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Subliminal Rock

> To ignore your environment
> is to eventually find yourself
> a slave to it.
>
> WYNDHAM LEWIS
> The Art of Being Ruled

A Subliminal Hook

This chapter probes those subliminal techniques engineered into popular records that almost anyone can find. The subliminal messages are hidden in relatively simple verbal or musical illusions. Subliminal technology sells records by the tens of millions each year in North America. No one apparently knows or understands as yet, however, the consequences of this sensory bombardment upon human value systems.

Buried within the April 1974 list of top-thirty record sellers was a song called "Hooked on a Feeling" recorded by a rock group billed as Blue Swede. Like so many hundreds of other such rock ballads, relentlessly merchandised each year across North America, "Hooked" was a passed-over item a few months later. But during its brief glory peak, the record sold several million copies, producing a small fortune for its promoters. Most of the singles were purchased by gum-chewing, long-haired teen-age girls who first heard it being plugged by disc jockeys on the AM baud wasteland.

Not one of the rock biggies, "Hooked" did well. Though few fans could consciously decipher the banality in the song's lyrics, the melody was whistled and hummed by both teen-

agers and even by some of their parents who picked it up unconsciously.

"Hooked on a Feeling" has a curious chant, sung by the chorus, which is sustained behind the lyric. The repititious background phrase sounds like "ooh-ga-shook-ah." Considering the lyric and chant hi a figure-ground relationship, the audience consciously listened to the lyric's meaningless banality, not the background chant. Roughly a hundred teen-agers who owned the record, both male and female, were asked what the background phrase "ooh-ga-shook-ah" meant. No one had any idea. They also had no conscious idea what the lyric was about, even though all had heard the song dozens—if not many, many dozens—of times.

At several points in the continuity of the background chant—consciously ignored because attention was focused upon the foreground lyric—the chanted phrase "Ooh-ga-shook-ah" smoothly and very distinctly converted into "Who got sucked off?" The technique has been called metacontrast or backward masking, much like the magician who tricks you into watching his right hand while he picks your pocket with his left.

Several weeks later, many in the group interviewed stated all they could hear now in the song was this embedded obscenity. Most appeared disgusted and disillusioned with both the record and the recording artists. Several pointed out, "We've been had!"

North America is a visually oriented culture. Americans are more consciously concerned with visual form, experience, color, movement or the lack of movement, depth illusions, and other visual experiences than are many other cultures, Russians, for example, appear strongly biased toward auditory experience, putting far more trust in what they hear than in what they see. Because Americans tend to consciously ignore or consider auditory experience insignificant, there appears little indication that we are aware of either music's power or its pervasiveness.

Two thousand years ago, Plato demanded strict censorship over popular music in his Utopian Republic. He feared citizens "would be tempted and corrupted by weak and voluptuous airs and led to indulge in demoralizing emotions." Fears of music's power to corrupt have been expressed by many

philosophers and scientists. In modern America, even with all the media criticism published, very little mention has been made of the behavioral effects of music or lyrics. Popular music, in all its happiness and horror, is an invisible dimension of today's environment

Divide the Market and Conquer

Popular music is skillfully marketed to specific groups and subgroups within the society with an intensity that would make an underarm deodorant salesman blush with envy. A record may be produced and marketed for several young markets, but producers usually aim at specific targets: the preteen, eight to twelve; early teen, thirteen to fourteen; midteen, fifteen to sixteen; late teen, seventeen to nineteen; and postteen, over twenty. Rarely will a single recording artist or group hit across the board, selling to all the markets. The Beatles were, in their later years, one of the few groups who appeared to cross virtually all demographic groups. As some successful music groups aged, however, their audiences sustained their enthusiasm as they, too, grew older. This is rare. Most of the groups hit hard, saturate their markets, and disappear.

The teen-age rock market has been studied for years by commercial researchers, much like any marketing target: purchasing patterns, life-styles, psychosexual development, mating customs, aggressions, costuming, drive systems, paternal-maternal relationships, the whole range of complex needs within individuals and the groups to which they belong.

