

**CRITICAL
THEORY
AND
SOCIETY
A READER**

EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
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ROUTLEDGE

NEW YORK

LONDON

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10. For a comprehensive theory on myth and art, see Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Amsterdam: Querido Verlag, 1947), passim.
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2. Joseph Goerres, *Rheinischer Merker*, July 1 and 3, 1814.
3. Helen MacGill Hughes, introduction to *News and the Human Interest Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), pp. xii-xiii.
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5. Samuel A. Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Adjustment during Army Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 8.
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7. *Recent Social Trends in the United States*, I (New York and London: McGraw-Hill, 1933), p. 215.
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10. For example, Max Horkheimer, "Art and Mass Culture," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX (1941); T. W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, vol. IX; Leo Lowenthal, "Biographies in Popular Magazines," *Radio Research, 1942-43*, ed. Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (New York, 1944).

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Perennial Fashion—Jazz

Theodor W. Adorno

For almost fifty years, since 1914 when the contagious enthusiasm for it broke out in America, jazz has maintained its place as a mass phenomenon. Its method, all declarations of propagandistic historians notwithstanding, has remained essentially unchanged; its prehistory dates back to certain songs from the first half of the nineteenth century, such as "Turkey in the Straw" and "Old Zip Coon." Jazz is music which fuses the most rudimentary melodic, harmonic, metric, and formal structure with the ostensibly disruptive principle of syncopation, yet without ever really disturbing the crude unity of the basic rhythm, the identically sustained meter, the quarter note. This is not to say that nothing has happened in jazz. The monochromatic piano has been forced to cede the dominant role it played during the ragtime period to small ensembles, generally winds. The wild antics of the first jazz bands from the South, New Orleans above all, and of those from Chicago, have been toned down with the growth of commercialization and the audience, and continued scholarly efforts to recover some of this original animation, whether called "swing" or "bebop," inexorably succumb to commercial requirements and quickly lose their sting. The syncopation principle, which at first had to call attention to itself by exaggeration, has in the meantime become so self-evident that it no longer needs to accentuate the weak beats as was formally required. Anyone still using such accents today is derided as "corny," as out-of-date as 1927 evening dress. Contrariness has changed into second-degree "smoothness" and the jazz-form of reaction has become so entrenched that an entire generation of youth hears only syncopations without being aware of the original conflict between it and the basic meter. Yet none of this alters the fact that jazz has in its essence remained static, nor does it explain the resulting enigma that millions of people seem never to tire of

Translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber

its monotonous attraction. Winthrop Sargeant, internationally known today as the art editor of *Life* magazine, is responsible for the best, most reliable, and most sensible book on the subject; twenty-five years ago he wrote that jazz was in no way a new musical idiom but rather, "even in its most complex manifestations a very elementary matter of incessantly repeated formulae." This kind of unbiased observation seems possible only in America; in Europe, where jazz has not yet become an everyday phenomenon, there is the tendency, especially among those devotees who have adopted it as *Weltanschauung*, to regard it falsely as a breakthrough of original, untrammelled nature, as a triumph over the musty museum culture. However little doubt there can be regarding the African elements in jazz, it is no less certain that everything unruly in it was from the very beginning integrated into a strict scheme, that its rebellious gestures are accompanied by the tendency to blind obeisance, much like the sado-masochistic type described by analytic psychology, the person who chafes against the father figure while secretly admiring him, who seeks to emulate him and in turn derives enjoyment from the subordination he overtly detests. This propensity accelerates the standardization, commercialization, and rigidification of the medium. It is not as though scurrilous businessmen have corrupted the voice of nature by attacking it from without; jazz takes care of this all by itself. The abuse of jazz is not the external calamity in whose name the puristic defenders of "real," unadulterated jazz furiously protest; such misuse originates in jazz itself. The Negro spirituals, antecedents of the blues, were slave songs and as such combined the lament of unfreedom with its oppressed confirmation. Moreover, it is difficult to isolate the authentic Negro elements in jazz. The white *lumpen proletariat* also participated in its prehistory, during the period preceding its thrust into the spotlight of a society which seemed to be waiting for it and which had long been familiar with its impulses through the cakewalk and tap dancing.

