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Commercial song[1]

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The authors of this book present four complementary approaches to the issue of commercial song,[2] i.e. of that 'gastronomic' music produced by the music industry in order to meet trends that the industry itself discovers (and feeds) in the national market. The fact that they have restricted the focus of their inquiry to 'gastronomic' music already suggests the polemic attitude of their studies: considering that the whole family of 'bad music' – music aimed at satisfying needs by definition trivial, superficial, immediate, short-lived and vulgar – is examined and accused here, the reader might think that the authors have employed a considerable number of pages to convince us of something we never doubted. Yet the authors felt the need to establish – albeit by means of analyses that are at times animated and angry – the historical and structural foundations of such musical sleaze.

So, Michele L. Straniero examines step by step the history of popular song in Italy from the early decades of the 20th century, through the age of the fascist rule, until the dawn of our 'neo-capitalist springtime', highlighting meaningful connections and parallelisms. Sergio Liberovici identifies a 'model' rhythmic accompaniment, based on triplets (*terzinato*), and starting from it (focusing on it as a typical case, for methodological reasons) he presents his discourse on musical sleaze

[1] This text first appeared – untitled – as a preface (Eco 1964a) to a book written by four former members of the songwriting collective Il Cantacronache (Straniero et al. 1964). It was republished shortly after, in February 1964, in the journal *Il Marcatre* (Eco 1964b). It was included later in the same year – with a small but meaningful change at the end – in Eco's then controversial *Apocalittici e integrati* (Eco 1964c). It was never translated into English (Eco did not include it in *Apocalypse Postponed* (Eco 1994), a collection of previously untranslated essays, also drawing from his 1964 book). There were neither bibliographical references nor footnotes in Eco's original text: they have been added here by the translator. For this translation an effort has been made not only to make Eco's opinions understandable to an Anglophone readership, but also to respect his style, which in the early 1960s was somehow more convoluted than that of his later essays on semiotic theories, not to mention gender correctness, which was then totally absent from this kind of text, not only in Italy. If, here and there, the text sounds odd in today's English, it does so in Italian as well.

[2] There is no exact English translation for 'canzone di consumo'. 'Di consumo' means something whose social function is to be bought and consumed ('prodotti di consumo'), or to be part of the economic cycle of consumption ('cooperativa di consumo'). The expression was introduced into Italian cultural debate in the 1950s, to address artefacts whose value allegedly consists only in their consumption, and is exhausted in it ('letteratura di consumo', 'cinema di consumo', 'canzone di consumo'), with derogatory overtones, by comparison with highbrow artefacts or 'authentic' folk artefacts. Although Eco did not share those 'apocalyptic' (Adornian) views, in Italian intellectual circles of the 1960s – and later – 'canzone di consumo' was the only accepted and apparently neutral term to indicate popular song, along with 'canzonetta' (even more derogatory, but somehow affectionate). Although Eco's ideas on mass culture were considered then as scandalous, when he wrote for an intellectual readership he adopted the accepted vocabulary, while trying to stretch its limits and introduce new concepts (like 'canzone diversa', 'different song'). Rendering Eco's irony, his way of adapting to the vocabulary and convoluted style of Italian 'apocalyptics', while trying to turn their arguments upside down, is not an easy task. In this text 'canzone di consumo' is translated as 'commercial song' and 'canzonetta' as 'popular song'.

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precisely as *musical*, discovering its roots and mechanisms in a certain way of *making music*, in the circulation of formal models, in their trade, in their recurring and systematic theft. Emilio Jona endeavours to develop a kind of *psychoanalysis of the lyricist*, or, as we shall see, a psychoanalysis of the formulae by which the lyricist, reduced to a conventional and interchangeable entity, is dominated and forced to speak. Finally, Giorgio De Maria places the issue of industrialised popular song, seen as a *squandering of sounds*, within a wider cultural horizon – in connection with other historical phenomena, which until recently had been dealt with more often by academic musicology than by an engaged history of social conventions.

So, the reader is confronted with an overview of gastronomic music; from it he can infer the existence of trends and development patterns that are not fortuitous. Gastronomic music is an industrial product that does not pursue any artistic intention; rather, it pursues the satisfaction of the market's needs. However, the question posed – and answered – by these essays is whether the industrial production of sounds is adapting to the market's free fluctuations, or rather, whether it acts as a well-designed pedagogic plan to orient the market and determine its demands. If human beings in mass industrial civilisation are such as sociologists depicted them, i.e. other-directed individuals (their thoughts and desires are actually produced by the great apparatuses of hidden persuasion and control centres for taste, feelings and ideas – they think and desire according to the resolutions of psychological decision centres), commercial song appears then as one of the most effective tools for the ideological coercion of citizens in mass society.