These music consumers are highly discriminating in what they purchase, and usually buy strictly within their market segments. The soul sounds of James Brown will not likely reach the same market segment supporting Bobby Sherman. Rock music, for example, breaks down into "rock 'n' roll," "jazz rock," "bubble gum," "commercial rock," "acid (or psychedelic) rock," "heavy rock," etcetera ad infinitum. The category list constantly changes, divides, and subdivides.

Teen-agers generally listen to top-forty music stations an average of six hours daily. They purchase an average of four new records weekly. They buy 60 percent of all 45-rpm singles, while the under-twenty-five age group buys 80 per-

cent. The music merchandising business is aimed at the young, especially those in the upper-middle income group with high discretionary incomes supplied by indulgent parents.

Marketing technicians have been extraordinarily successful in managing teen-age music markets. More millionaires are believed to have emerged from the popular music industry during the past two decades than in any other segment of the American economy.

Paul's Early Death

One very profitable use of subliminal manipulation technique involved the Beatles' multimillion-dollar publicity stunt over the supposed death of Paul McCartney. For never-explained reasons, McCartney avoided public appearances over an extended period. Rumors swept the world, "Paul is dead!" Headlines questioning the fate of Paul appeared in every major world capital.

Had they really wished to resolve the question, the rumor could quickly have been turned off by simply permitting a wire service to interview the musician. This, of course, was never done. When you can make more money by staying home than appearing in public, you stay home. The Beatles milked the rumor for all it was worth—and it was worth millions. They embedded material on Paul's death in their recordings. One of these was in the Magical Mystery Tour album in the last few grooves of a song titled "Strawberry Fields," A voice inexplicably appeared at low volume and said, "I buried Paul." In the hysteria of the time, similar sound embedding appeared in many other recordings. These embeds would not be consciously perceived, but would subliminally—because of their strong emotional impact—reinforce the album's value and emotional significance far more powerfully than could a million dollars' worth of network television commercials.

The death rumor was also reinforced on the covers of albums such as Sergeant Pepper, where on the cover the four Beatles were pictured with Paul McCartney's back turned to the reader. The Abbey Road album cover even showed Paul in a burial costume. The cover layout on an album titled The

Beatles in the Beginning also included a four-candled candelabrum with one of the candle's flame extinguished.

The success of these strategies is attested to by virtually any parent who has witnessed the glassy-eyed hypnotic stupor in which they find their youngsters absorbing highly amplified stroking via the latest hit record. The highly visible effects of these promotions are a compulsive purchasing of singles and albums and endless hours of repetitive listening.

Music as Sex Substitute

Very strong subliminal sexual stimulation is at least part of what is being massaged into the young psyches. In one survey of about fifty male high school students, almost a third openly admitted masturbating while listening to rock music. Most young Americans are highly secretive about their sexual behavior. This implies that the actual percentage of those who obtain vicarious sexual stimulation from, auditory stimuli is much higher.

Most clearly, neither record addicts nor their parents who support the addiction have any conscious idea of what they are so deeply involved with. In a survey of over four hundred students in metropolitan Detroit and Grand Rapids, Michigan, psychologists John Robinson and Paul Hirsch found that only about 20 percent of these teen-agers—from the eighth and eleventh grades and varied in social class, race, and religion—could reasonably explain the meaning of lyrics from such super-hits as "Ode to Billy Joe," "Incense and Peppermit," "Heavy Music," and "Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds." A third to one half of these students had no conscious idea whatsoever as to the meaning of these lyrics. And the rest had only vague or partial explanations of the various songs' verbal meanings.

The teen-agers surveyed uniformly tried to avoid any discussion of meaning, many maintaining there was no real meaning—"just a good sound!" Seventy percent emphasized they liked a record more for its beat or sound than for its message. None appeared certain just what "beat" or "sound" meant, nor could they even specify what they meant by "message."

In the above Michigan study, as well as many others, what

appeared was a consumer repression from consciousness of lyric meaning. If the mind-massagers who produce the music were as vague and uncertain about what was going on in their markets as are the consumers, widespread bankruptcy would be in store for every major record producer in America. Consider the king's ransom these companies have had to pay writers such as Paul Simon. Yet few of their fans appear to either understand or consider significant what these writers produce. This is, to put it mildly, a strange paradox—unless the song's lack of conscious meaning becomes highly meaningful at the unconscious level, and song lyrics, like poetry and other art forms, are purposely produced for unconscious perception.

