



# THE POPULAR ARTS

With a new  
introduction by  
**Richard Dyer**

Stuart Hall  
& Paddy Whannel

## THE POPULAR ARTS

STUART HALL: SELECTED WRITINGS

*A series edited by Catherine Hall and Bill Schwarz*

*The* **P** *opular* **A** *rts*  
*Stuart Hall*  
*and*  
*Paddy Whannel*

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# Introduction to the 2018 Edition

Richard Dyer

The really popular is almost worthless—this applies to newspapers, music, art and most activities except football, horse-racing, and other forms of sport. The trouble about a democratic age . . . is that it generates a strong prejudice against imposing anything on people. [ . . . ] But of course the imposing goes on all the same. The educational system, the churches, the B.B.C. still, all in their ways attempt to raise the masses to the level of the middle class.

Today it is hardly incendiary to admire Raymond Chandler, Billie Holiday and Miles Davis, or John Ford and Gene Kelly, as Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel do in *The Popular Arts*.<sup>1</sup> When the book was published in 1964, however, it was in a context represented by the view above, quoted by Whannel (1958: 34) from a front page article in the *Times Educational Supplement*.<sup>2</sup> *The Popular Arts* sought to counter such views, feeling its way toward a critical position within rather than against popular culture. It is poised on the cusp between a tradition of cultural critique that preceded it, Arnold and Leavis by way of Hoggart and Williams, and the cultural and film studies that were to come. Perhaps somewhat neglected subsequently, it nonetheless constituted a vital and engaging stage in the emergence of the latter pair.

Hall and Whannel explicitly place themselves (*PA* 15) in a wave of writing emblemized by the work of Raymond Williams (1958, 1960, 1962) and Richard Hoggart (1957).<sup>3</sup> This is also both how *The Popular Arts* was taken up in the initial response (“This is another book in the tradition of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams,” “emphasis falls on what might crudely be called the Hoggart-Williams approach to contemporary culture”) and placed in later accounts (e.g., Turner 1990: 67–68; Procter 2004: 19–24).<sup>4</sup> Other books of this wave commonly adduced include *The Making of the English Working Class*



(Thompson 1963), *Music in a New Found Land* (Mellers 1964), *Discrimination and Popular Culture* (Thompson 1964), and *Understanding the Mass Media* (Tucker 1966).<sup>5</sup>

Behind these is a tradition of engagement with culture, which Williams himself had traced, in his *Culture and Society* (1958), back to the mid-eighteenth century. It is a tradition grounded in philosophical and literary writings, and crucial among these, as far as *The Popular Arts* is concerned, are those of F. R. and Q. D. Leavis, and the journal *Scrutiny* with which they were identified. These critics had established (or been taken to establish) the study of literature—but really English—as the vehicle for developing a critical engagement with life and society. Literary works were evaluated for the ethical depth and complexity made possible for the reader, not in the sense of teaching moral lessons but through involvement in a work's depiction of life. This entailed paying detailed and sustained attention to the literary work. These two elements—the ethical evaluation of a work, the full attention to its properties—are guiding assumptions of *The Popular Arts*.

Although F. R. Leavis had no admiration or enthusiasm for popular art, he had in 1933 collaborated with Denys Thompson on a book, *Culture and Environment*, which at least addressed popular culture in detail. Thompson would go on to edit the collection indicated above, *Discrimination and Popular Culture*. Q. D. Leavis was likewise no fan of such culture, but her *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) scrutinized popular fiction in a serious and systematic way and realized that readers' pleasure in it mattered. Like a scattering of others noted by Hall and Whannel (e.g., de Rougemont 1939; Eliot 1948; Rosenberg and White 1957; James 1963) including some specifically dealing with film (e.g., Wolfenstein and Leites 1950; Balázs 1952;<sup>6</sup> Kracauer 1947; Morin 1960; Warshow 1962), the Leavises and *Scrutiny* had addressed themselves seriously to the popular arts and new media, and in 1959 Whannel even declared that “what the cinema needs is a Leavis” (Whannel 1959a: 30). In an interview in 2009, Hall noted that Whannel comes out of—he's not a Leavisite in a narrow sense—but he

comes out of that tradition of attention to these words in this order, which is very much the T. S. Eliot, Leavis tradition . . .

that kind of close criticism applied to popular culture was really what he was wanting to do, and that was sort of what I was wanting to do at that stage too. (Hall with Jaggi 2009: 24<sup>7</sup>)

With Terry Bolas in March 2004, Hall was more circumspect, suggesting the Leavisite vocabulary was more strategic, “mindful of the strong influence of Leavis among English teachers,” the latter the initial target audience. The Leavisite quality of *The Popular Arts* was widely perceived at the time (the book “offers a number of particularised judgements in the Leavisian spirit . . . within the field of mass civilisation itself” (Bantock 1967: 162)) and in later, historicising accounts (the Thompson collection and *The Popular Arts* “constitute the last significant episode in the *Scrutiny* tradition of cultural criticism” (Hilliard 2012: 174)).

The Leavisite pressure, but also moves beyond it, can be felt in a number of elements. The overall project of the book echoes the subtitle of Leavis and Thompson’s *Culture and Environment*, namely *The Training of Critical Awareness*, as well as Thompson’s collection: “We should be seeking to train a more demanding audience” (*PA* 35), “It is . . . on a training in discrimination that we should place our emphasis” (*PA* 37).

The Leavisis’ stress on a full engagement with the detail of the object of study is several times reiterated, albeit in relation to texts in media they would not have considered: “generalizations are really only useful . . . when supported by reference to detailed examples” (*PA* 14–15), “there is a difference, surely, between vague opinion and the considered view based on close analysis” (*PA* 35)—that “surely” the same rhetorical device as the famous Leavisite phrase for forwarding critical debate, “this is so, isn’t it?” Much of *The Popular Arts* puts into practice this dictum of close attention. In a discussion of a furore occasioned by the scene of Nancy’s murder in a television adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, Hall and Whannel insist that the only way to come to terms with it is to address “the actual presentation and handling of the episode” (*PA* 115); similarly, in discussing changes in the tropes of romantic fiction they argue that it is not “the simple presence of these themes, tensions and experiences which deserves

attention, it is the way in which, in each period, they are being handled" (PA 169). The stress on the specificities of the text at hand is not to be formalist, but always about how they shape a perception of the world, and offer a response to it. In this too Hall and Whannel are Leavisite, even quoting F. R. approvingly at one point: "a serious interest in literature can[not] confine itself to the kind of intensive local analysis associated with "practical criticism" [ . . . ]: a real literary interest is an interest in man, society and civilization" (PA 40).<sup>8</sup>

