of the work of art.<sup>32</sup>

Each Art World takes its own "decision" about the artistic merit of the work at its centre - "every co-operative network that

constitutes an Art World creates value by the agreement of its members as to what is valuable."<sup>33</sup> Any Art World is able to confer the status of art on work it produces; thus the genesis of art is firmly placed in the concrete social context in which it is constructed. Becker has acknowledged his debt in the formulation of the concept of the Art World to some recent developments in aesthetics, in particular, the so called "Institutional theory"<sup>34</sup> which has adopted an essentially "relativist" position.

Becker emphasises that there is not just one Art World, for every art work has an associated Art World "radiating out from it",<sup>35</sup> and comprising the network of people whose co-operation has produced something which they call art. There are likely to be very many art worlds coexisting at any one time. Becker offers an image of a dynamic universe of differently structured Art Worlds, some of which are in clusters and form constellations, others of which are entirely independent. "They may be unaware of each other, in conflict, or in some sort of symbiotic or co-operative relation. They may be relatively stable . . . or (be) quite ephemeral. People may participate in only one world or in a large number, either simultaneously or serially."<sup>36</sup>

There are a number of inconsistencies in Becker's articulation of the concept of the Art World, and the extent to which they are unresolved reduces its value as a sociological tool, and seriously weakens his analysis, as we are unable to satisfactorily establish the nature of the Art World he is exploring. For while he shows an appreciation of the relevant features of a full analysis of the collective production of art, in what we have referred to in the



previous chapter as its "social production" meaning, his interactionist perspective and practice belies this. This difficulty lies at the heart of the Griffins' major accusation of Becker's lack of conceptual clarity for we are unable to establish whether he is referring to the limited collaborative production, or to the all-inclusive social production.

In referring to the nature of the action which leads to the creation of the art works he appears to use the terms "collective" and "co-operative" interchangeably, defining neither term. As Nesbit writes, the essence of co-operative action is that it is a combination of efforts towards a specific end in which there is a common interest.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, collective production has no such intention necessarily present, individuals would be acting collectively if they all did the same thing in parallel.

The imprecision about the type of relationships between actors comprising Art Worlds recurs throughout Becker's discussion. As a social interactionist, we would expect Becker to be concerned with co-operative action, although he does not properly clarify his understanding of its nature, sometimes referring to it as "co-ordinated". The Griffins ask "does Becker mean that individuals act co-operatively while in awareness of other actors?"<sup>38</sup> Becker gives an example of an orchestral concert which includes both circumstances where awareness, knowledge, and content are very likely, and circumstances where any contact, knowledge or even awareness is unlikely, if not impossible.<sup>39</sup> Thus, in the first case, we can assume that the actors involved in orchestral rehearsals, or concert publicity are continually adjusting their actions in the light of and in response to others, and we might

see this as co-ordinated. In the second, where there is no contact between actors whose contributions are essential to the production of the art work, individuals, such as those concerned with the invention of instruments or devising of notation, will not adjust their actions to accommodate others. Although Becker does not distinguish between the two types of social network implied, there is clearly a very great difference between them.

He suggests that the Art World may be relatively small, as he claims that the status of art and artist arise out of a consensus of those who comprise the Art World. A consensus is only really tenable for individuals who are cognisant of each other. Yet within the same paper a much wider definition of the Art World is also referred to, one that is all-inclusive, comprising "all those people and organisations whose activity is necessary to produce the kind of events and objects which that world characteristically produces."<sup>40</sup> This, in many circumstances, is not to define it meaningfully at all for it is difficult to distinguish it from "society" as a whole, as we have to include all those who conceive the idea, who execute it, who provide equipment and materials, and who 'provide' and comprise an appropriately informed audience.

It is apparent that in the case of contemporary works of art created with a modicum of technical support and made available through the mass media to a spatially separated audience, the numbers of people we could include as constituting the Art World, on this definition, may be very large. As an example, the Art World of a new work by an established playwright and premiered on television, would, using Becker's analysis, consist at the very minimum of the play-

wright, actors, television studio personnel, publicists and writers who have forewarned and prepared the audience, and critics who help mould opinion afterwards and, say, five million people watching it. The Art World for this play would therefore constitute at least five million and one thousand people. But if we include all those people whose activity was necessary, we might include, amongst many others, previous playwrights and critics whose work was studied by the playwright and informed his latest work, his literary agent for encouraging and advising him; those employees of the paper and pencil industries who made his materials, and the retailer who sold their product to him; the carpenters and painters who made the studio set; the workers who made the cameras, lights and transmitting equipment, and those who operate them; and the workers who made the television receiving equipment, and so on.

Clearly, to include people whose relationship to the art work is through one of some of these categories, is to make the concept of Art World unmanageable, and we certainly could not assume that all its members had an interest in, or even knowledge of, the work to which they are contributing. Yet all contribute inescapably to the existence of the artwork, and in some cases shape it, and a break in that chain might make that existence problematic. It seems that in this case, where modern industrial technology is used, it is not possible to distinguish an Art World as a separate entity to society as a whole.

## The artistic division of labour.

Having argued that art is produced within an Art World, Becker next considers how that Art World is constituted to produce art, and the division of labour that is necessary in order for it to do that. One of Becker's arguments for using the concept of "Art World" rather than a more abstract term, is that it would act as a reminder that artistic works are the result of "people doing things together".<sup>41</sup>

We have already noted the tasks Becker lists as necessary for the creation of any art work, from conceiving the work in the first place, to training audiences to understand the conventions used. It is, he comments, unlikely although not impossible for one person to do all these tasks, but typically, a number of people participate in doing the work, for without this participation it would not be created. The way in which these tasks are divided amongst people is sociologically significant.

A particular division of labour is not a natural phenomenon, whatever it may appear like to the participants but, according to Becker, results from a consensual definition of the situation.<sup>42</sup> He notes that once a division of labour has been established in an Art World, or indeed any organisation, the participants of that organisation will tend to view it as natural. It is further to be expected that those to whom a particular division of labour offers advantages will, as Becker says, resist attempts to change it by those who regard it as unnatural, or inefficient.<sup>43</sup>

The technology of any art does not, either, make one division of tasks more appropriate or "natural" than another, and Becker gives a number of examples from different cultural fields showing how, with

the same technology but in different circumstances or societies, the necessary tasks are carried out by different people. Thus, some art photographers make their own prints, while others seldom do; in some Eastern cultures calligraphy is an integral part of poetry, whereas in the Western tradition most poets are happy to leave the final form to a printer to make legible. We will see that in the recording industry there are in some circumstances significant variations in the division of labour for carrying out essential tasks.

Becker's particular interest is the "division of artistic labour" in the Art World, the boundary between those individuals who may be called "artist" and creative, and those individuals or groups who are not, and whom he describes as "support personnel". He is concerned to identify the person regarded as most responsible for the artistic or expressive content of the work, the "artist" who is the central character in his Art World.

There are, however, some shortcomings in Becker's approach to a division of artistic labour. Despite setting out to address and demystify the concepts of "art" and "artist", he only partially succeeds. For although he shows the limitations of the myth of a single artist responsible for all aspects of an art work, the basis of the Fine Art Tradition we discussed in the previous chapter, by arguing that both "art" and "artist" are social constructs, he nevertheless shares the Fine Art Tradition's regard for "art" and the work going into it as special and distinct from other cultural production.

Although Becker argues that there is no a priori "artist", for the artist emerges out of the consensus of the Art World, he does nevertheless assume that one will be found, for he places him at the

centre of each "Art World". Indeed, his Art World might more appropriately be referred to as an "art wheel" with the artist at its hub, and around whom supporting personnel circulate as they carry out their business on his behalf and for his benefit. It is relevant to note here that, following Kuhn in his work on scientific paradigms,<sup>44</sup> Becker psychologises change in artistic styles, by explaining them in terms of artists' desire for change as conventional approaches become dysfunctional for them.

Becker is right to distinguish between collaborative workers in the Art World, for there are real differences in their work, status, and authority. However, this does not lead us necessarily to a single two way division between "artists" and "others", and our reservations about his procedure are that he is not sufficiently convincing that there are fundamental differences between "artists" and "others", or that these differences are more significant than other differences between support personnel. He suggests that in any art work made collaboratively there will be contributions of both art and craft, two kinds of work carried out by artists and craftsmen. He writes "The person who does the work that gives the product its unique and expressive character is called an 'artist' and the product itself 'art'. Other people whose skills contribute in a supporting way are called 'craftsmen'. The work they do is called a 'craft'."<sup>45</sup> Implicit, therefore, in this view of collaborative production within an "Art World", is the notion of a distinguishable "artist", someone who is different from other members of the team, and who is responsible for the work that the Art World defines as "art".

Each Art World has a special, leading individual, an artist. The artist and his support personnel together create a cultural product which becomes designated as "art" as a result of a consensual definition made by the Art World. Becker claims that "what is taken, in any world of art, to be the quintessential artistic art, the act whose performance marks one as an artist, is a matter of consensual definition."<sup>46</sup> It follows from this consensual definition, what we might call the "social construction of the artist", that as "art" and "artist" are not natural physical phenomena but social phenomena then the activities (and people) that we defined as "artistic" may change from time to time and place to place. Becker shows with a number of examples that this is the case.

Art worlds differ, for example, in the way they ascribe the title of "artist" to a participant. In some Art Worlds it is the culmination of a long apprenticeship whereas in other it is left to the lay public. An activity may also change status from art to non-art, or vice versa, and Becker refers us to Kealy's work on recording engineers, a number of whom were accorded the status of artist when technical advances first offered very much greater expressive possibilities, but when these became more widely attainable the status was forfeited.<sup>47</sup> Hence, we would argue, Becker postulates an "Art World" which presupposes and centres on an artist, while arguing simultaneously that it is the same "Art World" which decides whom of its members may appropriately be referred to as an "artist".

There are, therefore, a number of questions that may be raised about the concepts of art and artist within the Art World which Becker does not adequately answer. For example, can either an Art World or

an artist exist without the other? Could an Art World conspire not to define one of its members as an artist, when he might normally be accorded that status? What consequences would that have for the Art World? Would it in those circumstances, or if certain statuses changed, suddenly cease to exist? or could it remain in existence pending a decision on another candidate? What consequences are there if members of an Art World were unable to agree on who, if anybody, should be described as artist?

### Power

The Griffins also argue that, while Becker is aware of the existence of "aesthetic conflicts" within Art Worlds, apparently within co-operative relationships, he fails to recognise the role of power in their resolution.<sup>48</sup> Even where a compromise is agreed, coercion is not necessarily absent, and one of the protagonists may have coerced the other. Aesthetic conflicts, like other conflicts are resolved by relative power and relative resources.

Within any Art World we can see that power is distributed unequally, in some cases hierarchically in accordance with a formal pattern of authority, in others informal patterns may have developed dependent on individual participant's personalities, or on outside factors such as financial power, or "artistic" status or reputation.

Becker cites as an example of aesthetic conflict the case of a sculptor and the lithographic printers who were to print from his work. The sculptor wants to incorporate large areas of solid colour, and when he learns that this may cause the printer difficulties because of the possibility of roller marks showing, proposes to incorporate such



marks into his design. As the printers felt that to leave roller marks on the finished work would contravene their own craft standards they were not prepared to do it for him.

At first sight we might expect the sculptor to be the more powerful, as he is, in effect, an employing entrepreneur. He does not necessarily need this firm of lithographers as he could learn to do the work himself, find another firm, or simply not produce the sculpture. In practice, however, this power is constrained. He does not gain anything by not making what he wants to make. Presumably, he does not wish to spend time teaching himself to print lithographs, and he may not be able to find another firm of comparable competence and price able to do the job. Similarly, the lithographers are not powerless, they clearly do not need the work and their reputation is valuable to them, and worth more than this contract.

We can see how support personnel limit the exercise of "artistic" power and, therefore, are able to impose a countervailing will of their own. In this case the sculptor recognises the limits to his freedom of action and adjusts his actions to take them into account. Becker would argue that what we then see is a consensual agreement. However, the fact that the conflict of wills is covert rather than overt should not blind us to the fact that the resolution was, and will always be, in favour of the greater power.

Becker's failure to recognise the role of power and coercion in the consensus he sees undermines the authority of his analysis, as the difficulty in dealing with power diminishes all analyses founded on the theoretical basis of symbolic interaction. Layder argues that symbolic interactionists are unable to comprehend power as a property

of structural position, wielded or at least possessed, by an individual by virtue of incumbancy of a social position. This blind spot arises because in the symbolic interactionist perspective, power is an attribute of individuals or groups of interactants rather than as an outside constraint independent of the interpretive capacity of those involved.<sup>49</sup>

#### The value of interactionism

Becker makes a useful and valuable contribution to the Sociology of Art in one of the first major attempts to come to terms with the problems of analysing the making of art that is collectively produced, by suggesting the co-ordinates of a sociological analysis. We would suggest that the division of artistic labour is particularly important and is a starting point for our own inquiry into recording. However, we have identified in his key concept, the Art World, a number of shortcomings which limit its usefulness; it is flawed in its vagueness, and the apparent inconsistency this vagueness obscures between the interactionist collaborative production unit that Becker would investigate, and the wider context of social production that he is clearly aware should have a place in any understanding of how art works are made; the lack of clarity about the nature of the action that takes place within it; its apparent inability to deal with power in the resolution of conflict; and its privileging of art and the artist.

In general, a collaborative production perspective on its own, such as is offered by interactionism, is insufficient for a proper sociological understanding of art, as it only considers those

activities most directly and physically related to the making of art works, and separates and insulates them from the outside social world.

### The social production of art

In this chapter we have reviewed some recent developments in Marxism, Art History, feminism and American interactionism which suggest ways of revitalising the Sociology of Art so that it is more able to cope adequately with the reality of cultural production and release it from the limitations of a positivist perspective. Taken together they point towards a satisfactory sociological account of the complex intermesh of factors that contribute to creativity and cultural production. In particular, each in different ways highlights aspects of the social construction of conceptions of creativity and the organisation of creative roles. Through the process of production, these in turn impact on the cultural product itself and on the individuals who are producers. We propose to draw on insights from each of these sources in the analysis of the production of recorded popular music in the chapters that follow.

Janet Wolff has recently drawn together some of the strands we would wish to follow and articulated them as a "Social Production of Art" perspective. She suggests that the work of art, which is more accurately (and neutrally) described as a "cultural product" should be seen as the "complex product of economic, social and ideological factors, mediated through the formal structures of the text, and owing its existence to the particular practice of the located individual."<sup>50</sup> Any analysis should be able to account for and incorporate all the contributing factors to production; and the sociology of art is

properly concerned with study of the practices and institutions of artistic production. This necessarily involves the study of aesthetic conventions and the social and historical locus of the artist. "It also discloses the ways in which these practices are embedded in and informed by broader social and political processes and institutions, with economic factors historically playing a particularly important role."<sup>51</sup>

These themes will be considered in the following chapters in our account of the social production of recorded popular music.

Footnotes for Chapter Three.

1. T. Bennett, p104-6
2. T. Bennett, p106ff
3. Eagleton, p69; T. Bennett, p156-7
4. Eagleton, p83
5. see Eagleton
6. Williams, 1977, p87
7. Williams, 1977, p141; see also Williams, 1981, pp30-32
8. see Clark, 1973
9. Clark, 1973, p12
10. Clark, 1974, p562
11. Clark, 1974, p562
12. Clark, 1974, p562
13. Marx and Engels, 1974, p108
14. Clark, 1973, p17
15. Clark, 1973, p147
16. see Lloyd
17. Lloyd, p11
18. see Laing, 1969
19. Greer, p6
20. Greer, p324-5
21. Greer, p327
22. Greer, p7
23. Pollock, p6
24. Pollock, p6
25. Becker, 1974, p768
26. Becker, 1974, p767
27. Blumer, p540
28. Becker, 1974, p767
29. Becker, 1976, p703
30. Becker, 1976, p703
31. Becker, 1974, p768
32. Becker, 1976, p704
33. Becker, 1974, p774
34. see Blizek, Danto, Dickie, McGregor
35. Becker, 1976, p704
36. Becker, 1976, p704-5
37. see Nisbet
38. Griffin and Griffin, p174
39. Becker, 1974, p767-8
40. Becker, 1974, p767
41. Becker, 1974, p767
42. Becker, 1974, p768
43. Becker, 1974, p768
44. see Kuhn
45. Becker, 1978, p863
46. Becker, 1974, p769
47. see Kealy
48. see Griffin and Griffin
49. Layder, p40-1
50. Wolff, p139
51. Wolff, p139

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The contemporary production of sound recordings.

This chapter briefly sets out the processes involved in the contemporary production of a recording and introduces some terms, as a necessary preliminary to the discussion of the following chapters. In general, recordings are initiated for profit by entrepreneurial organisations as sources of profit in their own right, or as part of a wider project. Individual capitalists themselves may play a role in the production or may hire others to work on their behalf.

### The Studio

Most recording is carried out in a "studio", which normally comprises two separate rooms, a recording room and a "control room". The sounds made for recording for inclusion in the final product are made in the recording room. It is likely to be at least 400 sq. ft., sound-proofed to prevent the intrusion of extraneous noise, and in the more sophisticated studios, designed and equipped to offer a variety of acoustic environments. An all-purpose non-ambient environment is generally regarded as the most useful for recording popular music; as most acoustic environments can be simulated electronically from this base.

The recording room is linked by microphones and speakers, and visually by a sound-proofed window or closed circuit television to the "control room" where the engineer and producer work and which houses the equipment for receiving, storing, modifying and replaying the sounds made in the other room. It may also serve as a general waiting, sitting, and listening room for others involved.

Control rooms conventionally focus on the recording console, the "desk", through which all sound is controlled and routed. In appearance, the console is a bank of switches, faders and dials for operating and controlling microphones, tape recorders, amplifiers, electronic enhancements and loud speakers. Present day consoles are an aggregate of parallel control units, each corresponding to one of the sound channels on the recording tape, each of which is capable of being recorded or worked on in isolation, while kept in synchrony with the other sound channels. The console is normally designed for operation by one person, in some cases incorporating small computers to assist the recording engineer in memorising and coordinating the control switches. Recording consoles represent major items of capital expenditure and, on first installation, are usually designed to specification.

A recording studio is a considerable capital investment; studios tend to be owned either by recording companies as integral parts of their operation, in which case they are primarily for the use of their own contracted performers, or by independent entrepreneurs for hire to others for particular projects. Costs vary enormously, ranging from 10 to 100 per hour, depending not only on the specification of the recording equipment, but on such factors as location, comfort and reputation. The studio may expect to supply the engineer(s).

### Recording

Once a decision to invest in making a recording has been made, producer and performers are engaged, an appropriate concept for recording is articulated if it has not been done so already, and

arrangements are made for the recording to take place. Its production, the concretisation of the concept, will normally follow a standard pattern. There are four basic stages, the initial recording when relevant sounds are collected and stored; mixing, when these sounds are electronically enhanced, edited, and amalgamated into a final recording; manufacture, when the finished recording is transferred into a suitable form and then duplicated; and publication, when it is distributed and sold to a public.

Our particular concern with the production of recordings encompasses the first two stages, but we are, throughout, aware of the ways in which the later manufacture and publication, particularly through the financial imperatives on the entrepreneurial organisations, impinge on production.

The numbers of individuals directly involved in the production of recordings is generally small. In Chapter Eight we shall analyse the social relations of the organisation of production, but it is pertinent to note the principal roles here. Recordings are normally produced under the direction and control of a producer; the work of operating the recording equipment, recording and manipulating the sounds, is carried out by one or two recording engineers; and musical sounds are made by the performer(s) whose names are associated with the recording, with assistance as required from session musician(s) interpreting the work of composer and arranger. Some individuals may combine more than one role, such as engineer and producer, and performer and composer. Others may assist these principals, but are regarded as having minor roles.



Those recording personnel who are engaged to work on a project, will be those whom the entrepreneur believes are capable of making the type of recording he wants. Recording personnel are typically engaged on a fixed-term contract, although in some cases, recording engineers may be permanent employees of an entrepreneurial recording company or a studio. Performers will normally be contracted for a number of projects; most others will be engaged for the project in hand. The organisation may be made more complicated when the entrepreneur is also a participant, usually as a producer, but occasionally as a performer.

#### Initial recording

During the initial recording, all sounds for possible inclusion in the final product will be made by performers and any session musicians in the recording room (or occasionally, on stage in front of an audience) and recorded onto a storage medium such as magnetic tape, by the recording engineer.

Performers and musicians strive to achieve recordings that are consistent with the conventions of recorded sound and the aesthetic aims within these that have been established by the producer. This frequently involves painstaking repetition, perhaps the most characteristic feature of recording.

Each sound source may be recorded sequentially and separately in isolation, allowing individuals to take more than one role, performances to be repeated in order to perfect them, and greater flexibility for all the individuals involved. Alternatively, musicians and performers may record simultaneously together, in the

same way as if it were a "live" stage performance, a method that may offer advantages both in terms of costs, because it saves time, and is thought to improve the performance recorded in terms of music making, because it may enable the performers and musicians concerned to respond to each other's work together and generate some excitement and emotional input.

Most recordings of popular music today are undertaken in both ways, with the rhythm section recorded simultaneously, and those individual performances that are highlighted and therefore open to scrutiny being recorded separately, edited and treated as required, and "overdubbed" on to the remainder of the recording during mixing.

#### Mixing and reduction

The essence of modern multi-track recording technique is that once sounds are recorded, the technical equipment allows great flexibility because of the independent storage of each sound source. Thereafter, there is an almost infinite range of acoustic and artistic possibilities, restricted only by the sounds that have been recorded or are available.

Once the initial recordings are made, they are edited, that is, combined or "mixed" together and normally "reduced" to form a "master" recording in stereo. The standardisation of technical equipment, a point to which we shall return in Chapter Seven, permits mixing to be undertaken at an entirely separate time and place from the initial recording. It is usually carried out by producer and engineer alone.

The mixing and reduction of sound recordings is the same principle as editing the more familiar visual medium of film. An

indication of the radical effect editing can have is graphically outlined by Butler in his account of its crucial role in the case of film. "The potential influence of editing on the finished product can scarcely be exaggerated. It can quicken the action by the removal of alternate frames, or slow it down by the insertion of additional ones; it can ensure a smooth progression or jerk an audience from scene to scene with shock cuts; it can totally alter the meaning and significance of a sequence, or even the entire film, by revealing one aspect before another; it can, as Eisenstein demonstrated in an ever-lastingly quoted instance, bring stone lions to life. It can ruin a potentially good film, and can to some extent rescue a poor one - but this is not easy."<sup>1</sup>

The effect of mixing on recorded sounds may be no less substantial; its impact can be seen when, from time to time, differently mixed versions of a recording are made available to the public.

During mixing, recorded sounds are edited, relative volumes for each recorded sound-source set, and electronic enhancement, if any, added. They may also be located spatially for a simulated stereophonic or quadrophonic effect on replaying. The producer will normally choose between different recorded performances, or fragments of them for the parts to combine in order to construct the sound for which he is aiming.

He also sets relative sound volumes. There is no "natural" sound level to electronically amplified or recorded musical instruments, and there can be no "natural" balance between the sounds of instruments recorded on different occasions. Indeed, sounds are recorded at a

maximum volume in order to minimise the signal-to-noise ratio and eliminate interference. Electronic enhancements may be used to create an artificial sound environment, but is more often used to treat conventional vocal or instrumental sounds to create new sounds or make them more interesting. The recording tape itself, may be slowed down, speeded up, or reversed.

The assembling and reconstructing of the different sounds into the sequential collage that is the finished recording might be regarded as a form of performance in its own right, as sounds are combined from different recorded sources, and heard together for the first time. This collage of recorded sounds is the usual culmination of production work, and it is duplicates of it that are subsequently sold and looked upon as recordings.

The characteristically fragmented and complex procedure means that the recording and mixing of a three-minute piece of music could spread over a number of days. For convenience, and in order to spread costs and retain a greater number of options for publication, it is more usual to make a number of individual recordings during one period. In this way, a project may take a number of weeks.

### Manufacture

When the recording is finished it is transferred onto a "master" disc or tape from which duplicates can be manufactured. This transfer can be critical to the sound of the finished work reaching the public, and although it is possible for minor amendments to be made to the sound at this point by recording personnel, this is unusual. Duplicate discs and tapes are manufactured by an industrial process

that is entirely independent of the production of the sounds recorded and in which economies of scale can reduce the cost of manufacture of each duplicate to a few pence. All recordings are manufactured in the same way, regardless of content.

### Publication

The cycle of production is completed when the manufactured duplicates are made available and distributed for retail sale. By no means all recordings which are produced are ever published. Recording companies sell recordings to retailers, either directly with their own salesmen, or indirectly through wholesalers. Their relationship with the public is, therefore, in this aspect a mediated one, although their marketing of recordings and performers and promotion through various media is aimed directly at a potential public.

In the following chapters we shall examine how the technological, economic, ideological and organisational factors supporting this system of production lead us to argue that recordings are socially produced.

Footnote to Chapter Four.

1. Butler, p150

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The institutional context of production.

In this chapter we shall consider how the cultural institutions of the society in which cultural production takes place embed themselves in that production. Cultural production is evaluated not solely by individuals on "absolute" criteria, but by a network of institutions according to socially produced criteria. These criteria permeate cultural products by establishing the aesthetic framework in relation to which production takes place. White and White use the term "institutional system" to refer to the "persistent network of beliefs, customs, and formal procedures which together form a more-or-less articulated social organisation,"<sup>1</sup> the purpose of which is the creation and recognition of art. Wolff spells this out in more detail; she writes, "In the production of (what is judged to be) art, social institutions affect . . . who becomes an artist, how they become an artist, how they are then able to practise their art, and how they can ensure that their work is produced, performed and made available to the public."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, we not only want to consider the social context in which art works exist, what Bird<sup>3</sup> refers to as the "socio-economic environment", traditionally studied in conventional sociology of art, in order to understand what happens to "art" once it is made, but we also want to investigate the social structures and institutions associated with cultural production in order to better understand how the finished artifact is defined and shaped by that context.

In particular, we shall focus on three aspects of especial interest in the production of recordings, the social categorisation of cultural

production, the role of cultural markets in sustaining particular definitions of creativity, and the role of the public in production.

### Social Institutions

Social systems are not homogenous. As our particular interest is the contemporary recording of popular music, we are concerned with recording in a bourgeois dominated, class-based society with capitalist economic relations. In such a society, culture, like society as a whole, is fragmented, stratified and dominated by the bourgeoisie. The logic and practices of capitalist economic relations are such that there is a tendency for cultural artifacts to be shaped by the demands of the market place, dominated as it is, by a small number of monopolistic enterprises. The social relations of the recording of popular music are, therefore, those within a specific bourgeois and monopolistic capitalist social system.

The imperatives of this wider social system ultimately shape decisions about the production of recordings. Institutions of the "art world" of recordings are organised in ways consistent with these wider social imperatives, and mediate their effect on recordings. All recordings are concretisations of concepts about appropriate things to record and these mediated imperatives affect decisions about, amongst other things, the type of material that may be recorded, the specific material for recording, the way this is carried out, and who undertakes it. In an analysis of recording, therefore, we need to be cognisant of how and why certain ideas and individuals rather than others are brought forward for recording.



Although appearing to be "natural", because it is familiar, the conceptual and institutional framework of cultural production is historically specific and socially constructed. A sociological investigation cannot eschew analysis of such taken-for-granted phenomena.

### Musics.

"Music" in its widest sense, is one result of a social categorisation of sounds, a classification that has designated some sound energy as "noise", and others as, for example, "speech", or "background hum" or "music", while still others are conventionally ignored. The distinction between "music" and "noise" is an ascribed characteristic, the boundaries of which may be vague, and may, from time to time, be in dispute. In bourgeois culture, "music" has become defined as deliberately made sounds, usually in a formal relationship with each other, and normally made on a limited range of mechanical or electronic contrivances, or by human or certain animal voices.

Systems of artificial sound, "music", would appear to have a role in all societies,<sup>4</sup> although the form that this "music" takes varies considerably and a piece produced in one culture would not necessarily be recognisable as such in different cultures.

The term "music" itself covers a wide range of cultural production, some of which is regarded by bourgeois society as legitimate and some of which is regarded as non-legitimate. Within the general category of "music", there are major sub-categories, such as classical music, church music, or popular music; sub-sub-categories dividing these up into, for example, chamber music, orchestral music, and baroque music; or rock, rock and roll, and soul music; and further

sub-divisions of each of these groupings. To refer, therefore, to "music" in general, or "popular music" or "classical music" without being aware of these differences may be to make misleading assumptions about the homogeneity of a number of very different phenomena.

The same point may be made about the visual arts, where similar distinctions are usually made between, for example, oil and water painting, lithographs and engravings, or between works of the Impressionists, the Fauvists, and the pre-Raphaelites.

In practice, popular music is largely defined in opposition to the "art" or "serious" music sanctified by cultural and educational agencies and may refer to any style of music, even overlapping from time to time, with "art" music. The musical differences between such music in the European serious tradition and popular music are essentially the latter's Afro-American musical criteria and the electronic amplification of instruments. "Popular music" need not be popular, and indeed most, as measured by the sales of recordings, is not.<sup>5</sup>

Stratton suggests that popular music is conventionally defined experientially and non-rationally. He argues that concerned individuals learn to "know" what is, and what is not, "rock music" and that as there are no sets of criteria that can be articulated and which must be fulfilled, "A person knows from experiencing a piece of music whether or not it is 'popular music', but only for him or herself."<sup>6</sup>

The parameters of the broad band of acceptability as popular music are set in Britain by the broadcasting agencies, dominated today by the BBC. Other mediating agencies, such as the consumer music and

other press, discotheques, public performances of performers, fan clubs and word of mouth, are still significant, but usually of secondary importance. Broadcasting agencies determine the types of music that may be regarded as popular and may help define the varying sub-categories. As recordings are made to sell, inclusion in programming is vital for a recording if a potential buying public is to be alerted to its availability, and it is inevitable that the "gatekeepers" of these broadcasting agencies exert a very great influence over the type of recordings made. Broadcasting agencies will at the least be concerned not to lose their audience by playing unconventional types of music, and concerned to maintain broadcasting standards of decency and party political neutrality in terms of song lyrics. These constraints are largely effected by self restraint or through their internalisation on the part of recording personnel. Periodically, recordings achieve commercial success precisely because they deliberately flout the conventions, and compensate for the lack of broadcast exposure by the publicity associated with proscription.<sup>7</sup>

The coexistence of different types of music and other cultural products is related to the various socio-economic sub-environments in which each was produced, according to Bourdieu,<sup>8</sup> who has argued that as there is an economic base to aesthetics, an economically differentiated society will support differentiated aesthetics.

It is pertinent at this stage to recall Lloyd's dictum about "folk" music which has a wider application, "Deep at the root there is no essential difference between folk music and art music; they are varied blossoms from the same stock, grown to serve a similar purpose, if destined for different tables. Originally, they spring from the

same area of man's mind; their divergence is a matter of history, of social and cultural stratification."<sup>9</sup>

In a society stratified on a class basis, the differing aesthetics associated with each class will also tend to be stratified in the same way. One aspect of bourgeois hegemony is the superior status ascribed to the bourgeois aesthetic, and it is significant that, under capitalism, it is this aesthetic that becomes described as "art", and the yardstick against which others are measured.

### The categorisation of cultural production.

Pierre Bourdieu has sought to explain the bases of different treatments of cultural production by arguing that categories such as "art" are defined and conferred on cultural products by certain authorising and consecrating agencies in society. He also acknowledges ambiguous cases where the categorisation is not clear cut.

### The Intellectual Field

He has put forward the concept of the "intellectual field" to explain the manner in which these consecrating agencies work. The "intellectual field" is a system of power lines (like a magnetic field) made up of the various authorising and consecrating agencies. Its specific structure at a given moment of time will be determined by these agents whose influence may vary, depending on the "weight" and activity of the groups they represent. The intellectual field arose historically when creative artists freed themselves from dependence on the Church and the aristocracy, and artistic institutions such as

academies and salons developed in their place as arbiters of taste. More recently, dealers and mass-media critics have become an additional source of influence. Bourdieu sees the competition for cultural legitimacy as providing the "specific logic" of the intellectual field. Since it cannot be assumed that all of these agencies will act in the same way and at the same time, "various systems of expression from the theatre to television are objectively organised according to a hierarchy independent of individual opinions, that defines cultural legitimacy and its degrees."<sup>10</sup>

At any time, cultural activities may be legitimate, non-legitimate, or in one of a number of transitional stages. Bourdieu illustrates this with respect to contemporary society. "One passes . . . by degrees from the entirely consecrated arts - like theatre, painting, sculpture, literature or classical music (among which hierarchies are also established that may vary in the course of time), to systems of signs which (at first sight anyhow) are left to individual judgement, whether interior decorating, cosmetics or cookery." In addition, there are those of intermediate status, intermittently legitimate, such as photography, whose position, "halfway between 'vulgar' activities abandoned apparently to the anarchy of individual preferences and noble cultural activities subject to strict rules"<sup>10</sup> explains the ambiguous reactions it receives, particularly from the "cultivated" classes. Photography, like cinema and jazz, is in the process of becoming legitimate.

Bourdieu's work on the intellectual field supports a phenomenologically inclined stance that recognises that different music may have different criteria which are equally valid.

There are difficulties, however, with his analysis. Vulliamy, for example, has drawn attention to an important limitation, namely the static picture of a dynamic environment. How and why, he asks, do the "spheres of legitimacy" change over time? He points out that Bourdieu's placing of jazz, for example, in an intermediate category does not answer the interesting question of how the meaning of jazz (or other popular music) changed in such a way that what was once regarded as "uncivilised music" subsequently became suitable for scholarship.<sup>12</sup>

The status ascribed to different cultural products has important implications. The position of the recording of popular music vis à vis the market, for example, is one such consequence, for cultural production is not necessarily undertaken for the market by profit-seeking businesses. The origins of recording lie in the commercial entertainment boom of the late 19th Century, but the reason why the performing and recording of popular music continues to remain supported solely by the market place lies, ultimately, in its not being regarded as worthy of state or business support. Consequently its survival as a cultural form has depended on its success in the market place; this applies equally to the sub-categories of popular music where being "in" or "out" of fashion is a reflection of the level of support in the market, and styles of music supercede one another as bases of active performing and recording. By way of contrast, state and private patronage is considered appropriate for the performing, although not usually the recording, of "classical" orchestral music.