It is precisely this paltry stock of procedures and characteristics, however, the rigorous exclusion of every unregimented impulse, which makes the durability of this "specialty"—one which accepts change only when forced to, and then generally only to suit the demands of advertising—so difficult to grasp. For the fact remains that jazz has established itself for a short eternity in the midst of a phase which is otherwise anything but static, and that it displays not the slightest inclination to relinquish any portion of its monopoly but instead only the tendency to adapt itself to the ear of the listener, no matter whether highly trained or undifferentiated. Yet for all of that it has not become any less fashionable. For almost fifty years the productions of jazz have remained as ephemeral as seasonal styles. Jazz is a form of manneristic interpretation. As with fashions, what is important is show, not the thing itself; instead of jazz itself being

composed, "light" music, the most dismal product of the popular-song industry, is dressed up. Jazz fans—short for fanatics—sense this and therefore prefer to emphasize the music's improvisational features. But these are mere frills. Any precocious American teenager knows that the routine today scarcely leaves any room for improvisation, and that what appears as spontaneity is in fact carefully planned out in advance with machinelike precision. But even where there is real improvisation, in oppositional groups which perhaps even today still indulge in such things out of sheer pleasure, the sole material remains popular songs. Thus, the so-called improvisations are actually reduced to the more or less feeble rehashing of basic formulas in which the schema shines through at every moment. Even the improvisations conform largely to norms and recur constantly. The range of the permissible in jazz is as narrowly circumscribed as in any particular cut of clothes. In view of the wealth of available possibilities for discovering and treating musical material, even in the sphere of entertainment if absolutely necessary, jazz has shown itself to be utterly impoverished. Its use of the existing musical techniques seems to be entirely arbitrary. The ban on changing the basic beat during the course of the music is itself sufficient to constrict composition to the point where what it demands is not aesthetic awareness of style but rather psychological regression. The limitations placed on meter, harmony, and form are not less stifling. Considered as a whole, the perennial sameness of jazz consists not in a basic organization of the material within which the imagination can roam freely and without inhibition, as within an articulate language, but rather in the utilization of certain well-defined tricks, formulas, and clichés to the exclusion of everything else. It is as though one were to cling convulsively to the "latest thing" and deny the image of a particular year by refusing to tear off the page of the calendar. Fashion enthrones itself as something lasting and thus sacrifices the dignity of fashion, its transience.

In order to understand how an entire sphere can be described by a few simple recipes as though nothing else existed, one must first free oneself of the clichés, "vitality" and "rhythm of the time," which are glorified by advertising, by its journalistic appendage, and, in the end, by the victims themselves. The fact is that what jazz has to offer rhythmically is extremely limited. The most striking traits in jazz were all independently produced, developed, and surpassed by serious music since Brahms. And its "vitality" is difficult to take seriously in the face of an assembly-line procedure that is standardized down to its most minute deviations. The jazz ideologists, especially in Europe, mistakenly regard the sum of psycho-technically calculated and tested effects as the expression of an emotional state,

the illusion of which jazz evokes in the listener; this attitude is rather like regarding those film stars, whose regular or sorrowful faces are modeled on portraits of famous persons, as being therefore of the same stature as Lucrezia Borgia or Lady Hamilton if, indeed, the latter were not already their own mannequins. What enthusiastically stunted innocence sees as the jungle is actually factory-made through and through, even when, on special occasions, spontaneity is publicized as a featured attraction. The paradoxical immortality of jazz has its roots in the economy. Competition on the culture market has proved the effectiveness of a number of techniques, including syncopation, semi-vocal, semi-instrumental sounds, gliding, impressionistic harmonies, and opulent instrumentation which suggests that "nothing is too good for us." These techniques are then sorted out and kaleidoscopically mixed into ever-new combinations without there taking place even the slightest interaction between the total scheme and the no less schematic details. All that remains is the results of the competition, itself not very "free," and the entire business is then touched up, in particular by the radio. The investments made in "name bands," whose fame is assured by scientifically engineered propaganda, and, even more important, the money used to promote musical bestseller programs like "The Hit Parade" by the firms who buy radio advertising time, make every divergence a risk. Standardization, moreover, means the strengthening of the lasting domination of the listening public and of their conditioned reflexes. They are expected to want only that to which they have become accustomed and to become enraged whenever their expectations are disappointed and fulfillment, which they regard as the customer's inalienable right, is denied. And even if there were attempts to introduce anything really different into light music, they would be doomed from the start by virtue of economic concentration.