Training in "discrimination" implies the making of value judgments. Hall in 2009 noted that *The Popular Arts* "was still at the point of being fascinated by value judgments, recognizing that we were applying critical procedures which had developed in relation to serious literature and high culture and philosophy to the underground culture" (Hall with Jaggi 2009: 25<sup>9</sup>) and Hall and Whannel note their intention to focus in their discussion of examples on "work of some quality, material with the power to last" (PA 15). Some of the terms of judgement are recognizably Leavisite, notably the opposition of the authentic with the meretricious, the latter a key term in the period indicating not just superficiality but something easily and immediately pleasing, as if ease and immediacy are themselves reprehensible. Elsewhere notions such as originality, intensity, and subtlety as well as crudity and the ersatz are deployed. At other points, however, other less evidently Leavisite criteria peep out. Raymond Chandler is valued over Spillane and Ian Fleming by the modernist yardstick of self-reflexivity: "Chandler never disguised the conventions of his form [and] is continually reminding the reader of them" (PA 160), "He inverts the thriller conventions, draws attention to their artificiality" (PA 163). They value the arts they consider for their very modernity, their use of new technologies, their accord with the world as it is now: the cinema, notably, "is a *modern* medium, not simply because it belongs to an advanced technological stage in society, but because its characteristic forms—its immediacy, its continual shifts of focus and perspective—are themselves aspects of the modern sensibility" (PA 46).

In one of their statements of intent, the authors observe: "A true training in discrimination is concerned with pleasure" (PA 38). The move to pleasure marks an extension, even a break with, the

Leavisite purview. There is sometimes a direct embrace of pleasure: “there will always be a need for films that merely affirm, which offer a fantasy of delight and genuine release in a celebration, rather than a criticism, of life” (*PA* 224). Sometimes, as in the discussion of the novels of Mickey Spillane, the embrace is more cagey. The account of the way the pleasures of sex and violence are conveyed is detailed and evocative (*PA* 143–151) and they conclude (*PA* 151):

As one ploughs through a succession of novels in which the elements of the form are crudely welded together, with the drool of pleasure of the supposed readers already written into the novel, one begins to develop a perverse respect for Spillane himself. At least, in his novels, the incidents are given some pattern overall by Hammer’s philosophy of life, repellent though it may be. Moreover, they are written with a certain cold-hearted gusto and drive.

Here a Leavisite negativity (“ploughs through,” “crudely,” “drool”) gives way to a version of the positive notion of organic form (the narrative pattern is given a wider sense by the underlying worldview) and winds up in affective enthusiasm (“gusto and drive”—even the “cold-hearted” is a way of being more precise about the feeling quality of the work). This is not unabashed, postmodern hedonism, nor is it dismissive of or unresponsive to the pleasures of violence and nastiness. They are less equivocal in their discussion of romantic fiction in Chapter 7, noting the collapse of issues of honor that inform classic works such as those of Richardson, Austen, Brontë, and D. H. Lawrence, “leaving the reader [in contemporary romances] totally exposed to the events [which] give them their full sensational impact,” with “sensational” here by no means used enthusiastically. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that they wrote about such fiction at all, and seriously and in detail, and much of their argument concerns the implications for women’s emancipation. Their discussion was published eleven years after the first translation of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*<sup>10</sup> and only a year after Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, with its critique of romantic fiction, and it seems to anticipate the debates over pleasure, romance, and pornography that were to be so central to second-wave feminism less than ten years later.

Important as the Leavisite dimension is to *The Popular Arts*, there are also other, more immediate contexts that shaped and distinguished it, political, pedagogical, disciplinarian, and personal.

*The Popular Arts* was also a New Left project. In addition to its rejection of the imperialism and authoritarianism of much actually existing socialism, the New Left had sought to break with the economic reductionism of the established left, seeing cultural issues, in the broadest sense, as at least as determinant and important. Its chief organ was first (1957–59) *Universities and Left Review* and then from 1960 *New Left Review*. Hall and Whannel had both contributed to the former, and then Hall edited the first twelve issues (1960–62) of the latter and Whannel wrote for it and was on the advisory board. In the editorial to the first edition, Hall made clear the importance of popular culture (Hall 1960: 1):

The purpose of discussing the cinema or teen-age culture in *NLR* is not to show that, in some modish way, we are keeping up with the times. These are directly relevant to the imaginative resistances of people who have to live within capitalism—the growing points of social discontent, the projections of deeply-felt needs.

*The Popular Arts* is shot through with just such a sense of social urgency about popular culture, of it mattering.

The actual coverage of the popular arts in *New Left Review* was little. There was an article by Whannel with Brian Groombridge about pop music that was at times (Groombridge and Whannel 1960b: 52) bilious (“noise of an unbelievable ugliness is wrung from saxophones and guitars with sadistic cruelty and finally processed in the laboratory”), elsewhere (ibid.: 53) open to its possibilities (“The response to the surly aggressiveness of Presley contains within itself valuable sources of non-conformism”), a veering found in *The Popular Arts*. Whannel contributed to a supplement on television that was addressed to the Pilkington Committee, reporting on the state and future of television (and to which Richard Hoggart made a decisive contribution), and here (Coppard et al. 1961: 35–36) popular culture was strongly spoken up for:

It is only when the concept of popular culture is treated with the respect—and enthusiasm—it deserves, and when the same care, seriousness, awareness of the human dignity of the audience that is apparent in a few of the best “minority” programmes spreads through the whole range of production, that we are likely to get good television in this country.

In an article titled “The New Frontier” in the eighth issue of *New Left Review* (Hall 1961), Hall stressed the centrality of education to a new socialist politics, and *The Popular Arts* very clearly places itself on this political frontier. Hall and Whannel had both been secondary school teachers; at the time of writing Hall was teaching film and media at Chelsea College of Science and Technology as a supplementary subject to students taking largely vocational courses, and Whannel was the Education Officer at the British Film Institute (BFI) and traveling the country speaking on film mainly within an adult education context.<sup>11</sup> Whannel had co-organized an eight-day forum at the National Film Theatre in London on “The Visual Persuaders,” linking the BFI’s educational work with social, cultural, and intellectual debates of the day (see Bolas 2012: 136), and had been involved in shaping the agenda of a conference held by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) in 1960 under the title “Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility,” which had identified the importance of addressing popular media in education.