## Mass Culture

One intellectual tradition which uses this economic context as a basis to justify a differentiation between what it calls "art", which essentially means bourgeois culture, and marketed forms of "non-art", which it calls "mass culture", is represented in the influential collection of the same name edited by Rosenberg and White.<sup>13</sup>

Mass culture has been characterised as being created "for everyone, indifferent(ly) to sex, age, education . . . and formed by the requirements of profitable mass production, standardisation and bureaucratisation."<sup>14</sup> Coser has succinctly summarised the salient features attributed by these critics: "It (mass culture) is distinguished from folk culture and from high culture by its standardised mass production, marketability and parasitic dependence on other forms of art and culture. It embodies a sharp cleavage between the consumer (the audience) and the producer. The latter exploits and manipulates the former. These characteristics radically distinguish mass culture from other cultural forms."<sup>15</sup>

The proponents of the "mass culture" theory on the left of the political spectrum, such as Adorno and Marcuse, and on the right, such as Leavis and Eliot both point to the way in which non-legitimate cultural products such as film, pulp fiction, popular music, and popular broadcasting are made primarily for consumption as entertainment, arguing that their roles are simply to divert, and that the effect is to dull consciousness to a state of passivity. They are qualitatively different, therefore, from "art", and standing outside the "Fine Art Tradition"<sup>16</sup> need not disturb its assumptions.

Although recorded popular music is intrinsically a commodity, we must be mindful that not all musicians working within one of the idioms of popular music are primarily motivated by financial gain and may be trying to create what they consider to be serious artistic music,<sup>17</sup> and secondly that the offering of cultural products for sale has not necessarily precluded their being regarded as "art".

Swingewood has recently rejected the "mass culture" perspective on the grounds that it is essentially conservative and upholds a static ideological concept of culture. He notes that under a capitalist economy and technology, a capitalist culture has achieved an economic and cultural richness and diversity on a scale unparalleled in earlier human history.<sup>18</sup>

A consequence of the influence of the theory, however, is that the music establishment and many critics have failed both to appreciate the different musical criteria of popular music or to differentiate its constituent varieties. We shall look further at this differentiation below.

#### The role of cultural markets.

One of the practical consequences of the social categorisation of cultural production is that some cultural products become reliant, to varying degrees, on the market. The concepts of creativity within which production takes place, ideas about such things as who is regarded as "creative", and about what "being creative" means tend to be defined by intermediaries of the market place.

H.C. and C.A. White's study of French painting in the 19th century<sup>19</sup> illustrates how the institutional context of cultural



production, may define the concepts within which creativity and production takes place. In particular, they illustrate the role of cultural markets in favouring particular conceptions of creativity. They also show how the institutional framework may change, and allow in its train, a whole new range of possibilities to emerge, thereby pointing to a social source of aesthetic and stylistic change.

The Whites trace the emergence of Impressionism as a legitimate style of painting, and relate it to changes in the institutional structure of French painting. This change, caused both by the internal contradictions in the previous arrangements, and the contemporaneous development of a bourgeois art market transformed the way in which works of art were conceptualised, judged and reached the public, and, whereas there was nothing before, created careers for painters in particular styles.

They adopt a Mertonian functionalist perspective in analysing this phenomenon and in accounting for change. Merton recognised that while an activity may be functional in contributing to the well-being and sustenance of a given system, it may also be having an adverse effect on another part of the same system or on a different system, and be "dysfunctional" for it.<sup>20</sup>

The Whites show how the French Royal Academy had become "dysfunctional", and how, in its place, there emerged a dealer-critic network as the institutional system in which the painters worked. The Academy was based socially on the agrarian aristocracy, having developed tenuously from the destruction of the medieval guilds. In the 19th Century it became victim largely of its own ideology and working organisation. As painting became centralised in Paris and

painters became numerous, it was simply overwhelmed by weight of numbers of both painters and their works, became clogged up, and late attempts to streamline it, merely lowered it in public esteem. During the same period, sustained by the growing economic and cultural power of the bourgeoisie, an alternative arrangement, a dealer-critic system, evolved. In the first place this new system coped with the overflow of the marginal or unconventional painters who could not get their work displayed by the Academy.

Whereas the Academy had been organised around painters' works on canvas, and had undervalued their career aspirations, the dealer-critic system helped develop the careers of painters and benefitted from more general changes in the socio-economic environment which had led to the development of a bourgeois market for portable and decorative works of art, at the same time as there was a rapid decline in sources of patronage. The new dealers were able to nurture and exploit the new markets informed and guided by a new intermediary, the journalist critic. Painters rather than paintings were the aesthetic focus of the new system, not as a result of any collective altruism on the part of dealers, but because it was in their long term interests, as much as in the painters', to support a career that spanned a number of paintings. This, as we shall note later in this chapter, is the principle behind all "star systems".

The Whites detail how some painters were forced, through their disaffection with, and rejection of, the official training system, to make private arrangements in what was becoming established as an "alternative program". Two features of this were an atelier system and outdoor work in the company of fellow painters - arrangements in

opposition to the practice in "official" establishments. As a result, the network of close working relationships of the Impressionists forged under these arrangements, began to resemble the traditional (and pre-Academy) guild.<sup>21</sup> According to the Whites, "The Impressionists' definition and solution of formal and technical problems was to some degree, then, a result of the social structure of the group and the circumstances of their work in partial isolation from the official system and its styles."<sup>22</sup> The development of a dealer-critic system enabled them to form a viable group, rather than remain a collection of marginal individuals.

One of the consequences of this was the construction of a new conception of creativity. The Whites argue that a new meaning for the individual work of art emerged out of the work of the Impressionists as a group and the burgeoning dealer-critic system. Individual paintings were regarded as part of painters' interpretation of nature, "a piece of the whole" rather than standing alone for consideration in isolation.<sup>23</sup>

The Whites emphasise a factor that is crucial in the analysis of the production of recordings, namely the role of cultural markets in favouring particular conceptions of creativity. They also vividly remind us how the institutions which make and shape cultural products are themselves social constructions made in response to other social forces.

#### The creative individual - copyright and authors.

The institutional structures of society as a whole and of the recording industry permeate the production of recordings through their

construction of the concepts of creativity within which recordings are made. We can now see how the exigencies of the production and distribution systems of the recording industry sustain and support a particular concept of creativity in recording, the notion that the performer is the sole source of creative work.

The notion of individual creativity and genius, which we discussed in Chapter Two frequently interrelates with the notion of author. In its modern sense, "author" means originator of completely new work and as a consequence of the development of commercial law, its owner.<sup>24</sup> The idea of an "author" as owner is supported in the U.K. and elsewhere by the state through copyright law, which aims to protect intellectual property.

Copyright, the right to prohibit work being copied, is intended to enable intellectual property to be exploited commercially. Carter-Ruck and Skone James<sup>25</sup> argue that the principle of copyright simply extends the Judao-Christian concepts of private property rights of an individual over artifacts created by his hand, to those creations of his mind. For centuries, in those societies organised on those concepts, creation of a tangible asset has given its creator property rights over it, that is, the right to enjoy or dispose of it as he wishes and in England these property rights have been upheld by the state.

Creation of a non-tangible asset has, historically, been less readily recognised as conferring property rights. Arnold Hauser dates the idea of intellectual productivity and intellectual property to the disintegration of Christian culture, as intellectual expression might then be considered to have had some autonomy from religious control.<sup>26</sup>

However, the moral basis of intellectual property, the condemnation of plagiarism, has always been appreciated. The owner of a tangible asset can enjoy and exploit it as long as it is not physically stolen from him, because, as a physical object it is unique. The owner of a non-tangible asset, such as a work of literature, can only exploit it fully if he retains exclusivity, that is, if it is not copied.

The effective protection of rights over pre-Renaissance literary works or paintings was the laborious process of copying, while the limited market minimised any economic value of the copy. The notion of literary authors with property rights was not feasible until print stabilised written works sufficiently to put an end to the "scribal drift"<sup>27</sup> that occurred as works were copied and commented on. Previously, written works had been made incorporating variable amounts of original and secondary work; the proportions would not be thought to be significant in a pre-printing environment.

With the advent of printing, copying literary works became relatively easy, and businesses developed to meet a demand. It was to protect those printers who had paid authors for their work that a system of Crown privileges was developed, and a concept of property right in a literary work emerged in U.K. Common Law.<sup>28</sup>

Whale has argued that the rationale behind U.K. copyright legislation is not the "natural" property right linking an author to the creations of his mind, but the thoroughly pragmatic encouragement of authors and publishers (in their widest sense) to produce creative works, and that the state confers a copyright for this purpose. Copyright legislation, therefore, attempts to balance two opposing

public interests, on the one hand encouraging and supporting intellectual creativity, while on the other, granting the widest possible public access to this work.<sup>29</sup>

Significantly, copyright has developed step by step alongside the development of creative works as marketable commodities and, to a very considerable extent, their marketability as commodities depends on copyright. The corollary is that where there is no intention of making commercial transactions, there is no real need for this protection.

Authorship is not only related to the exploitation of property rights. Janet Wolff<sup>30</sup> has reminded us of Michel Foucault's comments on the nature of authorship, and his arguments that the author's name is functional, serving as a means of classification of texts, and characterising the operation of certain discourses in society. Unlike proper names, the information attached to an author's name as relevant is selected and controlled; that is to say, for example, that we have learnt to be interested in, and regard as relevant, an author's letters rather than his shopping lists.

This does not refute the suggestion that each text is physically created by the identifiable person who wrote it, but, as Wolff has written, it is to point out that "the 'personality' of . . . (an) author is constructed, in terms of certain characteristics which are taken to be relevant by the historically specific discourse of literary theory."<sup>31</sup> Wolff adds that the notion of an author may also operate to unite artificially, and thence obscure a variety of texts which, being produced over a period of time, may show very considerable differences of style or approach and

which might otherwise be thought of differently.

### The presentation of creativity in recording.

The recording industry's ethos of creativity becomes manifest in its adoption of the notion of "author" and its support of the myth that the named person linked to a recording as its creator, the performer, is solely responsible for its content. There is a separate and related pretence that a recording is a reproduction of a real event, a performance by that named person, a theme to which we shall return in Chapter Nine when we consider the technological context of recording.

The recording industry takes pains to attach an "author" to a finished recording, and suggests very strongly that that named person(s) is the creator of the recording. We may reasonably infer the impression the industry intends to give the public about creativity from the manner in which recordings and performers are presented to it, particularly on television, which provides the most sought after marketing opportunities. Performers are usually shown in a way that suggests that they are the sole person(s) responsible for the recorded material, its instigator(s) and maker(s). It is rare for a group of performers who would claim to be musically self-sufficient to have additional musicians in view, although they may be on the specially made recording which is itself being reproduced. Where support musicians are playing with solo performers, they will remain literally, if not necessarily musically, in the background. Whatever the extent to which a published recording, or a "re-recording" for some television programmes, depended for its success on electronic

treatment and enhancement of sounds, there are no circumstances where it is considered appropriate for recording personnel working on these aspects to be visible. The focus of attention of cameras and of audience is exclusively on the named performer(s).

Short promotional video films made for specific recordings, and intended for showing on TV to the potential public, concentrate solely on images of the named performers, frequently with only symbolic reference to performing or to playing musical instruments.

Similarly, and working to the same end, advertisements in the specialist press and display posters normally juxtapose the name (and picture) of the performer with the title of the recording that is being promoted. There is very unlikely to be any reference to other persons involved in making it. Advertisements and popular use on broadcast media refer to particular recordings as being "the performer's" recording, meaning either or both that the performer owns the recording, or that he was responsible for making it.

From time to time it has become known that named performers credited with making a recording were not, in fact, responsible for the sounds made on those occasions when the recording was made. The reaction to this form of practice has paralleled what we know of responses to deviancy. Howard Becker's earlier work draws attention to the "moral entrepreneurs" who delineate and maintain the boundary of socially acceptable behaviour<sup>32</sup>. In recording, the popular press has adopted the stance of moral entrepreneur on this issue, and pilloried the practice as unacceptable, and the unfavourable publicity has largely inhibited recording companies from engaging in it.<sup>33</sup>



## A "star system"

The industry finds it essential to present creativity in this manner because of its embrace of a "star system" for marketing its products. Companies in the recording industry who face the problem of selling successive products, have adopted a strategy common to other industries marketing cultural products of supporting selected performers and concentrating on their work over a period of time, in order to satisfy the market which has been created for it.

A "star system" is a marketing strategy designed to maximise and accentuate the difference between famous performers in whom the public will want to take an interest, and obscure performers in whom they will not. Sennett has explained the mechanism in this way: "If 500 people are famous, no-one is, and so to find someone you can call a recognisable personality, a man who stands out, at least 490 must be positively unrewarded in the same measure the 10 are rewarded; by denial as much as approval, a few people will then be brought forward as recognisable individuals."<sup>34</sup> Assuming that the level of interest available is finite, then the more interest there is in the famous, the less there is available for the obscure. The purpose of this strategy is to maximise the return from investment concentrated on a small number of performers.

A further reason for adopting this strategy is that, with a cultural product that is normally short-lived in marketing terms, it makes financial sense to concentrate investment on the longer career of the performer. Although record companies are primarily interested in selling records, the means to do this is through selling performers and establishing careers. Successful careers can encompass a number

of individual projects and, indeed, contribute substantially to the selling of them. Later projects are helped to sell by emphasising an association with careers and names that have already been made visible. This principle is not only applicable to marketing strategies based on star systems, for it is also, as we have noted, behind the art dealer's support for the career of a painter.

It seems probable that minor star systems have operated wherever entrepreneurs have invested in commoditised entertainment. Certainly "names" were being made in nineteenth century vaudeville and music-hall. The revolution in communications media has permitted elaborate star systems to develop in the twentieth century in, most obviously, the cinema, but also in radio, television, politics, sport, as well as the recording industry.

Benjamin suggests an additional purpose behind the development of a star system, and linked to the qualitative changes in the art forms associated with technological developments. In discussing the film industry, he notes how a star system has built up to make selected film actors appear "larger than life" - that is, as stars, in order to counteract the effect of the technology of film which diminished their personal aura before the camera, rather than a live audience. He comments that film responds to the "shrivelling of aura" with an artificial build up of "personality", outside the studio. The cult of the film star, supported and sustained by the financial resources of the film industry, "preserves not the unique aura of the person, but the spell of the personality, the phony spell of the commodity."<sup>35</sup>

The build up of personality makes the star special and distinct from non-stars, which is necessary if he is to maintain his status as

a star.

An effect of this strategy of the star system is to support the myth of the individual creator. The belief that the person designated as star is a creative person helps maintain the credibility of the promotional effort, singling him out as special. It means that the star can partake in the kudos attached to being creative, and can share the notions of "specialness" and "genius" conventionally associated with being "artistic". The association is also convenient in legitimising (if not encouraging) unconventional and self-indulgent behaviour on the part of the star which, when not publicity-seeking, may be excused as "artistic" bohemian sensitivity.

The industry is therefore led by economic reasons to sustain the ideology of the creative individual, and to this end has secured the legal backing of the state.

#### Copyright in recording.

A second factor leading to the industry's adoption of the ethos of individual creativity derives from copyright law, and the very considerable financial implications.<sup>36</sup>

Copyright law as it stands is selective and tends to single out for protection only those parts of creative production which can be assigned to particular individuals, thereby helping legitimise the ideology of individual creativity. This partly reflects the relative ease of defining the boundaries of what is being protected, and hence the possibilities of being realistically able to defend them, but it is also a reflection of the relative power of different creators. The more powerful are able to enjoin the State to protect their interests

on their behalf and the structure of copyright legislation in recording has inevitably been affected by the concerns of instigators, such as recording companies.

Hence, the work of some of those involved in recording is protected whereas that of others is not. Copyrights exist for the named persons responsible for words and for the music of a song, a consequence of earlier established cultural commodity markets, but not for others involved in making the finished work. Hence, the interpretation of the composition by performer and musician or the overall sound created by the sound engineers, contributions which may be crucial to the distinctiveness and success of a recording are not protected. Publishing record companies do, however, have protection against copying the recording as a whole. This is unusual in two ways, firstly as copyright may, on occasion, reside not in individuals but in limited companies, and secondly, recording companies have the right to copy, for a fee, any composition that has already been recorded regardless of the desire of the copyright holder.

This exclusion is peculiar to recorded musical works, a tribute to the lobbying power of the record makers,<sup>37</sup> and is rare in law in compelling copyright owners to treat with makers with whom they may not want to do business, and makes them unable to prevent "unworthy" recordings of their works. It has had important effects, firstly by encouraging the re-recording of songs, and therefore making them more widely known, and secondly, by enabling the recordings produced by comparatively under-resourced companies to be virtually copied by larger recording companies and other performers, better placed to exploit them commercially, and retain their market domination.

In Britain today the named composer of an original musical work has three rights of ownership giving him or her control over reproduction in any form, of his composition, specifically by publication, mechanical recording, or by public performance. In addition there are ancilliary rights protecting a sound recording on behalf of a recording company, and protecting a musical performance on stage by a performer from mechanical copying, in both cases regardless of the copyright status, if any, of the musical content. As the basis of the recording industry is marketed duplicates, copyright protection is particularly important.

The structure and selectivity of copyright legislation, therefore, reinforces and helps sustain the concept of creativity that the industry would tend to adopt for marketing purposes. It increases the apparent importance of some aspects of a creative project at the expense of others. It puts a premium on formal written composition which individuals are encouraged to undertake, at the expense of group composition and the less tangible areas of creative production, such as the creation of new sounds, and the interpretation of the composition by performers and musicians. Hence, as creative acts which are likely to be carried out by individuals are enhanced in status and supported financially, whilst those that are more likely to be undertaken by a loosely defined group of people are not given equivalent recognition, the myth of the creative individual is sustained.

## The differentiation of popular music

In popular music, the marked differentiation of styles that have been developed in response to a competitive market would appear to confirm Swingewood's thesis on culture under capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

Differentiation has occurred for two reasons, firstly, as a reflection of different publics/consumers which may be related to their class position; and secondly, as a deliberate strategy to emphasise these differences in consumption by agencies marketing recordings.

Producers are encouraged to differentiate as a means of distinguishing recordings from one another.

The distribution of the different styles is not haphazard, for certain elements of popular music are associated with particular social groupings and classes of audiences and/or musicians. We shall refer in the next chapter to Virden's adaptation of Bernstein's work, which aims to match aesthetic choices to social groupings.<sup>39</sup>

However, although Murdock and McCron largely confirm his thesis with respect to young people and popular music in Britain, by showing taste to be closely correlated with social class,<sup>40</sup> Virden is unable to explain by this method the differences in taste apparently associated with age. Many writers have argued that the age of the audience, and sometimes the musicians, is of primary importance in popular music.

Differentiation of popular music is not motivated and sustained entirely by consumers, for it is both fostered and supported by those involved in making and marketing recordings. The differentiation and categorisation of the range of popular music, may be seen as a marketing device whose purpose is to divide up the total market into manageable sizes and to provide the public and the

industry with a means of making sense of a wide range of music.

The language of marketing, therefore, structures the vocabulary of aesthetics available to the public. Marketing organisations both articulate different aesthetics of recorded popular music and fill them with appropriate recordings. There are numerous cases of this practice at work, for example, the introspective "bed-sit" ballads, "folk" and then "electric folk" musics of the 1960s illustrate how aesthetic styles can develop out of marketing labels into self-perpetuating recognisable styles as successful recordings are imitated.

There are a number of reasons why commercial organisations should support this differentiation and categorisation. Firstly, as in any market, fragmentation of the total market allows more effective selling in smaller specialist sub-markets. It is more efficient marketing to be able to pinpoint target consumers and avoid wasting resources on inappropriate media and campaigns. Secondly, popular music has proved to be highly susceptible to fashion, and the planned obsolescence that this entails, as elsewhere, boosts sales. The total number of sub-categories is likely to increase as some earlier ones persist, or are in decline as others rise to replace them. It is evident that the industry puts considerable resources into creating and supporting new fashions.

Thirdly, some sub-categories of popular music that have been created have subsequently become almost self-supporting markets, where almost any published recording is likely to generate sufficient sales to be commercially worthwhile. Children's recordings, "country" music, brass band music, and West Indian reggae music are all examples

of sub-categories where it appears that as long as potential consumers are informed of what is available they need no further persuasion to buy.

Once particular styles have become successfully established a "standardisation"<sup>41</sup> effect comes into play, and for as long as there is thought to be a reasonable chance of continued success in the market place, they will tend to persist and be sustained by the efforts of recording personnel actively seeking out new material within the same general formulae to satisfy a known demand. Music and performers in established styles will therefore have a better chance of being recorded and promoted and entering the public domain. Performers may be influenced in the presentation of their work by the knowledge that a market already exists for popular music of certain types.

If performers, or pieces of music, do not fit into recognised musical categories, then they will have to bear the costs of extra difficulties in selling, and increased chances that people will not buy. In practical terms, the recognised categories, as we have noted, largely define both audiences' and production personnel's concepts of music, and performers are unwilling and may be unable to develop styles outside of these categories. However, experimentation at the margin may not be discouraged.

Musical categories are further sustained by other media, such as magazines and radio, for whom new ones may provide content, and who may have a vested interest in not questioning the basis on which categorisation takes place or their boundaries, and in the continuation of established divisions.



## The public in cultural production

A public which must be taken into account by producers is a necessary consequence of a market-supported artifact; a social production perspective argues that that public is, therefore, a contributor to that cultural production.

There are two ways of theorising the public in relation to cultural production. Firstly, we have already noted the important role that a consideration of the art-public plays in sociology of art based on positivist premises, although that consideration is, typically, restricted to the accumulation of what might be termed "box office" information, as part of the social context in which art is made.

The public's contribution to the art work is one mediated by the makers of the art works who interpret the aggregates of those actions which are observable and measureable, such as box office payments or retail sales, and then adjust their own behaviour as they judge to be appropriate in the light of this information. As the public can only react to a finished art work, art works-in-making may only incorporate adjustments to reactions to similar past work; the reaction to a new work may be mediated and incorporated into a later work.

Secondly, some writers within the phenomenological perspective attempt to incorporate the meanings attributed by individual members of the art public to the works to which they are exposed into their analysis and have elevated the art public to a crucial role in the production of art works. For example, the central assumption of Shepherd et al.'s "Whose music" is, in Shepherd's own words, that "any significance assigned to music must ultimately and necessarily be located in the commonly agreed meanings of the group or society in

which the particular music is created,"<sup>42</sup> and which appreciates it. Implicit within this is the view that the meaning of music is "somehow located in its function as a social symbol."<sup>43</sup> This position is set up in opposition to attitudes to music which use what is argued to be an "objectively" conceived aesthetic<sup>44</sup>, and which looks for the meaning of music internally, that is, within the structure of individual pieces. For the phenomenological sociologist, music can only have meaning when it comes into contact with its public; only then do the sounds become music.

A social production perspective gives a direct but not exclusive role to the art-public in the production of art works, acknowledging it as an intrinsic part of the process of production. T.J. Clark has argued that the public cannot remain distinct from a work of art, but should be incorporated into a "proper" account of production. He rejects the role of a reified public in the positivist perspective, exhorting his readers to ". . . stop thinking of the public as an identifiable 'thing' whose needs the artist notes, satisfies, rejects."<sup>45</sup> He goes on to suggest that the public exist within the work and within the process of its production "as a prescience or phantasy"<sup>46</sup> that has been invented by the individual artist, and which makes its presence felt regardless of its verisimilitude.

Bourdieu, as well as others such as Becker<sup>47</sup> and White and White,<sup>48</sup> has noted the contribution to production of a wider range of outsiders than simply the consuming public. Bourdieu has suggested that a work acquires an objectified public meaning "in and through" the network of social relations that the producer maintains with the various agents of the intellectual field at any given time. These

agents include other artists, critics and such intermediaries between artist and public as publishers, art dealers and journalists. In each of these relationships the agents use the socially established idea of the other and the idea of the idea that the other producer has of him.<sup>49</sup> Hence, Bourdieu maintains, even a creator's relationship with his own work is one mediated by its public meaning, the judgement of others. He argues that for "even the 'purest' artistic intention to exist (it) . . . is obliged to make some reference to the objective truth reflected back from the intellectual field".<sup>50</sup>

A social production of art perspective, then, takes a phenomenological based approach that acknowledges the art-public as an important component in cultural production, as the meanings attributed by members of the public to art works and the meanings attributed to these meanings as far as they are known by producers become a factor in their production.

#### The public in the production of recordings.

Frith has written of the importance of the public in the practices of the popular music recording industry, which "has developed its rules of production from its interpretations of the youth market, and the ideology of rock is riddled with untested assumptions about youth culture and music's meaning for youth culture."<sup>51</sup>

The importance of the public becomes clear, for example, when we remind ourselves why some music is thought to be appropriate for recording, whereas other music is considered not to be. "Appropriate" in an environment whose main objective is to sell records, means

thought likely to be saleable. Recordings must therefore be thought to have an appeal to a potential public with purchasing power. This is necessary because, whereas if one recording does not sell it will not necessarily have any undue consequence for other recordings, or for individuals other than those involved in its production, if there were no records sold, there would ultimately be no production of recordings by the commercial recording industry as we know it. The sales of "old" recordings finance the next "generation" of "new" recordings.

The role of the market in sustaining the production of recordings means that perceptions of the public are not peripheral but will enter directly into production via the ideas of "appropriateness" and "saleability" held by key individuals and are as real in terms of production as the real market position. Any judgement of the appropriateness or advisability for recording of a particular piece of music or style of production will be based on the decision maker's conception of the market and its taste. This is necessarily subjective, as the "objective" information available to recording personnel is limited.

As the recording industry does not normally conduct market research into the appeal of its products, the knowledge of most recording personnel about the market is crude and unsystematic. Impressionistic information about sales is readily available to all, although accurate figures are not normally made public. However, even if sales figures were available, they would, like box office returns in the cinema, only provide information about outcomes of past behaviour, and be unable to distinguish the meanings involved.

Furthermore, as with the cinema, information about the success or otherwise of a previous product may be neither relevant nor predictive for later work.

The recording industry is exceptional among consumer goods industries in not putting considerable effort into investigating its public. From its point of view, the short commercial life of any one recording, the relatively low costs of its production, and the difficulties of subjecting musical recordings to this type of analysis and contacting a sizeable population, make it impracticable to organise systematic market research for new recordings. Furthermore, for many years, while publishing recordings was very profitable, there was little incentive for companies to improve their chances of success by spending on such research. Stratton suggests<sup>52</sup> also that market research would jeopardise the relationship between the industry and popular music, undermining the industry's belief that recordings are bought, not as a commodity, but for non-analytical and non-rational reasons. He notes that recording companies characteristically attempt to distance themselves from any research that, exceptionally, is carried out on their behalf.

Many producers and performers would eschew such investigation, taking pride in their own insight and instinct about the market. As we shall see in Chapter Eight many producers see part of their role as being to keep in touch with public tastes. Few production personnel appear to have any firm knowledge of the structure of the market. This "ignorance" is by no means unusual in the entertainment industries, Schlesinger encountered something similar in his study of television personnel.<sup>53</sup>

In view of this lack of information, production personnel must rely on their "own" perceptions of the consumption of recorded music; perceptions which may or may not resemble reality. As in other fields, it is most likely that the perceptions of any one individual will be determined by his or her immediate experience. Some of the strategies used by recording personnel will be referred to in discussion of the producer's role in the recording studio; as elsewhere, reliance is placed on the assumed taste of imaginary potential consumers, or on that of friends or relatives.

The public for recordings.

This subjective "knowledge" of the market for recordings, in terms of who buys or is thought to buy recordings makes an important contribution to the production of those same recordings. "Objective" information about the buyers of recordings is not widely available, and the little that has been published tends to deal in aggregates, and does not distinguish, for example, by social class.

A general profile of buyers of recordings shows that total spending on recorded music is marginally skewed towards the young.

<u>age</u>	<u>U.K. population</u>	<u>% of total expenditure</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>on recorded music</u>
0-24yrs	38	40
24+ yrs	62	60

source: BPI Yearbook 1978

However, these aggregated figures mask the preferences, let alone the meanings, involved for different forms of recordings, which is not unrelated to the type of music, both between the sexes and between age groups. Nearly 3 in every 4 of "single" 7" discs are bought by consumers aged less than 24 years, and of these, a majority by females; whereas the greater proportion of long playing recordings on disc and tape are purchased by males within the 25-44 age range.<sup>54</sup>

The subjective knowledge of recording personnel is confirmed by this market research "knowledge" that recorded music is a phenomenon associated, in terms of consumption, predominantly with young people.

Frith and McRobbie have argued that the consumption of rock is crucial to the constituting of young people's sexuality;<sup>55</sup> a role that derives from the need of the capitalist organisation of production to constitute sexual expression as an individual leisure need.

Hence, the public plays an important, indirect part in market-oriented cultural production, as production is for a public, and producers will take their understanding of the public's responses into account in their work. In this way, we can say that the public becomes incorporated into the final product.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored a further aspect of the social production of recordings, by considering how the socially founded conceptual and institutional framework within which production takes place is embedded in the final work. Recording takes place within a historically specific social system which shapes the specific social institutions which form a conceptual and practical context in which

cultural production takes place. Cultural production is evaluated according to socially produced criteria.

In a society stratified on class lines, differing aesthetics will tend to be similarly stratified, from the superior "legitimate" "art" through varying intermediate stages to non-legitimate, "non-art". In bourgeois society, popular music and other cultural production classified in the latter category must rely on the market to support its continued existence. The institutions of the cultural market place are particularly prominent in defining the concepts and language of creativity. In the case of recording, the notion of the creative individual is presented and supported by the industry as a consequence of a marketing strategy, which operates a "star system". The public for recordings is also a potent influence on the practice of recordings, as ideas about it are internalised into the working practices of production personnel.



## Footnotes to Chapter Five

1. White and White, p2
2. Wolff, p40
3. see Bird
4. see Blacking
5. as evidenced by the majority of recordings which sell fewer than a few thousand copies each; see Chapter Seven
6. Stratton, p297
7. see Chapter Eight
8. see Bourdieu, 1980
9. Lloyd, p17
10. Bourdieu, 1971, p175
11. Bourdieu, 1971, p176
12. Vulliamy, 1975, p192
13. see Rosenberg and White (eds)
14. Gedin, p112
15. L. Coser "Comments on Bauer and Bauer" in Journal of Social Issues, 1960, 26 quoted by Vulliamy, 1975,p180-1
16. see discussion of Fuller's concept of the "Fine Art Tradition" in Chapter Two.
17. Vulliamy, 1975, p185 ff
18. see Swingewood
19. see White and White
20. Merton, p51
21. White and White, p117
22. White and White, p118
23. White and White, p118
24. see Hirst and Woolley
25. see Carter-Ruck and Skone Jones
26. Hauser, I p327
27. Hirst and Woolley, p41
28. Whale, p4
29. Whale, p26
30. Wolff, p121
31. Wolff, p122
32. see Becker, 1963
33. Performers known as "The Marmalade" were a celebrated case in 1968; their career never really recovered from the bad publicity. Personnel changes in groups of performers inevitably pose similar problems. The names of some performers/"authors", for example "The Drifters" and "Fleetwood Mac", are so valuable that they are perpetuated by businesses within the industry rather like trade marks, despite experiencing a complete change of personnel.
34. Sennett, p290
35. Benjamin, 1970c, p397
36. A mechanical recording right for composers was secured in 1911. A standard royalty payable to the composer was fixed in 1927 as 6.25% of the retail price. Today, the standard arrangement is for the publisher to get 50% of this royalty for each work, and the composer(s) the remainder. The expansion of the market for recordings means that the mechanical recording right has become very

valuable. Statistics presented to the Public Inquiry into mechanical royalties in 1976 showed that the number of compositions sold in 1975 was 1095 million, and sales per release averaged 27,570. The total amount of mechanical royalties collected in 1975 was £11.9million, with an average payment to copyright holders of £ 365 per release (i.e. issue of composition on one or more type of recording.) (Francis, p12-13).

Derived as it is from the market for recordings, the market for compositions is highly skewed, reducing the value of a mean figure. In concluding his Report of the Inquiry, Francis writes "there is no doubt that the highly successful composer of popular music. . . derives an enormous income from the present rate. . . Other successful composers, although not in the superstar bracket, also make very good incomes from the present rate. Even the moderately successful, especially if they get the occasional "hit " do not do badly. No doubt there are many unsuccessful composers whose rewards are modest. ."

A successful song can continue to earn royalties for its composer for a very considerable period after any initial success.

37. Whale, p74-5
38. see Swingewood
39. see Virden
40. see Murdock and McCron
41. Adorno's term; see Chapter Seven for further discussion
42. Shepherd, p7
43. Shepherd, p7
44. "Introduction" to Shepherd et al, p1
45. Clark, 1973, p14-15
46. Clark, 1973, p15
47. see Becker, 1974
48. See White and White
49. Bourdieu, 1971, p173
50. Bourdieu, 1971, p167
51. Frith, 1978, p14
52. see Stratton
53. see Schlesinger
54. BPI Yearbook, 1978
55. Frith and McRobbie, p98

## CHAPTER SIX

### The cultural context of production

This chapter considers a further aspect of the social production of art, namely the embedding in a cultural product of the cultural environment in which it is made. Thus, we are concerned with the ways in which production is shaped and contributed to by the countless unknown individuals who, over a period of time, jointly created a particular cultural milieu. Analytically, we might distinguish between the embedding of the symbolic framework of the cultural environment at a structural level, and the embedding at the level of specific types of cultural work, as new works cannot be created independently of earlier work in the same genre. We shall consider these two aspects in turn.