The insurmountable character of a phenomenon which is inherently contingent and arbitrarily reflects something of the arbitrary nature of present social controls. The more totally the culture industry roots out all deviations, thus cutting off the medium from its intrinsic possibilities of development, the more the whole blaring dynamic business approaches a standstill. Just as no piece of jazz can, in a musical sense, be said to have a history, just as all its components can be moved about at will, just as no single measure follows from the logic of the musical progression—so the perennial fashion becomes the likeness of a planned, congealed society, not so different from the nightmare vision of Huxley's *Brave New World*. Whether what the ideology here expresses—or exposes—is the tendency of an over-accumulating society to regress to the stage of simple reproduction is for economists to decide. The fear that marked the late writings of a bitterly disappointed Thorstein Veblen, that the play of economic and social forces was coming to rest in a negative, historical

state, a kind of higher-potency feudalism, may be highly unlikely, yet it remains the innermost desire of jazz. The image of the technical world possesses an ahistorical aspect that enables it to serve as a mythical mirage of eternity. Planned production seems to purge the life-process of all that is uncontrollable, unpredictable, incalculable in advance and thus to deprive it of what is genuinely new, without which history is hardly conceivable; in addition, the form of the standardized mass-produced article transforms the temporal sequence of objects into more of the same. The fact that a 1950 locomotive looks different from one made in 1850 leaves a paradoxical impression; it is for this reason that the most modern express trains are occasionally decorated with photographs of obsolete models. The surrealists, who have much in common with jazz, have appealed to this level of experience since Apollinaire: "Ici même les automobiles ont l'air d'être anciennes." Traces of this have been unconsciously assimilated by the perennial fashion; jazz, which knows what it is doing when it allies itself with technique, collaborates in the "technological veil" through its rigorously repetitive though objectless cultic ritual, and fosters the illusion that the twentieth century is ancient Egypt, full of slaves and endless dynasties. This remains illusion, however, for although the symbol of technology may be the uniformly revolving wheel, its intrinsic energies develop to an incalculable extent while remaining saddled by a society which is driven forward by its inner tensions, which persists in its irrationality and which grants men far more history than they wish. Timelessness is projected on technology by a world-order which knows that to change would be to collapse. The pseudo-eternity is belied, however, by the bad contingencies and inferiorities that have established themselves as universal principle. The men of the Thousand-Year Reichs of today look like criminals, and the perennial gesture of mass culture is that of the asocial person. The fact that of all the tricks available, syncopation should have been the one to achieve musical dictatorship over the masses recalls the usurpation that characterizes techniques, however rational they may be in themselves, when they are placed at the service of irrational totalitarian control. Mechanisms which in reality are part and parcel of the entire present-day ideology, of the culture industry, are left easily visible in jazz because in the absence of technical knowledge they cannot be as easily identified as, for example, in films. Yet even jazz takes certain precautions. Parallel to standardization is pseudo-individualization. The more strictly the listener is curbed, the less he is permitted to notice it. He is told that jazz is "consumer art," made especially for him. The particular effects with which jazz fills out its schema, syncopation above all, strive to create the appearance of being the outburst of caricature of untrammelled subjectivity—in effect, that of the listener—or perhaps the most subtle nuance dedicated to the greater glory of the audience. But