*The Popular Arts* was originally intended as a handbook for teaching popular culture in schools, and its last eighty pages (not reproduced here) consisted of curriculum and classroom plans and guidance on reading and audiovisual teaching materials. The book begins by referencing the authors’ experience of teaching in secondary modern schools.<sup>12</sup> The first chapter engages with the concerns expressed in the resolution produced by the NUT conference and other institutionally based statements such as the Nuffield Foundation television inquiry in 1958, conducted by Hilda Himmelweit and published as *Television and the Child*, the Crowther Report 1959, produced for the Central Advisory Council for Education and dealing with educational provision for fifteen to eighteen year olds, and the pamphlet,

*Sex and Violence in Modern Media*, published by the Educational Institute of Scotland in 1961. What all these share is an anxiety about popular media and young people, a panic related not only to a long established worry about the power of the media over young minds in general but more specifically the appeal of what were seen as newly forceful and available forms of media presentations of sex and violence, not least in the culture surrounding rock 'n' roll and the emergent social category of the teenager.

The general urgency of *The Popular Arts*'s concern with popular culture is intensified and darkened by this background, an example of what social scientists would come to call a "moral panic." This term was used probably first by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media* (1964) and taken up in the early seventies by Jock Young (1971) and Stan Cohen (1972); Hall and Whannel do not use the term, but there is clearly a germ here of some of Hall's most celebrated later collaborative work on youth cultures (e.g., Hall and Jefferson 1975; Hall et al. 1976). At points in *The Popular Arts* there are echoes of the concern signaled in Hall's *Universities and Left Review* article, "Politics of Adolescence?," where young people are not the problem but perhaps a glimpse of the solution to society's ills. "Instinctively, young people are radical," he argues. "They may understand superficially: but they feel in depth" (Hall 1959: 2), and he gives a rather moving evocation of an intuitive hatred among young people of the class system and bland politics. In *The Popular Arts*, young people are seen as "pioneering" about sexual morality (*PA* 273), and teenage culture as a "contradictory mixture of the authentic and the manufactured" (*PA* 276).

Some commentators emphasize this strand in the book, and it is certainly important to note its prescient presence, but it seems overstating the case to argue that "Hall and Whannel emphasized how young men from working-class backgrounds developed forms of cultural expression that enabled them to resist commercial culture" (Horowitz 2012: 235). The book is rather more propelled by the teacherly concern over how to respond to the wider worry about young people. On the whole Hall and Whannel are not enthusiastic about teen romance magazines or rock 'n' roll, but they have a

teacher's, and new left activist's, commitment to starting from where people are, a concern "not with the giving of knowledge but with the evaluating of experience," as Whannel put it at the NUT conference.<sup>13</sup> The wrinkle in the approach is that implicitly the authors hope that pupils will come to the same evaluations as them and learn to prefer a better—and older—popular culture than the ones they prefer at present, that is, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra rather than Adam Faith and the Twist.

Toward the end of *The Popular Arts* (394–395), Hall and Whannel surmise that "cinema might be given separate and specialist treatment," away from a general popular arts curriculum, for its special "quality of achievement" and at any rate the beginnings of a developed aesthetics. Whannel at the time was developing the education department at the British Film Institute, sometimes defining it as an "academy in waiting," preparing the ground for film as a discipline to be taken up in the universities (see Bolas 2009: 145–146). Hall was not only teaching film, including in extramural classes and for the British Film Institute (BFI) as well as at Chelsea College; he also contributed an account of doing so to a booklet, *Film Teaching*, edited by Whannel and Peter Harcourt (Hall 1964). The bulk of this essay is what would become, and still is, standard material in introductory film studies courses, looking at what was then called the "language of the cinema"; in the first part however, Hall states (p. 11) that what he understands film studies to be about is the training of intelligence and sensibility, explicitly citing F. R. Leavis and saying the only difference is that he is applying these precepts to film, while toward the end he turns away from the then canonical cinema he has so far drawn on (Eisenstein, *Twelve Angry Men*, Wajda) to the matter of popular cinema. He argues (p. 26) that it is not enough just to consider the work of the great directors:

The study of cinema would be wholly incomplete without that great body of work, done in the most popular forms, and reaching far wider audiences. This takes us into the realm of the commercial cinema proper; and, of course, a great deal of trash has been produced there. But can one understand the full potential



of the medium until one has accounted for the real qualities of some westerns, some thrillers, some comedies, and some musicals? For these are where the cinema has been *fully* creative—making out of unpromising material and debased conventions a quite original contribution to the art form. (Emphasis in original.)

Here it is not, as in *The Popular Arts*, a question of bringing out the artistic quality in popular works, but rather the centrality of the popular to understanding and appreciating the film medium itself. Given the commitment of both Hall and Whannel to film as film, it's not surprising that *The Popular Arts* should give a special place to it.<sup>14</sup> Only jazz is of equal importance, and lovingly as it is written about, the perennial problem of how to write rigorously about music, and a fortiori popular music, is probably what holds the authors back from advocating it too as worthy of "separate and specialist treatment."<sup>15</sup>

The enthusiasm for film and jazz in *The Popular Arts* stems partly from a modernist embrace of a new medium or form, but also directly from Paddy's and Stuart's love of them.<sup>16</sup> This is one of the personal elements that made the character of the book possible. However much it is informed by a sense of the political and pedagogical importance of their subject, it is not merely dutiful. They themselves, and others who knew them, have attested to their unabashed delight in jazz and Hollywood movies. Stuart came at jazz more through contemporary jazz and learnt much about the earlier history from Paddy ("He liked mainstream, and I liked modern jazz . . . I really discovered Billie Holiday with him").<sup>17</sup> As for Hollywood, Stuart recalled, "I always had a passionate addiction to the movies and . . . as a youth in Kingston, I saw on Saturday afternoon matinees at the Carib Theatre everything from Hollywood that found its way to Jamaica [ . . . ] This passion continued in Oxford. We often went to the cinema two or three times a week."<sup>18</sup> Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey (Mulvey and Wollen 2008: 219), who knew Paddy at the BFI, both stress the difference between him and Hoggart and Williams because "he loved Hollywood cinema" (Wollen). Mulvey (*ibid.*) suggests that standing up for Hollywood was also "a provocative stand against dominant

cultural values”; somewhat similarly, David Horowitz (2012: 243) speculates that watching Hollywood films in Jamaica was perhaps for Stuart “a counterweight to British influence.”