Our authors' analysis is led, in the end, by a few methodological principles, which could be easily summarised as follows: commercial song must be analyzed as superstructure, and it is within the system's economic structure that we shall look for the reasons why commercial song is as it is and it couldn't be otherwise. The fact that such methodological assumptions could make the investigation unilateral and harsher has been taken for granted, but at least – in so doing – our authors reveal themselves to be immune to a bad habit that affects even the best critics of mass society: hatred against the masses and a tendency to discover the roots of all evil in the masses' incurable depravity. The authors of this book wonder for which socio-historical reasons, and under which concrete conditions the masses (to which all of us belong daily, now and then, without exception) identified themselves with a certain musical product. The relation is between a set of historical conditions and a set of musical models that reflect and perpetuate them. Thank heavens, 'the people' are not involved in this critique of an aspect of today's culture.

Indeed, the real targets of such polemics and accusations are not individual authors or performers (or, as we have just seen, individual consumers). If it were so, the fact that Jona, for example, dwells on a scrutiny of sexual innuendo even in the most banal lines of playful songs, should make us think of the confraternity of lyricists as a mob of sexually obsessed people, chronically intent on knowingly trading petty pornography. However, it's much worse than that. If there is an outcome of this book's analyses, it is just that they show how the world of forms and contents of commercial song, constrained by the inescapable dialectics of supply and demand, follows a *formulaic logic*, from which the decisions of individual songsmiths are completely absent. Beware, responsibility is not absent: it is taken when an author decides to make commercial music for a market that demands it, and it demands it as it is. Yet, after this decision is taken, because of the necessity of mechanical conditions indispensable for the product's success, all invention disappears. If, as Wright Mills

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wrote in *White Collar*,[3] in mass society *formula* substitutes for *form* (and therefore formula *precedes* form, invention and even the author's decision), the field of commercial music appears as a typical model, to be studied attentively. See, for example, Liberovici's pages (where all remarks are supported by musical documents) on the almost literal tracing of introductory schemes in a series of songs: an example follows another, a song copies another, incessantly, almost by stylistic necessity, just like marked trends develop, beyond individuals' will. It does not matter, we would tell Liberovici, if his Caius is a petty cheater who tries to make a living, as a parasite, out of the success of someone else's hit, by tracing its parameters; actually, in a world where formula substitutes for form, success is met only by reproducing parameters, and one of the characteristics of commercial products is that they entertain us not by revealing something new, *but by repeating what we already knew, what we anxiously were waiting for, and which alone entertains us*. Entering another field, is there any viewer who cares about the crime story mechanisms[4] of *Detective Rock's* TV commercials? The crime story mechanism changes every time, but we are not interested in it: we are only interested in the moment when, in response to the flattering 'You never make a mistake', Cesare Polacco takes his panama off, uncovers his bald head, and utters the fateful phrase: 'Yes, I made a mistake once'.[5] Only at this point we like the story and smile at one another, just like children are pleased by listening once again to a fairy tale they already know. It is the mechanism on which crime stories with a fixed character are based, as well as comic strips, ancient fables and elementary forms of musical structure in traditional drumming.[6] Liberovici's analysis shows that in commercial song pleasure is always administered according to such mechanisms: therefore, plagiarism is not a crime anymore, but the ultimate and perfect accomplishment of market's demands. It is also the ultimate and most accomplished pedagogical act, aimed at the homogenisation of collective taste, and its sclerotisation on fixed and unchangeable demands, where novelty is introduced judiciously, in small doses, to awaken consumers' interest without disappointing their laziness.

These studies, then, offer us a kind of X-ray analysis of the impersonal intentions that support the music industry, or a kind of map of the customary social unconscious, establishing the foundations of a system of human relations, on which the discourse about song opens a crevice, a perspective. Others have analysed the semantic worms that make us *be spoken* (while speaking) by the language's formulae, and by its very syntactic structure (and its is not by chance that a scholar of General Semantics, Hayakawa, dedicated a sharp study – also cited by Jona – to American commercial song);[7] others have analysed the 'mythologies' forming the texture of our psychological and social behaviour. We could see Straniero's, Liberovici's, Jona's and De Maria's contributions under this perspective, even

[3] Wright Mills (1951).

[4] In the original text the expression used by Eco is 'meccanismo giallo', which is an uncommon expression in Italian, albeit understandable. 'Giallo' (yellow) means thriller or detective story (from the colour of a popular series of crime stories).

[5] A very popular TV commercial in the 1960s, *L'ispettore Rock* – featuring actor Cesare Polacco – advertised a hair cream: the only mistake detective Rock ever made was not to use that hair cream.

[6] In the original text, 'il ritmo di tam-tam'. Eco probably referred to 'primitive' drumming, following a common prejudice (widespread in Italian academic musicological circles in the 1960s) concerning the 'elementary' character of traditional rhythmic patterns.

[7] Hayakawa (1955).

