

CURRENT OF MUSIC
Elements of a Radio
Theory

Edited with an Introduction by
Robert Hullot-Kentor

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G The Problem of a New Type of Human Being¹

I

As a science, psychology assumes that its object, the human being, is largely constant in nature. Its constitution is thus attributed to such ancient behavioural patterns, and such profoundly natural necessities, that the historical changes in that period of humanity of which we have some idea are inconsequential by comparison. Hunger and love, aggression, envy, ambition, desire – supposedly very little of that has changed since the ancient inhabitants of India. In the psychology of the Enlightenment, this was self-evident; and the experimental psychology of the 19th century maintained this supposition. More recently, the assumption of the relative constancy of human nature has been emphatically confirmed by Freud.

The entire traditional pedagogical system relies on the assumption of this constancy, as well as the assumption that the individual can be made ever more perfect. It divides human nature into two categories: on one hand the constant drives, on the other the products of their sublimation, the cultural artefacts. The more one succeeds in opening people up to 'culture' and affecting them through 'enlightenment', this theory states, the better. It does not ask, however, whether the drive structure of humans permits such influence through 'culture' in the same way during all periods. Nor does it ask whether, in certain situations, this culture becomes such a contrast to real living conditions that it can no longer carry out the task imposed on it, namely to domesticate human drives. Finally, the value of this culture itself and its problematic

character in a given situation are not considered at all. The fiction is maintained that inducing people to listen to Beethoven symphonies, read Milton and gaze upon Raphael madonnas is equally 'progressive' and humanistic at all times. Though both the possibility of a living relationship with cultural artefacts and their own worth is acknowledged as having obviously become problematic in particular cases, the pedagogical approach questions neither the possibility of cultivation as such in the present situation nor its absolute value in any serious fashion.

The question of the invariance of human nature – an invariance that probably exists only in a society based on exploitation – cannot be examined in its entire dialectic here, any more than the no less dialectical question of the value and possibility of culture. We are of the opinion, however, that at least those layers of humanity open to 'education' are experiencing such radical transformations in the present phase of society that neither the traditional assumption of an essentially equal basic nature nor the – paradoxically – closely related one of constant perfectibility can be maintained. We also believe that these changes, which have affected a very considerable number of those alive today, are of such a kind that the usual pedagogical call to 'cultivate' them can no longer be considered unflinchingly applicable, in terms either of the human capacity for reception or the continued relevance of cultural artefacts themselves. Regardless of how educators might assess such issues as drive structure, sublimation or culture, their work is only of use if their reflections take the real changes that have gone on, both in people and in the power of culture, into account without any illusions. It is those reflections to which we are hoping to contribute with our planned investigations.

It seems questionable to us in the first place whether one can actually describe the changes with which we are dealing as psychological. The concept of psychology is part of liberalism; it presupposes the individual as relatively self-enclosed, constant and autonomous in its aims – as the 'ego', in Freudian terminology. While the individual as a biological unity naturally continues to exist, and hence also those of its characteristics which serve its procreation, it has entered a social constellation in which the reproduction of its life can no longer be carried out in the old sense by its 'monadological' nature, that is to say its independent and antagonistic separation from its environment. The individual seems to be on the way to a situation in which it can only survive by relinquishing its individuality, blurring the boundary between itself and its surroundings, and sacrificing most of its independence and autonomy. *In large sectors of society there is no longer an 'ego' in the traditional sense.* As all the traditional culture with which educators wish to bring people into contact presupposes the

ego, however, and appeals to the ego, the very possibility of cultural education is now highly problematic from the outset.

II

The changes we are examining are those of social reality, of the surroundings we live in. We consider these changes so far-reaching, especially with regard to the early stages of development in childhood, that the sublimation which has always consisted in an engagement with extra-mental reality can no longer take place in the same way – both because reality denies the developing ego the necessary crutch for sublimation and because this reality has taken on such dominance that it suffocates the ego and eats away at its innermost constitution through realistic fear.

The following offers a rhapsodic presentation of certain motifs of these structural changes in our surroundings, without any claims to continuity of conceptual development.

a) The world no longer offers the child any images, unless one includes the technical *imagines*² of the car and the aeroplane. The repertoire of religious imagery has disintegrated. The imagery of bourgeois art never reached most of the population, especially the industrial masses and country people. The movements arising from the Enlightenment were iconoclastic – and necessarily so – whereas in a persisting class society the need for images, as one of the central factors in any sublimation, is as strong as ever, perhaps even increasingly so. Today, however, images only appear as ready-mades supplied by monopolistic centres, with all the emblems of their own falsity. So far, there has hardly been any serious recognition of what these images mean for people, or of the consequences of their falsity. At any rate, one can safely say that the dwindling of the objective repertoire of images is accompanied by a dwindling of subjective imagination that increasingly keeps people within the boundaries of the status quo.