The readiness to remain true to their pleasure in the popular cultural forms of their childhood and youth may also have been made possible from the fact that both were inside outsiders, people in established positions with a fair degree of cultural capital and yet for different reasons somewhat displaced from inhabiting those positions straightforwardly. Stuart was an Oxford graduate about to take up a position in a major red-brick university, but also a Jamaican in the United Kingdom, from a family that was among the upper echelons of Jamaican society but who was now living in a country that largely did not recognize such niceties in its attitudes toward black and immigrant peoples. Paddy was Scottish but working in London; he had worked as a projectionist on leaving school at age fifteen and got back into education after the war, earning a teaching diploma from Alnwick College of Education in 1946 and a diploma in art history from the University of London in 1948. Both had been teachers but in the least prestigious parts of the secondary and tertiary education sectors. Quite apart from their socialist convictions (probably less outlandish then than in post-Blair Britain), they were influential, established, and socially skilled men who nonetheless carried histories and experiences that enabled them to speak outside of conventional lines and embrace the culture that had also made them.

*The Popular Arts* had a mixed reception on publication. The British press, tabloids and broadsheets alike, tended to scorn the absurdity of taking popular culture seriously, though the educational and left-wing journals were more welcoming. Later commentators have praised it as a significant step toward the serious engagement with the popular (it “remains one of the most diverse and sustained accounts of popular culture ever written” (Procter 2004: 19)) and film in particular (it “was the first book to use what you might call a theoretical approach to a subject that had no academic standing” (Mulvey and Wollen 2008: 218)). Yet there is generally a feeling that the Leavisite legacy sometimes results in “a degree of elitism” (Procter 2004: 23). Indeed there are occasionally surprising formulations (“It

would, of course, be foolish to make large claims for this popular culture” (*PA* 40), “The best cinema—like most advanced jazz—seems to push towards high art: average films or pop music are processed mass art” (*PA* 78)) and a palpable dislike throughout of the popular press, most television, and advertising. Even cinema, “by far the most mature and expressive” form of popular art, “cannot be compared to literature either in volume or *quality of achievement*” (ibid., my italics), and jazz “is still—compared with the classical forms—a simple music” (*PA* 72). The notions of originality, newness, and surprise that Hall and Whannel deploy at points are argued to prevent them valuing convention, repetition, and familiarity, characteristics of popular (and also classical) aesthetics (see Turner 1990: 67–68); Eric Hobsbawm, in a teasing contemporary review, suggested that they simply hadn’t come to terms with the fact of the industrialization of culture.<sup>19</sup>

The impact of *The Popular Arts* beyond the United Kingdom is hard to determine. In most countries, even English-speaking ones, by the time cultural studies had been discovered, it was Hoggart and Williams who constituted the founding texts.<sup>20</sup> It was translated and published in Italy in a series (“Cultura e Società”) edited by Richard Hoggart and Fernando Ferrara, part of the development of cultural studies within English studies at the “Orientale” in Naples and used there in research and teaching for many years.<sup>21</sup> This was, as far as I can tell, the only language into which it was ever translated. In an article published in 1987, Karin Barber argued that *The Popular Arts* could offer “a promising application to African arts” (p. 71), implying that it was not in fact already a known text.

The book was published by Pantheon in the United States, perhaps a few months after its appearance in the United Kingdom and with an additional subtitle—*A Critical Guide to the Mass Media*—that registers the already considerable presence of mass media research in the United States while holding on to a humanistic notion of analysis. An early review by Roger Brown of the University of Illinois noted that “although a good deal of the output examined is British rather than American, anyone interested in improving his critical awareness of this sort of material ought to benefit from working carefully through the distinctions that are made” (1965: 430). A similar

enthusiasm, yet with the sense of a need to take into account geocultural difference, was registered ten years later by Richard E. Barbieri in an article in *The English Journal*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English. Arguing that the emergence of “Pop culture [is] not only a growing but an eminently worthwhile field for students and teachers,” he observed, “Though British, [*The Popular Arts*] contains much of value for American culture, and its teacher orientation, strong rationale, specific curriculum suggestions and excellent annotated bibliography make it a prime resource” (1976: 35).

A quick trawl of national and university libraries in Anglophone countries indicates that the book is in their holdings, often in both the British and American editions. The former ran to three editions. However, a history has yet to be written about how it was taken up, either by individual scholars in their work or in curricula and syllabi. Although Whannel himself published little after *The Popular Arts* (and died in 1980 at the age of fifty-eight), the book clearly informed the thinking of many of the film studies graduates at Northwestern in his time. Jane Feuer (1980, 1982), for instance, draws on Hall and Whannel to discuss the complex position of the Hollywood musical between folk art and mass art, while Jerome Delamater (1976, 1981) linked the work of Busby Berkeley with that of the French surrealists, thus placing a mass cultural product unapologetically in the context of canonical avant-garde ones.

For Grant Farred (2007: 85), *The Popular Arts* is a text “that has long since fallen into disuse, if not disrepute”; for David Horowitz (2012: 235) it is “a landmark book on mass media, albeit one to which scholars have paid relatively little attention.” Philip Bounds (2016: 100), on the other hand, refers to it as a “seminal investigation.” Farred and Horowitz are probably right to say that it has been to a considerable extent forgotten, except by those with an interest in the history of cultural studies, but, if it is hard to show in a precise way its influence on later work, Bounds may also be right to discern already in it much that followed.

The book’s title words, which accurately state its contents, also cue some of the ambiguities of its legacy. The notion of the popular it pursues situates it between folk, autochthonously produced culture

of the people, and mass, centralized, production line culture. The former has all but disappeared from Western societies (and Hall and Whannel are wary of sentimentalizing it), the latter seeks to hold sway. Somewhere between can be discerned cultural production that is still rooted in ordinary people's lives and experiences, even though produced within a commercial imperative and on a large scale. Chandler, Chaplin, Miles Davis, John Ford, Billie Holiday, Gene Kelly, Marie Lloyd, and *Z Cars* are among the examples of "the really popular work" (*PA* 78) the authors seek out. This particular notion has fallen into desuetude, although it did inform the popular culture course that ran at the UK's Open University from 1982 to 1987, led by Tony Bennett under Hall's aegis. What remains on the agenda is the popular as an issue, the notion evoking as it does both the autochthonous ("jazz is of the people," *PA* 73) and the box office and how we are to pick our way through these opposed notions.<sup>22</sup>

Farred (2007: 96) observes that *The Popular Arts* introduces "the vexed and difficult issue of the aesthetic into cultural studies." Much of the trajectory of cultural studies qua cultural studies seems to be a move away from the implications of the "arts" of the book's title, though if one considers the latter in relation to film studies and musicology, its prescience is striking. Partly through the way that Whannel's involvement in the development of film studies in the United Kingdom and the United States shaped the discipline, the contours of an aesthetics of popular art emerge: genre, star, representation (supplemented by authorship, a notion implicit but unexplored in *The Popular Arts*). These concerns have been extended and modified in later years with work looking beyond Hollywood, notably and rather late in the day at Hindi cinema as well as the popular cinemas of Africa, South America, Asia, and Europe. Similar trajectories might be traced in musicology (see Laing 1994) and art history (the latter often in its reinvention as "visual culture"), although literary and television studies seem to have made less headway, the former wary of the popular, the latter of art.