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when – and it happens sometimes – the moralist's indignation prevails over the analyst's coolness, which could be severe enough, even by itself alone.

However, it would be incorrect to think of this book as an act of distrust of popular song, of 'non-serious' (non-classical, non-experimental) music, and of 'applied' music in general: music for entertainment and escape, for play and recreation, because it is not necessary that entertainment and evasion, play and recreation be synonyms for irresponsibility, automatism, apathy and uncontrolled gluttony. It is worthwhile, I think, to pay respect to this book's four authors, who have been among the initiators of a movement for the renewal of Italian popular music. Attentive to folk music and related issues, admirers of a song tradition that in other countries has proved to be very effective (offering excellent lyrics and undoubtedly worthy and original melodies), they gave birth, with others, to the Cantacronache movement, which had a greater impact on Italian music life than is usually recognised.[8] When Cantacronache began composing their songs, mobilising lyricists like Calvino or Fortini,[9] re-inventing partisan folklore already veiled by nostalgia, venturing a few examples of polemic, deliberately outrageous songs (*non-conformist*, we would say, if snobbery had not seized the project already, reducing it to a *formula*, as happens with all avant-garde gestures), when Cantacronache began releasing their early records or faced a mass audience in a few political rallies, in Italy there were only few isolated efforts by people of good will. There was Dario Fo's 'case', there was Ornella Vanoni's 'case', there was Roberto Leydi, who pursued a diligent rediscovery of Italian folk repertories (anarchist songs, patriotic songs from the 19th century, songs from the anti-fascist resistance, proletarian songs) and Laura Betti's 'case' was taking shape. However, they were 'cases', indeed.[10]

We would not be able to say if Cantacronache acted as a catalyst, or if they created a fermenting agent that, together with others, gave substance to what was then becoming a current, not a 'case' anymore, but a habit, a musical practice. The fact is that, today, after seven or eight years, we can recognise in our country an active current of lyricists, composers and singers *who make songs differently from others*. Today a TV programme like Giorgio Gaber's[11] 'Canzoniere minimo' could become successful presenting singers who do not shout, who give up what was commonly thought to be 'melody', who seem to refuse rhythm, as if rhythm for mass audiences was just Celentano's,[12] and who sing songs where lyrics are important and *listened to*. Lyrics are also not necessarily about love, but also about many other things; and if they mention love, they do not do it by means of abstract formulae, outside time and place, but they circumscribe love, giving it a backdrop, like Porta Romana walls,[13] or sad and sweet Sundays in industrial Lombard suburbs. We would say that this new current in Italian song, starting from political satire or from a slightly

[8] See Pestelli (2014).

[9] Italo Calvino (1923–1985), novelist; Franco Fortini (Franco Lattes, 1917–1994), poet and literary critic.

[10] Dario Fo (1926–2016), actor-playwright, recipient of the 1997 Nobel Prize for Literature; Ornella Vanoni (1934), sophisticated pop singer – in the late 1950s she started her career as a performer of songs from the underworld; Roberto Leydi (1928–2003), music critic and ethnomusicologist; Laura Betti (1927–2004), actress and singer, collaborated with Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922–1975).

[11] Giorgio Gaber (Giorgio Gaberščik, 1939–2003), singer-songwriter and actor-playwright.

[12] Adriano Celentano (1938), singer and songwriter, one of the pioneers of rock'n'roll in Italy, still very popular today.

[13] Reference is to the lyrics – by writer and playwright Umberto Simonetta (1926–1998) – of 'Porta Romana', set to the music of a traditional prison song: it was recorded by Giorgio Gaber in 1963.

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snobbish revival of songs from the underworld, on the one hand, brought back to mass audiences a kind of social song imbued with problematic issues, embodying a form of historical awareness (just think about the Milanese success of a show like 'Milanin Milanon');[14] on the other hand, it discovered new ways for love songs, by means of what we have defined elsewhere as 'committed neo-crepuscularism,[15] convincingly exemplified by Margot's songs[16] – it is not by chance that she began finding an unexpected audience in large Piedmont working class communities, who discovered a new and more authentic dimension of *evadere cantando* (escaping through singing).[17]

We don't know how much this current will still be able to give, but we think that it is a change in customs that is slowly finding access to popular audiences. Anyway, it is an ongoing process that will not remain without consequences.

However, if one wants to act more consciously in the field of culture, one should account for a third set of problems, which in this book are hinted at, but are not dealt with.

So far, we have considered two possibilities: on the one hand, an ethical–political analysis of negative trends in commercial song; on the other hand, the (still experimental) quest for a 'different song'. The analysis of negative trends clarifies a number of equivocal issues, demystifies dangerous habits and evidences threats that are paternalistically undermining collective sensibilities. The proposal of a 'different song' opens alternative ways, but how does it follow them? Fatally, we must say, still at a 'cultured' level (and by 'cultured' we mean a way of understanding values that derives from a whole cultural tradition shaped by humanism; a tradition where we grew up, but which does not offer us adequate tools for the solution of problems posed by a larger and more differentiated community than the one addressed by humanistic culture; a community which is creating on its own, often in aberrant ways, its set of values).