#### a.) The symbolic structure

Recent work by Shepherd, Virden and Wishart, and Bourdieu<sup>1</sup> has argued that any cultural product unwittingly incorporates the society in which it is made through its symbolic structure.

Shepherd argues that "society is creatively 'in' each piece of music and articulated by it"<sup>2</sup> as all symbolic modes are permeated by social symbolic constructs which are creatively articulated by specific consciousnesses and symbols. He acknowledges the difficulty of proving this relationship, but nevertheless claims that within certain limitations analysis can elucidate the social meaning inherent in music<sup>3</sup>, and seeks to demonstrate the culture-specific nature of music articulation by comparing societies exhibiting different intellectual structures and frameworks. He embarks on an analysis of

the "deep structure" of pre-literate and tonal music, concluding that the differences in the formal aspects of the two classes of music reflect "the difference between oral man's and typographical man's orientation with regard to time and memory."<sup>4</sup>

While Shepherd appears to favour a technological basis to differing symbolic structures, others have related the structural differences in types of music and other cultural products to the differing specific social and cultural sub-environments in which each has been made and in which each has a public. Virden,<sup>5</sup> for example, explains the diversity of twentieth century music by referring to the high degree of social stratification in industrial societies, arguing that musics are largely differentiated in our society as "the musical expression of the general social-political, economic and cultural class system of industrial societies."<sup>6</sup>

He draws on Bernstein's well known theories relating social stratification to linguistic codes,<sup>7</sup> and suggests that Bernstein's findings may be relevant to symbolic codes other than language. He notes that since we communicate by both verbal and non-verbal means, it would seem likely that artworks, too, may be similarly differentiated. He adds that it should not be assumed that different people in different social situations all construct and interpret artworks under the same rules, and that differing groups "read" the same message. In general it might be expected that, in the same way as speech, the functional emphasis and the form will be upon the elaborate and the individual within any art mode for the bourgeoisie, while that for working class publics will be implicit, shared and communal in orientation.

He suggests that all twentieth century musical production can be placed somewhere on a continuum between, at the one extreme, almost totally extensional or explicit elaboration within the piece, and at the other, almost totally intensional or implicit elaboration.<sup>8</sup>

#### The "cultural unconscious".

Bourdieu suggests that these factors become manifest in cultural production through the concept of the "cultural unconscious", the ways of thought, forms of logic, and stylistic expressions of a given society or sub-society which are unwittingly incorporated into cultural works. He writes ". . . It (the culture of an artist) constitutes the necessary precondition for the concrete fulfilment of an artistic intention in a work of art."<sup>9</sup> Because such things as ways of thought and forms of logic seem obvious and natural, they are implicitly assumed rather than explicitly postulated. The ubiquity of the "cultural unconscious" is such that any artist's conscious intellectual and aesthetic choices are always directed, if not completely determined, by his own culture and taste which he has interiorised. Bourdieu refers to this "general disposition" of a particular scheme of thought which will then be applied in different circumstances as the cultivated "habitus".<sup>10</sup> An artist's culture is specific to his own society, age or class.

#### The symbolic structure of recorded popular music.

In structural terms, the implicit structure of most contemporary recorded popular music correlates with the implicit structure of working class language. The relationship between the two arises

because such recorded music is, as we have noted, produced principally for the biggest possible public, which must, therefore, mean a predominantly working class one. Among other pressures leading towards implicitness is the marketing need to make recordings immediately attractive to a public who are unlikely to have the opportunity for sustained listening.

As music and other cultural products are crafted with the symbolic tools of the cultural environment in which they are created, therefore, they inevitably absorb and display its features at a structural level.

#### b) The "cultural legacy"

An alternative approach which is also concerned to trace the impact of the cultural context within which production takes place, has emphasised a more specific effect, namely the space created by, and the example of, earlier work in the same genre. A number of writers who acknowledge the presence and contribution of this earlier work offer different explanations of the mechanisms by which it is incorporated and by which it constrains subsequent cultural production.

For any established form of cultural product, this previous work in the same genre comprises what has been called a "cultural legacy". This cultural legacy constrains all new cultural production, which has to fit into the patterns that have been established if it is to be recognised as within a particular genre and treated appropriately. New work will also be measured against a yardstick established by earlier work. Hill has reminded us of the importance of this legacy

in criticising Murdock and Golding's work for reducing the media to "transcriptions of socio-political ideologies originated elsewhere", and for leaving a "gap" between economic production and media forms, the particular organisation of expression. For, as he writes, (about film) "'imagery' is not only the end product of an economic process, but the product of a work of signification as well with its own internal dynamics and operations (and internal history) . . ."<sup>11</sup>

Heath has referred to this domain and uses the term "machine" which, in referring to the cinema, he defines as "cinema itself seized exactly between industry and product as the stock of constraints and definitions from which film can be distinguished as a specific signifying practice."<sup>12</sup> He argues that film and other cultural forms do not only "express" or "represent", but have their own specific properties deriving from their continuing histories.

### Reinterpretation

The histories of cultural forms, the content of this legacy, are not unchanging. For, although these earlier productions may be concrete artifacts and, therefore, physically unalterable, their meaning and significance does not remain unchanged. In the first place, they may be interpreted in a number of ways by different individuals, although they will usually tend to acquire, through opinion leaders, a more widely accepted interpretation. However, this may itself change over time as opinion leaders change and other events occur, and new significances emerge. Earlier interpretations may then be reinterpreted and, later, further re-reinterpreted.

Bennett quotes Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey's summing up of the general idea of perpetual reinterpretation: "Works of art are processes and not objects, for they are never produced once and for all, but are continually susceptible to "reproduction": in fact, they only find an identity and a content in this continual process of transformation. There is no eternal art, there are no fixed and immutable works."<sup>13</sup>

A given cultural tradition is not simply, then, an unchanging inheritance, but an "active construction"<sup>14</sup> implying that a cultural product is never finished, for its meaning, which is an intrinsic part of it, is under perpetual construction. In any consideration of the impact of earlier cultural works on later ones, therefore, we must be aware that we are referring to an interpretation of one moment, which may later change.

#### The legacy of previous recordings.

The "legacy" of previous recordings is important for a number of reasons to the production of new recordings. Those previous recordings that are available are, however, only a very limited selection of those that were once made. Their selection illustrates the vital role of interpretation in giving them meaning and significance. In practice, the significance of almost any recording derives primarily from the commercial success which has given it public visibility as much as from any intrinsic quality it may have. Its contemporary meaning will derive from this and from its perceived position relative to other recordings and events, a meaning which may itself be subject to further reinterpretation over time. For example,



the meaning attributed to a recording entitled "Love me do" in 1962, changed when it emerged from provincial obscurity to enjoy a minor national success. In turn, the recording acquired a different meaning, a curiosity value as its "authors", The Beatles, achieved spectacular commercial success, and then again, when it later became apparent that it had heralded a major social and aesthetic revolution in the popular music recording industry.

A significance derived from an intrinsic musical or technical quality such as a new aesthetic technique may also become of greater or lesser importance, depending on subsequent events.

Selected previous recordings influence both audiences and production personnel. Audience tastes have been shaped over a period of time by existing recordings. Existing recordings selected on current criteria are also brought to their attention by radio programmes, for example, which frequently incorporate previous recordings as a means of maximising audiences, and by publishing recording companies who periodically re-package and re-market successful earlier recordings for sale to a new public as a low-risk, low-cost venture.

Previous recordings also, as we shall see in Chapter Eight, provide a common reference point for recording personnel who routinely refer to previous recordings in discussion amongst themselves, in place of an adequate descriptive language.

### Style

The concept of "style" has been used by Kroeber<sup>15</sup> to account for the way in which earlier forms are subsumed into new art works, how,

as he puts it, "art breeds art". He distinguishes three elements in style, firstly the subject matter; secondly, the 'concept' of the subject, that is, the uniqueness of a particular producer's interpretation of a subject; and thirdly, execution, the specific technical form given to his work by the producer, by the manner in which he carries out its construction.

Although Kroeber argues that the third element is pre-eminent in style, all three factors are present and, as he puts it, each represents "a specialised and coordinated selection from among a variety of possible (aesthetic) expressions."<sup>16</sup> He then maintains that within any artistic tradition, and all artists belong to one, artists' use of the elements of style are highly interrelated and coordinated.

It is through these three elements of style that the experience of the past, (or other areas of the present) is built into the work of art in hand, for he sees established style as a skeleton on which any new work is founded. Hence, he writes, "the take off for variation in execution is always the already traversed course of the style, or some part or facet of it; it is never . . . a wholly fresh observing of the objective world by the uncontaminated mind of individual genius."<sup>17</sup>

Hence, he argues, "It is not nature that breeds art, but art that breeds art." Thus far we would agree, but Kroeber qualifies his forthrightness by seeing artistic creation as the outcome of the interplay of individual artist, artistic tradition, and nature as a source of inspiration, reverting to a pre-social, "psychological" perspective on creativity. As illustration, we can cite his comment on the advent of Impressionism, where "it is clear that the effective

alterations (to established styles) were made by artists within the art in fulfillment of their personalities, not at the behest of outside theorists."<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added)

Kroeber's work is to be welcomed for the emphasis it directs to the inclusion of the work of previous practitioners in later cultural products. This previous work is not necessarily static or unchanging for, as we have noted, it may be subject to reinterpretation. We would, however, take issue with Kroeber's view that creativity is an individual response to the cumulative product.

"Style" is also used by Klingender in his account of cultural effects,<sup>19</sup> although he takes a broader perspective than Kroeber to account for the linking of creative activity to the social and economic environment in which it takes place. He sees the spirit of the age mediated through the work of individual artists, and inevitably playing a major part in the forms of representation used in works of art.

Klingender illustrates both this point and his methodology in his accounts of the development of scientific illustration out of the working drawings of engineering draughtsmen, topographical drawings from architectural drawings, and the way in which English 18th Century documentary drawings and prints developed step by step into the characteristic landscape art of the Romantic era. He notes how, concurrent with the accelerating development of technology towards the end of the eighteenth century, a style of mechanical drawing emerged that combined the precision of scientific drawings with some outstanding aesthetic qualities. Klingender sees the origins of this style as the "direct aesthetic reflection" of the revolution in

mechanics.<sup>20</sup>

He suggests that it derives from the composite plates used to illustrate the eighteenth century encyclopaedias. Like Kroeber he relies on the strength of stylistic characteristics to form a developmental lineage between different sorts of representational work. These are then backed up (where appropriate) by essentially biographical information.<sup>21</sup> Biographies are, of course, a product of the times in which they are lived.

Although we would not always wish to give primacy to the individual creator in the way that Klingender does, his work is relevant to the social production perspective, because it does demonstrate persuasively that art works cannot be produced independently of their socio-cultural environment, and that this environment is embodied in the art work. It is clear, also, that the socio-cultural environment is not proscriptive, for different kinds of image-making co-exist within the same set of social and cultural relations, with diverse styles and artistic forms drawing on the same sources.

#### Style in recorded music.

Although musical differences within much of the general category recorded popular music are not great, there are within a potential spectrum distinct clusters of similarly structured aesthetic material. The existence of these styles is fundamental to the production of recorded popular music.

H. Stith Bennett has recounted a mechanism by which previous recordings come to exert an important influence on the musical careers

of performers and become a contributory factor in their development.<sup>22</sup> As new performers' careers are judged by their ability to build up audiences and followers they must start out by playing "other people's music", that is, music in established styles, in order to assuage the taste of audiences shaped by the commercially successful of these recordings. Only when performers' careers have been successfully established are they likely to be in a position to create and play their own or new music. It is very likely that this early experience will influence their later work.

There are also financial pressures on production personnel to restrict their work to the forms established by previous recordings. In the next chapter we shall explore Adorno's argument that a characteristic of popular music recordings is a standard stylistic framework into which a distinguishing novelty element is inserted. At this stage it is sufficient to note that standardisation in a limited number of styles is imposed on producers by the financial pressures of competition in the market place. The entrepreneurial agency will certainly encourage, if not require, production personnel to work within previously successful styles in order to reduce its risks and maximise the chances of selling recordings and hence the return on its investment.

The majority of new recordings are, therefore, made within previously established stylistic frameworks, using existing components, and working to models that might be emulated or avoided.

## Conventions

Some of the points that Kroeber, especially, makes have been expanded and generalised into a more direct contribution to the social production perspective by Becker.<sup>23</sup> His primary concern is to consider the way in which the participants of a given "Art World", which we considered in Chapter Three, are able to communicate with each other and jointly contribute to the production of the work of art and uses the concept of the "convention" to include both working practices and agreements about aesthetic representations.

Artistic conventions are "earlier agreements now become customary, agreements that have become part of the conventional way of doing things in that art."<sup>24</sup> The production of any art work, or indeed any work, requires a very great number of decisions to be made, and in this context conventions are simply some of those decisions which are customarily repeated.

Conventions, as ways of doing things, come to appear to the participants of an art world, like the division of labour, as natural. In time, conventions determine, for example, the materials used, the way in which abstract forms convey particular ideas and experiences, and the way in which materials and these abstract forms are combined. Conventions would also suggest appropriate dimensions for a work and govern the relations between cultural producers and audience.

Becker argues that the existence of conventions has two important consequences. Firstly, they make possible artistic experience by providing a common reference point through which artists and audiences can make sense of the work, thereby enabling emotion and responses to

be brought out. Secondly, conventions permit an easier and more efficient co-ordination of activity between artists and their support personnel in the art world. In this meaning Becker argues that the convention is interchangeable with such terms as "norm", "rule", "shared understanding", or "custom", all of which refer to mutually held ideas and understandings through which people effect co-operative activity. Importantly, the concept of the art world is only feasible if it includes mediation by conventions between the participating producers.

As social constructions, conventions are not inviolable, and may offer considerable leeway for negotiation. However, they can and do exert constraint on a cultural producer's freedom of action. If he chooses to set aside and depart from customary practice, he is likely to increase the work he has to put in himself, and at the same time decrease the circulation of his work among a wider public. However, this path may be chosen for its compensations in much increasing freedom of action in decision making. Becker quotes the case of Charles Ives who, when his experiments in polytonality and polyrhythms were deemed to make his work unplayable, chose to see it as a great liberation for he was no longer bound to write music that the musical art world found practical or playable.

Conventions, however, are not easily ignored, for each has become locked into a complex interdependent system. Becker has summarised the effect over time " . . . a system of conventions gets embodied in equipment, materials, training, available facilities and sites, systems of notation and the like, all of which must be changed if any one segment is."<sup>25</sup> This is perhaps clearest to see in the familiar

case of photography, where the equipment and materials are internationally standardised to specifications that emerged from a wide range of possibilities. These, in turn, have become incorporated into the aesthetic conventions surrounding photography. Thus, if any individual wanted to overturn these aesthetic conventions, they might also have to tackle the problem of obtaining non-standard equipment and materials. Clearly, similar constraints apply to sound recordings.

Becker sees conventions changing in two ways; both may be criticised for their psychologism, their emphasis on isolated individual actions. Firstly, he suggests that change occurs as an inevitable gradualist reform, as some conventions become dysfunctional for the artist(s). Small innovations occur continuously as artists seek to surprise and by-pass the accepted ways of creating expectations and delaying their satisfaction which, Becker claims, become conventional expectations in their own right. Secondly, on a broader scale, he suggests that from time to time there are cultural revolutions broadly comparable to political and scientific revolutions.<sup>26</sup> He instances the Cubists as an example of these. It may be presumed that Becker is referring to the wholesale breaking of conventions by numerous individuals. In turn, deviations from conventions may become conventions in their own right.

An attack of this revolutionary nature on existing conventions has other implications for, as Becker puts it, "Every convention carries with it an aesthetic" based on that convention; and an attack on a convention is also an attack on a related aesthetic and, he might have added, associated social relations. Because people



experience these, not as arbitrary social constructions, but as "natural, proper and moral,"<sup>27</sup> an attack on a convention and an aesthetic is also an attack on morality.

More importantly, as we have hinted, an attack on an aesthetic belief is an attack on the statuses it supports and the social structure in general and all those members of that art world who have invested their capital and skills in that aesthetic. As Becker notes, when a new group is able to successfully create an art world that defines different conventions as possessing aesthetic value, then all those who took part in the old art world and are unable or unwilling to adjust to find a place in the new situation lose out. Some members of the art world may have a greater interest than the artist in perpetuating an aesthetic and may put pressure on him not to disrupt the status quo.

The artistic convention is an elaborate and specific form of the "norm", agreed behaviour that binds society together and makes social behaviour possible. Thus, an art world is a sub-society whose members not only organise their behaviour around the norms of the wider society of which they are members, but also carry out tasks and work with reference to an additional set of understandings and assumptions that have evolved for that particular art field. These additional conventions help ensure a lineage between earlier and later cultural products and practices.

#### Technical and aesthetic conventions in recording

Conventions are important in the production of recorded music, because of the use of standardised technical materials and equipment,

and the need to communicate to a public. Together these technical and aesthetic factors make it difficult to break new ground, and ensure that most new recording remains firmly within established conventions.

Conventions about the technical materials and equipment of recording and reproduction have important consequences for recording; it must be recognised that it is only because there is widespread agreement about the use of particular technical materials and processes that the recording industry exists in its present size and form. When there is uncertainty about the materials and processes in use, such as in the development of quadrophonic sound recording, the potential market for recordings is undermined, as consumers are reluctant to take risks with their investment in the "reproduction" equipment.

While there is little scope for non-standard materials and processes in the storage and reproduction media, technical changes in the production of recordings may be made unilaterally, as in the case of the introduction of electrical recording, so long as they take place within existing parameters and are not incompatible with existing "reproduction" equipment.

The technical parameters within which contemporary recording takes place are, ultimately, conventions, and in some cases are the results of formal agreements. For example, the standardisation of the lengths of time of recordings are consequences of agreements within the industry about the technical materials of recording and reproduction equipment.

The use of standardised equipment and materials in recording studios throughout the industry (and the world) has a number of

economic advantages for capital, as it enables recordings to be worked on over a period of time in more than one location, and also enables recording personnel to transfer their skills from one place to another, possibly to work with musicians and performers who are less geographically mobile. The world-wide standardisation of recording equipment is just one aspect of cultural imperialism.<sup>28</sup>

Aesthetic conventions, too, are important; for once an art public has learnt to appreciate and understand certain conventions of production, a considerable influence is exercised on future work, as non-conventional approaches must be explained and the public "taught", inevitably at some "expense", to appreciate them. It will therefore always be easier, cheaper, and more likely to be successful, to continue working in a familiar mode, within the same conventions.

There are a whole range of aesthetic conventions available for recording personnel in recorded popular music, some of which are related to recording technique and some of which have a longer history in popular song, used as a short-hand way of communication. The following examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive of some aesthetic conventions used in contemporary recording; slow strings or a wailing guitar may indicate loneliness or a "broken heart"; echo in a recording may also be used to indicate loneliness or, in some contexts, a quasi-religious sincerity, the impression of which may be enhanced by massed strings and/or a "heavenly choir" of high female voices; Hoggart<sup>29</sup> noted the long established "big dipper" style in popular song in which a single voice rises and falls to suggest a deep-felt emotion; close harmony singing, which may be simulated by "double tracking" in the recording

studio, conventionally suggests unity or friendship. We shall suggest in Chapter Eight that a purpose of the musical arrangement to a song is to use conventions in musical accompaniment to create or suggest a mood, or to "fill out" the words of a song. Each of these conventions are used as efficient short cuts in communicating. Each has been established over a period of time by innumerable practitioners.

Conventions are not only used for the musical content of a recording, but also in the recording techniques used and the inter-relationship of content and technique. In a recording that simulates a live performance before an audience, certain types of musical works and background ambiences and sounds are considered to be appropriate which are different from those that would be recorded to make a collage of perfect details. Such aesthetic stances have, again, been developed over a period of time by countless recording personnel, and confirmed as usable and acceptable by listeners.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored how the cultural context is embedded in cultural production, arguing that it occurs in two ways, both of which are the result of social behaviour.

Firstly, at a structural level, music and other cultural products are crafted by individuals who have interiorised particular ways of thinking and who will work with symbolic "building blocks" and tools which have themselves been produced within a specific cultural framework. These will inevitably shape the work that is produced with them.

Secondly, all new cultural products are made within frameworks of acceptability and appropriateness that have been hewn out by previous earlier work. In some cases it is possible to trace a lineage back to this previous work of shared styles and conventions. The weight of this "legacy" of previous work is particularly strong for the production of recordings where there are strong financial pressures not to diverge far from established forms. Earlier works are widely available and known, some of those involved in recording may be encouraged to familiarise themselves with them, and extracts and sounds are used as a working vocabulary by some recording personnel.

In both cases, the vital work framing the forms and parameters which cultural production takes has been done in the social sphere.

## Footnotes to Chapter Six

1. see Shepherd, Virden and Wishart, Bourdieu.
2. Shepherd, p60
3. Shepherd, p69
4. Shepherd, p111
5. see Virden
6. Virden and Wishart, p163
7. see Bernstein
8. Virden and Wishart, p156
9. Bourdieu, 1971, p180
10. Bourdieu, 1971, p184
11. Hill, p114
12. Heath, p256 quoted by Hill, p114
13. T. Bennett, p68; quoted from P. Macherey. Problems of reflection.  
In Literature, Society and the Sociology of Literature. University  
of Essex, 1977.
14. T. Bennett, p68
15. see Kroeber
16. Kroeber, p123
17. Kroeber, p123
18. Kroeber, p130
19. see Klingender
20. Klingender, p61
21. for example, Klingender, p63 on Paul Sandby
22. see H.S. Bennett
23. see Becker, 1974
24. Becker, 1974, p771
25. Becker, 1974, p772
26. see Kuhn
27. Becker, 1974, p773
28. see discussion of "Cultural Imperialism" in Chapter Seven
29. Hoggart, p223

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The impact of the financial and economic context

An important component of the social production perspective is an analysis of the ways in which financial and economic factors permeate the finished cultural product. Golding and Murdock have argued that any sociological analysis of cultural production which fails to consider the economic determinants framing production is bound to be partial, because these not only determine the range and nature of cultural production but also underpin the ideological role of communications agencies.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter we shall show how capitalist financial and economic factors have a distinctive effect on recordings. We shall consider the development of the recording industry in the social context of the creation of a mass entertainment industry, its integration into the wider cultural products industry and its business structure, and the consequences of these for the production of recordings.

As recorded popular music in advanced capitalist societies is almost entirely dependent for its continued existence on success in the market place and the potential for profit-making there, its production is subject to the logic of the capitalist market-place. Hence, an entrepreneurial agency with the requisite capital is always required in order for recordings to be made. The market place will tend to exert its own pressures on such agencies, in particular by encouraging them to assume a shape and undertake activities that are efficient for profit-making and raising appropriate capital.

## The financial and economic dimensions of cultural production

Relatively little consideration has been given to the financial and economic dimension of cultural production. Indeed, the major exceptions to this rule, Golding and Murdock, and Garnham, in recent papers looking at different aspects of the economic dimension, have made similar comments on its underrepresentation in the literature.<sup>2</sup> Both point to the emphasis on ideology in recent Marxist approaches for the, ironically, limited interest in the economic sphere.

The only other significant contribution in the field of economic factors has been Blaug's collection<sup>3</sup>, but the emphasis there is on using the concepts of academic capitalist economics to assist responses to the perceived financial crisis of some arts in contemporary market economies. Most papers in the collection are concerned with exercises on financial and other statistics of the institutions of the art world. We should not overlook this approach, however, for these are the same financial considerations which will enter into decision making by the corporations which largely control cultural production. Certainly, "Baumol's Disease"<sup>4</sup>, the inevitable increase in costs of production occurring in certain labour-intensive service industries, where technical progress is incapable of raising labour productivity, is particularly apposite for collaborative production, and an important concern for any cultural production under capitalism.

Golding and Murdock argue that any satisfactory sociological analysis must relate "macroanalytical" social and economic concerns to the "micro" analysis of cultural production if it is to explain how the "the economic organisation and dynamics of . . . production



determine the range and nature of the resulting output,"<sup>5</sup> and urge that future sociological work should focus on three areas; firstly, and at the most general level, by looking at the overall distribution of financial and economic resources in society which largely determines the range and form of available media; secondly, working within individual media organisations on the economic imperatives which determine the allocation of productive resources between various divisions with different cost ratios; and thirdly, they propose studies of the economic considerations which shape particular productions.<sup>6</sup>

We would support this general strategy; the following pages focus on the second and third areas, the ways in which the economic imperatives of the organisation of the recording industry shape cultural production.

#### The Development of a Mass Entertainment Industry

A sociological explanation of the economic structure of recording must include some understanding of its social genesis. The recording industry did not create itself in a vacuum, but was developed in a developing capitalist industrial society and has subsequently flourished in an essentially post-industrial society, where knowledge is the major element in new economic growth and social change. A crucial aspect of this development has been the rise of a commoditised mass entertainment industry, of which the recording industry is today one sector.

The nineteenth century was a period of profound change in Britain marked by the emergence of an industrial stratified society.

Together, the undermining of the traditional rural way of life, and the breakdown of the old pattern of popular recreations, and the compartmentalisation of working class life under the factory system created a space for non-work that presented the bourgeoisie with a serious problem of control. Bailey, for example, has written that the middle class were "apprehensive about the effects of leisure and its freedoms on a working class with a traditional taste for wantonness and an uncertain allegiance to the authority of its betters."<sup>7</sup> The state played an enabling role in the rationalisation and commercialisation of working class leisure as a means of social control and self-control and the development of "a play discipline to complement the work discipline"<sup>8</sup> of industrial capitalist society.

Briggs<sup>9</sup> has suggested five major economic preconditions for the development of a mass entertainment industry; an urban population, rising real incomes, leisure, public transport, and modern technology, each of which was present in Britain by the end of the 19th Century. Firstly, a large and concentrated urban population had come into existence. By 1851, for the first time, over half the population lived in urban areas, and by 1881 two out of every five people lived in just one of the six conurbations.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, the real income of large sections of this population "had risen sufficiently during the previous fifty years to enable people to afford to buy regular cheap entertainment."<sup>11</sup> Hobsbawm has noted how, in particular, life for the working class became "very much easier and more varied" as living standards generally improved as both wages and profits increased, and hours of work decreased. "There was a current of municipal reform which benefitted them (the working

class), and an even stronger commercial movement to exploit the unsatisfied desire of the labouring poor for entertainment and vicarious comfort by such institutions as the cut-glass-and-mirrored gin palace, and the sham opulence of the Victorian music hall . . ."<sup>12</sup> By the beginning of the twentieth century the middle and lower middle classes accounted for perhaps 30% of the population, in families which were "reasonably" or "comfortably" well off, with an income of at least double the annual average.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, the shorter working week meant an increase in the amount of available leisure time, preparing the way for its commercial exploitation. There were already signs of the scope for development in this field. Sport, in particular, appealed to the middle class families who were first able to support a wide range of leisure activities and entertainments. Between 1863 and 1873 football, cricket, racing, rugby, and boxing were all brought under formal supervision, and by 1890 controlling bodies had been established in all other major team and individual sports.<sup>14</sup> In the large cities, the legislation of professional sport in 1885 led to a flourishing of spectator sports such as football, which soon enjoyed a mass following.<sup>15</sup>

Another facet of entertainment that demonstrated the general growth in spending power and the increasing consumption of mass entertainment was the daily and weekly press.<sup>16</sup> The "new journalism" offering news as entertainment, introduced by Northcliffe in the Daily Mail in 1896 revolutionised circulation figures. As Garnham puts it, "Capital moved into organise the new leisure time and the sphere of culture was at least partially brought within the field of exchange

value."<sup>17</sup>

Briggs' fourth precondition, public transport, had improved sufficiently in the 1880s and early 1890s to permit late night travel from city centres to residential suburbs.

The final precondition, technology, "was being applied to entertainment, sometimes falteringly and uncertainly, but in retrospect at least, decisively."<sup>18</sup> A cluster of inventions developed at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the electric lamp, the telephone, the gramophone, kinoscope cameras and the thermionic valve "were as basic to new ways of life in the twentieth century as were the inventions of the last quarter of the 18th Century in textiles, iron and power to the new industrial pattern of the 19th Century. The difference between them is that the 18th century inventions transformed the material standard of living and the 19th century inventions the form of culture . . . Without the existence of the first cluster there could not have been the second."<sup>19</sup>

Although in many cases technology was first harnessed to assist in distribution, Hobsbawm argues that it led to the revolutionising of production as well, for the demand created a level of output that was too great for individual craft creation.<sup>20</sup>

The development of capitalist industrial society in the late Victorian period and the presence of all these socio-economic preconditions presented fertile ground for new initiatives in mass entertainment, all of which depended on some, if not most, of these conditions. The times were propitious. We have noted the growth of professional sport and the phenomenal growth in demand for newspapers. Radio did not boom until after the First World War, and television

until after the Second. The example that is most readily to mind is the cinema. Motion pictures were first screened in Britain as part of a general vaudeville programme in 1896; within twenty years there were more than 3500 cinemas throughout the country, and in the next twenty a national weekly cinema audience had been created.<sup>21</sup>

Briggs has perceived a pattern of double conflict common to the history of almost all mass entertainment.<sup>22</sup> The first is between one form of entertainment and another, and the second is between different parties seeking to provide the same kind of entertainment. The first conflict, rather than ending in the supplanting of one kind of entertainment by another has more often resulted in their commercial integration and supplementation, an example is film and sound recording, as the overall market has expanded to accommodate competing goods. The second conflict, in the provision of the same kind of entertainment, has centred on patent rights and litigation, and again the recording industry, more particularly in its early stages,<sup>23</sup> provides instances of these conflicts. This, too, has more frequently ended in integration and accommodation than victory and defeat.

The identification of these socio-economic preconditions are illuminating, but they do not, taken in isolation, explain either the structure of the business created, or the form or content that mass consumption was to take. The phenomenal commercial success of the sound recording industry did not occur until after entrepreneurs had harnessed it to the structure of an already existing music market. In time this structure was itself adapted to maximise exploitation and accommodate its own success. The music market whose commercial structure, business procedures and marketing strategies were adopted

by the early sound recording entrepreneurs was that of music publishing.

### Music Publishing

Music publishing as a business had arisen from printers specialising in the production of street ballads and broadsides - words of songs printed on flimsy broadsheets for unsophisticated readers - for which from the turn of the 16th century until the middle of the 19th there was a wide market.<sup>24</sup>

Street ballads had been developed using the forms of ancient myths and legends,<sup>25</sup> but once written down and available for sale, topical and melodramatic tales of romance, sensation and scandal became predominant as their social status declined in the 18th Century.<sup>26</sup> In their later period, adaptations emerged in urban industrial communities as trade songs, local commentaries and political statements.

By the beginning of the 19th Century, there were hundreds of printers producing broadsides and pamphlets in a profitable, if highly speculative business.<sup>27</sup> Songs were bought from anonymous writers for a shilling, and in some cases sold tens of thousands of copies<sup>28</sup>, and exceptionally, over a million.<sup>29</sup>

Music publishers were thus well placed to benefit from the popularity of Victorian music halls. "Beginning as an entertainment by and for the working class, with a sprinkling of Bohemians, by the end of the 19th century the music hall had a mass appeal, and was produced entirely by professionals who realised immense profits."<sup>30</sup> Although early performers had written their own songs, in time they

found it easier to buy those offered by publishers<sup>31</sup>. The competition between publishers for a star's approval for a new song suggests not only a considerable excess of supply over demand, but also that a song associated with a star could sell in very large numbers.

The ballad was adopted as the basis of the variety song, and "gave rise to a new type of popular songwriter - a composer whose expertise enables him to achieve humorous and sentimental touches."<sup>32</sup> Vast numbers of songs were written for professional singers.

At the same time, domestic music-makers were catered for by the "royalty" songs, or drawing room ballads which flourished in the late-Victorian period. Their stock themes of sentimental escape and optimism<sup>33</sup> appealed to the middle and lower-middle class family around the piano. Hundreds of thousands were sold for domestic consumption. Like the music hall songs, they were the product of professional "composers and lyric writers with an instinct for commonplace sentiments,"<sup>34</sup> and although not suitable for the rough and tumble of the music halls were the chief stand-by of pre-wireless musical evenings. The name of a popular lyric author or an association with a popular singer would help sales.<sup>35</sup>

In the absence of any other means of "storing" music, all this musical activity revolved around sheet music, and its sale and supply supported a considerable industry. In Britain, and even more so in the United States<sup>36</sup>, publishers adopted aggressive selling techniques, such as paying singers a royalty or fee to include certain new songs in their programmes.

This, then was the environment into which sound recordings, as commodities for personal entertainment, were launched in both the U.K.

and North America. The form and content of recordings, and the business methods of the companies involved, were derived from the existing music publishing industry.

#### The development of the U.K. recording industry

Technology for making a crude sound recording had been developed 20 years before American entrepreneurs successfully established a business in Britain in 1898 making and selling recordings as part of an international network of factories and markets. By present-day standards, reproduction was appalling, despite the exorbitant claims made for it, and limited to three or four minute snatches. However, within its limited horizons, the gramophone was an immediate success, and recording technicians travelled Europe and the Empire searching for suitable artists to record for sale on both sides of the Atlantic.

In a limited, essentially middle class<sup>37</sup>, market, business thrived and the Gramophone Company, at least, was always profitable<sup>38</sup> and able to re-invest heavily in recording and manufacturing equipment.