Seen from the perspective of departments, journals, and publishers, lists of cultural studies, *The Popular Arts* seems part of a pre-history of the discipline offering only passages and glimpses of what was to

follow. Seen in relation to developments in arts and humanities disciplines in the past fifty years, and with its ethics wearing identity politics garb, its paradigms of popular aesthetics are ubiquitous. Everyone's doing cultural studies now, something suggested by the way the word "studies" is appended to so many disciplines. And not only. Broadsheet newspapers, weekly and monthly journals of comment, museums, niche TV and radio stations (think, to take only British examples, of *The Observer*, the Victoria and Albert Museum, Radio 4, Sky Arts), all routinely take popular culture seriously along the lines set out by Hall and Whannel. When I began rereading *The Popular Arts* for the purposes of this introduction and its place in an edition of Hall's work, it seemed to open up a path not taken; now looking around I wonder where it did not lead.

## NOTES

1. Reference citations in the text will use the abbreviation *PA*.
2. Published in response to a forum organized by the Joint Council for Education through Art.
3. It is not stated in the book whether or which parts of *The Popular Arts* are more the work of one or the other man. Garry Whannel has a copy of the book, almost certainly his father's, with chapters initialed as follows: 1. The Media and Society, PW; 2. Minority Art Folk Art and Popular Art, SH; 3. Popular Art and Mass Culture, SH; 4. Popular Forms and Popular Artists, SH/PW; 5. Violence on the Screen, SH; 6. The Avenging Angel, PW/SH; 7. Falling in Love, SH; 8. Fantasy and Romance, PW; 9. Friends and Neighbours, SH; 10. The Young Audience, PW; 11. The Big Bazaar, SH; 12. The Institutions, PW; 13. Mass Society: Critics and Defenders, PW; 14. The Curriculum and the Popular Arts, PW. In a much later interview Hall referred to "my chapter on advertising . . . Paddy Whannel's chapter on the Western" (Hall with Jaggi 2009: 25). As noted elsewhere, there are echoes of Hall's writings on adolescence in the book, and David Horowitz (2012: 238–242) shows how many of the topics covered in it were also covered by Whannel writing a regular column for the NUT journal *The Teacher* from 1962 to 1966 under the rubric "Albert Casey's Entertainment Guide" (the pseudonym a reference to one of his jazz favorites, the guitarist Al Casey).
4. Quotations in parentheses are from Flew (1964: 876) and Coleman (1964) respectively.

5. Bolas (2009: 112) notes that Tucker had seen *The Popular Arts* in manuscript.
6. See Carter (2010) for the relation of this book to Balázs's original publications.
7. I am grateful to Marina Vitale for drawing my attention to this interview.
8. The quotation is from Leavis (1952: 200).
9. It is clear in the context that by "underground" here Hall means popular mass culture, not the avant-garde.
10. First published in France in 1949 (*Le Deuxième sexe*. Paris: Gallimard), first English translation, by Howard Parshley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).
11. On the importance of adult education for the development of cultural studies, see Steele (1997). In a review of *The Popular Arts* in the journal *Adult Education*, Roy Shaw described the BFI Education Department as "one of the most off-beat extra-mural departments in the country, and quite the most adventurous in the past decade."
12. In the prevalent two-tier system, secondary modern schools were more vocationally, and less academically, oriented. Part of Hall's agenda in "The New Frontier" is the abolition of this system in favor of comprehensive schools.
13. This is from a verbatim report of the conference published by the National Union of Teachers, quoted here from Bolas (2009: 103).
14. For further discussion of the privileging of film in *The Popular Arts*, see Farred (2007: 92).
15. In a review of Francis Newton's *The Jazz Scene* in *Universities and Left Review*, Whannel (1959b: 70) did urge educationists to take jazz into consideration, "not because I want to see our schools setting up courses on the story of jazz [ . . . ] but because an understanding of the urban popular arts will help us to get the task of teaching in a better focus."
16. Stuart Hall was my PhD supervisor and we remained friends until his death. Paddy Whannel facilitated my PhD thesis by okaying the private screening of an unusually large number of musicals for me at the BFI (in pre-video days) and acting as the external examiner on it. I met him only a couple of times, as he moved to Northwestern University in 1971. Rereading *The Popular Arts* now I am astonished—and rather embarrassed—to realize just how much a child I am of it, without quite realizing it. Much of what I have written—on entertainment, musicals, stars, thrills—is all there in embryo and yet I must have so imbibed it and made it mine that I nowhere formally registered the fact.
17. From an unpublished interview with Bill Schwarz.
18. Ibid.
19. Storey (2000: 55) draws attention to the modernist implications of the authors' use of the term "surprise." The Hobsbawm quote was published in

- the *Times Literary Supplement*, 3277, December 17, 1964, reprinted in Hobsbawm (2013: 261–271); I am grateful to Rosalind Brunt for drawing this to my attention.
20. I am grateful to Graeme Turner, Tom Waugh, Anu Koivunen, Maxime Cervulle, Erica Carter, and Jane Gaines and Ted Striphas for discussion of the mainly non-presence of *The Popular Arts* in, respectively, Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, and the United States.
  21. Hall and Whannel (1970). My thanks to Martina Vitale for discussing this with me.
  22. The introduction by Ginette Vincendeau and myself to our collection on popular European cinema exemplifies this (Dyer and Vincendeau 1992). In seeking to wrest European film from both art house and national cinema problematics, we were treading in Hall and Whannel's footsteps.