The new song we mentioned above led a polemic against gastronomic melody, looking for new modes even in church music, as well as in folk music; it led its polemic against gastronomic rhythm developing 'spoken' articulations, 'continuous' discursive patterns, apt to highlight verbal contents, not trying to capture the listener's attention by means of fascinating primitive rhythms, but, rather, by the steady intrusion of uncommon concepts and appeals. The result was to provide songs that people *concentrate on, in order to listen to*. Normally commercial songs are used while doing other things, as a background; 'different' songs demand respect and interest.

In Italy such a kind of song was missing (it is not so in France, for example), and it was a merit and a success to have made it pleasant and necessary. However, songs that demand respect and attention represent still, even within mass culture, a

[14] 'Milanin Milanon', which debuted in December 1962, was a show written and directed by Roberto Leydi and Filippo Crivelli (1928), based on traditional Milanese songs. It was performed by actors and singers who were among the leading figures of Italian theatre (Tino Carraro, Milly), folk revival (Sandra Mantovani, Anna Nogara), cabaret and singer-songwriting (Enzo Jannacci). It was also the forerunner of 'Bella ciao' (1964), by the same authors, which brought to the nation's attention the folk revival movement.

[15] Eco (1963), p. 29.

[16] Margot (Margherita Galante Garrone, 1941–2017), singer-songwriter, a member of Cantacronache.

[17] 'Evadere cantando' is an untranslatable pun based on 'recitare cantando', the singing style of early Italian opera. Its usage by Eco is a clear sign of the kind of readership he was aiming at in this essay.

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'cultured' option. They represent a peak of ambition for mass culture, the first step towards a further education of taste and intelligence, through which more complex experiences can be reached. This is a fundamental step, then, but it does not represent the answer to all problems posed by music's mass consumption.

Above in this text we spoke of a kind of 'applied' music, aimed at entertainment and escape; and we spoke about that primitive tendency (which emerges even in the most educated among us) that brings us to enjoy, during the day, moments of rest and relaxation in which the elementary appeal of a repeated rhythm, of a game we already know, of a joke or a narrative model without unexpected events reveals itself as an indispensible complement in a balanced mental life. Listening again to detective Rock's notorious line, reading for the umpteenth time that Slim Callaghan is lighting his umpteenth cigarette (and it will always be a *Player's* number 6), whistling every morning the same tune and reading again every day the same Jiggs and Maggie story (which varies according to external circumstances, but is basically always the same, and that is why we like it), does not imply insensibility or stupidity. It is a healthy exercise in normality – *if it represents a time off*. Mass culture's tragic aspect is that the model of the time off becomes the norm, the surrogate of any other intellectual experience, the drowsiness of any subjectivity, the negation of any problem, the surrender to behavioural conformism, the passive ecstasy required by a paternalistic pedagogy aimed at the creation of *adapted* individuals. Discussing mass culture as *the anthropological condition where episodic escape becomes norm* is one thing, and it is a task, but discussing the mechanisms of episodic escape as radically negative is another matter, and may constitute a dangerous example of intellectualistic and aristocratic hubris (quite often only professed in public, because privately the severe moralist eagerly and silently indulges in the same distractions that he publicly condemns).

The fact that commercial song may appeal to me thanks to its imperative rhythm, which measures and commands my reflexes, may constitute an indispensible value, pursued by all human communities, offering the normal outlet for a number of tensions. This is just one out of many examples. Here is, then, a first investigative thread, which consists in the discovery within mass culture's mechanisms of immediate and vital values, which should be reconsidered as positive in a different cultural context.

It is not just that though. The average listeners' ecstasy and enchantment in front of a 'gastronomic' appeal, which rightly offend us,[18] may represent for them the only chance to satisfy needs that are not addressed by 'high culture'. It would be worth (at most) taking note of verbal protocols formulated by a 'naive' user about the emotions experienced while listening to a record by the pop star of the day; translating the naive protocol into technical terms we might curiously discover that the type of emotion that is reported is the same a 'cultured' user would report as 'lyrical emotion', as the sentimental intuition of a totality. Such analyses would open up interesting discussions, both in order to better understand the kind of values enjoyed by 'naive' subjects, and to verify the categorial inadequacy of the 'cultured' definition with respect to the 'cultured' product (many aesthetic theories would be challenged).

[18] This is just another clear sign of Eco's awareness of the kind of readers he expected for the book he was prefacing.

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However, without stepping on such a dangerous terrain, we would suggest an imaginary experiment as a starting point for a series of working hypotheses and more thorough methodological developments, in order to proceed later to real, solid, statistically founded experiments.