During this early pre-war period, a number of the industry's present-day business practices were established. The recording companies embraced and promoted a "star system" for their performers, and paid royalties and advances against them, to performers for their services. Recorded sound for sale came to represent a fragmented piece of music associated with a named "author". Although most early performers had established reputations, notably in opera, it was not long before recording careers and reputations began to take precedence.<sup>39</sup>



In the 1920s the market for gramophone records in the U.K. changed significantly, and with it the type of music that was recorded. Notwithstanding some geographical exceptions there was a distinct improvement in the standard of living of the vast majority of the population.<sup>40</sup> A mass domestic market emerged for a number of consumer goods, typically "the cheap articles of domestic and personal use" sold in multiple variety stores, and manufactured in the new trading estates of West London rather than the industrial north.<sup>41</sup> Gramophone records formed part of this pattern, the Gramophone Company's manufacturing base was established at Hayes. Peacock and Weir conclude that, judging by evidence presented to the 1928 inquiry into record royalties, a mass market for gramophone records first developed in the second half of the 1920s.<sup>42</sup>

The immediate post-war boom was sustained and bolstered by cheaper records and improving techniques of recording and reproduction. Records of popular ballads could be bought for as little as 6d. in Woolworth's, although better quality records with "serious" prestigious artists were selling at about 7 or 8 shillings.<sup>43</sup>

As a business, however, recording was not isolated from general trends in business activity and subsequently suffered a period of recession and retrenchment before the general revival of activity in the later 1930s. In America, record manufacture slumped in 1932 to just 6% of the 1927 figure<sup>44</sup> while in Britain, the two major competitors combined in 1931 as a defensive measure in the face of falling profits, which jointly fell by 89% in that year.<sup>45</sup> Sales in Britain did not experience quite the same collapse as in America, for

new firms were able to enter the market<sup>46</sup> and they began to recover to an annual level of about 15 million by 1938-9. By then, the popularity of recorded music had led to a significant fall in the sale of sheet music<sup>47</sup>, the mainstay, as we have seen, of an earlier music market and which was soon to be superceded in importance.

The two decades after 1950 were characterised in all the developed Western economies by a prolonged economic boom, and as living standards rose, the major beneficiaries were the consumer goods industries. In Britain, for example, consumer expenditure almost doubled in the 1950s as "the sun of Conservatism shone brightly on private enterprise and private consumer expenditure"<sup>48</sup>. Throughout the world the sale and profitability of the recorded music business multiplied. The extent of the phenomenal world-wide rate of growth is indicated the following table:

Sales at manufacturers' selling prices (fm)

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>
North America	37	115	430
Japan	2	8	75
West Germany	2.5	12	35
United Kingdom	2.5	12	34
France	2	9	27
Others	<u>20</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>109</u>
<u>World Total</u>	66	205	710

source: Wood p669

In Britain, the size and major period of growth of the industry is indicated in the following table which shows a peak in 1978 and the subsequent stagnation and decline which has followed:-

U.K. manufacturers' sales - recorded music

	fm	RPI	1960 prices fm	%change
1955	9.1			
1960	15.0	100	15.0	
1965	25.5	119	21.4	+42
1970	40.8	149	27.4	+28
1975	173.0	281	61.6	+124
1978	250.1	400	62.5	+1
1980	251.8	533	47.3	-24

sources: BPI 1979 p114; BPI 1982 p19  
with additional calculations

The 1978 figure represents retail sales of £354.4 million.<sup>49</sup>

The net effect of the period of expansion has been to make a large and prominent world-wide business based on recorded music. It has been estimated that, annually, £6,000 million, of which the U.K. contributes 5.8%, is spent in the world on recorded music and related goods.<sup>50</sup>

The persistent growth of business offered unrivalled opportunities for profit-making<sup>51</sup> by allowing firms and individuals to expand their activities, and enabled considerable investment to be made in the technology of recording. A further effect was to advance the integration of the recording industry locking it into the wider capitalist economy, firstly, because the industry became the site of

profit-seeking investment by outside firms, and secondly because firms within the industry were able to generate the resources which they subsequently invested in outside areas.

#### The integrated communications industry.

Having looked at its antecedents, we shall now consider the contemporary financial and business structure within which sound recordings are made in the U.K., before assessing its effects on those recordings.

Murdock and Golding have argued for a sociological analysis that is appropriate to and accommodates all communications media and cultural production. They argue that a fragmented approach that considers one product in isolation is redundant in view of recent developments in the economy, particularly the emergence of conglomerates with interests in a number of different sectors and their consequent interrelationship, because it leads to an understatement of the importance of mass communications in "wider considerations of economic and cultural policy"<sup>52</sup> and because the various communications and cultural products of the modern economy are ideologically mutually supportive.

The communications conglomerates are themselves, as Garnham points out, a consequence of a post-industrial economy dominated by information- and symbol- processing. The field of information is, he says, one of the "economic leading edges" of developing multi-national capitalism, and a key area in its development. Hence, he suggests, it should now be recognised that "superstructural production" is the economic base<sup>53</sup> that drives the rest of the national

and international economy.<sup>54</sup> Some of the largest U.K. firms have major interests in cultural production, which has been a major source of corporate funds. As Murdock and Golding note, "In short, communications is big business."<sup>55</sup>

They have argued that the communications industry in general in the U.K. presents a picture of increasing concentration of productive resources and decreasing choice for the consumer.<sup>56</sup> All communications media have shared a common developmental cycle, in which small-scale personalised production has expanded to the extent that distribution and selling have become separated and commercialised, production is industrialised, and consumption is on a large impersonal scale. Industry growth characteristically reaches a saturation point, and thereafter there are persistent problems of rising costs and declining revenue. The response to this crisis has generally been economic concentration, and continuing rationalisation of resources, often to the detriment of the wider public interest.

The recording industry is clearly an integral sector of the wider communications and cultural products industry, as many firms that are active in other sectors have financial interests in the music industry, either directly through recording companies, studios, or music publishing, or indirectly via the consumer music press, or equipment manufacture. We shall look in more detail later at the extent to which recording has become an integral part of the business structure of the wider communications industry.

Secondly, like many other media and cultural products, recordings are made initially under labour-intensive craft arrangements and then made widely available via industrially based duplication methods, and

in the case of recordings, nationally distributed to the retail trade in the same way as, for example, magazines or paperback books.

Thirdly, the different communications media frequently share a common content, and may be marketed together. As Hirsch points out, increased exposure of a performer in one medium increases his value to the others.<sup>57</sup> There is, for example, frequently an overlap between film and recordings which, tending to appeal to similar publics, helps intensify public interest in both.

The recording industry has shared in this common developmental cycle, and the tendency towards concentration, although the persistent expansion of sales has meant that the characteristic problem of market saturation causing rising unit costs, has not until recently occurred to the same extent as elsewhere, because the effects of rising fixed costs have been mitigated by increased production. Only recently has the recording industry begun to experience the stage of "crisis" as costs have risen faster than revenue.

Murdock and Golding have suggested that concentration in the communications industry threatens the public interest in three ways.<sup>58</sup> Firstly, it limits the "range and diversity of views and opinions which are able to find public expression", in particular, by systematically excluding those of less powerful social groups. Secondly, large conglomerates are likely to emphasis production goals of maximising profit at the expense of alternative social goals. Thirdly, concentration reduces democracy because it distances control from the point of production and because it "removes the media from public surveillance and accountability."<sup>59</sup>

## Economic concentration in the recording-industry.

Economic concentration in the recording industry, as elsewhere, is the outcome of three interlinked but distinct processes, integration, diversification, and internationalism.<sup>60</sup> The present day structure of the recording industry can be traced to the outcome of similar financially based strategies.

### a) Integration

Vertical integration, the taking over of supplies or markets is primarily a strategy for security<sup>61</sup> as it reduces a firm's vulnerability to fluctuations in costs and supplies of essential materials and services, and, by increased control over its markets enables it to regulate production more precisely. It may be intended to increase efficiency by eliminating the cost of using the market for transactions, or it may be a readjustment to a changed technology.<sup>62</sup>

Vertical integration is widespread in the music business as a whole, where it has generally been undertaken for security reasons, not usually as a defensive measure in the face of crisis and contraction, but as a means of further exploiting and benefitting from the expansion of the industry and gaining access to scarce resources. Hence, recording companies have tended to invest in new studios, marketing and sales organisations, and to set up music publishing enterprises. At the same time, a number of new record companies, apart from those subsidiaries of overseas companies, have emerged as investments by organisations and individuals already in the music industry, in order to bypass restrictions in the old arrangements. Publishers, in particular, have been expansive, partly because of the vulnerability of their traditional role in the music market,<sup>63</sup>

mediating between composer and the recording and performing sides of the business.

Horizontal integration, the consolidation of competing firms by merger or takeover, enables the sharing of resources and maximising of economies of scale within a particular sector of production, thereby assisting the growth of firms. Take-over may also be a means by which large firms defend their market position when threatened by smaller competitors with a new technology,<sup>64</sup> or in cultural production by competitors with more attractive products.<sup>65</sup>

In the recording industry there have been periods of both integration and dis-integration. In general, firms have been able to duplicate each other's activities in an expanding market rather than be under pressure to amalgamate and share functions. However, as the industry's rate of expansion has slowed and stopped altogether, sections of the industry have suffered decline, and amalgamation has become more widespread as firms have sought to reduce costs and competition.

#### b) Diversification

Diversification is the broadening of areas of business activity by companies, usually in order to cushion the effects of a possible recession in its specialist area of activity, or as a source of growth and increased profits.<sup>66</sup> Murdock and Golding, have noted how the wider interests of Associated Television (as it then was), particularly in music, successfully "protected" the company's revenue from the effects of the imposition of a levy on commercial television revenue, whereas the non-diversified Westward Television, was more vulnerable.<sup>67</sup>

Firms established in static markets (e.g. the newspaper industry)



will tend to diversify into faster growing markets, such as commercial television or recording. Communications companies have, in the first instance, tended to stay within the communications industry, because generally, the direction of diversification is dictated by the advantage which established firms have in the production of goods in which they have special experience in marketing or technology.<sup>68</sup>

Diversification has integrated the recording industry into the wider communications industry. The extent to which the U.K. recording industry, as a whole, has been a target for diversifying firms is indicated by the fact that, with the sole exception of one music publisher, there is no public company whose principal activity is recording or music publishing. All the firms involved in the recording industry are either private companies, (and so out of reach of predators) or are subsidiary divisions of other British or foreign public companies. The leading companies which dominate the industry are all subsidiaries of multi-national conglomerates. The recording industry undoubtedly gains financial stability and resources from these outside interests, but in many cases the relationship must be seen as exploitative, with established communications and electronics companies taking advantage of the growth and potential profit in a buoyant related sector.

Those private recording companies with available resources have tended, as we would expect, to expand first into other sectors of the music industry such as studio ownership, music publishing, or concert promotion. A few have diversified further into related sectors of communications such as film production and book publishing, and then invested in other sectors of the economy.

Of the larger public companies originally based in recording, EMI successfully diversified before being taken over by an electrical goods manufacturing company, so that despite its claim to be the largest recording company in the world, in 1983, its worldwide music industry activities accounted for just 18% of the company's total turnover and pretax profits.<sup>69</sup> In the reverse direction, other large public companies have diversified into the U.K. recording industry, and their recording activities also represent only a small proportion of their activities.<sup>70</sup> Similar developments have taken place in the U.S.A. where, for example, only 32% of the total sales of C.B.S. Inc. in 1975 were from recording;<sup>71</sup> while the whole of RCA's Consumer Products and Services, which included records amongst other things, accounted for only 26.8% of R.C.A.'s sales in 1973.

Hence, recording has become a peripheral interest for most of the larger corporations involved in the industry. The interest of those companies which have expanded by investing in the industry, is essentially financial, and hence recording is very likely to be regarded as secondary to other corporate aims. This may be illustrated in the comment of the chairman of a large private "independent" recording company on rejecting a proposed takeover by the recording subsidiary of an American communications conglomerate, ". . . If we had a number one hit, and they had a movie that flopped, the record would be of no concern to them. . ." <sup>72</sup>

### c) Internationalism

A third response to a small and saturated home market is to expand overseas. Communications products, with their high value and low volume (or electronic dissemination) are a particularly attractive

proposition to export from advanced industrial economies. British communications companies have sought wider markets for their goods in advanced economies by setting up subsidiaries or buying into existing concerns, and have also shared in the "media imperialism" of the Third World - "the process whereby the ownership, structure, distribution or content of media in any one country are singly or together subject to substantial external pressures from the media interests of any other country or countries without proportional reciprocation of influence by the country so affected."<sup>73</sup> The British communications industry has also been an object of expansion by overseas companies, particularly American, also seeking wider markets.

Recording companies, like other cultural production agencies have been active in cultural imperialism, and have largely been able to impose Anglo-American recording technology and concepts and tastes of recorded music. This power to construct and largely define the world's popular recorded music is the real power of the British and American recording companies and is the source of their control over a high percentage of sales in the world's markets. It also enables the large multi-national corporations to view the world as one large market and conduct their business on an international scale.

All active companies have subsidiaries or licencing arrangements with overseas firms to market their product in other markets, in the same way that overseas companies gain access to the U.K. market and U.K. performers. Recording companies in different national markets tend to be closely associated. The major companies that are pre-eminent in Britain, also largely control the recording industry throughout the non-communist world. The same companies

dominate all leading markets, as the table following shows with respect to the two largest, the U.S.A. and Japan:

<u>USA</u>	% of successful titles singles, LPs and tape	<u>Japan</u>	% share of market
	<u>1973</u>		<u>1975</u>
Warner Comm.	23.8	Warner/Pioneer	6.8
CBS	14.5	CBS/Sony	13.5
Capitol(EMI)	7.5	Toshiba/EMI	12.0
RCA	6.7	(RCA) Victor	14.1
MCA	6.4		
A & M	6.0		
ABC	5.4		
Polygram	4.9	Polydor	15.8
Arista	3.6		
Motown	3.6		
		King	5.8

sources: USA; Chapple and Garofolo, p188 from "Billboard"

Japan; Tunstall, 1977, p163 from "Variety" 11.2.76

Elsewhere, the picture is similar. For example, in France, Polygram and Pathe Marconi (owned by EMI) control 47% of the market,<sup>74</sup> and Frith notes that a British firm, EMI, controls 98% of the Indian market for recordings.<sup>75</sup>

The past acceptability of Anglo-American styles and performers in world markets provides strong financial incentives to seek success overseas, particularly in areas such as the U.S., Japan or Germany.

Additionally, recordings may represent financial investments on such a scale that the U.K. market alone cannot provide the rate of return that record companies are seeking or consider adequate.<sup>76</sup> Some "independent" record companies derive the majority of their income from exports.

A consequence of the search for wider overseas markets is to "internationalise" cultural products, to squeeze out unorthodox or minority tastes in favour of those that are more readily acceptable internationally.

#### The business structure of the U.K. recording industry.

The work of making recordings, manufacturing and distributing them is carried out by a variety of entrepreneurial organisations working within a capitalist system. Although our primary concern is with the making of recordings, it is relevant at this stage to note the five distinct stages involved in getting a recording to a public, because they are linked to the business structure of the recording industry. The five stages are production, making recordings and providing financial and administrative support for transforming ideas-for-recording into a physical artifact; publication, making recordings public; marketing and promotion, bringing performers and recordings to the attention of the public; manufacture, the industrial duplication of the artifact; and distribution of these artifacts to the public.

This division by function enables us to distinguish between companies involved in the music business and discern how progressive increases in resources, with increasing economies of scale, are needed to perform each stage economically. There is a sharp decline in the

numbers of firms active at each stage, from over a hundred involved in production, to less than ten in distribution. In practice, the very largest firms are involved at each stage, whereas the smaller ones may be concerned with one, two or three functions only.

The extent and consequences of economic concentration become clear when we consider the relationships between the various firms comprising the recording industry. At the manufacturing and distributing levels firms are highly interdependent, share resources and may work in cooperation with one another as much in competition. The fully integrated companies may carry out the work involved in publication, marketing, manufacture and distribution that they do for themselves, on behalf of a number of smaller firms also, whose activities, in practical terms, they therefore control. It is possible to see the industry as comprising a limited number of interdependent "constellations" of related companies, each of which is largely controlled by the fully integrated firm at its centre, which is itself, as we shall see, likely to be owned and controlled as a division of a multinational electronics and communications corporation, with interests elsewhere. Frith has suggested that it is likely that reported information about financial ties understate their real extent.

As the focus of our interest is the making of recordings, we shall restrict our analysis to those organisations whose activities include the production of recordings, excluding those, for example, who only manufacture or distribute finished recordings.

Three main types of recording company can be identified in the U.K. industry, corresponding broadly to small, medium and large:

- (i) production companies who make recordings only, and licence out the other functions,
- (ii) "independent" record companies, generally carrying out production, publishing and marketing, but contracting out manufacture and distribution,
- (iii) "fully integrated" record companies, carrying out all functions for themselves and under contract for smaller firms.

This structure of the industry is neither static, although it does show a remarkable resilience, nor is it without exceptions to the general pattern. There will always be movements as new entrants to production work replace established firms on the outside boundary, and some lesser changes take place within the industry between categories. New firms may attempt, and will from time to time succeed, in making recordings and reaching a public by means outside the established arrangements. Characteristically, however, success of this manner has been short-lived and unsupportable in the long run; where it has been prolonged it has become accommodated into the main stream of the industry.

(i) Production companies

Production companies are characteristically small-scale organisations whose sole purpose is the production of recordings to licence to recording companies for publication, and from which it derives income from commission. The licensor carries out all post-production administration and manufacture using his expertise and

industrial plant.

Some production companies are closely linked by an exclusive arrangement with a publishing recording company to take all their product, whereas others may be free to place it with the highest bidder. Inevitably, some product will not be placed, although the scale of investment required today to make a master recording usually means that a cheaper "demonstration" recording will have been made to solicit interest.

Many production companies are largely nominal in existence, formed for the exploitation of the work of one or two individuals, usually producers who, in some cases, also write or perform their own work. This development of the production company has been a factor in the transformation of producer from a salaried employee to a free-lance agent, negotiating for each piece of work.

A number of production companies have been established by successful performers, initially for their own work, and will employ a producer for particular projects. It is now quite common for performers to make finished recordings for licence, rather than sign directly to the publishing recording company, as this allows ownership and artistic control to be retained. There will also be a much bigger financial return if successful, although the performer will have to shoulder any risks.

Another source of production companies are as off-shoots of established firms carrying out activities within the music industry, such as music publishing, or studio ownership, and who are seeking to supplement this by expanding into a related field where they may have expertise or resources that might be useful.



Some production companies may trade under their own name, that is, have a "label identity" and the appearance of being a separate record company, while others will supply material for any company who wants it. Although an "own label" published on its behalf by a larger company indicates considerable control by a production company over its own affairs, in practice it is unlikely to be a source of much self-sustained life outside the work of its owners. Consequently, its fortunes may change very rapidly, dependent as they are, on the continuing market appeal of a few individuals. The few production companies that have evolved from having their "own label" to becoming a fully fledged "independent" recording company, our second category, act as a stimulus and model for later entrants.

(ii) "Independent" recording companies

The medium sized recording organisations, the "independent" recording companies, although varying in size, have a distinctive character and operating principles. In the U.K. today, there are about a dozen firms in this category, which apart from a few subsidiaries of smaller American firms, are privately owned and, almost all having been established in the last 15 years, are still controlled by their founders.

All these firms record, market, and promote their own repertoire and performers, but contract out manufacturing and distribution to one of the fully integrated firms, thus enabling them to avoid becoming shackled with heavy fixed investments and financial commitments. They tend to specialise in sectors of the overall market, not attempting to cover it all.

These companies often claim a commitment to their performers, their music and their careers and may attempt to gain a reputation for artistic integrity. This commitment may be thought to manifest itself in being more indulgent towards performers or simply in being sympathetic to, or knowledgeable about, a particular sub-market. The founder of one such company has commented "I feel the role of any independent is to have the creative side really going strong and work within the scope of a major".<sup>77</sup> Certainly, with a relatively small roster of performers, company staff can be more attentive to each release and each performer's career, with less scope for competition between performers for access to a budget for promotion. However, ultimately, as with any capitalist business enterprise, the company is looking for a return on its investment.

The independent companies vary greatly in their financial resources, although in the long run they will tend to be financially insecure, because their income is dependent on a limited range of performers whose careers (or contracts) will, in the normal course of events, come to an end. Some companies are virtually supported by just one or two successful performers, and with a smaller roster of performers, firms must achieve a higher success rate than the major companies.

Although the larger independent companies may have a subsidiary in the USA, they will generally rely on the international companies to look after their interests overseas under licence. This may be less profitable for them, although it is less risky and usually means advance payments for the company, and it may also be less advantageous for the performers concerned.

(iii) Fully integrated companies

The small number of "fully integrated" companies operating in the UK are each subsidiaries of multi-national conglomerates, predominantly concerned with electrical goods manufacture or communications.

These recording companies share a number of characteristics which differentiate them from those smaller recording companies, carrying out all the functions necessary to enable recordings to reach a public. They will aim to publish most types of recording, normally own studios and, in some cases, wholesaling and retailing divisions. All have associated music publishing divisions. In some cases, the recording division may benefit from the parent company's ownership of facilities, such as theatres or film or television production.<sup>78</sup>

The recording division can gain considerable financial strength from a parent company, which may be willing to subsidise recording activities enabling a longer than short term view of investments, or enabling riskier yet potentially more profitable investments to be made. Its financial resources may also permit the recording division to compete financially to "buy" low risk investments to secure its position.

On the other hand, as a division of a larger corporation the recording company will be expected to defer to corporate interests, especially financial targets, in some cases to the extent of financing the activities of the parent company, which may severely curtail its own freedom of action and which it may regard as inappropriate for a recording company. The recording company may also find itself

disposed of in the financial dealings of parent companies.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to processing their own internally generated product, the fully integrated companies carry out all administrative, manufacturing and distribution functions on behalf of licenced repertoire, as well as manufacturing and distribution for "independent" companies under contract. Virtually all manufacture and distribution in the U.K. is undertaken by these same companies. Licencing agreements for manufacture and distribution can be a major part of the fully integrated company's business and a source of considerable business income. It has been reported that fully integrated companies can make almost as much money from manufacturing and distributing for some independent companies, and from licencing operations where it performs a bigger role, than it can from developing its own performers.<sup>80</sup>

The details of these arrangements are a matter for financial negotiation and competition. A fully integrated company will be concerned that its licencees and its own labels together provide a broad range of repertoire to insulate it from the effects of rapid changes in public taste, and do not compete too much with each other. Hence, once appropriate volume is secured, licencing arrangements will be especially sought with partners supplying complementary rather than competing or duplicated repertoire<sup>81</sup>. Manufacturing companies may also work together in sharing any temporary surfeit of demand for its product that one company cannot meet.<sup>82</sup>

For historical reasons rather than their contemporary structure, major companies tend to have an extensive "back catalogue" of recordings. These provide a stream of proven repertoire that can be

repackaged and re-released at fairly short notice and at minimal cost (except when there are heavy advertising costs) to even out troughs in the demand for new product. If catalogue material is not available from its own sources, it may be possible to buy up from a defunct company.

As members of large international corporations, the major companies have associates in all major world markets, EMI, for example, having subsidiaries operating in over 30 countries enabling them to sell recordings more effectively in the international market, which is a considerable attraction to performers. Overseas subsidiaries also give the company access, for the U.K. market, to performers and repertoire that have proved themselves elsewhere; American associates are particularly important in this respect.

#### Recording under capitalist economic relations

We have outlined some of the parameters of the business structure within which recordings are made. How, then, do capitalist economic relations and the specific business structure of the recording industry permeate and define the production of recordings, and how do they mediate particular concepts of creativity? It is not possible to step back from the production of recordings and say that some of the observed phenomena are the peculiar effects of capitalist economic relations imposed on previously untainted recording arrangements that had been established on a non-capitalist basis for, as we have seen, recording and the recording industry are themselves products of capitalism and, consciously or otherwise, have incorporated its imperatives from the beginning.

Nevertheless, we can distinguish some areas where the demands of capitalist business are direct and prominent, and have a distinctive and direct effect on the production of recordings and their availability. These are in addition to indirect effects mediated by the technology or by the work organisations of recording, which we shall look at separately in the following two chapters.

We shall consider here firstly how the business structure affects the content and availability of the artifact, the record, through the effect of recording budgets, and through business organisations' strategies to protect the value of their investment by limiting and spreading risks and maximising their return. We shall then consider how these business imperatives mediate conceptions of creativity and creative persons, by analysing the designation of one individual as "author", and looking at his relationship with the recording company.

a) The size of budget

The major direct mediating link between the financial and economic circumstances in which recordings are made, and the final sound of the recording is through the budget for recording work. We can assume that all recordings are made to a budget, even if this is unlimited or not explicitly stated beforehand.

The level of that budget depends on a number of factors. From the point of view of a business involved in making recordings, the cost of that recording is an investment; and its decisions about that investment will be based on its assessment of its own financial resources, its estimate of the degree of risk involved, and the possible return likely to be generated.

We shall consider these factors as they are present in the recording industry, before looking at how they are manifested in the final recorded sound.

The level of resources made available as a recording budget does not necessarily vary in any direct way to the circumstances of the firm making the recording. In general, however, the recording budget that may be allocated for a performer contracted to a large and profitable firm is potentially much greater, other things remaining the same, than if the same performer was contracted to a smaller, or temporarily unprofitable firm. However, these factors may be overridden in practice by special consideration about the market as a whole, or special links with other media, or general policy of the firm involved.

The degree of perceived risk has an important effect on the availability of resources, performers who have already had commercially successful recordings are much less of a risk than a performer new to recording, and will normally have access to a much larger recording budget. For example, the budget allocated by MCA Records for a recording of the show "Evita" was more than six times that for the same composers' "Jesus Christ Superstar" which had become an unexpected and phenomenal success, only after it had been recorded.<sup>83</sup> Although there are exceptional cases where there may be virtually no risk whatsoever, the potential returns very high and the budget effectively unlimited, the great majority of investment in recording is purely speculative. As in any business environment, where firms try to reduce risk to their investments, so in recording, risks may be reduced by extensive promotion and marketing, such as by

linking the recording to successes in other media, finance for which may have come from a separate source.

A third factor affecting the size of a recording budget may be a low ceiling imposed by the small size of the potential market and scale of business in some sub-markets of popular music. In some "specialist" areas, such as contemporary folk music, or some reggae music, there is often a stable market and sales of recordings, although small in number, may be relatively predictable and evenly distributed, thereby allowing a low-budget, low-turnover business to flourish.

#### b) Effect of the budget on the sound of recording

There is no necessary direct relationship between the budget for a recording and the final sound reaching the public. However, in recordings, as in other cultural products, they are related by the manner in which the given size of the budget largely determines the level and type of resources available to make that recording. The effect of a budget on recordings can be greater than the impact of a budget on many other cultural products, because most of the major resources used in making the recording are purchased in the market place.

The size of the budget has a critical effect on the availability to the producer of both the quantity and quality of these resources, and hence on the finished recording. The effect will mostly be felt through a form of "self censorship" in which recording personnel have to accept some limitations to their activities. We shall note, in discussing Becker's concept of the convention, that there is a



penalty of increased costs in not conforming to established conventions. The consequences of a limited budget are illustrated in the following comment from a performer/producer, "Even that tape (of a new recording) is full of inaccuracies but that's because I had to stop recording some time, and I couldn't afford to keep the musicians there any longer. There are things that are drastically wrong, but with the budget they gave me to make an album there is no way I could do it any better."<sup>84</sup>

The major resources which are both expensive and, to a degree, voluntarily incurred are the quality and quantity of recording studio time, and musicians.

The cost of hiring a recording studio varies enormously, depending mainly on the specification of the installed equipment, and also on such factors as location, general facilities, comfort and reputation. The more expensive studios will offer sophisticated and complex multi-track recording facilities, possibly a computer-assisted mixing facility, as well as a wide range of ancillary electronic equipment. Recordings made under these conditions have a greater number of options available, and the studio facilities may allow the creation of a very much more refined and complex sound than is possible in a cheaper studio.

A more important factor that interrelates with the relative cost of the quality of the studio is the amount of studio-time that is available. If the full potential of the more sophisticated recording facilities are to be realised, then a great deal of time may be spent in getting the initial recording precisely as desired, and working with some of the numerous options available during mixing. In other

words, an abundance of studio-time means the opportunity to experiment in the studio, to try out different possibilities both for the initial recording and with the electronic enhancement and mixing of that sound, and the opportunity to try out different musical material for its effectiveness. In some cases, performers might compose music in the studio in order to make the most of the electronic possibilities. Another possibility offered by abundant studio-time is the opportunity for performers to be recorded playing sequentially on a number of instruments which, in the finished recording, would sound simultaneous.

The other major resource whose availability affects the final sound is the musical accompaniment additional to any musical contribution of the performers. Again, both quality and quantity affect the final cost. In practical terms, the differences in rates of pay between different arrangers or different session musicians is not significant, given the much greater variability introduced when hourly rates are multiplied by the time needed and the numbers involved. The length of time hired does not necessarily correlate with the amount of music to be recorded as, again, musicians may be used to repeat and perfect, or experiment with pieces of music.

Clearly, the more musician time that is available, the more choices there are for the producer, and the more he is likely to be able to perfect his work. The number of musicians used may make a very great difference to the final recorded sound. It may be minimal or non-existent as the performers make all the recorded sounds, or alternatively, at its most costly, may involve lavish and indulgent orchestral and choral arrangements. In the latter case, arrangements

must be commissioned, and a large number of musicians hired for the recording work.

A larger budget offers greater recording opportunities which are denied to those working on a limited budget. We can neither predict that they will be taken, nor cause them to be so, although it is true to say that those on a small budget will not be able to.

The "punk" movement in the U.K. has recently demonstrated the effect of these factors in practice, and show how they relate to the final sound of the published recording. "Punk" performers were originally restrained by limited financial resources, being recent recruits to the business of recording, often with a small local public only, and usually contracted to a new and/or small recording company. Their aesthetic response to these circumstances was to develop and celebrate musical and recording styles that were raw and straightforward, and inexpensive to make. In one well-documented case, a single recording that was ultimately as successful as others costing an average 600 times as much, was reputedly made for £46.<sup>85</sup> The prevalent aesthetic in contemporary recording, the idea of a collage of perfect details, which suits the present technology of recording but which makes the production of recordings expensive, favours those with considerable financial backing.

### c) Standardisation

A further effect of the business imperative of risk minimisation is the tendency towards standardisation around what is known to have sold in the past. Adorno has noted that when any one recording achieves success, imitators are encouraged and the most successful

combination of elements will be repeated in a process that culminates in a "crystallisation of standards."<sup>86</sup> These standards become frozen and rigidly enforced upon new material by the monopolistic agencies involved. Recordings are, therefore, made to established formulae of structure, and although the surface features may be different, nevertheless share a common underlying structure which assists the public in gaining familiarity and comprehension.

As we saw in the previous chapter, these same standards are also socially enforced by the public, as they take on the appearance of being "natural" and define what members of the public regard as the "inherent, simple language of music itself."<sup>87</sup> New popular music must conform to this, yet simultaneously and apparently contradictorily, provide stimuli that provoke and attract the listener's attention. It is the simultaneous exercise of these pressures that leads to the structural standardisation within a limited number of sub-categories of popular music, and at the same time an excessive concentration on the surface details to distinguish one piece of music from another.

Hence, recording personnel aim to distinguish individual performers by creating a distinctive "sound" for their recordings, while individual recordings are often given a "hook", a distinctive recurrent phrase or line, as an aid to their rapid familiarisation and identification.

#### d) Risk-spreading

The capitalist business structure of the industry has significant effects on the availability of recordings through the willingness of recording companies to record individual performers, and to

"concretise" ideas-for-recording.

Decisions about which ideas-for-recording will be made are subject to assessments by company decision makers of the investing company's position in the market place. The company will aim to compete with recordings in different identifiable sectors of the market within areas of general specialisation, and will therefore be more receptive to certain ideas than to others. It will not want to finance too many competing recordings, but at any one time, work in certain idioms will be much more acceptable, and therefore will be more likely to attract investment, than some others. Knowledge of this effect will inevitably influence the ideas-for-recording that are brought forward for consideration as candidates for investment.

e) Overproduction and differential promotion

We have suggested that the size of the recording budget, the amount that the recording company is willing and able to invest, affects the final artifact. Having committed itself to an investment, the recording company will seek to protect this by reducing the associated risks. Some of the practices have further consequences for the artifact itself, and its availability to the public. That, and therefore the ability of a performer to reach an audience is also dependent on its making satisfactory progress through a complex network of intermediaries responsible for creating a demand, distributing and selling it.

Hirsch<sup>88</sup> characterises the system of distribution to the market of the recording industry as one of overproduction and differential promotion, a practice that is also characteristic of other cultural

industries such as book publishing and the film industry. Over-production and differential promotion is a two-sided strategy used within cultural production to effect the pre-selection of goods which is, as he reminds us, a feature common to all industries, although it is more usual for there to be internal procedures for assessing the potential of candidates before they are made available for consumption.<sup>89</sup> Cultural industries have to cope with an uncertain and changing environment with a high element of risk. Hirsch suggests that overproduction is one of three "coping" strategies designed to reduce the risks involved.

The other two strategies that recording companies have adopted are the deployment of "contact" men to organisational boundaries, where they can ease the difficulties in recruiting "creative" raw materials; and the co-optation of mass media "gatekeepers" to ease the constraints on output distribution posed by the media, by a variety of mechanisms designed to influence and manipulate their coverage decisions. Neither of these strategies in themselves impose on the production of recordings, although the first may ease the recruitment of certain types of performer, and the second may widen the range of recordings made as access to the media may be less uncertain.

Recordings receive differing promotional support. Those aimed at a mass market may be published with no publicity, with minimal information given, or after a large and expensive promotional campaign. The company's choices here and possible rank ordering of its own material indicates to both key personnel in the mass media and to its own regional promoters its expectations for and evaluation of its product. However, this factor may be overridden by the

independence of the gatekeepers, and it is testimony to their influence that the recording industry does not rely entirely on its own judgement. In practice, those recordings which are picked out by mass media personnel, but which are not already supported, will quickly be given promotional help.

The effect of this differential promotion is to cause performers to compete with each other to gain corporate support for their recordings, for without it their chances of a wider public becoming aware of the recording are slim. The performer's dependence on the record company for successful negotiation of this system gives the company considerable leverage over him.