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## THE POPULAR ARTS

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## Introduction

The origins of this book can be traced back to the period when we were both teaching in secondary modern schools. This is a sobering experience for any teacher—a time in which he is made acutely aware of the conflict between the norms and expectations of formal education and the complexities of the real world which children and young people inhabit. Some attempt on our part to come to terms with those areas of life and experience which did not fall within the boundaries of ‘education’ naturally led to many discussions about their cultural and leisure interests. At the same time we felt an urgent need, as teachers, to bring into relation with the concerns of the school our own interests in some of the modern arts, especially the cinema and jazz. During the succeeding years we have been lecturing on and arguing about the cinema and the mass media with a variety of audiences—film societies, teacher training colleges, youth clubs and youth leaders, adult education classes, students in further and higher education. The arguments in this book grew directly out of that experience.

In recent years there has developed an interest in the social and cultural aspects of the mass media. This is both a debate about the media themselves—about the place and nature of art and communication—and about, broadly, the ‘quality of life’ in our society. Naturally we have been involved with both aspects of this debate—with the general discussion about cultural change, and with the problems of relating these topics directly to the classroom. Our original intention was to produce a book which could have been used by a teacher who already had some idea of what he was trying to do in this field. This would have contained

examples with some guidelines for discussion, together with lists of available materials—a practical handbook. But the more we looked at the problem, the clearer it became to us that the gap between the general debate and the classroom was still too wide.

We have therefore produced a book which tries to bridge this gap. We have not tried to advance general and theoretical arguments about 'mass culture', the 'mass society' or 'mass communication'. On the other hand, this book cannot be used directly with a class, though we move some way towards this by proposing a number of teaching projects, and by offering sources and materials and a selective reference section which we hope can be of immediate service to teachers. But the book is now aimed more widely—to the teacher and the educationist, of course, but also to the general reader who is concerned about these problems in an 'educational' sense, using the term in its broadest context. Thus we have dealt with a wide range of material, but our selection of themes has been guided by their educational relevance. We have discussed a host of examples, but we have paid attention to those which might have special meaning and significance for a young audience. Where we have touched on the more general or theoretical aspects of the problem, we have tried to give the discussion an educational slant. In the central section, where we make a critical examination of various examples of material offered by the media, grouped in terms of particular themes, we have tried to suggest connections and to conduct the critical argument in such a way as to indicate the educational approach which we believe ought to underpin any work in this area. Both the detailed examples and the extensive use of quotations and references to other work will, we hope, suggest particular teaching approaches, though we have reserved more practical proposals for the end.

One of the problems facing anyone writing about the mass media is that so much of the material is ephemeral. The danger of going rapidly out of date could have been avoided by writing in more general terms, but this is precisely the approach which we believe to be least helpful; generalizations are really only useful in

this field when supported by reference to detailed examples: already, far too much written on this subject has behind it nothing of the direct response to watching a film, or the actual experience of listening to a pop song or looking at television. The risk that these references will be wasted because the material is often so weak and transient is somewhat minimized by the approach adopted, since within each of the themes discussed we have stressed work of some quality, material with the power to last. This is not an opportunist tactic; it is central to the main thesis of the book. In terms of actual quality (and it is with this, rather than with 'effects', that we are principally concerned) the struggle between what is good and worth while and what is shoddy and debased is not a struggle *against* the modern forms of communication, but a conflict *within* these media. Our concern is with the difficulty which most of us experience in distinguishing the one from the other, particularly when we are dealing with new media, new means of expression, in a new, and often confusing, social and cultural situation. This book attempts to develop a critical method for handling these problems of value and evaluation in the media. We have had, of course, to deal extensively with inferior work, but even when the specific examples discussed may soon vanish, the formulae on which they are based are likely to remain for some time.

The debt we owe to many writers in this field is recognized in the use we have made of their ideas in our argument and the direct references we have made to their work in our text. Our hope is that the reader will study this body of work for himself. But we wish to make specific reference here to the work of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams. They have made a major contribution to this whole debate, and our debt, directly and indirectly, to them is immense. We have gained a great deal from discussions with colleagues engaged in lecturing, teaching and writing about the media, especially Brian Groombridge, Alan Lovell, Peter Harcourt, Lawrence Burton, Boleslaw Sulik, Jim Kitses, Laurie Stenhouse, Anne Mercer, Norman Fruchter and Roy Knight. We owe another kind of debt to those who have



sponsored classes, courses, seminars and discussions in this area, and who were bold enough to encourage and initiate work before the subject itself had become so popular: in particular, Stanley Reed of the British Film Institute, Fred Flower, Principal of Kingsway Day College, Gerald Collier, Principal of the College of the Venerable Bede, Durham, and Norman Arnold, Principal Lecturer in Liberal Studies at the Chelsea College of Science. The chapter on the thriller novel was strengthened by access to an unpublished study by Harold Silver. We are especially grateful to Roy Shaw, Graham Martin and Marghanita Laski for the valuable criticisms and suggestions they made to us during the early stages of writing. Our thanks are due to Jeannie Semple, Barbara Negri and Brenda Davies for checking some of the factual details, to Margaret Shields for helping with the bibliography and to Charles Marshall for making detailed corrections to the manuscript. We should like to acknowledge the immense amount of work, time and energy put into the project by Kay Whannel and Suzy Benghiat, who typed numerous drafts and collected many of the examples. With Garry Whannel, now aged fourteen and a sharper television critic than the authors, they watched more bad TV programmes, suffered more noisy records and sat through more bad films than even the most dedicated critics ought to expect.

Finally, we owe a great deal to Ann Howgate of Hutchinson, who did some ruthless editorial work on a first draft and made many useful criticisms at all stages of writing, and to John Stevens who accepted with such calm the fact that he commissioned one book and received another.

PW and SH

PART ONE

Definitions

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## I

# The Media and Society

I have only reached the stage of firmly opting for any straight hour's worth of mass-culture in preference to again being told about it.

KINGSLEY AMIS, *Encounter*, July 1960

The story is told of an ancient tribe whose people lived a comfortable and unchanging existence. The children of the tribe were brought up in the traditions of their fathers and were taught how to fish in clear streams and how to hunt the sabre-toothed tiger. Then the snows came and the streams became muddy and the sabre-toothed tiger moved south. But the tribe preserved their traditional ways. They cleared a small part of the stream so that the children could continue to fish, and they stuffed a tiger's head so that they could learn to hunt. Then a radical young tribesman approached the council and asked why, instead, the children were not taught to fish in muddy streams and hunt the polar bear, which had recently begun to ravage the villages. But the council was angry. 'We have always taught how to fish in clear streams and how to hunt the sabre-toothed tiger. These are the classical disciplines. Besides,' they added, 'the curriculum is overcrowded.'

