

RULING CLASS AND RULING IDEAS

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. In so far, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch.

[...]

The division of labour [...] manifests itself also in the ruling class as the division of mental and material labour, so that inside this class one part appears as the thinkers of the class (its active, conceptive ideologists, who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood), while the others' attitude to these ideas and illusions is more passive and receptive, because they are in reality the active members of this class and have less time to make up illusions and ideas about themselves. Within this class this cleavage can even develop into a certain opposition and hostility between the two parts, which, however, in the case of a practical collision, in which the class itself is endangered, automatically comes to nothing, in which case

where also vanishes the semblance that the ruling ideas were not the ideas of the ruling class and had a power distinct from the power of this class.

[...]

When now in considering the course of history we detach the ideas of the ruling class from the ruling class itself and attribute to them an independent existence, if we confine ourselves to saying that these or those ideas were dominant at a given time, without bothering ourselves about the conditions of production and the producers of these ideas, if we thus ignore the individuals and world conditions which are the source of the ideas, we can say, for instance, that during the time that the aristocracy was dominant, the concepts honour, loyalty, etc., were dominant, during the dominance of the bourgeoisie the concepts freedom, equality, etc. The ruling class itself on the whole imagines this to be so. This conception of history, which is common to all historians, particularly since the eighteenth century, will necessarily come up against the phenomenon that increasingly abstract ideas hold sway, i.e. ideas which increasingly take on the form of universality. For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.

BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

Karl Marx

The general conclusion at which I arrived and which, once reached, became the guiding principle of my studies can be summarized as follows. In the social production of their existence, men enter into definite, necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relations of production corresponding to a determinate stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which there arises a legal and political superstructure and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life-process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary it is their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or – what is merely a legal expression for the same thing – with the property relations within the framework of which they have hitherto operated. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. At that point an era of social revolution begins. With the change in the economic foundation the whole immense superstructure is more slowly or more rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic, in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.

From Marx, K., 1976a, Preface and Introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, pp. 3–5.

LETTER TO JOSEPH BLOCH

Frederick Engels

London, September 21 [–22] 1890

According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Therefore if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the *only* determining one, he is transforming that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various components of the superstructure – political form of the class struggle and its consequences, such as: constitutions drawn up by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflections of all these actual struggles in the minds of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas – also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases determine their *form* in particular. There is an interaction of all these elements in which, amid all the endless number of accidents (i.e. of things and events whose inner interconnection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we can regard it as non-existent and can neglect it) the economic movement is finally bound to assert itself. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history one chose would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree.

We make our history ourselves, but first of all, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one. The Prussian state also arose and developed from historical, ultimately economic, causes. But one could scarcely maintain without being pedantic that among the many small states of North Germany, Brandenburg was specifically determined by economic necessity to become the great power embodying the economic, linguistic and, after the Reformation, also the religious differences between North and South, and not by any other elements as well (above all by its entanglement with Poland, deriving from its possession of Prussia, and thus with international political relations – which were in fact also decisive in the establishment of the

From Marx, K. and Engels, F., 1977, *Selected Letters*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, pp. 75–8.

dynastic power of Austria). Without making oneself ridiculous it would be a difficult thing to explain in terms of economics the existence of every small state in Germany, past and present, or the origin of the High German consonant permutations which widened the geographic wall of partition formed by the mountains from the Sudetic range to the Taunus, making a regular division across all of Germany.

In the second place, however, history is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a variety of particular conditions of life. Thus, there are innumerable crisscrossing forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces which give rise to one resultant – the historical event. This may again in turn be regarded as the product of a power which works as a whole *unconsciously* and without volition. For that which each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one wanted. Thus history, up to the present, has proceeded in the manner of a natural process and is essentially subject to the same laws of motion. But from the fact that the wills of individuals – each of whom desires what he is impelled to by his physical constitution and external, in the final analysis economic, circumstances (either his own personal circumstances or those of society in general) – do not believe what they want, but are merged into an aggregate mean, common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value is equal to zero. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this extent included in it.

I would furthermore ask you to study this theory from the original sources and not at second hand; it is really much easier. Marx hardly ever wrote anything in which it did not play a part. But especially *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* is a very excellent example of its application. There are also many allusions to it in *Capital*. I may also refer you to my writings: *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science** and *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, in which I have given the most detailed account of historical materialism which, as far as I know, exists.

Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle over and against our adversaries, who denied it. We had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to let the other factors involved in the interaction be duly considered. But when it came to presenting an era of history, i.e. to making a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error could be permitted. Unfortunately, however, it happens all too often that people think they have fully understood a new theory and can apply it without further ado from the very moment they have mastered its main principles, and even those not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent 'Marxists' from this reproach, since some of the most amazing stuff has been produced among them, as well. . . .

* [Published in English as *Anti-Dühring*.]

ON POPULAR MUSIC

Theodor W. Adorno

The Musical Material

The Two Spheres of Music

Popular music, which produces the stimuli we are here investigating, is usually characterized by its difference from serious music. This difference is generally taken for granted and is looked upon as a difference of levels considered so well defined that most people regard the values within them as totally independent of one another. We deem it necessary, however, first of all to translate these so-called levels into more precise terms, musical as well as social, which not only delimit them unequivocally but throw light upon the whole setting of the two musical spheres as well.

One possible method of achieving this clarification would be a historical analysis of the division as it occurred in music production and of the roots of the two main spheres. Since, however, the present study is concerned with the actual function of popular music in its present status, it is more advisable to follow the line of characterization of the phenomenon itself as it is given today than to trace it back to its origins. This is the more justified as the division into the two spheres of music took place in Europe long before American popular music arose. American music from its inception accepted the division as something pre-given, and therefore the historical background of the division applies to it only indirectly. Hence we seek, first of all, an insight into the fundamental characteristics of popular music in the broadest sense.

A clear judgment concerning the relation of serious music to popular music can be arrived at only by strict attention to the fundamental characteristic of popular music: standardization.¹ The whole structure of popular music is standardized, even where the attempt is made to circumvent standardization. Standardization extends from the most general features to the most specific ones. Best known is the rule that the chorus consists of thirty-two bars and that the range is limited to one octave and one note. The general types of hits are also standardized: not only the dance types, the rigidity of whose pattern is understood, but also the 'characters' such as mother songs, home songs, nonsense or 'novelty' songs, pseudo-nursery rhymes, laments for a lost girl. Most important of all, the harmonic cornerstones of each hit – the beginning and the end

Adorno, T., 1941, 'On popular music', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, no. 9.