The effect of differential promotion, although it is not the only factor, is directly evident in the distinctive pattern of sales of recordings, which show that only a very limited range of titles is bought by the public. In the U.K. in 1976, (the only year for which detailed figures have been published,) over 3000 different titles of single records were published, but no less than 7.3 million of the 56.9 million copies sold, more than one in eight, were accounted for by just 10 titles. Indeed, the leading one hundred selling titles accounted for over 50% of all record sales. The following table provides graphic illustration of the unequal distribution of sales in 1976:

rank order	estimated U.K. sales('000)	cumulative total ('000)	cumulative % of U.K. sales
1	1,050	1,050	1.8
2	890	1,940	3.4
3	770	2,810	4.9
5	750	4,330	7.6
10	500	7,310	12.8
25	310	12,880	22.6
50	225	19,390	34.1
75	190	24,735	43.5
100	155	28,990	50.9

source: BPI 1977

with further calculations

The average sale for these 100 titles was 289,900 whereas the average for the remaining 3,052 titles was only 9,145, although the average for all titles released in 1976 was 18,052.<sup>90</sup>

The evidence suggests that sales of many single records are in the hundreds, with the vast majority selling no more than a few thousand. In 1974-5, for example, 87% of the 432 single records released by EMI sold fewer than 34,000 copies, EMI's average break-even point.<sup>91</sup> A record company will normally press about 5000-6000 copies initially for a new and unknown performer,<sup>92</sup> which suggests an expectation of sales of 3000-4000 assuming nothing untoward happens. For the industry as a whole, in a relatively typical year, one in seven titles published broke even, representing sales of more than about 27,000.<sup>93</sup>



The sales pattern for long playing titles shows a less extreme but otherwise similar shape to that of 7" discs, with a small number of titles accounting for a relatively high proportion of total sales. The vast majority of LP titles sell between 5,000 and 15,000 copies. In 1974-5, only 21% of LPs released by EMI sold more than the company's break-even point of 19,000.<sup>94</sup> The average break-even point for the industry was 16,122 in 1975<sup>95</sup>, and it is unlikely that more than about one in five LPs sold more than this number. Again, as with singles, income from the titles that sell in very large quantities defrays the inevitable losses on the others. Calculations based on BPI "awards" show that during 1976, a year when 4000 new LP titles were released, 8 titles achieved sale of at least 300,000 (not necessarily all in that year); 62 reached 70,000; and only 143, less than 4 in every hundred, reached 30,000.<sup>96</sup>

The practice of the industry in creating an artificially short "life" for recordings, by making them "time-bound" and their sale a function of fashion also has an effect in its impact on the chances of any one individual or idea-for-recording. A major means of achieving this effect is through the sponsoring of widely publicised league tables of best selling records, "the charts", showing the relative position of weekly sales based on a national sample of retailers. Although the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the charts may be questioned, their influence is undoubted, through their role in further determining which recordings are brought to the public's attention and are available for purchase in shops.

The purpose of this is twofold. Firstly, to bring a limited number of records to public attention and, secondly, to stimulate sales by

creating a competition in which the public can feel they are joining in by making purchases. Fashion turns an essentially durable good into an item of consumption, for which a replacement will be sought. Underpinning the charts is an assumption that quantity indicates quality, and that the highest seller is the best. Within their context, each recording is reduced to a false equivalence with all others.<sup>97</sup> The influence of this strategy is shown in the reduction of the effective sales life of a recording to an average of about ten weeks.

Overproduction and differential promotion in the recording industry is a rational organisational response to an environment of low capital investment and demand uncertainty. For most companies it has been proved to be more efficient on financial grounds to have a low success rate from a high number of starters, than to sponsor fewer items, supporting each on a massive scale. We have noted that these arrangements give considerable control to the recording companies over the activities of recording personnel.

Although one consequence of the characteristic overproduction is that it makes it more likely that a wider range of sounds and repertoire will be recorded in the first place, the net effect of selection by differential promotion within the recording companies and by mass media gatekeepers is to reduce the public's range of choice.

Furthermore, as we shall see in the next chapter, once recording personnel have been allocated a certain level of resources to make a recording, there is seldom any direct attempt to control the proceedings. It is clear that this is not necessary, as differential promotion enables the company to retain ultimate control. In view of

the crucial importance of gaining the promotional endorsement of the company's policymakers, an interpretation of their perceived views will be internalised by recording personnel and thereby enter into the production, working to channel the recording in those ways thought to be acceptable. Differential promotion gives considerable power to the recording company in its relationship with the individual performer, as all but the already established and successful depend on it for their promotional support in the market place.

The strategies of budget limits and of differential promotion enable capital to retain control over its investments in recordings. These, however, are not the only investments made by recording companies. We shall now review how investment is made in performers, and the implications this has for the concepts of creativity and the recognition of creative persons.

(f) The performer as a commodity

Recording companies, with their financial resources and their control over the components which form a performer's career largely determine the shape of that career, although formally, this is the function of management. In this respect, the record company's relationship with the performer may be seen as parallel to that between art dealer and painter.

In their discussion of the emergence of art dealers in 19th Century France, White and White distinguish their two complementary roles of speculator and patron, a pattern of art dealership first established by Paul Durand-Ruel.<sup>98</sup> As a speculator, the dealer attempts to buy cheaply and sell at a higher price later when the

market improves, a situation which he aims to engineer. The second role, that of patron, was recreated in its Renaissance sense, although Durand-Ruel was working from a different economic base, and with different motives. In return for an exclusive supply of new work to sell, a painter would receive substantial advances. However, although the relationship with a dealer was primarily one of money, painters "had someone of whom they could demand regular support, recognition and praise."<sup>99</sup>

Today, recording companies are one of a number of cultural intermediaries who carry out these same roles. In each case, the intermediary supports and promotes a career, as a means of maximising his interest in selling a succession of particular works over a period of time. The support of careers in the recording industry follows a distinctive pattern. The financial logic of the industry directs recording companies towards the operation of a "star system," that is, to emphasise the names of performers as authors and to treat them as commodities.

As we noted in Chapter Five, a star system is a marketing strategy that concentrates on building up the personas of a small number of performers on whom attention will be lavished, at the expense of others.

The mechanism of carrying out this strategy of promotion are familiar. Performers' careers are supported in the longer term and largely constructed through feature appearances in broadcast and press media, with an emphasis on the construction of an "image",<sup>100</sup> particularly through extensive and selective use of photography and visual symbolism. At the same time, and interacting with this,

additional promotional effort is concentrated on the shorter term support of successive recordings using standard marketing strategies for consumer products, aimed both at consumers and at retailing intermediaries.

(g) Performer and record company

As we have noted, the relationship between record company and performer contains the same complementary roles of patron and speculator as the relationship between art dealer and painter. In terms of speculation, the record company attempts to buy its raw materials when they are cheap. Although new performers may be able to exploit competition between rival speculators (companies), they will not be able to secure the sort of advantageous terms that established performers might get. Thus in respect of cost per copy of the recording, the record company will be buying cheap, while selling at the standard price and, if the speculation is successful, at the same quantity as the established performer. Occasionally, the services of an established performer can be acquired cheaply at an apparent trough in his career, with the intention of revitalising it.

Record companies purchase exclusive rights to new recordings, and indeed, without exclusivity for a period of time in the future, they would not be prepared to invest in a performer's future career. They will normally pay an advance against future royalties, which serves both as an inducement to sign, and as financial support until income is generated.

Larger record companies may be able to provide greater financial support than smaller ones who, in contrast, may emphasise their

specialist knowledge of the public and may be more sympathetic to the performer. The greater the financial resources of the record company the more it is able to compete successfully for performers, mainly by guaranteed advance payments for repertoire - the costs of which are later recouped from sales or, at worst, written off. The recording company may commit itself in advance to a certain level of promotional activity.

A major integrated company is able to maintain a larger roster of performers than a small one, and offer them greater financial support, as it has the financial resources to bear the burden of supporting investment in a number of areas at the same time. Indeed, it needs to maintain a certain number of performers in order to reduce risk, spread its fixed costs, and make proper use of what would otherwise be under-utilised resources.

In contrast, a smaller company may emphasise to potential performers the possibilities in a smaller company of personal and sympathetic attention, and may claim superior skills at specialist promotion in the sub-markets in which it is active. As we have already noted, it will probably be compelled to achieve a higher proportion of successes than a larger company. Indeed, the financial pressures are such that the company only remains in business because it has had such success in the recent past.

Performers will vary in their assessment of the relative importance of these factors and of the company's willingness and ability to carry out its commitments. The relationship between performer and recording company is a contractual one based on mutual financial advantage, inevitably perceptions of this advantage may

change over time, and contractual arrangements may be revised. If a record company appears to be failing to meet expectations, a performer may attempt to move elsewhere. Similarly, a record company will aim to cut its losses if a new performer seems unlikely to achieve the level of success expected, or an established one is in permanent decline.

Recording companies also have needs of performers which will affect their attractiveness. Some performers virtually support the company they are working for, and the company's success is dependent on their success. It has frequently been suggested that the profits generated by the Beatles between 1964 and 1968 financed EMI's expansion into other business fields such as medical electronics, while more recently, Virgin Records' expansion into other areas of the cultural products and leisure industries has been financed principally by the success of Mike Oldfield and Culture Club. Many smaller companies survive and prosper through the continued success of just one performer.

An established performer may provide prestige and an immediate high turnover, whereas new performers are needed as an investment for the future. Performers may also be attractive because they can compete on behalf of the company in markets which would otherwise be neglected. In order to insure against the collapse of particular sub-markets, or of backing the wrong performer in an important area, recording companies will aim to compete in different identifiable sectors of the market within areas of any general specialisation, and hence will normally attempt to recruit one or possibly two performers as its representative in these sectors. Whenever an identifiable new

sector emerges, usually as a result of a "maverick" recording, each major recording company will attempt to recruit a representative for it. In some circumstances, this has led to an "auction" for the services of prospective performers. Thus, the chances for any individual performer being offered recording facilities and being able to reach a public are strongly influenced by factors derived from the recording company's position in the market place, its perception of its needs to maintain its commercial position, as well as the number of other performers it currently has under contract.

In general, for all but a handful of successful performers, the example of whom may be used to validate company practices, recording companies can exercise almost complete control over the performer's professional life, which becomes commoditised while he is under contract to them, as he needs their capital support in order to continue his recording career and to have his finished work distributed and sold.

### Conclusion

Contemporary recordings are commodities, objects made primarily for sale, and as such are subject to the financial considerations of profit-seeking entrepreneurs. The effect of the pursuit of sales permeates the production practices of recording and the finished product itself.

In reviewing the origins and business structure of the recording industry, we noted its development as a part of a wider movement of the commercialisation of leisure and the commodotisation of culture in the late 19th century. This context was vital to the emergence of



recording as a separate cultural form with a supporting industry. The nascent business adopted and then took over the structures and practices of the music publishing industry.

The industry's subsequent development in terms of markets and the resources it has generated has been consistent with a characteristic pattern of consumer goods industries, where slow growth in the interwar period was followed by further consolidation until a period of rapid expansion in the decade and a half from the early 1960's, which has been followed by a further period of retrenchment.

The contemporary production of recordings takes place within three distinctive types of entrepreneurial organisation, small-scale production companies, medium sized "independent" recording companies, and the recording divisions of multinational corporations.

A feature of the development of recording has been the integrating of the business of recording into the wider national and international economies through networks of ownership and control by major international communications and electrical goods corporations. A result is that the great majority of the production of recordings is controlled by enterprises whose major interests lie elsewhere. The industry is highly concentrated and has become both interrelated and internationalised, processes likely to lead to a reduced range of aesthetic choice.

This business structure and the capitalist economic relations it supports permeate the production of recordings, and has consequences for the production of recordings through its effects on the content and availability of recordings and the commoditisation of the performer. Recordings and performers are, inevitably, regarded

principally as objects of investment.

Recordings are made within budgetary limits set according to profit-making criteria and these may frame the creative possibilities open to recording personnel. The budget limits are themselves likely to be related to the resources of the entrepreneurial organisation sponsoring the production. As profit-seeking businesses, recording companies have adopted techniques to minimise risk in their investments, such as standardising successful recording techniques, and differential promotion of finished products, and the mechanism of a star system. The latter has the effect of sustaining beliefs in a division of artistic labour by singling out the performer(s) from amongst recording personnel for public presentation as uniquely creative.

Hence the recording of popular music takes place within a business and financial context that profoundly shapes its practices and products. The economic context is, therefore, a principle component of the social production perspective.

## Footnotes for Chapter Seven

1. Golding and Murdock, p198
2. see Garnham, Golding, 1978, Golding and Murdock, Murdock and Golding, 1974, 1977a, 1977b,
3. see Blaug
4. Blaug, p17
5. Golding and Murdock, p198
6. see particularly Golding and Murdock; Murdock and Golding, 1977, p211
7. Bailey, p5
8. Bailey, p5
9. see Briggs
10. Hobsbawm, p158
11. Briggs, p9
12. Hobsbawm, p158
13. Hobsbawm, p157
14. Nowell-Smith, p452
15. Hobsbawm, p185
16. Williams, 1965, p198
17. Garnham, p348
18. Briggs, p9
19. Briggs, p11
20. Hobsbawm, p160
21. see Golding
22. Briggs, p16
23. see Read and Welch, Gelatt
24. Vicinus, p19
25. Lloyd, p133
26. Lloyd, p29
27. Vicinus, p13
28. Vicinus, p13
29. Lloyd, p30
30. Vicinus, p239
31. Vicinus, p253
32. Vicinus, p239
33. Mackerness, p231
34. Mackerness, p232
35. Scholes, p293
36. see Ewen
37. Pearsall, 1976, p93
38. Interview with Arthur Clark, 1929, in "The Gramophone" Jubilee Book also see Pearsall, 1975, p40
39. Moore, pp89-90
40. Hobsbawm, p219
41. Hobsbawm, pp218-20
42. Peacock and Weir p57
43. Pearsall, 1976, p101,104
44. Gelatt, pp195-6
45. Walshe, p34
46. Gelatt, p20
47. Peacock and Weir, pp150-1
48. Hobsbawm, p263
49. BPI, 1979, p112
50. BPI, 1979, p139

51. RAK Records, for example, essentially a production company increased turnover from £72,000 yielding a pre-tax loss of £4932 in 1971-72 to £1,518,000 with a net pre-tax profit of £740,000 in 1974-75. In 1975, £500,000 was invested in studios and offices. (source: Companies House)
52. Murdock and Golding, 1977a, p95
53. Garnham, p345
54. see, for example, Bernstein, 1977; Poulantzas
55. Murdock and Golding, 1977a, p97; also see Garnham, p342-3
56. Murdock and Golding 1974, 1977a, 1977b
57. Hirsch, 1969, p40
58. Murdock and Golding, 1977a, p105
59. Murdock and Golding, 1977a, p106
60. Murdock and Golding, 1974, p213
61. George, p49
62. George, p50
63. see Peacock and Weir
64. George, p62
65. see, for example, Gillett, 1971 who relates how, in the USA, the larger metropolitan companies took over the small innovators
66. George, p44
67. Murdock and Golding, 1977b, p2
68. George, p44
69. M.A.M. Ltd., for example, set up in 1966 to provide management and recording services for two leading singers got only 30% of its £13.9m turnover from these and other music promotion activities in 1978, while over 52% from the operation of juke boxes and other amusement (fruit) machines, and the rest from the operation of a hotel chain, yacht marina, and executive jet aircraft.  
see MAM Ltd Annual Report to shareholders 1979.
70. Murdock and Golding, 1977a, p97
71. Chapple and Garofolo, p192
72. Chris Blackwell, owner of Island Records, quoted in Music Week 1.10.77, p28
73. Boyd Barratt, p116
74. Music Week 27.8.77
75. Frith, 1978, p113
76. Bob Mercer, director of Repertoire and Marketing, EMI Records Ltd, quoted on BBC TV The Risk Business
77. Chris Blackwell, owner of Island Records, quoted in Music Week 1.10.77
78. for example, EMI, ACC
79. for example, Decca Records was sold to Racal Electronics and then Polygram within a few months in 1981
80. Thorncroft
81. Thorncroft
82. see L.F. Hill
83. Melody Maker 12.3.77
84. Frank Zappa, quoted in Melody Maker, 19.2.77
85. The Guardian 10.1.77, recording entitled "New Rose" by The Damned
86. Adorno, 1941, p23
87. Adorno, 1941, p24
88. see Hirsch, 1969 and 1977
89. Hirsch, 1977, p640-1

90. calculated as 56.9m/3152 Cable includes actual sales figures of a typical weekly chart. Almost one in three of all sales of "single" records was accounted for by just three titles.
91. Fisher, p9
92. Music Week 22.11.75
93. BPI, 1977
94. Fisher, p9
95. BPI, 1977
96. Music Week 18.6.77; also see Frith p229
97. see Laing, drawing on work by J-P Sartre
98. White and White, pp124ff
99. White and White, p126
100. see Boorstin

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### The organisation of production.

In this chapter, we propose to show how the organisation of production affects the finished work. We shall consider some recent writings on organisational structure which seem to be particularly relevant, and relate them to the production of recordings, and to the detailed working roles prevalent during the second half of the 1970s, around the time in which field work took place.

Field-work of observation and interviews with recording personnel (see Appendix for details of methodology) took place in a period, 1975 to 1977, which was significant for the recording industry as a time of consolidation during which the "art world" of recording absorbed the changes that a decade of phenomenal economic growth and technical change had wrought.

The enormous expansion of the business of recording in the previous decade, which we explored in the previous chapter, created space for the concession of new contractual arrangements allowing the participants a greater share of the proceeds of recording. Linked to this, the period saw the emergence of newly defined roles in recording, particularly that of the independent record producer working on a recording project which was sold or leased by an entrepreneur to a major publishing recording company. Hitherto, these recording companies had carried out their own recording, delegating it to their own salaried staff. At the same time, entrepreneurs established independent studios employing salaried or free-lance recording engineers. These new arrangements have subsequently become firm as the industry has experienced periodic financial contraction.

In the same decade to 1975, fundamental changes in recording technology also took place; multi-track recording techniques and major electronic enhancements of increasing complexity became routinely used. By the time field-work took place, the technique of multi-track recording had become standard throughout the industry, and the aesthetic responses which catered for it, widely adopted.

Firstly, however, we shall draw on insights from recent writing in the sociology of organisations which has emphasised a distinctively sociological concern in investigating the priorities and principles behind the design of work and control within employing organisations, "work organisations" and their relationship with the society in which they originate. In considering the social circumstances of creativity, we shall also suggest that the division of artistic labour is not clear cut and unchanging but negotiable; hence it is not meaningful to distinguish "artistic" from "non artistic" individuals in work organisations such as those producing recordings.

An approach of this sort offers a number of useful insights for the sociology of creativity and of recording in particular by illustrating how, through the organisation of production, social concerns are incorporated into the finished work.

### The work organisation

Work organisations are not autonomous realms but are shaped and contingent upon the social, economic and technological imperatives of the society in which they exist.

Salaman argues that the purpose of any work organisation is to get things done; it is a means to an end. He asserts that any work

organisation is structured in a way that aims to be consistent with the goals of its leaders for, as he notes, "organisations, per se, don't have goals."<sup>1</sup>

The design of the work done and the control of labour within a work organisation, then, must be seen in terms of processes of organisational control in the interests of those who run or dominate it. "Organisations", writes Salaman, "are quintessentially structures of control and domination."<sup>2</sup> These interests derive from the wider society in which they operate. The manifestation of organisational goals as the allegedly neutral priorities of efficiency and technology is an attempt to disguise their real origins and depoliticise them.<sup>3</sup>

Salaman has argued that a further characteristic of organisations is the "constant and continuing (internal) conflict" that occurs systematically as subordinate individuals resist their domination and direction by others.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the identification and classification of such dissent and unintended action has been a recurrent theme in the literature of sociology.

The organisation of the production of recordings shares these features. It, too, serves to permit control and domination and is subject to internal dissent. The first part of this chapter explores through the sociological literature some of the factors which, in association with a felt need for control and domination, have been prominent in shaping the work organisation of recording. Firstly, we shall consider the primary impact of capitalist economic relations, and then consider the effects of the socio-economic, technological and ideological contexts of the production of recordings.



The most prominent of the socially constructed imperatives that shape work organisations including those for the production of recordings, are the economic relations of capitalism.

The work organisation under capitalist economic relations.

We have already noted in Chapter Five that, as our interest is in the contemporary recording of popular music, we are considering recording in a bourgeois dominated, class-based society, with capitalist economic relations. The institutions of the "art world" of recording are infused with these imperatives.

Marx noted that capitalism may be characterised by a division of labour in terms of the relations between the conception and execution of a production process. The knowledge necessary to organise production is appropriated by the capitalist class which has economic ownership and possession of the means of production. It is this appropriation that leads to the hierarchical division between mental and manual labour, and that forces the sale of labour power as a commodity to employers who are able to use it to make profits. Marx regarded labour power as the exercise of the "aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being."<sup>5</sup>

The capitalist employer must necessarily arrange for this labour power to be used in particular ways if he is to maximise surplus value. This produces an inherent conflict of interest with employees who are selling their labour, however, for an employer maximises his surplus value by increasing the efficiency of his employees by organising their work in a way that maximises their production. Such a search for efficiencies is clearly a sectional interest, for the

employee who has sold his labour power may not gain personally by maximising his production; indeed, it is more likely to cost him increased effort. In view of employees' lack of interest and possible antagonism to this objective, the employer may also feel compelled to discipline and supervise them in order to protect this surplus value and ultimately his profit.

Under capitalism, therefore, work organisations are structured in ways that coerce their junior members to do the work desired by the senior members in the most cost-effective way in order to maximise profit. Goals that may be (and usually are) claimed as being those of an organisation are, in reality, those of a sectoral interest within the organisation, namely management acting on behalf of the owners.

Braverman has shown that in the capitalist system there is pressure for the work of a growing number of employees to be made less skilled, in order to make their labour more substitutable and cheaper, while discretion and skill, control and direction is concentrated in the hands of a small minority.<sup>6</sup> As Salaman notes, "the consequent separation of hand- and brain- work, the former concerned with the detailed execution of procedures designed by the latter - serves the goals of productivity, discipline and control."<sup>7</sup>

#### The artistic division of labour.

Creative cultural artifacts are the products, like any other, of particular work organisations. There are no sociological grounds for exempting them from the general case we have outlined, although it is worth noting that those taking part in such organisations may like to regard themselves as special.

In work organisations making cultural products there is both a division of labour between capitalist employer and his agents on the one hand, and his employees on the other and, subordinate to that, a division of artistic labour between those deemed to be creative and those deemed not to be. We would argue that in so far as the second divide is meaningful, the two types of division overlap. The description of the organiser of a cultural project as the "artist" or, as in the theatre and sound recording, the "producer" or, as in the film industry, the "director", is an ideologically inspired mystification of the reality of capitalist employment relations.

The role of "artist" as the responsible aesthetic organiser is therefore, in reality, the role of employer or employer's agent in a work organisation. It is not possible to posit an "artist" who takes aesthetic direction in his work from a superior; it would be a contradiction in terms to suggest that there could be a superior in such matters. This does not only apply to work described as "artistic", for the employer's organisational mental work is the same regardless of whether it results in a product that meets certain aesthetic criteria.

In capitalist work organisations concerned with cultural production, only some participants have delegated responsibility for direction of aesthetic work. Other cultural workers may also be described as "creative", or regard themselves as such, but in practice their scope for creativity is "weak" and is circumscribed and subject to others' direction. The role of one such cultural worker, the recording engineer, was revealingly described by a producer who was interviewed as being "to creatively take orders."<sup>8</sup> The description of

such individuals as "creative" may also be linked to concepts of status and self-esteem and the development of a Romantic ideology.<sup>9</sup> Part of this is the promotion of some of them as "authors".

The structure of work organisations concerned with the production of recordings display the characteristic capitalist division of labour between the producer, who is a chief executive and artistic arbiter on the one hand, and such support workers as performers, engineers, and session musicians on the other, with a division of artistic labour at the same point. However, we shall argue later in this chapter that a characteristic of the production of recordings is that within such established parameters, the demarcation of creative work is periodically blurred as opportunities are presented by the socio-technical system of recording which allows some of those designated broadly as "non-creative" manual workers to take over the work of "creative" mental workers.

#### Factors influencing the shape of the work organisation.

Crucial to the blurring of demarcation lines between "creative" and "non-creative" workers in the production of recording is the characteristic structure of the work organisation. We propose now to consider some of the factors, suggested by the sociological literature, which are pertinent to recording, and which affect the shape of the work organisation. We would argue that these factors, the uncertainty of the socio-economic environment, the technology used, and the Romantic ideology surrounding the production of recording, are mutually reinforcing with similar effects.

A brief review of these factors helps to place the production of

recordings in the context of other work organisations, and to uncover the rationale behind its "natural" appearance.

The socio-economic operating environment.

Burns and Stalker have classified work organisations by their system of management, noting how different management structures appear to be appropriate for different working environments.

At one pole, they place a flexible "organic" organisational structure, where working roles typically have a distinctive core, the boundaries of which are not rigidly defined and are liable to be reinterpreted during production by the individuals involved according to the particular circumstances of the work. Characteristically, all stages of a single project are undertaken before proceeding to the next.

An organic management system<sup>10</sup> is a structure for command by senior members of the organisation over the junior members that is suited to, and deriving as an adaptation from, an unstable and changing working environment. The requirements for action, since they are not predictable, are not easily broken down in advance for distribution among a hierarchy of specialist roles. There is accordingly, little formal definition of jobs in terms of the appropriate methods to be used, and the powers of each post holder, as these are continually modified and redefined in interaction with others. Individuals may experience confusion about precise roles and expectations. Interaction and consultation within the work organisation is both lateral and vertical, with little apparent difference between the two. Although not hierarchical, the organisation is still stratified, and authority is typically delegated to

the extent that the formal head of the organisation is unlikely to know everything that goes on.

Burns and Stalker contrast this to a "mechanistic" management system developed as an appropriate form of management control for a relatively stable and predictable operating environment, where the methods and duties of each functional role are defined precisely; individuals are concerned only with their specific duties; a hierarchical management takes decisions and passes instructions down, while in receipt of information flowing upwards through a filtering process.

Mechanistic and organic management systems represent two ideal types; in practice, organisations will tend to lie at some intermediate stage on a continuum between these two poles depending on their particular environmental circumstances.

### Technology.

The technology necessary to carry out production is another important factor influencing the shape of work organisations, including those producing recordings. We shall argue in more detail in the next chapter that the use and shape of productive technology is not an autonomous construct, but is itself a response to specific social, economic and political needs.

Emery and Trist<sup>11</sup> have argued persuasively that the chosen technology not only limits what can be done, but also creates demands that must be reflected in the internal organisation and aims of an organisation, referring to a correlative "mutual influence" of technology and social system. Nevertheless, they also noted that the

same technical system may be operated by contrasting social systems, as usually more than one particular work relationship can be fitted to tasks, so that there is still an element of choice, as there may be in the effectiveness in achieving different goals. If the social system of an organisation does not match the technical system, however, then the organisation will experience internal strain, in the same way that other mismatches of social and psychological properties of the organisation may cause difficulties.

Woodward has argued that technical factors are primary in determining organisational structure and in affecting human relationships in firms. The different technologies chosen by management impose different kinds of demands on individuals and organisations, which are met through an appropriate organisational structure.<sup>12</sup> Firms with similar technology appear to have similar organisational structures, a link that persists in spite of conscious behaviour or policy, while distinct differences between organisations using different levels of technology were reported when measured both quantitatively and qualitatively.

In relating technological factors to organisational structure, she has distinguished between different types of productive technology, dividing this broadly into three categories, unit and small batch, large batch and mass production, and process production. They differ not so much in the complexity of technology used, nor its "advancement", but in its application and the extent to which the process of production is controllable, and its results predictable.<sup>13</sup>

Charles Perrow has developed Woodward's comparison of organisational structure based on the system of technology employed.

He uses a more all-embracing concept of technology than the concrete, literally mechanical definition of Woodward, to include all "the actions that an individual performs upon an object".<sup>14</sup> The object in question is raw material, be it inanimate, symbolic or human, and in changing raw materials in an organisational setting, individuals must interact with others, the form of that interaction comprising the structure of the organisation.

He has analysed organisations in respect of two concepts, "search" and "variability".<sup>15</sup> Search is the response to stimuli, such as raw materials, which are either familiar, understandable and analysable, in the sense that there are known ways of dealing with them, or are unfamiliar and require unanalysable search procedures which rely on "experience" or "intuition". Variability is the variety of problems that may lead to search procedures, and may be high where every task needs search behaviour, or may be low when situations are mostly familiar. Perrow measures variability in terms of exceptions encountered by individuals. The two variables interact in four possible ways:

	low few exceptions	variability	high many exceptions
unanalysable search	craft		non-routine
analysable search	routine		engineering

source: Perrow, 1970, p78



### The Romantic ideology surrounding cultural production

Stratton has suggested that a characteristic ideology of Romanticism surrounding cultural production is fostered by capitalist enterprises engaged in such production to support their own activities. Recordings are produced by work organisations established on non-rational premises, premises which themselves are a necessary product of capitalist economic practice.

In his analysis of the discourse of popular music, he argues that such discourse leads to practice through the "living of ideological premises". He suggests that, consequently, practitioners regard the production of popular music recordings as unanalysable, being the result of inspired work by creative individuals and argues that recording companies deliberately separate the production of popular music from economic rationality in order to generate a continual flow of the new product necessary to keep the industry functioning. From the point of view of the entrepreneurial recording company, the rationale for the structure of the work organisation involved is the fostering of an atmosphere of artistic inspiration. Stratton<sup>16</sup> argues that this is functional for the recording companies because, firstly, it enhances motivation among employees, secondly, it stimulates overall record sales in the market by emphasising individual "taste" and thirdly, it helps disguise the cash basis of the transaction there.<sup>17</sup>

### Effects on the work organisation of recording

The observed structure of the work organisation of recording is of a complex network of interrelationships of participants and of

technology. It is apparently conducted with a degree of flexibility about job tasks and decision making within the constraints of externally established working roles, contractual arrangements, and authority structures. Vignolle has characterised the typical studio-based recording session as a "horizontal collaboration" of the various specialist contributors in the "simultaneity of a musical and technical happening in which creation and execution are intermingled."<sup>18</sup>

Our argument in this section is that this structure is not the result of chance, but the response of organisational leaders to a particular set of social, economic and technical circumstances. The writers we have already referred to give us some indication of how these factors work.

The production of recordings takes place in an unstable, changing environment, where the details of each recording are different and the personnel involved change, although there are clearly recognisable patterns. The raw materials, sounds and ideas for sounds, while seldom presenting problems that require exceptional treatment, (that is, their variability is low) are not entirely predictable and may require frequent searches for appropriate responses. We noted Stratton's finding that the production process is believed to be unanalysable; recording personnel interviewed for the research in this Chapter typically commented that "each recording is different". There is uncertainty elsewhere in the production process, and rapid responses to change may have to be accommodated. Public taste is largely unknown and, therefore, requires unanalysable search procedures from recording personnel who, as we shall see later, can

only rely on experience and intuition. As one producer said, commenting on how he chooses between performances: "Generally you'll decide whether a performance is right purely down to your experience."<sup>19</sup>

Given this operating environment, it is no surprise that, as Burns and Stalker's work would lead us to expect, the structure of control of the typical work organisation of recordings tends towards an organic system of management, with a loosely defined hierarchical job structure.

From a different perspective, the technology used in recording supports the same organisational structure. The technological system of the production of recordings falls into the category Woodward describes as "small batch and unit production", somewhere between the categories Perrow describes as "craft" and "non-routine". The production of recording shares features characteristic of work organisations of these types; work is carried out on a project-by-project basis, management decisions are usually short-term and unlikely to distinguish between immediate problem solving and longer term policy decisions, there are normally few levels of management, the span of control of the chief executive is relatively small, and the cost of labour as a proportion of production costs is relatively high. In such production, it is seldom feasible to distinguish between development and production and, unlike mass and process production, both are preceded by marketing - not of the product, but of the work organisation's ability to make the product.

Similarly, the adoption by recording companies of a Romantic belief that recordings are the product of a number of personal

creative expressions will tend to lead them to support organisational structures that, by disguising their control functions and not conforming to the sort of formal authority based structure that is associated with capitalist enterprises,. appear to enable individually inspired contributions to be made.

As different fragments of the recording are made, roles of individual recording personnel are adjusted and shifted to accommodate the variable inputs of raw sound and the searches for appropriate responses. These adjustments are expected by all concerned, and are in the interests of organisational efficiency. Working roles may, therefore, be subject to negotiation, and workers may experience some ambiguity and have differing views about their particular job tasks.

Although such role adjustments are generally handled amicably and consensually within existing power relations, this will periodically break down. The examples below illustrate how this might occur, while showing the necessarily close working relationships involved in recording.

If the producer and Musical Director/arranger are not familiar with each other's working practices, they may entertain overlapping expectations brought in from outside of their legitimate fields of interest during recording. Producer E's account of one incident illustrates an instance of such boundary transgression: "They did a very good job on the arrangements, which is their job, fine, finished, but you can't have people interfering with a session, for instance saying to the engineer 'Do this. Try to do that . . .'" A further illustration was given in a response by one recording engineer during a discussion about his work which he sees as primarily involving the

translating of verbal instructions into technical terms and adjustments, and who consequently resented a producer's attempt to be very specific about what he wanted. In his words, "So instead of coming in, saying, on the drums, say, 'Can you make it a bit brighter?' he (a producer) started saying 'Can you put 5 dbs at about 8k on the Hi-hat' and that's where it starts getting annoying . . . I was fairly certain, although we didn't get on, that I knew how he wanted it to sound."<sup>20</sup>

We would argue, therefore, that the characteristic structure of the work organisation of the production of recording is a rational response of management, in the interests of control, to the social, economic and technical operating environment found in the recording industry. The importance for our concern with the genesis of creativity is the fluidity of this organisation, and the possibility of creative roles being negotiable and variable.

We now propose to consider the way in which these organisational imperatives condition social relations in recording, and through them the artifact itself.