the method becomes trapped in its own net. For while it must constantly promise its listeners something different, excite their attention and keep itself from becoming run-of-the-mill, it is not allowed to leave the beaten path; it must be always new and always the same. Hence, the deviations are just as standardized as the standards and in effect revoke themselves the instant they appear. Jazz, like everything else in the culture industry, gratifies desires only to frustrate them at the same time. However much jazz subjects, representing the music listener in general, may play the nonconformist, in truth they are less and less themselves. Individual features which do not conform to the norm are nevertheless shaped by it, and become marks of mutilation. Terrified, jazz fans identify with the society they dread for having made them what they are. This gives the jazz ritual its affirmative character, that of being accepted into a community of unfree equals. With this in mind, jazz can appeal directly to the mass of listeners in self-justification with a diabolically good conscience. Standard procedures which prevail unquestioned and which have been perfected over long periods of time produce standard reactions. Well-meaning educators, who believe that a change in programming would be enough to bring the violated and oppressed to desire something better, or at least something different, are much too credulous. Even when they do not greatly transcend the ideological realm of the culture industry, serious changes in program policy are angrily rejected in reality. The population is so accustomed to the drivel it gets that it cannot renounce it, even when it sees through it halfway. On the contrary, it feels itself impelled to intensify its enthusiasm in order to convince itself that its ignominy is its good fortune. Jazz sets up schemes of social behavior to which people must in any case conform. Jazz enables them to practice those forms of behavior, and they love it all the more for making the inescapable easier to bear. Jazz reproduces its own mass-basis, without thereby reducing the guilt of those who produce it. The eternity of fashion is a vicious circle.

Jazz fans, as has once again been emphatically shown by David Riesman, can be divided into two clearly distinguishable groups. In the inner circle sit the experts, or those who consider themselves such—for very often the most passionate devotees, those who flaunt the established terminology and differentiate jazz styles with ponderous pretention, are hardly able to give an account, in precise, technical musical concepts, of whatever it is that so moves them. Most of them consider themselves avant-gardistic, thus participating in a confusion that has become ubiquitous today. Among the symptoms of the disintegration of culture and education, not the least is the fact that the distinction between autonomous “high” and commercial “light” art, however questionable it may be, is

neither critically reflected nor even noticed any more. And now that certain culturally defeatist intellectuals have pitted the latter against the former, the philistine champions of the culture industry can even take pride in the conviction that they are marching in the vanguard of the *Zeitgeist*. The organization of culture into “levels” such as the First, Second, and Third Programs, patterned after low, middle and highbrow, is reprehensible. But it cannot be overcome simply by the lowbrow sects declaring themselves to be highbrow. The legitimate discontent with culture provides a pretext but not the slightest justification for the glorification of a highly rationalized section of mass production, one which debases and betrays culture without at all transcending it, as the dawn of a new world sensibility or for confusing it with cubism, Eliot’s poetry, and Joyce’s prose. Regression is not origin, but origin is the ideology of regression. Anyone who allows the growing respectability of mass culture to seduce him into equating a popular song with modern art because of a few false notes squeaked by a clarinet; anyone who mistakes a triad studded with “dirty notes” for atonality, has already capitulated to barbarism. Art which has degenerated to culture pays the price of being all the more readily confused with its own waste products as its aberrant influence grows. Education, traditionally the privilege of the few, is paid its due by self-conscious illiteracy which proclaims the stupor of tolerated excess to be the realm of freedom. Rebelling feebly, those it affects are always ready to duck, following the lead of jazz, which integrates stumbling and coming-too-soon into the collective march step. There is a striking similarity between this type of jazz enthusiast and many of the young disciples of logical positivism, who throw off philosophical culture with the same zeal as jazz fans dispense with the tradition of serious music. Enthusiasm turns into a matter-of-fact attitude in which all feeling becomes attached to technique, hostile to all meaning. They feel themselves secure within a system so well defined that no mistake could possibly slip by, and the repressed yearning for things outside finds expression as intolerant hatred and in an attitude which combines the superior knowledge of the initiate with the pretentiousness of the person without illusions. Bombastic triviality, superficiality seen as apodictic certitude, transfigures the cowardly defence against every form of self-reflection. All these old accustomed modes of reaction have in recent times lost their innocence, set themselves up as philosophy and thus become truly pernicious.