Let us choose a model of a 'naive' user, intended as a consumer who is not constrained by intellectual prejudices of 'cultured' origins; it could be a member of the working class, or a petty bourgeois. Of course, a methodologically correct analysis should encompass many social and psychological strata; to verify, for example, to which degree social levels are differentiating elements that influence reception in mass culture (because it is reasonable to suspect that mass culture's continuing pedagogy be implementing on its own a dangerous interclass homogenisation, which represents at the level of taste what in politics is represented by populism; in other terms, it would be the same challenge that the myths of compact cars and TV sets pose to political awareness in neo-capitalism, only under a different guise).

Let us interview a 'naive' listener about possible answers he is oriented to give when trying to verbalise what he feels while listening to a given song. To draft the models of possible answers, we should accept a provisional hypothesis about the possible functions of an artistic product (understanding 'artistic' in the widest sense). For example, Charles Lalo suggests five possible functions of art:[19]

(1) Diversion function (art as a game, an incentive for recreation, a pause, a 'luxury').
(2) Cathartic function (art as violent solicitation of emotions, and consequent release, relaxation of nervous tension or, at a more general level, of emotional and intellectual crises).
(3) Technical function (art as proposal of technical-formal solutions to be enjoyed as such, to be valued according to criteria of ability, aptness, completeness, etc.).
(4) Idealisation function (art as sublimation of feelings and problems, thus as an – allegedly – higher-level escape from their immediate contingency).
(5) Reinforcement or duplication function (art as intensification of daily life's problems or emotions in order to highlight them and make their consideration or sharing important and inevitable).

Let us apply this model to the possible reactions of our 'naive' subject when exposed to a song.

(1) It could appear as an invitation to relax, to rest, as a pretext to forget daily life's problems; this is a rather normal reaction that we may attribute to a piece of commercial music.
(2) It could appear as a field of psycho-physiological stimuli, apt to unleash various forces and to combine them according to the laws of the melodic, harmonic, or rhythmic patterns determining the process; if we think about it, it is the kind of reception that we activate at the lowest level when we use music to give rhythm to our attention while reading, writing, or doing other things; and it is such an outlet for repressed tendencies that is unleashed when people dance the twist. Basically, it is the function that our ancestors attributed to music as a medicine for passions, and nobody ever challenged the idea that a whole set of such rituals (for example, Dionysian festivals) responded to deep social needs; in contemporary society a similar function is carried out by sports, and it is positive when sports are practised, aberrant when sports are observed while others practise them, like in stadiums. However, in the face of the alarming sight offered by groups who make out of such Sunday catharsis the purpose of a whole week, reducing what was originally meant as a purification principle into obsession, one could oppose the indisputable

[19] Lalo (1948), pp. 30–4. Functions are listed under the title: 'Les cinq principaux rapports de l'oeuvre avec la vie de l'auteur ou de l'amateur'.

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testimony offered by those who, giving proof of their intellectual balance in daily life, affirm that they find in such practices, if conveniently dosed, occasions for relaxation that nobody could honestly deny them.

(3) A song could appear as a technical object to be valued according to its structural qualities, therefore stimulating an exercise in aesthetic criticism, which, albeit elementary, should not be underestimated. To this respect, it would be interesting to understand whether the product's rhythmic and timbral inventions and its melodic and harmonic solutions are perceived and enjoyed as such, rather than received unconsciously as stimuli for a 'cathartic' response. It would be interesting to evaluate how this factor is involved in the success of new trends in popular song ('shouters' *vs*. 'melodic singers', for example),[20] and which part is actually played by such evaluations in the overall response to a song.

(4) A song could be described as an idealisation of such big subjects as love or passion. This is the most underrated and more clearly 'naive' response, but it would not be useless to verify how, in a given social group or psychological category, this factor influences other factors, or to what degree it prevails over them.