b) The objects of action are changing. Their mechanization means that people must 'adapt' in their use of everyday devices to an incomparably higher degree than ever before. The act of driving a car or repairing a radio requires an infinitely greater subordination to the prescribed nature of those objects than the work of a craftsman, for example. Even during the entire era of 19th-century industrial capitalism, the functions of the individual – at least in his free time – were not remotely as dependent on technology as they are today. The game itself becomes governed by the technical structure of things.

c) The structure of the work process has changed in most respects. It no longer permits 'practice' or 'experience' in the old sense, as

evident in farming, for example. The changes in the work process extend from actual industrial work with machines through the whole of society, even infiltrating the realm of 'intellectual' work, where experience-based thought is already beginning to be replaced by technical, formal-logical manipulations. A single path leads from the conveyor belt via the office machine to the 'capturing' of spontaneous intellectual acts through reified, quantified processes.

d) The disintegration of family authority, especially under the pressure of structural unemployment, has been emphatically shown by sociologists. However, the dissolution of the family probably begins in the deepest layers of childhood development. The family is no longer the mediating agency between society and the individual; rather, society has taken hold of the individual directly and, by depriving the individual of the protective shield of the family, prevents him from becoming an individual in the old sense. The phenomenon observed in Germany, where the National Socialists conspired with children against their schools and households, as it were, is merely the institutionalized form of social tendencies that probably extend much further. Perhaps one could also say that, for American children today, a car wields greater authority than their father. It would be rash, however, to assume that the dwindling of family authority in present society automatically constitutes an element of progress and liberation. On the one hand, the individual's most productive powers flourish in a living and direct confrontation with his family, and these powers are now deprived of their target, so to speak; on the other hand, the immediately palpable domination of the individual by society, without any intermediary, is so profound that in a deeper layer of its consciousness, the child growing up 'authorityless' is probably even more fearful than it ever was in the good old days of the Oedipus complex. It is precisely this side of the situation that is often overlooked by progressive educators.

e) The wasting away of the world of images is accompanied by that of language and the capacity for expression through language. The traditional vernacular, with its sprinklings of religious phrases, no longer exists. People regard educated language as foreign and cold. They are fed from above with a synthetic, essentially advertising-determined language that no longer satisfies them. They no longer speak for themselves, but rather with the voice of the radio announcer, as it were. The change in the body of language concerns the interior monologue most of all. So far, there has not been any investigation of the influence of this nascent speechlessness on the overall condition of the people who are made speechless.

f) People's relationships with their own physicality seem to have undergone a peculiar and very far-reaching change. One can view sport as an attempt to regain for the body one of those functions of which machines have deprived it; yet it virtually becomes a machine itself. One finds a form of technological quantification of the body in which such ideas as fitness, training, and ultimately sheer physical strength take on an increasingly important role. It is this altered relationship with physicality, especially physical strength, which is no longer impeded by any taboos, that makes the possibility of 'cultivation' extremely questionable. The path to 'barbarization' is probably connected to this altered attitude to physicality. It too should by no means be considered a 'liberation' from the body 'repressed' by bourgeois culture; the physicality of sunbathing is largely de-sexualized. For the most part, there is an effort to translate what we refer to as cultural artefacts – in so far as they can be experienced at all – into categories of physiological capacity, or at least to experience them in an analogous fashion. They become competitions, tests or physical stimulants. The 'spiritual' layer of cultural products, crudely put, is virtually receding ever further.

III

The change in our surroundings, which has been illustrated here with a few examples that were not separated from their psychological implications, points towards the ongoing development of a new type of human being. It has been aptly described as the 'Radio Generation'. It is the type of person whose being lies in the fact that he no longer experiences anything himself, but rather lets the all-powerful, opaque social apparatus dictate all experiences to him, which is precisely what prevents the formation of an ego, even of a 'person' at all. From an orthodox analytical point of view, a type of human being so incapable of ego formation would be described as neurotic. But the concept of neurosis encompasses certain conflicts with reality. As, however, the 'Radio Generation' withdraws from ego formation precisely by adapting to reality, seemingly becoming part of reality without any conflict through its egoless nature, the concept of neurosis is not directly applicable here. If all these people are sick – which there is reason to assume – they are at least no sicker than the society in which they live. At the same time, the nature of this society must form the point of departure for any attempt at change. There is reason to assume that the loss of some abilities is accompanied by the freeing of certain others, and these are precisely what destines them to carry out changes that would never have been possible for the old 'individuals'. *Breaking*

through the monadological wall, which enclosed each individual within itself in the liberalist era, is the greatest source of hope.