In recent years two social changes have excited considerable comment and controversy in the educational world. The first is the revolution in communications brought about by the development of sound recording, cinematography, sound broadcasting and television, and the use of these media to provide information, art and entertainment. The second is the change in the attitudes of young people—the so-called 'teenage' revolution—which has been particularly marked since the end of the war.

The first is the direct outcome of the industrial revolution—the application of the techniques of multiple transmission and wide dissemination to the printed word and the reproduced sound and image. This technical transformation has been paralleled by a general growth in democracy and the spread of literacy. Yet the process has been a long and continuous one: it began with the invention of printing. The second is a more recent development and can be identified, not so much with the industrial revolution as a whole, but rather with one particular phase of that revolution—the phase of high consumption and increased leisure which has become a feature of some societies in the middle of this century. During this phase a widespread change in attitudes and style reveals itself among the younger generation—a change which reflects partly their enhanced economic status and partly the changing design of social values in the society as a whole.

Increasingly we are coming to see how the two processes interact. At the simplest level the media do touch the lives of a great number of people in the society. If we take the coverage of sound radio, the two television services, the national press and the sale of magazines and popular papers, and the cinema distribution chains, we have *four* major national communication grids—variable, it is true, for different parts of the country, but covering roughly every area to some degree, and every sector of the community. More particularly, the increased spending power of the younger generation, and the development of something approaching a discernible ‘youth culture’, means that a fairly direct connection can be made between the younger generation and the media. In some fields the media are sustained economically by the adolescent market, and much of the material communicated is intended for that age group. The media provide young people with information and ideas about the society into which they are maturing. They can test few of these descriptions and interpretations against their own experience. At the deeper level, the use of the media to provide imaginative experiences through various forms of art and entertainment has a modifying impact upon young people’s attitudes and values.

These changes cannot be held apart from education. They are bound to alter its character and modify its content and may even force us to re-examine its aims. Part of the teacher's task is to give his pupils some understanding of the world in which they live. But the media are changing the world in ways important enough for a study of these changes to become part of formal education. More than that; the attitudes of young people are changing. They mature earlier, in some ways their response is more sophisticated, and they are more acutely conscious of the differences between the world of the classroom and that of work and leisure. This alters their expectations of, and their attitudes towards, education. Changes are involved, therefore, not only in what we teach but in how we teach.

There is, in fact, a growing recognition that the media of mass communication play such a significant role in society, and especially in the lives of young people, that the school must embrace the study of their organization, content and impact. But there is little agreement about how such studies should be carried out. Just what shall be studied? With what precise purpose? In what relationship to the established subjects? Ultimately the answer will depend upon our attitude towards these media, our social thinking about the kind of society in which they wield their influence and, in particular, our response to the things the media offer—individual films, television programmes, popular songs, etc.

Many teachers feel that the media represent a threat to standards and traditional values. 'School and home', said Sir Ronald Gould, Secretary of the National Union of Teachers, 'are often oases constantly threatened by the surrounding desert.' It is easy to see how this attitude has developed. The teacher is at the point of interaction between many conflicting social and cultural pressures. He may regard education as justifying itself, a means towards securing individual fulfilment, but he will be made aware of the social pressures for education to provide 'good citizens' or 'skilled producers', and he will be conscious of the fact that for many of his pupils what they are taught seems little related either to their emotional needs or to the kind of work they are likely to

do. He is asked to be the guardian of a cultural tradition to which he does not always wholly belong. As the entry to the teaching profession widens, we see new tensions arising—tensions between the teacher's own background (which may be closer to that of his pupils than he would care to admit), the goals of the professional class to which he is a newcomer, and the culture of the school. The last of these no longer represents the coherent body of knowledge and standards it once did. The cultural map is no longer so clearly defined. The older culture has been put under pressure, not only from the new media, but also from the art and experiment of the *avant-garde*. But with the erosion of the old academic standards how is he to distinguish what is really new and original from the meretricious? How is he to separate the real line of continuity in culture from the many *ersatz* offerings? How is he to distinguish serious intellectual work from mere shifts in taste and fashion? An intellectual minority works to clarify the situation but is itself subject to the same confusions, and its concerns and debates frequently seem remote from the insistent demands of the classroom. Given this situation (which many training colleges have all too inadequately prepared him for) the teacher has to fend for himself, with the result that much that is taught in the school is an uncertain mixture of the progressive and the middlebrow.

These problems are intensified by the material situation—the out-of-date buildings, the understaffed schools, the overcrowded classrooms. Such conditions add to the psychological strain of teaching and intensify the teacher's feeling that the society has left him rather unmercifully exposed, that the community is unwilling to accord him the status and rewards he deserves. Experiencing this clash of values, uncertain of his place in society and of the traditional role of teaching, his task appears the more difficult because of the vigorously publicized products of the entertainments industry which appear, at times, so completely to engage the attention of his pupils. In his response to the new media there is considerable justice in the teacher's antagonism. Much that is produced under the name of 'entertainment' is

shoddy and third-rate, and some of it is profoundly debased. Yet one can understand Kingsley Amis's remark (at the head of this chapter). So much of the criticism against the mass media seems uninformed, the attacks mis-directed, at times little more than an outburst of irritation and anger at a *whole* situation, where the products of the media serve as a scapegoat.

If we are going to deal adequately with the problem as it affects the classroom we must define it carefully; even the more considered statements contain assumptions that should be carefully examined. These assumptions appear to group themselves around three broad and seemingly contradictory approaches. As an example of the first approach we might take the Resolution passed at the NUT Annual Conference in 1960:

Conference whilst recognizing the vital part played by teachers in developing the moral and cultural standards of the nation and its children, considers that this is a task in which others must co-operate.

Although today more young people than ever are actively engaged in intellectual pursuits and appreciate or participate in the creation of art, literature, music or drama, Conference believes that a determined effort must be made to counteract the debasement of standards which result from the misuse of press, radio, cinema and television; the deliberate exploitation of violence and sex; and the calculated appeal to self-interest.

It calls especially upon those who use and control the media of mass communication, and upon parents, to support the efforts of teachers in an attempt to prevent the conflict which too often arises between the values inculcated in the classroom and those encountered by young people in the world outside.