#### Working roles in the production of recording

We have noted the existence of a division of artistic labour in the production of recordings between those designated as "creative" and those not regarded as such. It is our argument that, although there is a division of artistic labour which we believe derives ultimately from the capitalist division of labour, it is not a "natural" or "absolute" division existing under all circumstances. Such an assumption has, until recently, underpinned what we have

called in Chapter Two "conventional sociology of art." This research is concerned with the variable, negotiated and contested character of the division of labour within the organisation of the production of recorded popular music. The pattern of this is dependent on the varying distribution of some of the factors in the socio-economic environment of recording.

As a means of understanding the social genesis of creativity in recording, we shall be particularly concerned to explore the extent to which participants are able to take decisions on aesthetic matters, and the sources of the major factor constraining and enabling them to take decisions, power.

### Discretion

Fox's concept of "discretion"<sup>21</sup> is a useful means of making relative distinctions between workroles. Discretion in their particular sphere of behaviour is given to members of work organisations who are believed to be trustworthy; the strength of the belief governing the extent of discretion given. Fox argues that it is most likely that, given an accepted method of measuring discretion, it would be possible to rank occupational categories in a graduated scale along that dimension.

For the purposes of explanation he distinguishes between low discretion and high discretion syndromes. Characteristics of the low discretion work role are, firstly and fundamentally, a perception by the role-occupant that he is not trusted to work as desired of his own volition; secondly, specified job activities and close supervision; thirdly, co-ordination of work with others; fourthly, the

responding to the inadequate performance of the role occupant by punishment or closer supervision; and fifthly, conflict between low discretion role occupants and their superiors is conducted on a group basis through bargaining processes.

In contrast, the defining characteristics of a high discretion work pattern are firstly, an expectation that occupants are committed to a calling and/or "organisational" goals and values; secondly, a lack of close supervision which is believed by all concerned to be inappropriate; thirdly, co-ordination of work is made freely by mutual adjustment; fourthly, the assumption of loyalty, support and goodwill of high discretion role occupants; and fifthly, the resolution of conflict by problem-solving rather than by bargaining.

Fox concedes that, between the high discretion levels and the large number of low discretion roles there are a great number of intermediate groups whose work situations display characteristics drawn from both the low- and the high- discretion syndromes.

We shall now review typical work roles in the production of recordings. We shall look in turn at the producer, performer, session musician, arranger/ musical director and engineer, consider the discretion available to each, and the ways in which the differential distribution of power enables some individuals to take the initiative in creative decision making.

#### a) The Producer

Within the recording of popular music in the U.K., the emergence of a separate and crucial role of "record producer" is relatively

recent. It appears to have emerged in about 1962, with the concept of "independent producer", "independent," that is, of the major recording companies, a practice already in use in the USA.

The making of recordings had been, typically, only one of the responsibilities of salaried personnel of the Artistes and Repertoire departments of publishing record companies. "A and R men" were primarily concerned with liaison between performers and recording company; they recruited new performers, who would normally be contracted directly to the record company, and looked after their recording careers. Deriving from this, they had a responsibility for recording, for organising the various resources, choosing appropriate material, physically supervising recording sessions while they took place, and taking artistic decisions on the content of the finished work.

The reasons for change and the emergence of the distinct role of "record producer" at this juncture are complex and interlinked.

The business of recording as a whole was expanding, the number of performers making recordings, and the number of recordings being made was increasing. New developments in the technology of recording, notably the use of multi-track recording tape, were leading to changing definitions of what constituted a recording, and to new expectations about the content. The range of possibilities for the finished recorded sound increased markedly; the task of organising the various resources became more involved, and the aesthetic decisions more complex. Some individuals were seen to be more skilled than others at exploiting the potential of the new recording techniques, and in creating distinctive and desirable recordings. It took longer



to make each recording. It was not, therefore, practicable for recording company A and R personnel to maintain a monopoly on recording production.

The increase in the volume of the business of recording, and the rise in profits that followed in its wake created a space for the intercession of an intermediary such as the record producer. "A and R" personnel were not unaware of the enormous revenues accruing to their employers and sometimes to performers as a result of their work, and they too wanted a share.<sup>22</sup> There was little or no resistance on cost grounds, therefore, to this development as such costs were miniscule in comparison with the potential returns. Hence, free-lance specialist record producers emerged.

Another means by which record companies' demand for finished recordings was met was by the importing of the American practice of leasing or buying in finished recordings made as speculative investments by small production companies and by independent capitalists who undertook organising and artistic decision-taking themselves.

The role of record producer, therefore, was filled as it continues to be, by free-lance individuals engaged either by the publishing recording companies to whom the performers are contracted, or by a production company (in many cases their own), or by performers and/or their management who do not wish to cede artistic control over recording to a publishing record company.

These differing backgrounds of individuals working as record producers is one factor behind the development of differing interpretations of the role of producer. In ideal type terms, two

contrasting roles can be distinguished, we shall refer to them as "performer based" and "recording based". Generally, the "performer based" is more likely to be working within the rock genre of popular music, while the "recording based" is more likely to be found in commercially oriented "pop" genres.

The "performer based" producer characteristically sees his role as providing expert assistance in recording to present the performer in the way in which he would wish to be heard, and to make arrangements for the finished recording to be published. As interviewee Q put it, "I don't sell, I just try to make people's music available." Tobler and Grundy<sup>23</sup> quote another producer, Chris Thomas, as saying "I see my job as helping a writer to realise his songs, and (in) the broader context, to bring the best out of a band." Producers working from this perspective will tend to regard recordings as the concretised creative expression of performers. As respondent Q commented further, "The music comes out because they're musicians, because they're writers of music, they're composers and they will write their music because of the music in them, as a poet will write, because he will."<sup>24</sup>

A "recording based" producer characteristically subordinates the performer(s) to a piece of music he wants to make a recording of for its own sake, or more usually, because he feels he can make a commercially successful recording of it with them, if he has the opportunity to use his professional expertise to mould their musician-ship into an appropriate form. Producer L explained how he and his partner worked "We're . . . finding a song, and (we) put together a backing track behind it and then (we) find someone who can sing

it . . . ." A characteristic belief of producers such as this working from this perspective is that the primary objective in making a recording is to make a saleable commodity. As one producer put it bluntly "Basically, I'm in business to sell records; as many as I can possibly sell, to support the life-style to which I've very much gotten accustomed to."<sup>25</sup> We have referred in Chapter Five to some instances where "performers" have been found to "adopt" as their own a recording already made by session musicians.

It is ironic that, whereas in social terms the recording based producer takes the more radical position, characteristically regarding the recording as an original in its own right while the performer based producer tends to define his recording work as realising a reproduction of an already extant original; in musical terms the positions are usually reversed, for the recording based producer is more likely, though not necessarily, to be producing commercially oriented recordings to tried formulae aiming to maximise sales.<sup>26</sup>

Most contemporary record producers, and this was certainly the dominant outlook among those interviewed, adopt a position somewhere between these two ideal types that we have identified and, while expecting to produce a recording that incorporated a sound and content that was largely determined by themselves, would still aim to allow space for some creative self-expression by the performer within the overall scheme that they have for a particular recording. These are not the only criteria for distinguishing between producers. A producer may have been hired by the entrepreneurial agency primarily for his skills at keeping costs down, for "sweetening" the style of a group of performers, or as a catalyst in manoeuvring a group of performers into

making fundamental changes in their line-up or approach. Producers may be chosen because, according to respondent P "They look groovy, they sort of dress fashionably and they set an atmosphere in the studio, which I'm not decrying, because quite often you need that atmosphere for it to work . . ."27

The producer is the chief executive responsible to the entrepreneurial agency for the making of the recording. In terms of the division of labour, he is a "brain worker" and decision-taker controlling the other workers on behalf of capital and in its interests. Within constraints which we shall consider later in the chapter, he has a high degree of discretion over how he carries out his tasks.

Regardless of the working practices of the individual producer, producers characteristically carry out three general tasks, to a greater or lesser degree. Firstly, as administrator and organiser of all the technical and human resources; secondly, as manager of the recording as it is taking place, maintaining its smooth running; and, thirdly, as final artistic arbiter, or decision taker on aesthetic matters. Although analytically distinct, these three roles overlap and are partially interdependent; clearly, the producer must take into account aesthetic choices in organising the necessary resources.

The first task of administrator and organiser is succinctly described in one producer's own words "You're booking the studio, you're finding and booking the right musicians, backing singers, music copyists and um . . . paying the bills, making sure everybody's paid on time, putting the professional package together."28 Once a recording is complete, a producer may also organise its transfer to

storage and replication medium, and may work on its marketing and distribution. In carrying out this administrative task the producer is a facilitator who is knowledgeable about the business and individuals in it. He may be regarded as a mediator on behalf of performers.

As recording takes place, the producer will normally be expected to co-ordinate and manipulate the various elements, the work of musicians, engineer, performers and others into a finished piece of work. This managerial role within the studio is important, easing working relations to create a relaxed and comfortable environment in circumstances that may try everybody's patience and good humour. One producer commented "the balance between the individuals is as delicate as the balance between the instruments."<sup>29</sup> As we shall see, some of those whose work he is co-ordinating are actively competing for aesthetic supremacy.

One aspect of this managerial role which overlaps with the role of artistic arbiter is the guiding, encouraging and coaxing of performers in their work. The following comment from an interview with an engineer, illustrates how this aspect may predominate in some producers' work: "He's a sort of producer who doesn't actually do much in terms of altering the music, but he does draw from Steve, who's very prima-donna-ish, he draws exactly what's right for the track from him. And that's a very subtle area of production that is almost, it isn't active in terms of altering the sounds, and is not active in terms of creating musically something out of nothing, but it's very active in terms of actually drawing the best from the artist when the artist is in fact very good."<sup>30</sup>

It is in carrying out the third range of tasks, that of artistic arbiter, that a producer is likely to make what appears to the outsider to be his most noticeable contribution to the proceedings as he is responsible for all the content of a recording. He is likely to be responsible for the choice of material for recording, an appropriate method of presentation, and for choosing between different ideas that may be offered, and individual performances and recordings that have been made for possible inclusion.

A "performer based" producer working with a "strong" performer would expect to choose between different performances and recordings, but may have less influence on other matters, whereas a producer who tends towards the "recording based" practice is more likely to expect to decide on all the details of the recorded sound.

Recording personnel characteristically distinguish two elements in recorded music, "performance" and "sound", and the producer works towards achieving on the finished recording what he regards as a good performance and a good sound, and a major part of his work is to choose between different performances and sounds. "Performance" is the execution of a musical piece by the performer, whereas "sound" is used to mean "audial impression" in referring to the recording as a whole, or in connection with any separate vocal or instrumental input. "Performer-based" producers, particularly, tend to be keener to capture good performance, whereas "recording-based" producers may give a greater emphasis to the "sound" of a recording.

#### Performance

A good performance comprises not only an adequate technique,

where each musical note is played or sung as it was composed or within musical conventions, but also in the ideal form at which most producers aim, has the addition of an almost intangible individual contribution of the performer over and above what the average craftsman might offer. This extra, known as "feel" is as highly sought after by recording personnel as it is by performers and musicians; to the performer it means communication through the emotion in his music-making with other performers and musicians and with his audience; to recording personnel, recording a performance with "feel" represents success in retaining the integrity of the musical performance, and overcoming the limitations of the medium.

The artificial environment of the studio, the fragmentation and repetition characteristic of recording, the lack of an audience, or of other musicians playing simultaneously are all practices that facilitate musical expertise, but, it is thought, at a cost of spontaneity and emotion. Many producers invoke "feel" as an alternative value to technical perfection. Thus, one producer commented: "I would prefer sometimes to accept a less technically perfect recording, or even a musical recording that has maybe a couple of mistakes in it, but has that little bit of spark that the others that are technically perfect don't have. I'd rather keep the one that has the better feel."<sup>31</sup> In the same vein, spontaneity is contrasted to precise, highly structured and planned pieces. Thus, it was explained that "no matter how much hard work you put into something, when something is a spontaneous musical experience, it's so much better because the life is in it, and that's the important thing, but

of course, now it very very rarely happens."<sup>32</sup> These values provide the aesthetic rationale for recording "live on stage" performances, and the use of "live" rhythm sections (playing simultaneously) as a base on which to build a studio recording. "A good live performance is better than a good recorded performance, because its got the actual spirit there."<sup>33</sup> Another said "I think with rhythm playing, that (having chord outlines) is very essential, because I don't think its down so much to notes as to getting the right feel out of the players, and getting them to play together properly."<sup>34</sup>

As performance is special, it is not necessarily repeatable. "For instance, with X you can do a vocal which will be, which will have performance in it, if you like, and then you can keep it on one of the 24 tracks you've got lying about, and you can do another one and you can switch between the two, and it doesn't sound like the same voice . . . it's purely performance."<sup>35</sup>

If separate recorded performances are different, a producer may have to decide which to include in the finished recording. The following interview extract illustrates the difficulty in articulating how such a decision might be made, and what ultimately it amounted to.

Q: "How do you decide one performance is better than another?"

W: "If you have any sympathy with the artist you probably know. If you're acquainted with the artist, you know."

Q: "So you're trying to recreate the best you've heard from the artist?"

W: "Or maybe better. Its not a case of recreate. It may be something the artist has never done other than what they are doing at the



time in the studio, but you should know when their performance is going to reach a peak. You might just be redubbing a guitar player doing a solo, you should know when you're going to get to the point at which he's not going to get any better. . . ."

Q: "Can you tell me how it would be "better" or "worse"?"

W: "Well it would just be, it would just sound . . . I mean it would be a better performance, it would be, maybe different notes, it would be maybe more romantic maybe more aggressive if the song's either a romantic or aggressive song. . . . generally you'll decide whether a performance is right purely down to your experience. You know that the person can do better or not. And if you couldn't decide on your experience, then you can probably decide on your taste."

### Sound

The producer looks to the engineer to provide a basic "good, clean, technical sound"<sup>36</sup>, expecting him to make available for tape as near as is possible the sounds that are being made in the recording room, free from distortion or interference. Once these technical standards have been satisfied, differences between sounds and the general overall auidial impression can be considered.

A producer's responsibility for the whole content of a recording covers both the minutae of each sound input as well as the overall sound impression, or mood of a piece. In describing his role as producer, for example, respondent H emphasised the importance of sound differentiation for him, explaining that he would be "working with the engineer to combine the sounds, to work on different kinds of sound to

create an aural image, very much from the sound point of view."<sup>37</sup>

Sound quality may be given considerable attention by recording personnel as a means of differentiation. Many performers will expend a great deal of time and effort on creating for reproduction a distinctive, recognisable sound. "If you're doing a record where the sound is very vital, the way it comes out . . . you do spend the time . . . (getting it as desired)."<sup>38</sup> It will be considered "very vital" if it is thought that it is this ingredient in the whole package that is a key to success.

It is a subjective judgement when a sound is "good". A sound would be more likely to receive this accolade by recording personnel if it were unusual, original, or in some contexts, a close replica of a sound that is established as successful or considered to be good. The following extract illustrates how one producer/engineer got what was regarded as a "good" sound by recording all (session) musicians and the performer playing together, instead of maintaining the conventional strict separation of sound sources.

W: "In fact, on X's record we cut one of the titles with the whole lot at once, we actually did that."

Q: "All musicians playing?"

W: "Yeh, the lot, and her (performer) playing the piano and singing.

Yeh, all at once, it's the best drum sound I've got for years.

And the reason is, 'cause its going down the string mics. I

mean, it's, everybody who hears it says, 'How did you get a sound

like that?' and I mean all you do is just tell them to play."

## Public taste

As recordings are made for sale within a commercial context, the producer's aesthetic decisions must take into account the presumed taste of a potential record-buying public. Both the "performer based" producer who is concerned about documenting and presenting a performer, and the "recording based" producer who is trying to create a commercially successful recording need to be aware of public taste and the limits of acceptability at any one time. Over a period of time, the ability to adjust to changes in this taste is a prerequisite of continued commercial success. Such taste, however nebulous, is one of what one producer called the "commercial parameters" that he has to take into account. He explained: "It's a question of judgement, judging what's being played, what's being bought, what's in the hit parade, and distilling all those qualities down into a fairly intangible thing called something that's commercial . . . There are the obvious things like that (being danceable and hummable), then there are all the shades of grey in between them, and descending from them."<sup>39</sup>

It is somewhat disingenuous for producers to claim to follow public taste, as that taste is not autonomous, but is formed partly in response to attempts on the part of individuals and organisational intermediaries to mould and shape it. A producer, therefore, does not only follow changes in taste, he is one of those at work creating it, and his aesthetic decisions will reflect this. One producer acknowledged this aspect: "Basically, you're working six months ahead of time, attempting to start new trends, and innovating as you go along."<sup>40</sup>

Most producers believe they are able to mediate between performer and public because their own musical taste is more sophisticated than that of the general public. On occasions this may be a source of frustration when they are not able to command resources to record their own preferences, but it has its advantages when it allows them to appreciate a musical performance that would not be understood by the general public in its original form. Producer U, (who generally tended towards the "recording based" approach) for example, described himself as a "middle ear" between performer and public, using his expert knowledge of both to negotiate the presentation of material in an accessible way. "In other words, it is an approach of making people able to hear a sound that could at the beginning have been a bit esoteric, but isn't any more by the time it comes out the other end."

#### The performer

Performers are selected for work in the recording studio through a variety of different mechanisms, from a pool of self-selected individuals who have made themselves available. A respondent with a good knowledge of the industry put it in this way ". . . a professional band, a recording band, they're not there because they're weak personalities, they're there because they've resisted the system, if you like, and they've become street poets, or whatever you like to call them. They've stopped, they haven't gone to work, they haven't fallen into the ways of the system, generally they have insisted on being musicians and they are successful. That's why they're in the studio."<sup>41</sup>

The role of the performer within the studio is circumscribed by his or her position and status in the economic structure of the industry and the nature of the relationship with the producer. The performer is the named "author" who plays or sings (or is said to have done so) what is made the leading and most audible parts of the recording. For example, the performer in a recording session whose purpose has been broadly established as documenting his work would expect to have considerable discretion over his work, that is his performance, both as a whole and in detail, with guidance only from the producer. On the other hand, a "recording based" producer would expect the performer to interpret the material that has been chosen for him or her in the prescribed manner and under detailed direction.

Whatever the organisation of the recording session, the performer is likely to sing or play the musical piece a number of times. Where the producer expects to indicate how he wants a piece interpreted, his real control will be exercised in his post hoc choice of the version he prefers.

The performer's role within the studio does not cease with the finished recording, for once a recording is published he will play a central role in its promotion and sale. Whether or not he contributes much to a recording, his public role presupposes a claim to regard the recording as his own work. Vignolle and Hennion<sup>42</sup> have noted how the performer's roles inside and outside the studio are closely related. The performer's public personality, his or her "image", constructed for marketing purposes out of publicity photographs, clothes, interviews and broadcasts, form an integral part of his recordings,

the words and music of which must be consistent with this construction.

Despite being the focus of attention, the performer is unlikely to have a major decision-taking role, as he or she is subject to the general direction of the recording company and, if they are not the same, his personal management. The performer will have an interest in each recording as a component of his longer term professional career, and he may also have a direct financial interest in the successful sale of individual recordings. Many performers' careers comprise the successive publication of recordings in their names, and the sale of these recordings largely determines the shape of their professional career.

The effect of the imperatives of the socio-economic structure of the industry outside the studio on the role of performers inside the studio become clearer when we consider the role expectations and the different status and power of session musicians.

### Session Musician

In terms of their job tasks of playing or singing music, the work of session musicians during a recording is very similar to those of performers. For these purposes, the producer may regard the work of session musician and performer as substitutable, for whosever work is included need make no discernible difference to the sound of the final recording. Session players are generally used as additional support for the performers in playing the arrangement for a song, or for playing with the performers to augment their performance.

Performer and session player, however, inhabit contrasting socio-economic environments, and a session musician cannot usually expect to have much discretion in his work, other than choosing whether to work or not.

The session musician is contracted by the hour to play whatever is required to be recorded. In hiring a session musician, a producer presumes he is hiring the capacity to play any type of music consistently and competently, sight-read or improvised along with the ability to get a "good sound" in a minimum of time - "the essence of a good musician."<sup>43</sup> At this minimal level of competence, session players are substitutable, and indeed, are very often hired through a third party, a "fixer".

The producer is concerned, however, to persuade session musicians to take a sufficient interest in their work, to do more than the contracted minimum. The characteristic contractual arrangement imposed on session musicians is effectively a fixed hourly payment which, coupled with the existence of a "buyers market" where the supply of potential musicians far outstrips demand for their services, enables producers to coerce musicians to conform to their expectations.

A producer's "ideal" session player is one who enhances what he is playing, or, as one respondent put it, "adds his personality", going beyond the general expectations of all-round musical competence. Producer D encapsulated what most producers would like from session players: "More than just being, of course, very good musicians, they must be able to play with "feel", and feel the song that they are actually playing. Not just to be basically a musician, plonk! plonk! plonk! they've got to be into the song as well . . . (He should) put the feeling into his playing."

It is their differing abilities and ways of enhancement that enables producers to distinguish between session players. For, notwithstanding the belief that all those working are competent, "You pick your session players according to the sort of music you want to play, really, because there are some people who are exactly right for a particular session, and you'd be foolish not to use them if they are available."<sup>31</sup> Thus session players are seen at once as substitutable, and highly differentiated.

This expectation about "performance" coexists uneasily with the working arrangements of session players. Producer H illustrated how his ability to get what he wanted from session players was limited: "What I would call the Old Brigade; (this) very much extends to strings, who are clock watchers, very much union men, very little interested in the session. You have to fight all the way with them, because basically, they just want their money, and they're not particularly interested, and also a lot of string players . . . are totally unsympathetic to getting the performance." Another respondent suggested that string players, many of whom were "frustrated symphony orchestra blokes" were "not generally asked to use the musicianship they've got, . . . they tend just to be a backwash,"<sup>45</sup> but were attracted to the work by the pay.

It is not only with such string players that this type of difficulty arises. Some producers do recognise this: "Always your problem if you're using established session musicians, they're playing on lots of other records. For a start, they forget, literally from one day to the next what they did with you . . . Whatever you establish (in terms of "good atmosphere") at the end of the day,



you're starting from scratch the next day."<sup>46</sup> Another said: "What you tend to lose, not because they're not capable, but because of the pressures of session work, is the basic "feel" and the time that is necessary to be able to think about what you're playing."<sup>47</sup> Clearly what is presented here as an aesthetic problem is at once the familiar one of the control of labour.

Many session musicians find their work alienating, both because they have little control over it, being expected to please the producer, and because they often do not hear the finished product to which they have contributed. As one such musician commented in a magazine article, "Whatever they (i.e. producers) want, you're there to please them - that's one of the hang ups in doing sessions, you have to please the producer . . . Sometimes you just do a backing track and never really get to know what song it is."<sup>48</sup> Not unsurprisingly, the opportunities for becoming emotionally involved in a piece of music and for exercising discretion are limited.

In return, session playing is well-paid, anonymous so far as the general public is concerned and, for the established within the industry, relatively secure. For the musicians concerned, it represents an approach to their work that has been characterised elsewhere as, appropriately enough, an "instrumental" approach.<sup>49</sup>

An analogy frequently invoked by recording personnel to distinguish between the musician as session player and the musician as performer is that of "craftsman" and "artist", which may be seen as the difference between "security" and "freedom". The session player is the craftsman who has trained or, more probably, accumulated expertise, and who ". . . whether the record sells a million, or

doesn't sell at all . . . still gets his wage."<sup>50</sup> The established session player is also seen as having a relatively secure position as the risks he takes are of a different order to others. It was explained in this way: "That artist that goes out there, if he doesn't sell his records, if that arranger doesn't come up with the goods, if that producer doesn't keep delivering his records, he is out; whereas year after year you see the same guys on the sessions."<sup>51</sup>

Recording personnel generally regard this relative security and the considerable financial rewards for session work as sufficient compensation for the lack of public recognition and discretion in their work. However, although established session players may be comfortable, the work of the majority of session musicians is not secure.

Much of the session player's role, then, resembles that of the performer, as the tasks they are asked to do are similar, and indeed, their work in the recording studio is often identical, but there is a distinct difference in the discretion each has over the details of his work.

#### Arranger/Musical director

Much popular music includes arrangements of orchestral or string parts to elaborate the basic melody. Arrangements cover a wide spectrum, from the addition of a few string lines to a recording by an otherwise self-contained unit, to the entire orchestration supporting a solo singer.

Whatever its scope, an arrangement is drawn up by an arranger for a fee<sup>52</sup> as a co-ordinated score for accompanying instruments. The

arranger need have no more contact with the production of a recording than the presentation of this score written within specifications drawn up by the producer. Arranging may be anonymous or the arranger might negotiate or be given a small name credit on an L.P. cover.

The purpose of an arrangement is to fill out the skeletal structure of a song, by adding musical colour and character and to make it more interesting and attractive to the listener. It may be used with appropriate recording techniques to establish a mood, or to simulate other recordings. The same song can be rendered almost unrecognisable by a different arrangement or "treatment". Old songs are frequently updated by the addition of arrangements in a fashionable style.

Some arrangers would emphasise the sustenance an arrangement gives to an otherwise threadbare song or performance. As one respondent put it "It's because people think that what they've got isn't good enough, and an orchestra might tart it up."<sup>53</sup>

A good example of the impact the arrangement can have on a recorded song is provided in the following extract, which is illustrative rather than typical. The performers are a largely self-contained unit, and include an established arranger, the respondent. In this particular case, the production of a recording is an activity that subsumes conventional categories such as composing and arranging, blurring the division between them, and there is the opportunity for flexibility and experimentation during recording.

"We've just got a new single out . . . and we went through 3 or 4 different treatments of it before we arrived at that one, and it's still the same song, initially. We didn't change the melody, we hardly changed the chords, didn't change the structure at all. But,

just by changing the feel underneath, what kind of instruments we were using, where . . . Like to start with, we were doing it too fast, we were trying to do it too heavy, we tried to make it a funky rock song . . . You can have the Hi-hat going - - - - or that -----, just double up, and that can entirely change the feel of the song."<sup>54</sup>

As the arranger's work is effectively purchased by the producer, the latter may feel he is entitled to do what he wants with it. Hence, arrangers frequently cite instances where producers have not been sensitive to their arrangements, and one reason given by many of those who have moved from arranging into production in their own right is that, for example, "you write something with an idea in mind and it's being interpreted completely wrong, not the way the composer has heard it."<sup>59</sup> Another commented, "there's nothing worse than . . . working on a complicated arrangement and you get some lovely figures of something like trumpets or oboes, and in the final mix it's all obliterated."<sup>60</sup> In these cases, the producer has simply asserted his right as artistic arbiter to take certain decisions, which arrangers, although possibly frustrated, have no choice but to accept.

It is the practice in the recording industry that, where session musicians are contracted to play the arrangement, the arranger also takes on the task of Musical Director during its recording. As musical director, he is "sub-contracted" by the producer to engage suitable musicians and be responsible for their recording of the arrangement and its final sound within his overall direction.

The arrangement can, clearly, make a substantial contribution to the final sound of some recordings. Despite this possibility, the

work of the arranger remains, in general, largely anonymous and directed.

### Recording engineer

There is plentiful evidence that, from the earliest days of recording, technical expertise has been necessary to operate recording equipment. Although recordings of reasonable technical quality can now be made on magnetic tape without skilled technical assistance, recordings made to the highest technical standards in professional recording studios depend on such assistance.

Most recording engineers are employed by the recording studio where they are based, although there are a small number who work on a free-lance basis, having built up a reputation and a network of potential clients. The recording engineer's involvement with a recording will be on a project by project basis, and he will normally be regarded by the entrepreneur, notwithstanding any special skills he may possess, as substitutable. This position is reflected in the role of the engineer in the studio, where he has only limited discretion. A salaried engineer employed at studios owned by a record company, on the other hand, is in a more secure position than those he is usually working with, and this may be reflected in a more assertive style of work.

Kealy has suggested that, after a period in which the recording engineer's status rose in parallel with the increasing complexity of his work, the recording equipment has more recently reached a level of technical sophistication which makes its control and management easier and, as it requires less specialist skills, the status of the engineer

controlling it has declined somewhat.<sup>57</sup>

The recording engineer's primary role is to control and use the technical equipment interpreting a producer's ideas and instructions on sound sources and capturing them as concrete recorded sounds through his expert use of the studio and its equipment. In the words of a practising engineer, he should "know the studio he's working in inside out, he's got to be able to do anything that is possible with his equipment, . . . he's got to know its limitations" and know "exactly what you can get out of a panel . . . (in terms of) . . . balance . . . perspective . . . distortion."<sup>58</sup>

If the producer is to achieve the final recorded sound that he wants, in both its major elements and its nuances, he must be in a position to communicate closely with his engineer. The need to verbalise what is essentially non-verbal can cause considerable difficulties for engineer and producer until a working vocabulary and understanding are established. As one respondent put it, "There isn't a language of music, except by experience, except by knowing somebody and working with them over a period of time, and getting to know what so and so means."<sup>59</sup> Another engineer illustrated how difficulties in this area could arise. "If somebody says to you, 'I want this to sound a little bit heavier,' a very nebulous comment, there's no button on the desk that says "heavy", you've got to appreciate what the producer's saying."<sup>60</sup>

Engineers may be quite contemptuous of producers' efforts to communicate with them, "I mean they do come up with silly expressions, you know, 'I want it to sound big and fat and thick!'"<sup>61</sup> Even then, a fairly limited number of terms in general use can cause difficulties

with different interpretations. "There's 'bright' which to some people means treble, between about 10 and 12k; to some means quite low, around about 1 or 2k."<sup>62</sup>

In view of the necessary closeness of the working relationship, the producer looks for an engineer who is competent and with whom he can work amicably and closely, someone who has "the right sort of personality", and who is prepared to learn the producer's aesthetic values and vocabulary, for "the more you know an engineer, the less you need to say . . . because he knows the way your mind works, and he knows what you're after."<sup>63</sup> At its most advanced, the engineer "can interpret what you (the producer) are thinking, and just a glance, you know, means something."<sup>64</sup>

One consequence of the difficulties in understanding and articulation is that the features of other published recordings and styles are frequently invoked as common reference points or models by production personnel; and hence further enter into the production of new recordings.

In the initial recording, where the producer requires what he regards as a "basic" sound recorded, most recording engineers are given considerable discretion over how they carry out their recording, as long as their results will enable the producer to finish with the sound he intends. The engineer is likely to have his own rule-of-thumb working practices; he has a very wide range of options on, for example, the type and make of microphones to use, their location vis a vis sound sources, and the acoustic properties of the recording environment.

During mixing when the producer expects to exercise control over the sounds produced, the engineer's discretion is, paradoxically, not necessarily reduced, because of the almost infinite number of sounds that can be created, and the producer's dependence on the engineer's technical expertise in controlling the recording equipment. The recording engineer's task then is to "concretise" the producer's ideas by electronically enhancing the recorded sounds, and editing and balancing them in such a way as to give the overall interpretation that is intended.

Most producers will readily give the engineer discretion to set up the broad parameters of the sound they want, as a way of making the possibilities more manageable for themselves in directing the final mix. By whatever means a groundwork is established, producers may be responsive to further suggestions from the engineer on aspects of the final sound. Most engineers welcome the opportunity to contribute to the content of a recording. Engineer K explained that he enjoyed mixing most because, as an engineer, he could "become the artist, become musician . . . have lots of ideas, effects, sounds . . ."

An engineer's opportunity to influence events may not depend solely on his ability to exploit his technical knowledge and control. In a comparatively short time he is likely to have acquired considerable experience of recording and it is likely that the others involved in recording may from time to time appeal to him for advice based on that experience. Similarly, gratuitously offered advice will be weighted and supported by any reputation and prestige the engineer has in the recording industry.



As a technical expert, most engineers regard it as axiomatic that the producer should properly delegate to him those areas that are formally within his competence; and should not attempt to impinge on them. As the functions of engineering and producing could be carried out by the same person, transgressions of the consensual division of labour are particularly sensitive.

If the partnership of record producer and engineer is to run smoothly, then it seems to be essential that they either conform to the general consensus of what constitutes an appropriate division of labour, or come to an understanding about any significant variation.

Some producers look to the engineer as another source of ideas, using his experience in studios and of recording work in general, and would like the engineer to share his own involvement and enthusiasm for the project. Producer L, describing what he regarded as a good engineer said, "you will find engineers who will finish the day, and then come back again the next day, and that's the first time they've heard it. But our guy actually takes a copy for himself and he listens to it. So when he comes back, he's probably got more idea than we have about what things should be." Another producer commented, "A good engineer, I think, will listen to the ideas of the producer, he'll listen to the music, and he will then take it to a degree that perhaps the producer himself didn't envision. . ." <sup>65</sup> This enthusiasm should not, however, prevent him from deferring to the producer's ideas when his own are not in demand.

Within a framework laid down by the producer, therefore, the recording engineer typically has a considerable degree of discretion over the details of his work.

### "Creative synthesis"

Although artistic decision making in the recording studio is the responsibility of the producer, he is, as we have seen, unlikely to be the only source of creative ideas.

Such innovative practices do not only derive from individuals, for there are occasions when they emerge from an association of individuals rather than the individuals themselves and in these circumstances, it is the association that may be regarded as creative. In the context of recording, one specific source of creativity is the collectivity of recording personnel within the studio.

The idea that a society or an organisation might represent more than the sum of its individual parts, holism or "creative synthesis", is associated with the work of Emile Durkheim. As he wrote in his Rules of Sociological Method, "Society is not just the sum of individuals, rather the system formed by their association represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics."<sup>66</sup> Indeed, this has been described as the "keystone" of Durkheim's entire system of thought.<sup>67</sup>

Durkheim noted that the origins of the factual characteristics of a society would lie in "the nature of this individuality, not in that of its component units", suggesting, as analogies, that water is more than hydrogen and oxygen, and that the hardness of bronze more than copper and tin. Although Lukes rightly criticises Durkheim for overstating his case about the social factors in social phenomena, and for a lack of conceptual clarity by sharply distinguishing facts as social or individual,<sup>68</sup> the substance of his argument remains valid.