Gathered around the specialists in a field in which there is little to understand besides rules are the vague, inarticulate followers. In general they are intoxicated by the fame of mass culture, a fame which the latter knows how to manipulate; they could just as well get together in clubs for worshipping film stars or for collecting autographs. What is important to them is the sense of belonging as such, identification, without their paying

particular attention to this content. As girls, they have trained themselves to faint upon hearing the voice of a "crooner." Their applause, cued in by a light signal, is transmitted directly on the popular radio programs they are permitted to attend. They call themselves "jitter-bugs," bugs which carry out reflex movements, performers of their own ecstasy. Merely to be carried away by anything at all, to have something of their own, compensates for their impoverished and barren existence. The gesture of adolescence, which raves for this or that on one day with the ever-present possibility of damning it as idiocy on the next, is now socialized. Of course, Europeans tend to overlook the fact that jazz fans on the Continent in no way equal those in America. The element of excess, of insubordination, in jazz, which can still be felt in Europe, is entirely missing today in America. The recollection of anarchic origins which jazz shares with all of today's ready-made mass movements, is fundamentally repressed, however much it may continue to simmer under the surface. Jazz is taken for granted as an institution, house-broken and scrubbed behind the ears. What is common to the jazz enthusiasts of all countries, however, is the moment of compliance, in parodistic exaggeration. In this respect their play recalls the brutal seriousness of the masses of followers in totalitarian states, even though the difference between play and seriousness amounts to that between life and death. The advertisement for a particular song played by a big name band was "Follow your leader, XY." While the leaders in the European dictatorships of both shades raged against the decadence of jazz, the youth of the other countries has long since allowed itself to be electrified, as with marches, by the syncopated dance steps, with bands which do not by accident stem from military music. The division into shock troops and inarticulate following has something of the distinction between party élite and rest of the "people."

The jazz monopoly rests on the exclusiveness of the supply and the economic power behind it. But it would have been broken long ago if the ubiquitous specialty did not contain something universal to which people respond. Jazz must possess a "mass basis," the technique must link up with a moment in the subjects—one which, of course, in turn points back to the social structure and to typical conflicts between the ego and society. What first comes to mind, in quest for that moment, is the eccentric clown or parallels with the early film comics. Individual weakness is proclaimed and revoked in the same breath, stumbling is confirmed as a kind of higher skill. In the process of integrating the asocial, jazz converges with the equally standardized schemas of the detective novel and its offshoots, which regularly distort or unmask the world so that asociality and crime become the everyday norm, but which at the same time charm away the

seductive and ominous challenge through the inevitable triumph of order. Psychoanalytic theory alone can provide an adequate explanation of this phenomenon. The aim of jazz is the mechanical reproduction of a regressive moment, a castration symbolism. "Give up your masculinity, let yourself be castrated," the eunuch-like sound of the jazz band both mocks and proclaims, "and you will be rewarded, accepted into a fraternity which shares the mystery of impotence with you, a mystery revealed at the moment of the initiation rite."* If this interpretation of jazz—whose sexual implications are better understood by its shocked opponents than by its apologists—appears arbitrary and far-fetched, the fact remains that it can be substantiated in countless details of the music as well as of the song lyrics. In the book *American Jazz Music*, Wilder Hobson describes an early jazz bandleader Mike Riley, a musical eccentric who must have truly mutilated the instruments. "The band squirted water and tore clothes, and Riley offered perhaps the greatest of trombone comedy acts, an insane rendition of 'Dinah' during which he repeatedly dismembered the horn and reassembled it erratically until the tubing hung down like brass burnishings in a junk shop, with a vaguely harmonic honk still sounding from one or more of the loose ends." Long before, Virgil Thomson had compared the performances of the famed jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong to those of the great castrati of the eighteenth century. The entire sphere is saturated with terminology which distinguishes between "long-" and "short-haired" musicians. The latter are jazz people who earn money and can afford to appear presentable; the others, the caricature of the Slavic pianist, for instance, whose long mane is exemplary, are grouped under the little esteemed stereotype of the artist who is starving and who flaunts the demands of convention. This is the manifest content of the terminology. What the shorn hair represents hardly requires elaboration. In jazz, the Philistines standing over Samson are permanently transfigured.