(5) Similarly, a song could be received as the privileged moment in which life's problems take shape and strength and are passionately dealt with. So, in case (4) a song could be indicated as a narcotic, capable of fictitiously attenuating real tensions thanks to an elementary mystic solution; in case (5) a song could be denounced as a stimulant, capable of generating emotional responses otherwise inaccessible to a lazy sensibility (hence case (5) would include also sexual excitements). As we take for granted that responses would not concentrate on just one of the above descriptions, but would offer mixed proportions among all such reactions, it is conceivable that responses of types (1), (2) and (3) would indicate the presence of structural elements (in the relevant song) and of response schemata (in the subject), which suitably transformed into interpretive tools and critically accepted could represent positive values, not to be underestimated. Responses of types (4) and (5) would probably denounce deplorable behaviours, but they would pose another problem: in fact, since idealisation and intensification may constitute positive values in works that we usually consider as highly 'artistic' (the *Divine Comedy* or the *Fifth*, *Madame Bovary* or *Guernica*), responses by the interviewed subject would open up ways for a structural investigation, to highlight the diverse conditions thanks to which the above-mentioned works are able to provoke responses that can be classified similarly, without giving rise to mere narcotic or purely stimulant effects. It is clear that we are dealing here with the old problem of the 'purity' of the work of art, but comparison with second-rate products would be useful, on the one hand, to clarify the latter's structural functioning, and, on the other hand, to understand whether in 'superior' works that purity and detachment that we normally talk about are really always present, or if their reception also entails elements like those reported by interviewees about commercial products, and to which degree in those two types of products such elements are combined with others, leading to such different results. However, above all, the path to a new issue would be opened: do analyzed subjects receive idealisation and intensification values in the rough way allowed by commercial products because they *choose* that specific kind of reception, or *because contemporary culture does not offer them possible alternatives*, i.e. products that are able to stimulate similar reactions in a more complex and critical way, although starting from more suitable communicative grounds?

Here is how a seemingly analytical–descriptive investigation, a kind of stock exchange listing that allows us to observe oscillations of taste in a given historical–sociological context, could open up deeper analytical perspectives for the diagnosis of a system. Seeing mass culture's products as an industrialised response to real demands may help us understand a lack of values that goes beyond any specific music event; it may suggest directions for a cultural work aimed at a change of the status quo, by means of a preliminary substitution of 'behavioural models'. Let

[20] In Italian, *urlatori* and *melodici*.

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us read Roberto Leydi's survey on *L'Europeo* (12 January 1964 – it appeared when we were drafting this text and looks like an interesting precursor, in journalistic style, of the kind of research we would wish for, albeit at a more complex and accurate level): it consists in a number of answers given by teenagers of various social conditions about their musical preferences. The prevailing key in those answers consists in the acknowledgement of a certain kind of commercial production (Celentano, Rita Pavone,[21] Françoise Hardy)[22] as 'our' music (teenagers' music) *par excellence*, to be defended against adults' incomprehension, to be felt as 'our' own just because it is refused by adults. Answers frequently clarify that such songs 'portray our feelings and problems'; not only rhythm or melody are important, but also lyrics – love issues (as 'the only truly universal theme') count if they are expressed according to teenagers' views. A whole generation identifies itself with certain musical products: beware, it does not just *use* them, but it *adopts* them as banners, just like another generation adopted jazz. However, the adoption of jazz implied, besides an instinctive acceptance of the spirit of that time, an elementary cultural project, the choice of a music that was tied to folk traditions and contemporary life's rhythms, the choice of an international dimension and the dismissal of a false provincial escapist folklore, identified with the Fascist age and with the culture of Italian comedy movies of the 1930s (the so-called *telefoni bianchi* movies). The adoption of teenage artists by new teenagers, however, reveals a more straightforward behaviour, the instinctive choice of the only 'cultural' forms that seem to faithfully represent the problems of a generation. To the point that (we are still commenting on Leydi's survey), when asked about the influence that the cultural industry's persuasive action exerts on their choices, interviewees strongly maintain that choices are theirs, and that no marketing persuasion is really and deeply influencing their behaviour. Such strength, though, is not aimed at solving the issue, but rather at rejecting it as false, at *removing* it.

The outlook, then, is extremely dramatic and ambiguous. On the one hand there is an incessant shaping of collective taste enacted by the music industry, which creates – by means of its stars and hits – behavioural models, which in turn are accepted as a matter of fact, and when youngsters think that they are choosing models on the basis of their own individual behaviour, they do not understand how much individual behaviour is articulated today on the basis of continuously changing imposed models. On the other hand, in the society which they are living in, teenagers do not find *any other source of behavioural models*, or at least, any comparably strong and imperative source. Regarding the music industry, there is also the fact that, in the aberrant way adequately analysed by books like this,[23] it perceives and satisfies some authentic needs of the audience it addresses. In the survey cited above, it is possible to confirm how youngsters' answers indicate in 'their' songs exactly the satisfaction of those needs of idealisation and intensification of real problems that we were talking about.

[21] Rita Pavone (1944), Italian pop singer.

[22] Françoise Hardy (1944), French singer-songwriter.

[23] There were no 'books like this' in Italy in the early 1960s. So, Eco's only reasonable reference is to Adorno's essays on music and the cultural industry, like 'Il carattere di feticcio in musica e il regresso dell'ascolto' ('On the fetish-character in music and the regression of listening'), published in Italian in 1959 (Adorno 1959; the original text in German was published in 1956). It was translated by composer and music critic Giacomo Manzoni, a friend and collaborator of some of the founders of Cantacronache.