This was an important Resolution. It was the first time the issue had arisen in such a form at a major conference and it led directly to the NUT Special Conference, *Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility*, which attempted intelligently to bring together teachers, critics, controllers of the media and creative artists working within them. But it is unfortunate that the Resolution puts the entire blame on the providers. The prime responsibility of the providers should, of course, be clear. Nevertheless,



it would have been encouraging if the Resolution had recognized that teaching has a more positive role, and that there are educational inadequacies to account for as well. No doubt if the Conference had listed the 'values inculcated in the classroom' they would have been unexceptionable. However, we could benefit from a more precise statement of what those values are, and of how they have stood the passage of time. And there is surely something to say about the *way* those values are handled, and of what often prevents them from making a serious impact upon young people. It is not only that these values are under pressure from newer, perhaps more meretricious, ones. It is that they are often handled in such a way that they fail to connect. They are offered as valid because they fell within a tradition, not because they are still active and alive and relate to contemporary experience. One of the reasons why the Special Conference itself was only a partial success was that many teachers present were too eager to think in terms of censorship and control, to defend the *restrictionist* approach, and to attribute to education a purely passive role.

In this respect the terms used in the Crowther Report are preferable:

There is undoubtedly a duty on those who wield such great power to use it responsibly. That is a matter for the whole community, and not especially for educationalists. There is also in our view a duty on those who are charged with the responsibility for education to see that teenagers, who are at the most insecure and suggestible stage of their lives, are not suddenly exposed to the full force of the 'mass media' without some counterbalancing assistance.

The Crowther Report does establish a better balance of blame than the NUT Resolution. But a more fundamental objection can be made to both statements in the way they define the problem itself. Both passages imply a clear distinction between the two cultures—the culture of the mass media and the traditional culture of the sophisticated arts. And both see these as standing in opposition to each other.

The language of the Crowther Report is that of threat and menace—young people ‘exposed to the full force of the mass media’. In the NUT Resolution, the ‘counter-balancing assistance’ is defined exclusively in terms of the traditional culture—‘art, literature, music or drama’. The opposition is expressed in even sharper form in a Report on *Sex and Violence in Modern Media* published by the Educational Institute of Scotland:

It should not be forgotten that while sales of ‘pop’ music grow so do sales of records of good music, and the increasing attendance of teenagers at classical concerts is no less a sign of the times than the yelling bobby-soxers waiting at the stage door for their latest rock-and-roll idol. The theatre too in Scotland, though not exactly flourishing, is in a healthier condition than it has been for some years. From these and other indications of a vigorous cultural life we conclude that many of the younger generation are well able to find worth-while leisure interests for themselves.

‘Pop’ music is seen here as universally the opposite of—implicitly the enemy of—‘good’ music. There is no recognition that popular music is of different kinds which vary in achievement and aim, or that each may have its own standards. ‘Pop’ here may well cover anything from jazz to dance music: ‘good’ music anything from the light classics to Bach. Much of this kind of writing is too generalized to be useful. It is not really in touch with its subject. The use of an old-fashioned term, ‘bobby-soxer’, is as revealing as the way some educational journals still use the word ‘crooner’.

It would be unfair to suggest, however, that either the NUT Resolution or the Educational Institute betray an outright and unqualified hostility to the mass media. The NUT Resolution refers rather to the ‘mis-use of press, radio, cinema and television’. Even so, the *right* use goes unstated. The tone of the Resolution suggests a rather narrow definition; we suspect it would be improving and didactic. Here, too, the implied assumption is of a clearly defined and unchanging traditional culture. A not uncommon attitude among teachers is that the media ought to be used essentially as transmitters of that traditional culture—more

documentary on television, and more respectful adaptations of the classics in the cinema. Again, the Educational Institute Report makes the point explicit:

There are of course honourable exceptions to the ruling trend. We still have quality newspapers which uphold the best traditions of British journalism, and the British Broadcasting Corporation, which has been animated by a high sense of public duty from its birth, has struggled hard to preserve its standards in the face of competition from commercial television.

We need hold no special brief for the *Mirror* or the *Express* to see that there is a peculiar blindness here to the faults and shortcomings of the quality press. It was, after all, *The Times* that made one of the most open appeals to snobbery in its 'Top People' advertising campaign—a campaign which, in its opening phase, was seriously intended and only later took on the defensive tone of irony. In its treatment of the Pilkington Report—a document close, one assumes, to the point of view of the Institute—the *Daily Telegraph* was distinguished from the *Sketch* by its typography and layout, but hardly at all by the quality of its arguments. The tribute to the BBC is, perhaps, better earned. All the same, there is a very limiting conception of broadcasting implied in the phrase 'animated by a high sense of public duty'. This was hardly the impulse behind *The Goon Show*, for example. Yet *The Goon Show* is very relevant here; the success of broadcasting should be judged not simply in terms of making the established works available to a wider public but also by the achievement of people like Spike Milligan who have used the medium in original ways. (This applies with even more force to the cinema.) The Educational Institute Report indeed recognizes that there is a body of popular work that has its own value:

Detective stories, thrillers and westerns, for example, have long been respectable and many of the great as well as the humble have owned that reading of this kind provides their favourite form of relaxation.

What is probably in mind here, though, is the old-style mystery story or the clean-living outdoor adventure yarn—tolerated because they are diversions, strictly for ‘relaxation’, as harmless as crossword puzzles or playing bridge, and somewhat grudgingly included, it seems, because they have been made ‘respectable’—and by the ‘great’ rather than the ‘humble’. Again, the tone excludes any kind of vigorous popular art that might challenge or excite. More relevant references might have been made to the singing of Ella Fitzgerald, the novels of Raymond Chandler or the musical films of Stanley Donen. But the moment we make such specific references we can see how the sharp distinction between traditional and popular culture begins to break down.

In opposition to these rather limiting standards are the views of those who seem willing to accept almost anything provided it is called entertainment. There is usually an assumed distinction between the serious matters which call for study and discrimination and those classed as escapist diversions. On the one hand there is serious art designed to educate, and on the other there is entertainment which provides distraction for our idle moments. It would therefore be foolish, it is argued, to bring to bear on the latter the language of critical analysis. The label ‘entertainment’ is assumed to absolve us from making judgements. In some youth clubs, for example, there is a striking contrast between the ‘activity’ periods where there is an attempt to apply standards, and the ‘leisure’ periods when the juke-box uninhibitedly blasts forth the values of Tin Pan Alley. Sometimes the distinction is underlined by applying a rule that club members are only allowed the privilege of a jive session if they also attend one of the more improving and approved activities.

The composer Malcolm Arnold, speaking at the NUT Conference *Popular Culture and Personal Responsibility*, said:

Nobody is in any way a better person morally or in any other way for liking Beethoven more than Adam Faith. . . . Of course the person who likes both is in a very happy position since he is able to enjoy much more in this life than a lot of other people.