In truth, the Philistines. The castration symbolism, deeply buried in the practices of jazz and cut off from consciousness through the institutionalization of perennial sameness, is for that very reason probably all the more potent. And sociologically, jazz has the effect of strengthening and extending, down to the very physiology of the subject, the acceptance of a dreamless-realistic world in which all memories of things not wholly integrated have been purged. To comprehend the mass basis of jazz one must take full account of the taboo on artistic expression in America, a taboo which continues unabated despite the official art industry, and which

* This theory is developed in the essay "Jazz," published in 1936 in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (p. 252ff.) and elaborated in a review of the books by Sargeant and Hobson in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, 1941, p. 175. ("Jazz" is reprinted in Adorno, *Moments Musicaux* [Frankfurt am Main, 1964], pp. 84–115. Translator's note.)

even affects the expressive impulses of children; progressive education, which seeks to stimulate their faculties of expression as an end in itself, is simply a reaction to this. Although the artist is partially tolerated, partially integrated into the sphere of consumption as an "entertainer," a functionary—like the better-paid waiter subject to the demands of "service"—the stereotype of the artist remains the introvert, the egocentric idiot, frequently the homosexual. While such traits may be tolerated in professional artists—a scandalous private life may even be expected as part of the entertainment—everyone else makes himself immediately suspicious by any spontaneous artistic impulse not ordered in advance by society. A child who prefers to listen to serious music or practice the piano rather than watch a baseball game or television will have to suffer as a "sissy" in his class or in the other groups to which he belongs and which embody far more authority than parents or teacher. The expressive impulse is exposed to the same truth of castration that is symbolized and mechanically and ritually subdued in jazz. Nevertheless, the need for expression, which stands in no necessary relation to the objective quality of art, cannot be entirely eliminated, especially during the years of maturation. Teenagers are not entirely stifled by economic life and its psychological correlative, the reality principle. Their aesthetic impulses are not simply extinguished by suppression but are rather diverted. Jazz is the preferred medium of such diversion. To the masses of young people who, year after year, chase the perennial fashion, presumably to forget it after a few years, it offers a compromise between aesthetic sublimation and social adjustment. The "unrealistic," practically useless, imaginative element is permitted to survive at the price of changing its character; it must tirelessly strive to remake itself in the image of reality, to repeat the latter's commands to itself, to submit to them. Thus, it reintegrates itself into the sphere from which it sought to escape. Art is deprived of its aesthetic dimension, and emerges as part of the very adjustment which it in principle contradicts. Viewed from this standpoint, several unusual features of jazz can be more easily understood. The role played by arrangement, for instance, which cannot be adequately explained in terms of a technical division of labor or of the musical illiteracy of the so-called composers. Nothing is permitted to remain what it intrinsically is. Everything must be fixed up, must bear the traces of a preparation which brings it closer to the sphere of the well-known, thus rendering it more easily comprehensible. At the same time, this process of preparation indicates to the listener that the music is made for him, yet without idealizing him. And finally, arrangement stamps the music with the official seal of approval, which in turn testifies to the absence of all artistic ambitions to achieve distance from reality, to the readiness of the music to swim with the stream; this is music which does not fancy itself any better than it is.

The primacy of adjustment is no less decisive in determining the specific skills which jazz demands from its musicians, to a certain extent from its listeners as well, and certainly from the dancers who strive to imitate the music. Aesthetic technique, in the sense of the quintessence of means employed to objectify an autonomous subject matter, is replaced by the ability to cope with obstacles, to be impervious to disruptive factors like syncopations and yet at the same time to execute cleverly the particular action which underlies the abstract rules. The aesthetic act is made into a sport by means of a system of tricks. To master it is also to demonstrate one's practicality. The achievement of the jazz musician and expert adds up to a sequence of successfully surmounted tests. But expression, the true bearer of aesthetic protest, is overtaken by the might against which it protests. Faced by this might it assumes a malicious and miserable tone which barely and momentarily disguises itself as harsh and provocative. The subject which expresses itself expresses precisely this: I am nothing, I am filth, no matter what they do to me, it serves me right. Potentially, this subject has already become one of those Russians accused of a crime who, although innocent, collaborates with the prosecutor from the beginning and is incapable of finding a punishment severe enough. If the aesthetic realm originally emerged as an autonomous sphere from the magic taboo which distinguished the sacred from the everyday, seeking to keep the former pure, the profane now takes its revenge on the descendant of magic, on art. Art is permitted to survive only if it renounces the right to be different, and integrates itself into the omnipotent realm of the profane which finally took over the taboo. Nothing may exist which is not like the world as it is. Jazz is the false liquidation of art—instead of utopia becoming reality, it disappears from the picture.