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So, we face the problem of a unique source, an industrial one, for responses to real needs; however, due to its industrial nature, that source is not aimed at satisfying needs, but rather, at reproducing them in a continuously varying shape. So, the cycle is not broken, and the situation seems to be insoluble. If you blame mass culture, maybe you will save your soul, but you will not replace the mythical aims that you want to deny your contemporaries with any real aim. On the other hand, praise the *Ersatz* function fulfilled by mass culture and you will become an accomplice of its continuing mystification.

In our opinion, one of the most exemplary phenomena, in this respect, is Rita Pavone, seen as a behavioural model. As a persona, Rita Pavone is a kind of 'node' where the ambiguity of all phenomena that we are interested in becomes clear. To dismiss her case as an example of industrial malpractice would be naive, in our opinion. To praise her persona with the snobbish spirit of the intellectual who attends public rites dedicated to him (happy in becoming, for one night only, a member of the masses, but also happy to be above the masses thanks to his own ironic judgement) is another deplorable solution.

In her early appearances, Rita Pavone raised doubts about her age. The real Rita Pavone could be 18 years old (as it was proven, later) but her persona oscillated between 13 and 15 years old. There was something morbid in the interest she raised. This girl had an appeal that could not be classified according to usual categories. The meaning of Mina's 'shout' was clear.[24] Mina was a grown up woman; the kind of musical excitement that she provoked could not be separated from an erotic appeal, albeit a sublimated one, but there was nothing morbid in this. Moralists may deprecate Bardot's myth and its success, but Bardot's myth is based on perfectly natural tendencies, even when it takes advantage of a lascivious teenager's turbid appeal; a taste for immodesty belongs in mother nature's projects. The meaning of Paul Anka's myth was equally clear: that wonderful documentary, *Lonely Boy*,[25] showed in detail the kind of hysterical reactions provoked by the singer both among the teenage girls who rushed to see him and among old ladies in a night-club. In both cases a healthy erotic appeal was at the base of such aberrant behaviours: you can make someone go crazy taking advantage of his sexual desire, but that does not imply that sexual desire is not normal.

In Rita Pavone's case, however, a different kind of sex appeal, more blurred and ambiguous, was achieved. Pavone appeared as the first pop diva who was not a grown-up woman; yet she was not a child either, in the way of those unbearable wonder children. Pavone's appeal consisted in the fact that what until then had been the subject of pedagogy primers and studies on coming of age became an element of a show. Problems related to coming of age, which make a girl suffer for not being a child anymore, but not yet a woman either, the restlessness of a glandular storm, which usually has ungraceful and secret effects, with her were transformed into public declarations, gesture and theatre, and turned into a state of grace. This girl who walked towards the audience with an attitude as if she was asking for ice cream, and uttered words of passion; this untrained voice, whose timbre and loudness were indeed suitable for calling mother from the courtyard, and which

[24] Mina (Mina Mazzini, 1940), Italian singer. In the late 1950s she emerged as one of the first Italian female rockers, but soon (from 1960 on) she became the paradigmatic sophisticated singer.

[25] Co-directed by Roman Kroitor and Wolf Koenig, *Lonely Boy* (1962) is a *cinéma vérité* documentary about Paul Anka.

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transmitted passionate, bewildered messages; that face, from which – after an initial puzzlement – one would wait for teasing winks, and which all of a sudden revealed a world made of simplicity and white woollen socks. In Rita Pavone, for the first time ever, in front of a whole nation, puberty turned into ballet and acquired full rights to the encyclopaedia of eroticism – beware, at mass level, and with the state television's blessing, thus in front of a consenting nation, not in the pages of a Nabokov novel[26] targeted at cultured consumers, or at most at inquisitive teenagers.

In this respect, Rita Pavone could have become the focal point of an entangled series of mythical projections, a symbol of innocence and depravity at the same time, so that her persona could be thought of as a masterpiece of the cruelty of slavery, like one of the victims of those *comprachicos* mentioned by Victor Hugo,[27] whose features were deformed by means of cruel surgery in order to transform them into monsters to be exhibited at fairs.[28] Yet if this girl's adolescence had been artificially stopped at the presumable age of about 13 years, in order to turn her into a show act for the curiosity of various kinds of people, this phenomenon would have immediately been circumscribed. There is a kind of mechanistic morality in mass culture, in its quest for median qualities; as a result, anything abnormal is rejected, with the aim to focus on a kind of 'normality' that does not trouble anybody.

It is peculiar, then, that in the mythological civil registry of the commercial cultural industry Rita Pavone's age was quickly stabilised at 18 years. Her latest show, marking her provisional retirement from live performances, was titled *Non è facile avere diciott'anni* ('It is not easy to be eighteen'). Automatically, after a kind of market homeostasis, her persona found a precise way to become the emblem of a generation, an exemplary model for Italian teenagers, who take that age (18 years) as a kind of reference point around which all problems of immediately younger or older age groups are rotating. Then, Rita Pavone, who could have been a Clinical Case, became an Ideal Norm and was established as a Myth.