Within the recording industry, there is a widely held belief in the possibility of creative ideas emerging from the association of recording personnel working in the studio, that is, that something will emerge from their work there additional to any planned contributions of the participants, and not wholly attributable to any one individual. This addition derives from the juxtapositioning of people, events and ideas, some of it unforeseen, with the opportunity on hand to experiment using the recording equipment.

Because deliberate experimentation takes studio time and is expensive, it is not an option that is available to all producers. However, even when a producer has extensively planned a recording session, he is unlikely to discount the possibility of including new and unforeseen elements arising out of the work in the studio. One experienced producer explained how he saw this: "It (a recording) is a very complex arrangement of emotions, people, and machines, and when you're trying to combine all of these things the chances are that out of the ideas you walk in with, a percentage, maybe 10 to 20 per cent will be altered, changed or not work . . . A lot of it is down to the spontaneity of the session."<sup>69</sup> It is this so called "spontaneity of the session" that we have in mind in referring to the unforeseen element during a recording session. He explained later, "Sometimes it's a musician who throws in an extra lick, or riff, or something that you didn't think of originally . . ."

At the other extreme, there are recording sessions where almost all composition and construction of the content of the recording takes place in the studio, with only minimal advance planning. This practice is most often associated with using the "studio as a musical

instrument", (although this need not be a collective activity) and is based on the premise that recording personnel are more likely to make creative use of the enhancements and facilities of the studio equipment if they are available throughout construction of the work. As we have indicated, the likely costs involved preclude most recording sessions from being conducted in this way, which is practicable only with a large budget. It has been particularly associated with successful performers for whom a large budget and unrestricted studio time may be available.

#### Working relations in the recording studio.

As a work organisation, recording sessions are subject to the pressures of control and coercion that occur in any organisation. The discretion available to participants and the distribution of power may be such that the authority vested in the producer by the entrepreneur does not give him unrestrained decision-making during the recording. In the process of production, decisions on aesthetic matters are from time to time effected by other participants. This may be the result of conceding discretion; or of delegation, in which case the underlying decision-making structure is unaltered; or of consensus between some participants; or the result of participants wresting the initiative on decision-making from the producer against his will. Their ability to do the latter is a function of their relative power, which derives from various sources in the socio-economic structure of the recording industry. Generally, the producer is able to use his greater power to uphold his aesthetic decisions, but there may be occasions when he has to acknowledge the strength of the opposition.

Aesthetic conflicts are, we would argue, the manifestation of power struggles within the work organisation about decision taking, and resistance on the part of directed labour to the roles set out for them.

There is generally a high appreciation among recording personnel of the extent of competition between people working on the same project to take aesthetic decisions. As one respondent commented, "the role of record producer can be taken by the engineer or the band irrespective of whether there is somebody there called 'record producer' present."<sup>70</sup> To a certain extent, this is regarded as perfectly legitimate and constructive, confirming commitment and interest in the project.

The following comments illustrate the perception by participants of such competition and conflict in recording work; the first is from an experienced performer who also produces, and arose in discussing the extent to which the producer is able to take decisions about the overall style of a recording: "If you (as producer) happen to be able to exert a particular control over a situation, you maintain that control as long as you can exercise it, and from the moment you cease to maintain that control, you lose it. It's taken away from you immediately, because there are half a dozen people always around who would like to be doing, who would like to be controlling the situation at that given moment. So it's a matter of how far you wish to go, and how far you are able to go."<sup>71</sup> Producer/engineer M referred to "a sort of pecking order situation that happens . . ." and advised that from the producer's point of view, "if you've got any sense, you arrange before you start how much control you've got."<sup>72</sup> A performer

with much experience of recording, confirms from a different perspective the same need to be assertive, if one is to overcome the efforts made by other people to direct one's work. "Well, of course, I mean there's a constant battle . . . because, er, you know, it's power against power all the time. . ."73

An arranger hinted at his understanding of the real underlying power relations by explaining how, as an arranger, he could not normally expect to get his own way; he interprets his own concessions on aesthetic matters as an indication of his flexibility. He said "You've got to be flexible in a session . . . No guy can walk into a studio and say that he knows it all. The producer's got his ideas, the arranger's got his ideas, and the artist concerned has got his ideas, and you've got to listen to the other people's point of view, and if necessary, fall in with their wishes, as far as you can musically."74

Aesthetic disputes may sometimes appear disguised as what are known elsewhere as "demarcation" disputes. We have characterised recording as exhibiting an "organic" structure of management, and noted that this structure commonly leads to ambiguity and uncertainty about work roles. Although there is flexibility of job tasks this does not mean that there are no boundaries that may be transgressed in pursuit of aesthetic aims.

The high premium placed on "friendliness" means that the ability to get on with the people with whom you might work may be considered as one prerequisite to a successful career in the recording industry. For most recording personnel, an ideal working relationship would be one that involves mutual respect, friendship, and "knowledge of each

other's limitations, weaknesses, strengths and everything."<sup>75</sup> It should therefore appear to be of relative equality.

The prevailing ethos of friendship in working relationships may, however, cause difficulties to the producer in carrying out a role of decision taker. One respondent reported one such difficulty he experienced, "One of the things a producer must be is decisive, and tough if you can be . . . That's the thing that I've found having slid from being an engineer to being a producer, that's the thing I find hardest to get together. Because as an engineer one doesn't actually have authority over a session, whereas as a producer you have to have. And it's rather like being made a prefect at school, or something, you're still working with the same people."<sup>76</sup>

Much of the exercise of power and control in the recording studio is covert, some power relations are internalised into working relations through employment arrangements and the self selection of working partners so that they appear to be normal. In these circumstances disagreements about aesthetic values will be diminished, but not abolished. There, however, other forces working against these, which offer opportunities for participants to take important aesthetic decisions, and blur the artistic division of labour.

#### Power in the recording studio

We now propose to highlight some of the factors leading to this blurring of the artistic division of labour to which we have referred, by using the concept of "power". Within sociology, the most widely used definition of "power" is Max Weber's from Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft - "In general, we understand by "power" the chance of a

man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action."<sup>77</sup> In the context of the recording studio and the production of recordings we are primarily concerned with the ability to persuade others in connection with aesthetic choices, although we should be mindful that problems which are presented as aesthetic may also be about resources.

The aesthetic power of recording personnel in the studio may derive from one or more of the following: capital; technical knowledge and control; particular work tasks; past success; prestige and status within the industry; and personality. In a recording session, these factors, which are distributed unequally, may be sources of power to individuals in aesthetic and other conflicts. They are at once the basis of the producer's power and authority, and bases from which this position may be questioned.

In the recording studio, power struggles should not necessarily be seen as occurring between the producer and other recording personnel; performer and engineer, for example, may be competing with one another for aesthetic supremacy. There is an intermesh of individuals wielding unequal "amounts" of power which may vary in different situations.

a) Power derived from capital.

The most effective and pervasive source of power in the recording studio is derived from capital. The entrepreneur, or his delegate, is able to exert considerable control through his role as employer of many of the individuals in the studio. An engineer described how he



felt this worked in practice, "Sometimes you have an idea, the producer says "Oh, dunno, mate" so because, basically, he's paying the bill, he has to decide."<sup>78</sup> As the delegate of capital, the producer is provided with a very powerful source of control. The strength of this form of power is demonstrated in the way in which his working style (as performer or recording based) normally establishes the pattern of working during a particular recording session.

Respondent E, a producer, noted how he was able to build this source of power into the working relationship he established with an engineer ". . . It's building up that kind of friendly relationship, so you both respect what each other's doing, but you know who's paying for the studio and who's paying your salary next week, without making anybody feel it. . ."

The producer can exercise control over the performer through his access to the mechanisms of the "star system" and differential promotion outside the studio of the recording company which effectively ensures its ultimate aesthetic control over the performer within the studio, as his or her recording career is dependent on the company's continuation of support. There is little advantage in recording something that will not be published.

Other employment arrangements bolster the control of capital through the producer. Recording engineers who are freelance or are employed by a studio are dispensable. Similarly both session musicians and arrangers are employed on a piece rate basis, with no security of any sort.

b) Power derived from technical knowledge.

Power based on technical knowledge and control is most obviously a resource available to the engineer. Recording has always been dependent on technical equipment, and as this has become more sophisticated so, in general, has the status and power of the person controlling it advanced.

Nevertheless, technical knowledge and control of the recording equipment remains a formidable source of strength at least in part because of the way it has been developed in the recording studio to minimise labour costs. The following example shows how one producer advises strongly asserting his own position to resolve what he perceives as the problem of the engineer's power derived from his technical knowledge and skills. (In passing, it also illustrates how salaried engineers may be in a strong position to assert themselves.) "Now, the engineer, obviously, in a lot of instances by the time you've been going through and through the song, has his own ideas, but you must overcome the engineer's ideas if you want to project your own as producer. In other words, you mustn't let him get carried away by setting, by making the settings for you; and saying "Do you think that's O.K.?" you know. He'll always say "Do you think that's O.K.?" but unless you quite categorically state "No, I don't like that at all", he'll leave it as it is, you know. Because **that's the engineer trying to be producer.** Do you see what I mean? And there are lots of engineers like that, particularly with major companies . . . So I mean you've really got to be ruthless over engineers by telling them exactly what sound you want."<sup>79</sup>(emphasis added).

Another comment, this time from a recording engineer makes essentially the same argument about the possible contribution of the engineer, but from the different viewpoint of suggesting that some producers will be happy to let others do their work for them. "Invariably, you find that unless you've got a really strong producer, um, that the engineer is really, if you analyse the session, and the producer wouldn't like this . . . but the producer in fact is not doing the job. The engineer is going in and saying 'Shall we double track this, et cetera, et cetera?' and these people come along and they obviously start talking, making a few suggestions, but in a good many cases, the engineer is . . . (doing the job)".<sup>80</sup>

The same concerns arise in the production of other cultural products, such as film, where there is a similar dependence by decision makers on technical personnel, and where the artistic authority, in this case the director, may have to insist on his decisions being put into effect. Buscombe quotes a film director who articulates the problem as he sees it; "You see, its possible to have a jolly good operator whose ideas are completely foreign to my own. Maybe they're better, but even if they are, they're not going to help my picture because its going in a certain direction and . . . if they are going in a different direction it won't work."<sup>81</sup>

More generally, the "technical power" of such occupational groups is not explained solely by their resources of technical competences for, as Elger notes, occupational skill claims are buttressed by institutions which facilitate craft controls over the supply and exercise of relevant competences.<sup>82</sup>

Recording, therefore, is only one field where the engineer's technical expertise and his position controlling the technical apparatus gives him considerable scope to usurp formal responsibility for decision making.

c) Power derived from working tasks

A third source of aesthetic power in the recording studio is what we might term "working tasks", that is, that some of an individual's tasks as part of his routine working role during recording may give him a particular chance to influence the outcome of the recording. The working role may incorporate limited discretion to take decisions on some aesthetic matters, but we are referring to the ability to take further decisions because of the sheer mass of possibilities and choices that recording can offer. It is not practical for the producer to be consulted about each and every one of these, and individuals are continually taking small decisions on behalf of the producer, which singly may not be of great significance, but which taken together may exert considerable influence over the course of events.

The recording engineer's "technical power", particularly his control over the equipment is an aspect of this type of power. However, what we have in mind is the ability of the performer to sing or play in one way in preference to another, insert his own ideas into his performance, and subtly affect it. The producer's formal control over the sound that is recorded is largely exercised post hoc, and in practice, while under general guidance from the producer, the details of the recording are usually the work of the performer. We would

argue that the performer's ability to contribute in this way derives from his working role.

The arranger, too, where used, is in a similar position when he is directing session musicians in the studio.

The work role power of both performer and engineer also includes a form of traditional industrial power as they may withdraw co-operation if they are unhappy about decision making. This places limitations on the extent to which others in the recording session can ignore their wishes if they feel strongly about an issue.

#### d) Commercial power

A fourth source of power for individuals in recording is their own "track record" of commercial success especially in recording environments which are commercially oriented. We noted in Chapter Seven that the commercial success of any recording cannot be predicted accurately, and the most reliable indicator is the commercial standing of previous recordings by the same performer or producer, recordings in the same style, or on information of other factors such as the level and type of promotion.

A producer who is enjoying a period of success which it is thought is primarily a result of a sound he has created will find his services to be in considerable demand; while within the studio his authority will be enhanced.

The performer, similarly, may derive similar benefits. As Adam Faith writes in his ghosted autobiography, "Who decides which the final track will be? That's my job, and one of the privileges of being a recording star. After all, my reputation rests on the results, so I

claim the right to choose which track I like best."<sup>83</sup>

The engineer may also gain in status and power by association with certain past recordings, and this will support him in discussions on matters with which he might expect to be concerned, and similarly, an arranger who has been associated with previous successes will have his status and power over certain areas of recording enhanced. This is one of the reasons why it is important to arrangers (and session musicians) that they are given a "credit", i.e. that their names are noted, for their work on different recordings.

e) "Artistic" reputation.

Power and influence during recording may also be derived from a fifth source, an external reputation for making recordings which have been critically acclaimed by opinion leaders, although they may not have achieved success in terms of sales. A reputation of this sort may give some extra influence in decision taking about aesthetic matters, not the least because it is likely to be believed that commercial success will ensue when a wider public have caught up with opinion leaders and learnt to appreciate the performer or producer's recordings.

f) Personality

An individual's personality can affect his opportunities within the recording studio. As elsewhere, the assertive individual is more likely to be able to get his own way. As one interviewee suggested, "the control that the producer has over the band depends upon the personal power of the producer in terms of his own personality,

whether he's got the front to front out five or six quite powerful musicians . . . mentally."84

### Conclusions

This chapter has supported the case for a social production perspective of the production of recorded music by considering how the organisation of production, which incorporates various social imperatives, contributes to the final product. We have used the concept of the "work organisation" to account for the network in which the production of recordings takes place. All work organisations, including those for recordings, are concerned with getting things done, and are purposely structured in ways that expedite this in the interests of their leaders.

We have argued that what is regarded as an "artistic division of labour" within cultural production is a facet of the manifestation of the social division of labour into mental and manual work, that is characteristic of capitalist economic relations and a consequence of the imperatives of capital accumulation. In the case of the production of recordings, however, our research suggests that within the framework of this overall social division of labour, there is a contested and negotiated division of artistic labour, and it is not practicable to make an impermeable distinction between individuals whose work comprises purely aesthetic decision taking ("artists"), and those who execute these decisions, "craftsmen". We traced this to the socio-technical system in which the production of recordings takes place.

Work organisations producing recordings adopt a relatively informal structure and project by project approach consistent, as it is a rational response to a particular set of circumstances, with other work organisations operating under similar conditions within a capitalist economic framework. There are close similarities with the production of other forms of cultural artifact, such as the feature film.

We considered typical work roles in the production of recording, those of the producer, to whom as a key figure we have paid particular attention, tracing the development of a distinct role; performer; session musician; arranger; and recording engineer. In each case, we reviewed the contractual arrangements, their role and practice within the work organisation, the extent of discretion in their work, and the opportunities they have to take the initiative in aesthetic matters.

These profiles informed our discussion of the working relations in recording, which looked at aesthetic power and control, and the sources of the ability of individuals to resist control and take the initiative in creative matters. Our purpose was to "map" the mesh of working relationships, indicating the relative strength of individuals' ability to take aesthetic decisions. We argued that such ability was based on power derived from the possession of access to capital, technical knowledge, aspects of their particular working tasks, previous commercial success, "artistic" reputation, and an individual's personality.

By governing the decision making opportunities available to individuals, organisational factors (which themselves mediate social imperatives), help shape the finished work.



## Methodological appendix to Chapter Eight

### The population

The "working universe" or population of the study were individuals actively concerned at the time of the enquiry with the production of recorded rock music in the U.K. These people, for whom we have used the term, "recording personnel" were working as producers, recording engineers, arrangers, session musicians or performers.

The total number of individuals in these groups with continuing active involvement in recording, probably numbered three or four thousand at that time.<sup>85</sup> A much greater number, of course, were indirectly involved, being engaged in, for example, manufacturing, promoting, or selling. A "continuing involvement" in recording even for as short a period as a year, requires at least a modicum of commercial success or appreciation by others, and this necessarily limits the numbers involved. At any one time, a very much greater number of people, principally performers and musicians would have been on the periphery of this universe, seeking entry into it, or effectively departing from it after a brief membership.

### The Sample

The sample aims at typicality. Recording personnel, primarily producers and arrangers, whose names and contact addresses were listed in trade directories, were written to and, in the context of explaining the nature of the enquiry, were asked for an interview. Such directories mainly list those who are actively seeking work, and so individuals new to the business or without a history of successful

projects will be overrepresented. Names were chosen at random, while contact was attempted for all those whom it was thought had accumulated some experience of recording. In terms of assisting in the enquiry it was expected that the latter group would be more able to help. The overall level of response was disappointingly low, about 1 in 3, and of these only a small number eventually materialised into formal tape recorded interviews. In the hope of encouraging responses, anonymity was promised at the outset, and for this reason has been maintained with the material used. Subsequent contact with potential interviewees was made by asking those interviewed if they knew anybody else who might be able and interested to help - a "snow-ball" sample.<sup>86</sup>

The following table gives some biographical detail about the sample of recording personnel. A distinction has been made in this chapter, where appropriate, between those record producers who approach their work as "performer based" and those who are "recording based". Although the sample includes individuals towards both ends of the scale, most of those interviewed would be classified as broadly "performer based" possibly because those who take performers and their music seriously for its intrinsic worth are more likely to be sympathetic to an outsider who regards these artistic concerns as a matter for research. Virtually all were based in London.

The sample could not be representative, but the range and tenor of opinions expressed on the topics raised were corroborated not only by broadcast and published interviews, but also by the writer's informal conversations on the same matters with recording personnel at a number of different studios and recording sessions visited and

observed during the course of the enquiry. In this aspect, therefore, the sample was reasonably typical of the population.<sup>87</sup>

With the exception of subject V, the sample was exclusively male. By chance, this was not unrepresentative of the production of recordings; very few females work in the principal roles we have identified in recording, other than as performers or session singers.

Tape-recorded interviews

<u>date</u>	<u>subject</u>	<u>roles in recording</u>	<u>biographical details</u>
27. 2.76 22. 3.76	A	arranger/producer	age 35, American, former arranger, working with commercially successful singer, and others. Tending towards performer based.
27. 2.76	B	engineer/producer	age 35-40, owner of small studio, aiming at commercial success as producer/manager. Strongly recording based.
3. 3.76	C	engineer/producer	age 55, owner of mid sized studio, works with all types of music
5. 3.76	D	producer/manager	age 30, partner in provincial entertainment agency, works with new pop performers. Strongly recording based.
17. 3.76	E	publisher/producer	age 25-30, working with new pop performers. Strongly recording based.
17. 3.76	F	performer/producer/ musician	age 50, works as and with music-oriented performers; experienced world class musician, new to producing
21. 3.76	G	performer/producer	age 30; producing self, performer based, has experienced some commercial success as leading member of group of performers
24. 4.76	H	producer	age 30; part-owner of top London studio working with commercially minded, music oriented performers
2. 4.76	J	producer/engineer	age 30; freelance; formerly engineer, has experienced some commercial success
14. 4.76	K	engineer	age 30; part-owner top London studio; pop and rock work
13. 4.76	L	producer	age 33*; writer/journalist; radio disk jockey; part-owner of small music-oriented record company
30. 4.76	M	engineer	age 30; working in own small studio as independent engineer/producer; had worked on very successful rock performer based sLPs
26. 7.76	N	arranger/MD	age 50-55; wide range of music for radio, tv, recording, including some best selling records. Formerly pianist.

21. 4.76	O	engineer	age 31*; worked 10 years in studios of major record company, commenced as tape operator; wide range of music; now engineer/studio manager for studio owned by successful performers
11.10.76	P	musician/arranger/	age 30-35; musician with group of successful performers; has had success as producer of pop recordings; arranges wide range of music for various purposes; trained as classical musician
16. 9.76	Q	producer	age 35; executive producer/manager for internat. successful jazz/rock performers; also produces ethnic folk music.
25.10.76	R	A and R /producer	age 25; in-house producer, medium size independent record company. Recording oriented.
3.11.76	T	engineer/producer/ A and R	age 28*; physics graduate; engineer in large independent studio, then journalism, classical musician; A and R for major internat. record company
3.11.76	U	producer	age 50; American; engineer in US; among first independent producers in UK; major commercial successes in '60s.
25.11.76 26.11.76	V	performer/musician	age 30; former session singer; major success with folk/rock group and as solo performer.
20.10.76 10.12.76	W	engineer/producer	age 40; studio owner/manager; wide experience as engineer, all types music.
3.11.76	Y	producer	age 25; minor commercial success; recording oriented.

\*age given by interviewee, others approx

### The focussed interview.

The interviewing technique employed was that known as the "focussed interview"; these interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Merton and Kendall<sup>88</sup> suggest that the focussed interview has four distinguishing characteristics, firstly, interviewees are known to have been involved in a concrete situation; secondly, this situation has previously been analysed by the investigator who has a set of working hypotheses; thirdly, the interviewer works from an "interview guide" rather than a standardised questionnaire; and fourthly, the interviewer concentrates on subjective experiences of that situation. A major feature of the interview is the interviewer's minimal direction, using open-ended questions, enabling unanticipated responses to emerge and the chance to uncover what is important to the subject rather than his opinion of what is important to the interviewer.

Tape recording is particularly valuable in these circumstances. It eliminates a major source of interviewer bias, namely the selective noting of responses; it frees the interviewer to concentrate on what is being said and to elicit further information and reaction from the respondent; and it retains a complete objective record of the interview. A complete typewritten transcript is immensely useful, if costly.<sup>89</sup>

The interview guide that follows formed the basis of the recorded interviews, and informed reading of miscellaneous literature, and casual conversations held with other recording personnel. The guide was designed principally to elicit opinion and information principally

on organisational and job task matters for this chapter, and secondarily to provide details of personal experience relevant to the financial and technological concerns of Chapters Seven and Nine respectively. With one or two exceptions, interviewees were reticent in discussing coercion and control in the studio and, in retrospect, insufficient attention may have been paid to drawing out views and experience on these matters, which became more clearly central to this chapter during its writing.

A. Topics common to all interviewees.

1. What activities are you currently doing in the music business?
2. How long have you been doing that?
3. How did you get into that?
4. How did you learn how to do your current job?
5. What does your job actually involve now? What do you do yourself?
6. How has your job changed since you first started?
  - 6a. If significant - What do you feel have been the important factors primarily responsible for these changes?
7. One of the things I'm interested in is the extent to which the introduction of new technical equipment into studios may have affected your job. Have there been changes caused by new technology?
8. Do you regard recording as a fairly routine procedure, or is each session different?
  - 8a. If yes - In what ways?
    - in personnel?
    - sound?
    - market?
    - purpose?
    - organisation?
    - songs?
9. Who do you feel is most responsible for the final sound?
10. Do you ever get the impression that the contribution of some of the people involved in making a successful record is not properly recognised?
11. Over a period of time, there appear to be considerable shifts in the sounds of popular music. How do you think these musical innovations occur?
12. What relationship do you feel does a recording have to a "live" performance?

B. Supplementary topics for producers.

1. When you are in a position to choose which studio to record in, what criteria do you use for making that decision?
2. To what extent are some studios better than others for particular types of recording?



3. How do you see the engineer's job? What should he be doing in a session, ideally?
4. What do you look for in an engineer you hire?
5. How do you distinguish between good and poor engineer?
6. What's the nature of your relationship with him during recording?
7. What are your criteria in choosing an arranger/MD?
8. How would you distinguish between arrangers?
9. What do you see as the purpose of an arrangement?
10. What about session musicians? What qualities do you look for in session musicians you hire?
11. Again, how do you distinguish between good and bad session musicians?
12. What about the public for recordings. What impact does public taste have on what you do?
13. Do you have a mental picture of somebody you are trying to please when you are making a record?
14. When you are considering whether a recording or a mix is good enough to keep, what are you listening or looking for?
15. How do you know when things are right and aren't going to get any better?
16. What about a session as a whole? What is distinctive about an "ideal" session, when you go home thinking, "That was a good session. "
17. What about the opposite, when you feel very fed up with a session? What would cause that?
18. When you commence a recording, do you have a clear image in your mind of what the final recording should sound like?
  - 18a. If yes - Does it tend to work out as you planned?
19. Where do you think your ideas for the sound of a recording come from?
20. When you are making a "live" recording, what are you trying to achieve?
21. What sort of effect might the size of budget have on a recording session?
  - 21a. Examples?

22. Can you tell me how marketing requirements might impinge on recording?
23. As a freelancer, how do your working arrangements differ from those of in-house producers?

**C. Supplementary topics for engineers.**

1. Do you have any academic qualifications relevant to engineering?
2. Some people say that certain studios are better than others for particular types of recording. To what extent is this true, in your experience?
3. How important do you feel the particular equipment at a studio is in the final recorded sound?
4. Presumably producers differ a lot. Can you tell me something about their different working methods? How do these differences affect you?
5. What sort of producer do you prefer to work with?
6. What about the artist? Are some easier to work with than others? In what way?
7. Do musicians or producers ever have difficulty in explaining to you what sound, or effect they are after ?
8. Do you need to talk much to other people in the control room and studio during recording and mixing?
9. I'm interested in the way the final sound evolves. I was wondering what influence you felt you, as engineer, had on that sound?
10. You must have your own ideas about when a performance is a good one. What do you feel constitutes a good performance?
11. Do you sometimes find you disagree with a producer about a take, about when it's good enough?
12. How are new sounds made and introduced? Have you had any experience, or do you know of any new sounds that have been introduced into general use?
13. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being free-lance as opposed to a studio engineer?
14. As a free-lancer are you normally contracted by the hour, for the completion of a job, a royalty, or what?

D. Supplementary topics for performer.

1. When you are in the studio, what do you expect the producer to do? How do you see his job?
2. Do you need to talk to him much during a recording? What sort of thing would you discuss?
3. You must have worked under different producers. Do they differ much in the way they work, and run a session?
4. What about the engineer? What do you expect him to be doing?
5. Do you need to talk to him much?
6. What is distinctive about a good engineer as opposed to a poor one?
7. Who decides what material you should record?
8. What criteria do you use in assessing whether a song is suitable for you to record?
9. One of the advantages of being in a studio is that you can repeat something until you get it "right" or "perfect". What are your models of perfection? What do you try to emulate?
10. Who decides when you've got something you are singing right, and you don't need to go on perfecting it?
11. What is the difference between a good and a mediocre performance on record?
12. Are you sometimes dissatisfied with what you have achieved in the studio?
13. Are there artistic advantages in recording songs you have written yourself, as opposed to an anonymous composition?
14. In what ways does singing a song in a recording studio differ from singing the same song at a live gig?
15. How much scope do you feel you have for being creative in the studio?
16. Some people say that certain studios are better than others for particular types of recording. Does the particular studio make any difference to you?
17. When you are recording in a studio, do you consider how you might perform a version of the recording on stage?
18. Have you had experience of being limited artistically by a restricted budget? How did this manifest itself?
19. What about the public for recordings? Do you feel constrained by

public taste in what you can do?

20. Do you have a mental picture of somebody you are trying to please when you are making a record?
21. In your experience, what differences do you notice between being in the studio as an artist and as a session singer?
22. What sort of contractual arrangements do you have for recording?
23. What services does the record company provide you?
24. What sort of say does your management have in recording? How is this manifested?
25. Looking back on your earlier experiences, do you notice that producers and engineers react differently to you now that you have more studio experience and are better known?

**E. Supplementary topics for arrangers.**

1. What is the purpose of an arrangement?
2. How important do you feel the arrangement is to the final sound?
3. What do you regard as a "good" arrangement? What is distinctive about a piece you are satisfied with?
4. How long would a typical song take to arrange?
5. Do you specialise in types of music you arrange? Is arranging very much the same sort of job whatever music you are dealing with?
6. In what ways might some songs be easier to arrange for than others?
7. Are some artists easier to arrange for than others?
8. How important are the lyrics of a song to you as an arranger?
9. What sort of constraints might there be on an arrangement that you do?
10. As arranger, does it help to have some contact with the writer of a piece you are working on?
11. What sort of liaison do you normally have with a record producer about a piece?
12. Would you expect the producer to offer you suggestions about your arrangement?
  - 12a. If yes - Would you feel obliged to use them?

13. How do you get work as an arranger?
14. What sort of contractual arrangements do you have for arranging and M.D.-ing?
15. What are the sorts of things you have to take into account in arranging for a recording as opposed to arranging for a live band?
16. What qualities do you look for in a good session musician?
17. Do you have to talk to them much during a session, to discuss what's going on, or is that left to the producer?
18. When you are considering whether a recording is good enough to keep, what are you listening or looking for?
19. How do you know when things are "right" and aren't going to get any better?
20. Presumably some producers are easier to work with others; what's a good producer from your point of view?

## Footnotes to Chapter Eight

1. Salaman, 1979, p84
2. Salaman, 1978, p538
3. Salaman, 1978, p519
4. Salaman, 1979, p145
5. K. Marx Capital I, Lawrence and Wishart, 1956, p164 - quoted by Salaman, 1978, p532
6. see Braverman
7. Salaman, 1978, p534
8. respondent U
9. see Stratton, 1983
10. Burns and Stalker, p5, p120-11
11. see Emery and Trist
12. Woodward, 1958, p16
13. See Woodward, 1958 and 1965
14. Perrow, 1967, p195
15. Perrow, 1970, p78
16. see Stratton, 1983
17. Stratton, 1983, p152
18. Vignolle, p87
19. respondent W
20. respondent O
21. A. Fox, p25-37
22. see Martin, 1979
23. Tobler and Grundy, p231
24. respondent Q
25.     ""     U
26. Phil Spector is a notable example of a recording based producer who has been prepared to take musical/commercial risks. see Frith, 1982, p146
27. respondent P
28.     ""     A
29.     ""     Q
30.     ""     M
31.     ""     A
32.     ""     V
33.     ""     P
34.     ""     H
35.     ""     W
36.     ""     A
37.     ""     H
38.     ""     A
39.     ""     H
40.     ""     U
41.     ""     M
42. Vignolle p88ff; see also Hennion, 1983, p182 ff
43. respondent J
44.     ""     F
45.     ""     O
46.     ""     H
47.     ""     L
48. interview in Melody Maker, 8.11.75
49. see Goldthorpe and Lockwood

- 50. respondent F
- 51.        ""        A
- 52. typically a fee of between £50 and £200
- 53. respondent P
- 54.        ""        P
- 55.        ""        A
- 56.        ""        M
- 57. see Kealy
- 58. respondent J
- 59.        ""        M
- 60.        ""        J
- 61.        ""        M
- 62.        ""        M
- 63.        ""        H
- 64.        ""        Y
- 65.        ""        A
- 66. Durkheim, p103
- 67. Lukes, p22
- 68. Lukes, p20
- 69. respondent A
- 70.        ""        A
- 71.        ""        F
- 72.        ""        M
- 73.        ""        V
- 74.        ""        N
- 75.        ""        K
- 76.        ""        J
- 77. Gerth and Mills p180
- 78. respondent K
- 79.        ""        D
- 80.        ""        C
- 81. Buscombe, p55
- 82. Elger, p124
- 83. Faith, p88
- 84. respondent M
- 85. The figure of 5000 is a best "guestimate". There are no official  
figures detailing the numbers employed in relevant occupations.
- 86. Rose, p50
- 87. Rose, p59
- 88. see Merton and Kendall
- 89. see Bucher et al.

## CHAPTER NINE

### The technological bases of recording.

In this chapter we shall consider a further facet of the social production of recording by examining the role of technology in its production. As the technology employed in production is itself a product of the social world, acting as an intermediary between social world and cultural product, it adds further support to our case for a social production perspective. We shall therefore examine first the place of technology in cultural production, referring back to Chapter Two where we reviewed Benjamin's work on the effect of mechanical reproduction on concepts of art and cultural production, and make use of the notion of the "technique" of cultural production. We shall then consider some of the factors influencing the form of technology adopted for particular purposes, and then review how decisions about the technology of the production of recordings, that have been taken for social, political and economic reasons, have subsequently shaped that production. This review leads towards a consideration of the central question of the chapter as a whole, namely, "What is a recording?" and to rival aesthetic explanations.

### Technology and cultural production

Walter Benjamin has reminded us how the technology of artistic production contains within it and reveals the social relations of that production. He writes, "Before I ask: how does a literary work stand in relation to the relationships of production of a period, I would like to ask: how does it stand (with)in them?" This question is aimed at the function that the work has within the literary relationships of



a period, what he calls its literary "technique".<sup>1</sup>

It is unfortunate that this last word has to stand for a German word "Technic" in the original and which does not translate easily into English. Benjamin uses it to denote the aesthetic technique of a work, but with considerable scientific and manufacturing connotations,<sup>2</sup> referring to the technical means of production of a work. He argues that the concept of "technique" offers an effective way of accessing a "materialist analysis" of production as it will embody social relations of production.

John Berger has used the same term in writing about oil painting, "The term (oil painting) . . . refers to more than a technique. It defines an art form."<sup>3</sup> He notes that although the techniques involved had been known for centuries, the oil painting itself was not developed until there was a need to use the technique to express a particular way of life.<sup>4</sup> He suggests that the oil painting is a visual expression of a social attitude, a peculiarly capitalist way of seeing the world, of reifying appearances.<sup>5</sup>

Our approach in this chapter draws on these sources. Firstly, we review the relationship between technology and cultural production.

#### Technology as a determinant

Eaves has argued<sup>6</sup> that technology, as a system of production, necessarily limits the freedom of action of the artist who must compromise if he is to gain a wider public as a benefit from machinery. The compromise is caused by the necessity of translating the principles of the art into the principles of the machine, and inevitably some detail will be lost in the interests of the uniformity needed by the machine.