The Radio Generation has been described as 'two-dimensional'. The lack of experiential continuity largely bars them from both happiness and suffering. Happiness: because there is only as much happiness as there are dreams, and they can no longer dream. They hardly conceive any aims that go beyond their immediate field of action and their adaptation to present conditions. For them, happiness consists mostly in integrating, in having the abilities that everyone has and doing what everyone does. They are without illusions. They finally see the world as it is, but pay the price of no longer seeing how it could be. That is why they also lack suffering. They are 'hardened', both in the physical and the psychological sense. Their coldness is one of their most conspicuous traits: they are cold in the face of the suffering of others, but also towards themselves. Their own suffering has so little power over them because they can barely remember it: it disappears, just as the patient awaking from an anaesthetic does not remember the pains of the operation (Ödön von Horváth has shown the aspect of coldness particularly emphatically). The torture methods of the fascists seem to be very closely connected to these matters. If they assume that their prospective victims have been desensitized to suffering, then these can only be reached through an excess of pain. This coldness is connected to a secret complicity with those things which one strives to resemble oneself. In so far as there is still such a thing as an individual libido, one that has not yet been collectively channelled, it directs itself at tools (the phenomenon of 'toolmindedness').³ The existing world of objects replaces that of images. They believe in the religion of cars. This relationship with technology leads to a very peculiar mixture of improvisational ability and obedience, of independent 'initiative' (raiding-party mentality) and abstention from independent thinking, that allows for either extreme. We see the decisive problem in the psychological thought ban that exists today. For most people, thinking more, i.e. beyond the direct needs of one's immediate environment, now constitutes a disturbance of that very adaptation which takes possession of their entire psychological energy. At the same time, more thought already means an endangerment of their chances of advancement, perhaps even their immediate security. But this disillusionment of reality, this quantification of work processes that virtually allows everyone to work anywhere, and the relative directness with which these social powers take effect, lead to a situation in which the objective world of things supports the very realization it suppresses. The same people who will not allow themselves to think (or do similar things such as read books, discuss theoretical questions, etc.) have

become 'canny' and can no longer be fooled. It seems to us that this contradiction really circumscribes the central concern of all conscious education in the present phase. It is a matter of pushing this 'canniness' so far that it breaks through its bond to the immediate world of action and transforms itself into real thinking. If that succeeds, it is precisely those 'crippled' human beings who will be most able to put an end to that crippling. Their coldness can become a readiness to make sacrifices for truth, their improvisation can turn into a cunning in the fight against the giant organization, and their speechlessness can become a willingness – without words or arguments – to do what needs to be done. It is revealing that the achievements of pedagogy in this direction do not correspond to those of an education in traditional 'culture'.

IV

It is our intention to make a first contribution to addressing these problems – however inadequately they may be described here – in the field of music. Firstly because we believe we have done considerable preparatory work in this direction, secondly for reasons of personal qualification, but thirdly also because we believe that music objectively offers an especially good point of entry.

The fact that music is still unexplored territory in socio-psychological terms means that one finds far fewer rigid views here than in other fields, and that there are far fewer obstacles in the form of clichés to impede the posing of questions. We intend to erect a small model settlement within this unoccupied theoretical field, one that would have little chance closer to the centres; but, once its results on this remote terrain are secure, there are prospects of applying these results to the truly decisive socio-psychological and socio-pedagogical questions.

Music is especially qualified to do this because it shares fundamental characteristics with language and, like language, is clearly dominated by monopolistic centres, while, at the same time, it is not directly connected to the world of objects in its content, and hence studies on it are not subject to the same taboos and rationalizations as those concerning the immediate world of objects. At the same time, however, the influence of this object-world is palpable in all elements of musical language and its reception. Music truly is, to cite Schopenhauer's aesthetics, 'the world once again', but a model that one can use to study the defining characteristics of reality without having to discuss directly the content of that reality. The political neutrality of music is especially important for such an aim. At the same time, however, music also shows many of the changes of environment characterized in section

(II). Phenomena such as toolmindedness, test and sport mentality, the replacement of family authority through social authority (jazz generation), the receding of the spiritual side of culture in favour of the physical – all those things can be studied extremely closely through music. The individual musical studies planned were named in the previous memorandum. Their connection to the general reflections touched on here is partly obvious, and will partly transpire in the course of the investigation. We hope in particular that we shall be able to diagnose the way in which traditional ‘cultural artefacts’ have become problematic and been assigned different functions far more concretely than has previously been the case.

Our plan has two parts:

a.) We intend to treat music as a neutral model for questions concerning the new human being, its connection to traditional culture and the way in which culture has itself become problematic.

b.) It will be attempted – in the sense of progressive education,⁴ i.e. without any abstract goals, purely on the basis of the facts available concerning the current state of awareness and its connection to the general state of society – to develop aims and methods for a musical pedagogy that is suited to actual conditions. That means not concealing these conditions through nebulous ideas of progress and culture, but on the other hand also avoiding the dangers posed by the barbarism and destructive hostility to culture that are descending upon us; rather, one must make the most of the possibilities that, by the standards of a truly emancipated humanity, are visible in our present situation, however faintly or negatively. We do not simply mean the hope that musical culture will survive by hibernating during the coming catastrophe – though such a wish by no means seems despicable to us – but rather the development, in the neutral zone of music, of methods with some prospects of application to less neutral areas.⁵