As a myth, she really embodies her fans' problems: anxiety for unrequited love, torment for challenged love (where Juliet and Romeo's situation must be adapted to non-legendary dimensions in order to touch teenagers from a short distance, and so it becomes a quick encounter while going to buy milk),[29] the choice between a gymnastic dance with social functions, and the 'dance on a tile'[30] with erotic functions (but, at the same time, the refusal of undifferentiated eroticism, the erotic option being reserved just to one, thus implying an unmistakable declaration of morality, a way to detach oneself from adults' generic immorality). Here we find – satisfied – the five needs that we hypothesised above: *idealisation* and *intensification* of daily life, *cathartic shock* owing to the shout's loudness, *technical quality* of a new singing style, received as such, and *escape* from a world built by adults, thanks to the legalisation, enacted by the singer, of a private world reserved for teenagers: a song – and

[26] The reference here is, of course, to Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita,* first published in Italian in 1959.
[27] In the 1869 novel *The Man Who Laughs* (*L'homme qui rit*).
[28] In the first version of this essay Eco called *comprachicos* the victims, not the criminals. In the version published in *Apocalittici e integrati* the mistake was corrected.
[29] Reference is to Gianni Morandi's 1962 hit 'Fatti mandare dalla mamma [a prendere il latte]' ('Ask your mammy to send you [to buy milk]'). Gianni Morandi (1944) was Rita Pavone's male counterpart.
[30] Reference is to 'Il ballo del mattone' (Dance on a [single] tile), a 1963 hit by Rita Pavone. The girl portrayed in the lyrics likes to dance the twist or rock with anybody, but with her lover she dances without moving, standing on a single tile. He must not be jealous, then.

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the persona singing it – do not become a Myth by chance, but because they fulfil all their audience's expectations.

Yet, and here is a contradiction, they fulfil them perfectly because at the same time they carry out a carefully planned task, whose existence is not even suspected by young consumers: *the Pavone Myth ensures that teenage problems remain in a generic form*. Adolescence, thanks to the mystification enacted by the myth, remains a biological category and is not confronted with the historical conditions of the world inhabited by teenagers.

If we read responses given by youngsters to various surveys included in the *Almanacco Bompiani 1964*,[31] we find a peculiar focus on such a perception of adolescence as a biological category, which refuses to share any responsibility with the world they live in. This world is considered by them as something *given* by adults, and opposed to them, by means of dissenting plans and schemes that employ structures built by adults, for which, however, no actual replacement is foreseen. Such de-historicisation of problems is perfectly exemplified by one of Pavone's hits (already a bestseller in France as well), 'Datemi un martello' ('Give me a hammer'). As a pretext for dance, this song presents itself as an expression of bold juvenile anarchism, as a programmatic declaration *against* something, but where it is not that something that really matters, but the energy displayed in the protest.

Actually, the song is the result of the rhythmic standardisation (according to schemes that Liberovici's analysis of other texts helps to explain) of an American political song, 'If I Had a Hammer', where polemic references are much clearer, and protest is aimed at real, historical targets. The hammer originally referred to is a judge's hammer: 'If I had a [judge's] hammer … I'd hammer out danger, I'd hammer out a warning'. The author is Pete Seeger:[32] his songs brought him in front of the Un-American Activities Committee, and he was condemned. Rita Pavone, however, asks for a hammer to: (1) beat on the head of that 'little bitch' who attracts the attention of all boys in the party; (2) beat all those dancing tight to each other in dim light; and (3) break the telephone that soon will ring, with mother telling her that it is time to go home.

Here is how a message, which already has a meaning, is adopted by using a superficial configuration and loading upon it a second order message, flattened to a new meaning with a consolatory function, as if obeying an unconscious need for reassurance. In this sense, as Roland Barthes says, Myths are always right-wing.

Could a cultural project about commercial songs, like the one that we have discussed about 'different' songs, be implemented taking into account those deep needs that even the most banal commercial song expresses in its own way?

Or will a 'different' song be such only to the extent that it will reject any popularity and industrial distribution, because in the context we live in, the only way for a song to become industrialised is to tread the path of fallacious Myth, source of fictitious needs?

Even if it were so – and if the solution to the problems of mass culture were not related to the proposal of new cultural forms within a given context, but to a radical change of context, in order to give new meanings to already existing forms – a deeper analysis of the way in which commercial artistic products are consumed will

[31] Morando (1963).
[32] With Lee Hays.

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definitely clarify the space we are moving in. In this respect, the book of our four authors must be welcomed as a first step (an indispensible *pars destruens*) in a debate whose continuation is becoming more and more urgent.[33]

Translation: Franco Fabbri

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[33] The final sentence was not included in the text published in *Apocalittici e integrati* (Eco 1964c).

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