He illustrates this, in general terms, with the example of writing which is ultimately the translation of auditory signs, namely speech - itself a translation of sensation and conception, into visual signs for communication over time or space with a loss of qualities such as pitch, volume, and gesture.<sup>7</sup> He applies this to the arts, arguing that in the arts, problems are caused by the limitations imposed by mechanical exigencies upon human creative thought<sup>8</sup> and suggesting that, for example, the writer is the "slave to the press" and must adjust accordingly.

We might characterise Eaves as tending towards "technological determinism" in his stress on the constraining rather than "enabling" features of technology. In its extreme form, technological determinism ascribes an autonomy to technology and technical change and development, viewing technology as analagous to natural phenomena and something to which the social and cultural world has to adapt. The social, political and economic determination of technology.

On the other hand, a characteristic of any technical problem is the availability of alternative solutions.<sup>9</sup> Although we can make a hole in a piece of wood by hand, with a hand drill, or with a power drill, we will choose a method depending on our resources and on whether speed, accuracy or quietness is important to us. Thus, although the general level of technology may be independently determined along a sequential path, in the sense that the steam mill necessarily follows both the hand mill and the production of cast iron cylinders, in specific applications design is determined by social criteria. These criteria are imprinted upon the technology with which we live.

Technological determinism is, therefore, an untenable notion because it substitutes for real social, political and economic intentions what Williams describes as either "the random autonomy of invention" or "an abstract human essence."<sup>10</sup> The real world, on the other hand, shows that "technology is at once an intention and an effect of a particular social order."<sup>11</sup>

Williams illustrates these intentions in his discussion of television, where he argues that the familiarity of the technology appears to make the social institution of broadcasting "predestined by the technology". It is, however, no more than a consequence of a series of particular social decisions. In the case of the capitalist democracies, these decisions were largely shaped by the economic and political considerations of investment by prospective manufacturers in distribution units, and the state's interest in communication. Hence, sound radio and television were developed for broadcasting to individual homes, although this was by no means an inevitable outcome of the technology.<sup>12</sup> The film industry, by way of contrast, has been freer of state control, and allowed to develop according to profit-making criteria.

Dickson contends that technological innovation is a manifestation of the needs of a dominant social class<sup>13</sup> and that explanations of innovation in economic terms of increased efficiency and productivity neutralises it, and obscures its essential concern with power and control. He uses a number of historical examples in the textiles and pottery industries to show that technological innovation was determined, not only by concern for the efficiency of production technology, but also by the requirements of a technology that

maintained authoritarian forms of discipline, hierarchical regimentation and fragmentation of the labour force.<sup>14</sup> Hence, he asserts, "the dominant forms of social organisation and control, under the mask of an appropriate ideology, become built into the technology of the time"<sup>15</sup>, so that modern technology represents a cumulative effect of these attitudes.

Technology, therefore, is the product of other social, economic and political forces; technological and scientific discoveries do not occur in a social vacuum, as scientific enquiries are always motivated directly or indirectly by social issues and the political and economic interests of powerful groups. However, notwithstanding this proviso, we would also argue, as both Eaves and Williams hint, that, as cultural products are essentially ideas transformed by technology into a concrete form, it is inevitable that to some extent the processes and various technical parameters of the materials used in this transformation are assimilated into the final form.

The social production perspective argues that one of the reasons for regarding cultural production as social is because social interests are mediated through these technical parameters. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, we propose to outline the major technological parameters of recording, their origins, and their social and aesthetic consequences.

#### What is a recording? The technique of the record.

The design of the technology used to duplicate sound recordings for eventual "reproduction", the familiar disc, was not the result of chance decisions, or of technical imperatives. Gramophone discs of

recorded sound and pre-recorded tapes satisfy a number of criteria for a commodotised entertainment industry; they can be manufactured and sold relatively cheaply, and in large quantities this can be made very profitable by economies of scale; they are semi-durable, and therefore the consumer purchases a longlasting good, but may be persuaded to seek replacements; they are portable, and cheaply and easily transported and stored. Lastly, and most importantly, discs of recorded sound could only be made by a process of manufacture that is difficult and costly to set up. This usefully hinders the entry into the market for discs of competitors who might engage in price competition, but more particularly, and what is sociologically important, distinguishes a social division of labour between producer and consumer, allowing producers to maintain control over recorded material, and hence over consumers.

This control of producers has recently been challenged by consumers using the newer technology of the blank magnetic recording cassette tape. The efforts of producers to combat this challenge by technical and legal means is testimony to its financial importance to them.<sup>16</sup>

The chosen manufacturing process also gives producers control over the type of sounds that are available. We have already reviewed in Chapter Seven the financial development of the recording industry which we placed in the context of the general increase in leisure time and disposable income of the working population, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. The sound recording as a cultural artifact, bears witness to these origins as an entertainment commodity. To paraphrase John Berger, the term "sound recording"

refers to more than a technique, it defines a cultural form that was developed only when there was a need for a particular way of listening.<sup>17</sup>

The initial impetus behind Edison's invention of a technique of sound recording in 1878 was the commercial potential of the market that a telephone manufacturing company perceived for a telephone repeater machine in government and business offices.<sup>18</sup> However, the market did not materialise and development stagnated. It is a sleight of hand to suggest that this was the source of the contemporary sound recording, as some recent accounts of the history of sound recording have done,<sup>19</sup> for Edison's recorders were designed to permit the operator to make his own recordings. We would argue on the other hand that the real source of the sound recording as a cultural artifact dates from Berliner's invention of the gramophone and pre-recorded discs in 1898. Gramophone manufacturers subsequently made sound recordings as a relatively cheap consumable good that would, by offering varied entertainment at home, encourage the public to purchase their own gramophones.

The sound recording as a cultural form is a socially constructed artifact whose origins, as a product of capitalist business, accounts both for its primary purpose as an object of consumption and for its technical form. It is a means of reifying, packaging and selling sounds. Certain technologies which have been used in recording production have become embodied in the sounds that are packaged and sold.

## The rise and fall of realism

In the earliest days of sound recording, both the recording industry and the public subscribed towards an ideal of realism, that is, that recordings should strive towards a faithful reproduction of the original performance; that what went into the recording machine should come out in exactly the same form at a later time.<sup>20</sup> Given our knowledge of the state of the art then, this was a perfectly reasonable and not unambitious objective.

The range of sound capable of reproduction is one measurable dimension where we can trace a path of consistent development and improvement in the quality of recorded sound. This improvement is an important background to other innovations. The earliest phonographs of Edison had given only the barest approximation to human speech, but progress in improving this was steady, if slow. In the first decade of this century, the quality of reproduction had been so poor that almost any room sufficed for recording (which offered some advantages) and it was normally necessary to rearrange a composer's instrumentation to bring the accompaniment within the limited range of the recording process.

Technical advances in improving the quality of sound reproduction or the manageability of the storage medium in the period until the 1920s were slow by modern standards. We may attribute this to the relatively limited financial resources available to firms in the industry. Recording was profitable, although not excessively so, and it is likely that this did not encourage risky investment.

At the most advanced stage of acoustic recording, a full symphony orchestra could be recorded without substituting instruments,

and the acoustic properties of the recording room could begin to be taken into account, although the frequency range remained limited to between E and triple C (164 - 2088cs.) compared with the 60 - 8,000cs. range of most music. This meant that neither the low notes were reproduced, nor were the overtones. Recorded music acquired a "metallic" sound and lost much of its flavour.

A contributory reason for the rapid diffusion in the late 1920s of electrical recording equipment and techniques adapted from radio broadcasting, was the noticeable improvement offered in the frequency range of sound reproduced. Musical recordings were still somewhat deficient in bass and treble with a frequency range of from 100 to 5,000cs., but quite good enough to pick up the ambience of the recording room.

By 1950, when the whole range of sound audible to the human ear (25 - 20,000cs.) could be recorded and reproduced by magnetic tape it might have been thought that the sound engineer's aims of a faithful reproduction of an original performance had been achieved. However, improving fidelity and electrical recording techniques had, ironically, the opposite effect, for they showed clearly to those who had not already appreciated it, that sound fidelity was only one component of a sound recording, which was not simply the technical reproduction of a given spectrum of the frequency range. These advances in the physical reproduction of sounds have made it clear that the ideals of fidelity and realism in sound recording are chimeras. Successive technical developments which have appeared to improve sound reproduction have, instead, increased the difference between sound recording and sound reproduction. As Read and Welch



write, "The old idea of preserving or storing up . . . gave way to the creation of calculated effects, of a specious and spurious type of reproduction."<sup>21</sup>

### Replicable art

We have noted in Chapter Two Walter Benjamin's argument that the possibility of mechanical reproduction fundamentally altered the meaning of art. He also pointed out that the possibilities of mechanical reproduction have sometimes been taken a logical step further, for in some cases the art-works themselves are indistinguishable from the artifacts called "reproductions", which should, by definition, be dependent on them. Then, multiple copies are made from a master copy, so there is no original, no unique artifact with the aura and authenticity of an original, no artifact with a better pedigree than any other. It is clearly inappropriate to continue to regard these artifacts as "art" in the traditional meaning of that term, with its associated concepts of authenticity and aura, or indeed, as "reproductions" of art.

Benjamin predicts that where works of art are habitually reproduced, they will become, under the inevitable pressure of events, "designed for reproducibility"<sup>22</sup>, or replicable art. The objective in making replicable art is not to make a single work of art whose value derives from its uniqueness, but to make a large number of identical artifacts for mass sale in the market place. A step is removed from traditional methods of reproduction, which presuppose the existence of an original of which the reproduction is the copy. "Process" reproduction such as this results in not one original, but ten, a thousand or tens of thousands of identical artifacts - each one an

original only in the sense that it does not replicate an earlier form.

This can be illustrated in the domestic example of the difference between cooking a meal for one person and cooking for a dinner party. The latter requires, say, eight meals which have been made with this end in mind using methods and quantities appropriate for eight servings, rather than making one meal eight times. Hence, there is no original.

The concept of replicable art, art made for reproduction, is particularly apposite for sound recordings. We would argue that the various technological, social and economic pressures have acted in a way to bring about this development. The idea of a contemporary musical recording as a reproduction of a real musical event is not tenable as, using multi-track magnetic tape recording, the final recording is assembled and "reconstructed" from a number of fragments, and so there is no "original" of which that published recording can be a reproduction. Indeed a significant amount of popular music has never existed in a prerecorded stage, being created as it was being recorded, or as a unique combination of previously recorded pieces first heard together during editing. Many recordings today are made with the circumstances of reproduction uppermost in mind, either on the radio, or for domestic listening. This represents a considerable change since sound recordings were first made; we now propose to consider some of these factors further.

#### A collage of perfect details

Contemporary recording techniques are intimately related to the use for recording of magnetic tape. However, it is not a necessary consequence of using magnetic tape that recordings should be

constructed out of fragments of recorded sound, nor does magnetic tape, notwithstanding its almost universal use, offer the only possible means of storing sounds.

The ease with which magnetic tape can be edited offers immense aesthetic opportunities, and its use has become a hallmark of recording today. Once the rudimentary editing facility was refined, sound recording was freed from limitations imposed by real time and real place, as temporally and/or spatially separated fragments of recording could be spliced together, and presented as apparently one complete sequential piece.

The technology of magnetic tape recording has been developed in a way that maximises its usefulness and effectiveness for sound editing. The single track tape recorder of the 1940s was succeeded by tape recorders with two tracks offering stereo recording in the 1950s. Editing was feasible to a limited extent, although there is evidence that, in general, recording engineers did not really take advantage of the new opportunities offered by this technology until it was further developed in the four track tape recorders in the mid- 1960s. Subsequent developments, mainly initiated as we have noted, by studios competing for a share of a burgeoning business, led to the availability and use of eight, 16, 32 and more, synchronous tracks of tape for recording. The use of magnetic tape enables recording personnel to make numerous artificial modifications to sound sources during recording as a means of widening the range of aesthetic choices, and to construct finished recordings from individual segments recorded at different times, each of which can be modified in isolation.

Recording personnel have chosen to use the facilities to ensure that the finished product includes only what they consider to be the best possible recorded performances. Many fragments are separately recorded and re-recorded a number of times. This search for a "perfection" is a prominent feature in the process of recording, and has implications for the questions of reproduction and illusion. "Perfection" is not an absolute quality, but a subjective judgement on the part of the artistic arbiter about the relationship between what has been recorded and what might have been intended. Recording is one of a number of cultural products where production personnel are seeking to achieve a perfection, for it is a phenomenon that occurs wherever there is the opportunity to scrutinise the work.

As a sound recording may be subject to considered attention over a period of time recording personnel are concerned to present a finished work that is as good as they feel they are able to put together with all the technical resources at their disposal. Recording personnel also put a high premium on the technique and musical competence shown in a recording, feeling that musical "errors", sounds that are incompatible with our cultural expectations and understandings of what is musical, tend to become prominent over a period of repeated listening. The end result is, in Sennett's phrase<sup>23</sup>, a "collage of perfect details".

Although the constructed recording may have the appearance of a performance, comprising as it does a sequential beginning, middle and end, it does not have the substance of one, that is, an uninterrupted sequence by the same musicians from start to finish and held together by a musical and emotional flow rather than by musical logic. It

offers, therefore, an illusion that it is a reproduction of a real event.

### Illusion

Illusion is fundamental to studio recording. We have referred to the illusion of the recorded "performance" constructed out of perfected fragments. There are other, minor, illusions which attempt to persuade the listener he is hearing something other than what was recorded in the studio, and in different locations and spatial relationships to those actually existing there.

From the early acoustic days, recording personnel have relied on aural illusion for aesthetic effect. The following eyewitness account of an orchestral recording session at Columbia's London studio in about 1911 illustrates a number of pertinent points. "In the recording room . . . there were a number of small platforms of varying heights, each large enough to hold a chair and a musical stand. The piano, always an upright, had its back removed. The Stroh violins were nearest to the horn. Muted strings were never mentioned. The French Horns, having to direct the bells of their instruments towards the recording horn, would turn their backs on it, and were provided with mirrors in which they could watch the conductor. The tuba was positioned right back away from the horn and his bell turned away from it; he also watched in a mirror. The big drum never entered a recording room . . ."24

It is evident from this account that, even then recording personnel were not solely concerned with the reproduction of reality. Their adaptations of musical instruments and orchestral layout were not solely intended to minimise the limitations of the rudimentary

recording equipment but also to create an illusion, to give an impression of what an orchestra might have sounded like. They were using their expertise at two levels, firstly to store as faithfully as possible the sounds made in the recording room, and secondly, to adapt these sounds at source so they would project an impression about what was actually being recorded. In this example, it seems that it was being pretended that a small orchestra was being recorded.

In contemporary recording practice electronic enhancements or synthesisers may be used to imply the presence of musicians or instruments that were not actually present when recording took place.

Recordings also incorporate illusions about location and spatial relationships. In acoustic, mechanical recording, sound was gathered at one point in a recording horn and transferred mechanically onto a storage medium - a soft disc or cylinder on which a moving stylus made indentations corresponding to the sound energy. The procedure was reversed for replaying, with the sound diffused through another horn. Hence as sound was both collected and distributed from the one point, there were no practical or perceptual difficulties about location.

The introduction into sound recording of electrical broadcasting microphones had two important consequences, firstly it meant that the sound source could be remote from the recording unit, and secondly, that more than one microphone could be used to gather the sounds, which could be fed into the one storage medium.

The essence of electrical recording is that changes in sound pressure caused by sound energy are transformed into changes in electrical current which are relayed by wire from the collecting source to the point where, like the acoustic techniques it replaced,

they were transferred to a storage medium. The essential difference between electrical and acoustic reproduction was that in the latter the sounds would be diffused from a speaker connected electrically rather than physically with the storage medium.

The gathering of sounds by spatially separated microphones and their reproduction from one point overturned the single focus of acoustic recording. Electrically recorded sound is now a synthesis, which on replaying, projects an illusion.

A synthesis is created of sounds collected at different points but recorded together so that on "reproduction" they are heard as if they were all collected at the same point. As each sound is collected separately, and can be amplified if necessary, it need not even be of such a sufficient volume to be heard above other sounds when recorded, for it can be amplified electronically before being added to the other sounds. The most important factor for the final recording is the putting together of the varying sound sources, and the relative volume of each sound in that synthesis. An arbitrary sound balance has to be created, its task being to support the suggestion of performance it purports to represent.

The illusion is that the synthesised sound is one that existed in its own right and that a listener could have heard had he gone to the right place. Indeed part of the illusion is that a recording unit had gone there on the listener's behalf and had recorded what it had heard. We have called it an illusion, because it is physically impossible for this to have happened.

Stereo reproduction aims to project an illusion of a preferred spatial relationship between recorded sound sources as each sound,

whatever the location of its source, is individually located on a two dimensional plane. The use of stereo may be justified for marketing reasons on the grounds of greater fidelity, but its practical use is to enhance the illusion of recordings and make them more attractive to purchasers/listeners.

A related locational illusion is the ambience of a recorded sound which is used as a convention to indicate the type of environment in which the recorded sound is purported to have been heard.

One of the consequences of being able to record and reproduce the whole range of audible sound is that the location of the recording becomes a distinguishable component in the recorded sound of a musical instrument or voice. The ambience of a sound, that is, those qualities of the sound which derive from the acoustic environment in which it is made are not easily distinguishable in the natural state, but once recorded and then "reproduced" in a different acoustic environment, become very clear. Thus, while offering a number of aesthetic opportunities, it also introduces problems for recording personnel. For if the ambience and timbre of a sound source are recorded, it is indissolubly "placed" in a specific environment. A piano, for example, will sound different in a small carpeted and curtained room, than in a large hall where there is likely to be reverberation or other extraneous sound intermingled with "pure" piano sounds.

In the mid-1920s, under the influence of contemporary radio broadcasting, recording personnel began to use their ability to incorporate the ambience of the recording room into recordings. It was no accident, therefore, that an aesthetic was developed that "in



the guise of science (presented) the illusion of hearing as though in a distant concert hall . . . as a great advance in the technics of sound reproduction."<sup>25</sup>

To achieve this, music was recorded in large halls, in some cases with an audience present. The impression deliberately created was that the listener was hearing a radio broadcast, with the advantage of choosing the musical programme. (Radio sound quality was, for a long time, much superior to the quality of recorded sound.) Radio, itself, at that time pretended that the listener was a witness to the original event.

Clearly, this is not the only way to present recorded music. An alternative aesthetic was developed later that suggested an intimacy between musician and listener, performer and audience, by emphasising the proximity of the musical source to the listener by virtually cutting out ambient sound. When first developed in opposition to the "radio" aesthetic, the style it incorporated was known as "crooning". Subsequently, it has become the basis for the preferred sound in popular music. The use of multi-track magnetic tape has reinforced and sustained this aesthetic as it is more difficult to manipulate recorded sounds incorporating various ambiances in a way that sounds credible.

Today, most popular music recording in the studio is routinely undertaken in a non-ambient environment which may be almost total, as a "dead" sound is regarded as a base from which other sounds may be more easily treated and adjusted and to which fragments may be added. The illusion fostered is that the listener is in the same room as the person(s) making the recorded sounds. It is an aesthetic that has

become strengthened by its osmosis into the working practices of musicians and sound engineers in the recording industry.

A "live" ambience, either real or electronically created is conventionally used to suggest recordings apparently made in a concert hall. Much "classical" music is contemporarily recorded in a way that aims to suggest that the music is "heard" in a concert hall. If actually recorded in one, its natural ambience will not be disguised. Alternatively, large recording studios will be used where musicians can play together and all sounds can be collected by a small number of microphones, together with any ambience.

#### The illusion of the "live" recording

There is a genre of popular music recording which does have the elements of a real performance. The "live" recording is ostensibly based on actuality, typically a concert, and claims to offer a reproduction of that event yet, even here, the finished recording offers only an illusion of a reproduction, neatly illustrating some of the technical compromises that must be made.

Firstly there are technical biases in the recording equipment interfering in the reproduction of actuality. In practical terms, any item of recording equipment, be it microphone, recording medium, amplifier or speaker cannot exactly reproduce original sound, as it will have various strengths, emphases and weaknesses related to the technical parameters of the material used in its construction. Recording engineers may be able to make choices about the equipment they use, and the way they use them. This has always been the case in recording. Moore quotes a sound engineer with knowledge of acoustic recording, "Acoustic techniques were personal and subjective:

recorders used their own favourite "sound boxes"; they might even have several, one for each sort of assignment - piano, voice, orchestra etc."<sup>26</sup>

Microphones do not work in the same way as the human organ they attempt to copy, and therefore, in the presence of the same aural phenomena, may not "hear" in the same way as the human ear. Similarly, in visual recording, the camera will "see" things in different ways to the human eye. Human eyes are not uniformly the same. Some are short-sighted, for example, while others are colour-blind. We are perhaps more familiar with the mechanical biases incorporated in the camera, than we are with those of sound recording. Our culture accepts that these biases do not necessarily render the camera inferior to the human eye, for in a number of ways, even without the intelligence that supports the human eye, it has superior sight. Scharf has pointed out,<sup>27</sup> for example, that the freezing of the image, while losing the fluidity and wholeness of movement has enabled observation of the previously unobservable, inaccessible or unrepeatable. Different camera lenses offer varying perceptions and insights that can extend our knowledge of conventionally observed phenomena.

Secondly, by using more than one microphone to collect the sound its "real" balance is inevitably destroyed. Sound sources are isolated as far as possible, to enable electronic enhancement and sound balancing to take place, and are thus not as they would be heard by a listener at the event. Additionally, the microphones set at arbitrary distances from the sound sources permanently "place" that sound in an acoustic environment. Multi-microphone techniques imitate

the physically impossible by "hearing" simultaneously in more than one place. A new and artificial synthesis will be created in its place.

A further dimension of artificiality arises from expectations that sound recordings available in the market should not include extraneous noises, and should be of a consistently clear quality. In order to achieve this, sound recordings are normally "posed" and undertaken in special places to isolate sound sources from possible interference. Hence, the actuality that the recording seeks to represent is not a real event, but a "pseudo-event"<sup>28</sup>, existing only for recording.

These technical reasons preventing a recording from being a reproduction of a performance are not the only reasons why a performance cannot be properly reproduced. A live performance in front of an audience is not only made up of musical notes, but also includes the aura of a performer, the rapport that he establishes with his audience, and the overall sound impression created. Musical "errors" are overlooked in the context of the piece as a whole. Indeed, it is likely that listeners will not notice errors in technique as any errors will be outweighed by their impression of the piece considered as a whole. As performed music disappears as it is played, there is no chance of returning to confirm or refute an error. Sennett has commented on this aspect of live performance, "the essence of live performance is that no matter what mistakes one makes one keeps going. Unless one has great presence and great public esteem, to stop in the middle of a piece and begin again is an unforgiveable sin."<sup>29</sup>

There is excitement and tension at a live performance before an audience, felt both by the performer, and to a lesser extent, by the

audience. The performer may be concerned to maintain a reputation, and may be worried about his ability to tackle a difficult piece, or to retain the sympathy of an audience. The audience may share these concerns, hoping to avoid embarrassment and any disturbance to their image of the performer. There may be an element of trade-off between a performer's technique, and his ability to win over and enthrall an audience, but a performer is generally judged to be successful or not, good or bad, by the reaction of an audience.

#### Technological innovation in recording.

The technique of the production of recording is clearly dependent on industrial technology. We have referred in passing to some of the major technical innovations in recording. They have had a profound effect, not only on the cultural artifact, the recording, but also on the practice of the production of recording. At the same time, it is equally evident that the general pace and direction of innovation has been set, as we would expect, by social and political interests, and recording personnel have only exerted a smaller influence in choosing from a limited range of pre-selected options.

Until comparatively recently, the recording industry was so small in commercial terms, that technological development of the equipment it used was dictated by the needs of other industries, such as public and commercial broadcasting, the military, and the cinema, and the recording industry has adopted these when it was convenient to do so. It seems clear that one of the impetuses behind technological developments has been economic, as innovations have been adopted as a means of furthering inter- or intra-industry competition by enhancing

the attractions of recordings in the face of competition likely to threaten profitability.

The two major technological innovations which have had the most profound impact on the production of recordings and the aesthetics of recorded music were both developed for quite different reasons by other industries, and in both cases appear to have been introduced into the recording studio for these economic reasons. While the basic technology of electrical recording had been developed during the 1st World War, and derived from wireless telegraphy and the discovery of the thermionic valve, the specific impetus for introducing the electrical microphone into sound recording came in the U.S. from declining market performance in competition with radio offering "free" entertainment and much better sound quality.

We have already noted the much improved sound quality of electrically recorded discs. Electrical techniques also widened the range of recordings possible by, for example, allowing recordings to be made with mobile recording units standing outside concert halls or other buildings, an innovation that obviated the need for performers to go to a studio to make recordings, or for companies to build studios suitable for all the types of recordings they wanted to make.

Magnetic tape was developed into a usable form for sound recording by the military during the second world war for radio propaganda and intelligence purposes, having been originally developed, although not really applied, for round-the-clock broadcasting. It was also brought into the recording studio for production work primarily as a means, again, of improving the attractions of gramophone records by a wider range of sound

reproduction and a lengthier period of recording. However, as we shall note, it also had a number of other advantages over the methods it replaced, being more manageable and robust, requiring fewer expert technicians to operate, and saving costs on performers.

In more recent years, the size, resources, and expectations of the recording industry have multiplied, and it has been able to finance technological inventions in recording which have had few applications outside the recording studio. Innovations such as increased multi-track facilities, computer assisted mixing, and a myriad of electronic means to enhance sounds, have been introduced into studios as part of the competition between capital groupings, between studios competing for customers for their recording services.

#### Technology and the social relations of recording.

The choice and design of productive technology is in the hands of capital, and we should, therefore, expect technology to be shaped to meet its needs. Not only can it be a powerful tool in reinforcing the control of capital, but in doing so it makes clear the real social relations of production which may have been concealed.

Technological innovation in the recording studio has been consistent with the argument that the introduction of new technology is invariably for the purposes of increasing control over the workforce.<sup>30</sup> The workforce in recording has never been large, and so controlling it has not been perceived as a major problem but may nevertheless be thought desirable.

The technology of recording makes more easily apparent the real social relationships of production. A clear indicator of where

effective control lies in the studio is seen in the design of the recording console; one noticeable feature of recording has been the gradual consolidation of its control over recording sessions. Situated in the aptly named control room, it has been developed from a device used in early broadcasting to balance sounds from different microphones, and has now become the focus of recording activity as all information is routed through it, and peripheral equipment directed from it. Hence, effective direction of a recording session is inevitably in the hands of the operators of the console, the engineer and producer, and through them, capital.

The modern console is also designed to minimise labour costs by enabling one person, normally the engineer, to operate it. Within the last decade, the installation in some studios of computer assisted mixing has enabled one operator to carry out highly sophisticated procedures which would otherwise require assistance.

Magnetic tape, too, while generally rationalised as offering improved technical reproduction and a wider range of aesthetic possibilities, also had the useful effect of enhancing the control of capital over performers, musicians, and engineers. Firstly, it became possible to isolate individual contributions, and therefore substitute them if necessary; secondly, less specialist engineering skills were required to achieve an acceptable result; and thirdly, it was potentially much less costly, because disruptions such as a cough or unacceptable musical technique could be simply edited out without the necessity to repeat the whole "performance". This greatly reduced the opportunity of performers to influence events in the studio.



Many recording personnel appear to have an ambivalence towards the recording technology provided by capital for their use, and the associated recording techniques which are most suited to the idea of perfection, what we might call a "recording" aesthetic. This aesthetic conveniently justifies the various technical innovations, a primary purpose of which has been to increase the control of capital over other recording personnel. It also has the useful secondary attribute of encouraging consumer investment in more complex and sophisticated "reproduction" equipment.

In contemporary recording practice we can discern an alternative, competing "performance" aesthetic which stresses the values of expression and emotionality or "feel", emphasising the performance aspect. It allows recording personnel to regard a recording, notwithstanding the technology, as a form of performance which is creative and artistic, rather than as a commodity constructed for the market-place at the behest and under the direction of capital.

### Conclusion

In this chapter we have furthered our sociological understanding of the production of recordings by considering the role of technology in production. Firstly, it is clear that recording, and the mass production of recordings have simultaneously led to both a standardisation of aesthetic experience, for all listeners are exposed to the same sounds, and a widening of aesthetic experiences, by making available to a public representations of existing sounds which were formerly inaccessible as well as new ways of hearing sounds.

Secondly, the specific technology used in any production work is chosen by particular social interests, and will inevitably reflect their priorities. The case of recording is no exception to this general case, and we see a technology in use that was appropriate to competing in the market for commodotised leisure, and would maximise the control of capital over other participants in recording, while minimising direct money costs. These priorities become manifest in the particular way of hearing that recordings represent, as the chosen technology becomes embedded in recordings both through the constraints of various technical parameters, and through the effect of different aesthetics which are intimately linked to it.

Thirdly, we highlighted three rival aesthetics of recorded music, competing answers to the questions of what a recording, and valid musical experiences are, or should be. In the early days of recording, the dominant aesthetic was that a recording should aim to be a reproduction of reality, and aesthetic success was measured against this yardstick. This became increasingly untenable as it became clear that successive technical developments, in widening the range of reproduced sounds, were highlighting the place of illusion in recordings, rather than realism, and a rival aesthetic emerged that celebrated the technical and musical "perfection" now made possible in recorded music. A third aesthetic, which emphasised "performance" values and the individual contribution of the performer in opposition to this emphasis on technical sophistication and the control it offers was also distinguished.

Footnotes to Chapter Nine.

1. Benjamin 1970c, p85
2. Benjamin 1970c, p85, footnote 1
3. Berger, p84
4. Berger, p87
5. Berger, p87
6. see Eaves
7. Eaves, p903-4
8. Eaves, p904
9. see Melman
10. Williams 1974, p130
11. Williams 1974, p128
12. see Williams 1974, pp23-26
13. Dickson, p63
14. Dickson, p64
15. Dickson, p64
16. It is claimed that in the U.K. the recording industry "failed to reach its full potential and achieved sales of only 2/3 of the level which could have been expected"; and that "lost sales" would have had a retail value of over £200m. per annum. BPI 1982, p41
17. see above, and Berger, p84
18. This Chapter relies heavily for information about technical developments on Borwick, 1977a, and 1977b; Cook; Gelatt; B. Lane, 1975 and 1977; Moore; Read and Welch; Rust; Townsend.
19. associated with the centenary see Borwick, 1970 for example
20. Read and Welch, p237
21. Read and Welch, p238
22. see Benjamin, 1970c
23. Sennett, p291
24. Herbert C. Ridout in "The Gramophone" 1940, quoted in Gelatt, p134-5
25. Read and Welch, p238
26. Moore, p175
27. Scharf, Chapter 9, p212ff; also Benjamin, 1970c, p387
28. Boorstin, p21
29. Sennett, p291
30. see Dickson

## CHAPTER TEN

### Conclusion

We have set out to analyse the social relations of the production of recorded music as a means to answering such questions as Who makes recordings? How do they do so? What is a recording? Why are recordings as they are?

What we have called the "conventional sociology of art" is prevented by its own positivist premises from accounting for the special problems posed by the recording of popular music. The assumptions it makes about cultural production are ideological in origin and lead it towards a one-sided view of creative activity which locates creativity in the imagination of a special individual, and is unable to accommodate a number of features prominent in recording, specifically commoditisation, changes in the technology of cultural production and the prevalence of atelier-type production.

Some recent developments in Marxism, Art History, Feminism, and American Interactionism suggest how a sociology of cultural production can overcome some of these difficulties associated with the positivist perspective. In different ways each stress and demonstrate how the role of artist is socially constructed. We noted that Wolff had drawn together some of the strands we would wish to follow as a "social production" perspective which places the cultural artifact as the end product of a complex creative practise contributed to by social, economic and ideological factors.

The institutions of the social context in which cultural production takes place shape that production by structuring the concepts of creativity within which it is framed. Aesthetics are

socially constructed and categorised and, in a bourgeois, class stratified society, are correspondingly stratified in a horizontal way. Cultural markets are especially important in constructing these concepts of creativity in a specific way, and the recording industry is led by its adoption of a star system to present the notion of the creative individual.

What we have referred to as the "cultural context" is embedded in the production of recordings in two ways. Firstly, at an underlying structural level, recorded popular music tends towards implicit and communal forms as it is made for a public whose own culture emphasises these factors. Secondly, the concept of the "cultural legacy" describes and illustrates an influential effect on recording, namely the way in which recordings are produced in relation to the spaces created and examples set by earlier work in the same genre.

The financial and economic context in which cultural products such as recordings are made has a primary and distinct effect on production. The business of producing and distributing recordings was developed in a favourable economic and business climate. It has since grown and developed in a pattern characteristic of other cultural products, becoming enmeshed in a wider international communications industry. The effects of the business structure and economic relations of a capitalist industry become part of the production process through their impact via differential budgetting on the content and availability of recordings.

Recordings also reflect wider societal concerns through their incorporation of the exigencies of the work organisation of production. Recordings are produced within organisations whose structures show a

social division of labour characteristic of capitalist economic relations. The typical structure of the work organisation for the production of recordings which has developed in response to the specific socio-economic, technical and ideological context of recording permits the recording personnel involved to exercise varying amounts of discretion. It was argued that, in consequence, the artistic division of labour was negotiable and contested. Recording personnel were able to exploit their position, and from time to time usurp the role of decision maker on aesthetic matters from the producer.

The technology of recording, as of any cultural product, has been developed in response to specific social and economic pressures, to which it acts as a medium. The technology of recording reflects and practices these concerns, especially the social priorities characteristic of capitalism, control over labour, and the minimising of direct costs, and mediates their inclusion in the production of recordings. Subsequent recordings are made using this technology. Differing aesthetics have been developed which adopt these socio-economic imperatives.

It is our argument that these various factors cumulatively justify our adoption of a social production approach to the production of recordings, as the only satisfactory way of accounting for the real sources of creativity and what we believe to be its social genesis.

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