Tommy's Invisible Sell

The Who's Tommy, a so-called rock opera, was released during 1975 as a feature motion picture, starring Ann-Margret, Oliver Reed, Roger Daltrey, and Elton John. Based upon a record album first distributed in 1969, the movie provided all diences with a visual bath in sensation.

Every visual trick in the book was thrown into the film by director Ken Russell—sacrilegious spectacles such as a rock communion procession escorting a fifteen-foot plaster statue of Marilyn Monroe with her skirt blown high and a communion offering to the faithful of booze and amphetamine (speed) capsules rather than the more traditionally symbolic wafers and wine. In one powerful scene Tommy's sensual mother (played by Ann-Margret) hurled a champagne bottle into a TV picture tube where soap and bean commercials were appearing. A flood of soapsuds shot into the room from the damaged tube, followed by a torrential outpouring of beans, and finally a surging river of excrement in which the actress erotically rolls and bathes.

The film, however, had very little to do with the record album. Marshall McLuhan's notion of "hot and cool media" well illustrates the point "Cool is involving, hot is not." The film version was "hot." Audiences could consciously perceive virtually everything the director and actors tried to express. The involvement was, for the most part, conscious.

The Who's original album of Tommy was another story.

Mostly designed for subliminal interpretation and involvement, the album was, in McLuhan's terms, "cool," deeply involving subconscious levels. The album, of course, initially programmed the audience for the film at least five years in advance. The album of Tommy sold roughly 2 million copies during the first year of its distribution.

An event like Tommy is usually dismissed as meaningless by adults, especially parents who usually finance the album's purchase. If they were consciously aware of the event at all, it was only in terms of a background-noise distraction in their living rooms.

In late 1969, a group of fifty adults in a university adult education class, many of them parents of teen-agers, were requested to write out briefly what they believed was meant by the story of Tommy. The record was played for them in its entirety. After hearing the record, the group sat with universally bewildered expressions. Some liked it, some disliked it, but most were uncertain how they felt. No individual in the group was able to even vaguely answer simple questions such as, "What is Tommy all about?" "What does the story mean?"

Tommy was played for the group a second time with the lyrics displayed on a projection screen so the group could read what they were hearing. But end results were identical—no one was able to specify anything about the story. However, feelings toward the album appeared to intensify after the second playing. More people strongly liked or disliked the album, and fewer were uncertain about their feelings. Nevertheless, even then no one in the group could describe what was going on.

Analysis of the lyrics was now undertaken by the group on a line-to-line basis, much as one might attempt to analyze an Elizabethan sonnet. Meanings for each phrase, line, and stanza were accepted only if a majority of the group agreed the meaning was a valid possibility. When the group disagreed significantly, alternative explanations were included as possibly valid.

The results of this experiment were, to put it mildly, shocking—especially as the primary market appeared to be teenage boys and girls in the thirteen to nineteen age group. The

following is a synopsis of what the group felt Tommy was all about:

A Romantic Fantasy

Tommy's mother was a prostitute whose husband died in World War I. After Tommy was born, she continued with her clients and eventually married a man who became her pimp, As an infant, Tommy had witnessed the sexual relationships between his mother and her lovers. He was told repeatedly by his mother and father to wipe these "absurd" memories from his mind. "To know the truth" by forgetting what had happened. The Oedipal implications of a young man and his step-father were, of course, basic to Shakespeare's play Ham-' let. Now, complicate the situation by making the step-father a pimp. Tommy became autistic—blind, deaf, and dumb, unresponsive and unaware of everything. He "sits silently, picks his nose and smiles, and pokes his tongue at everything."

Cousin Kevin taught Tommy about life. Kevin described himself as "the school bully, the classroom cheat, the nastiest playfriend you could ever meet." He put glass in Tommy's food, spikes in his seat, pins in his fingers, treads on his feet, tied him in a chair, called him a freak, held his head under water and laughed, shut him outside in the rain to catch cold and die, burned his arm with a cigarette, dragged him around by the hair, and pushed him down the stairs.

Uncle Ernie baby-sat with Tommy. A homosexual, he became drunk and sexually assaulted the autistic child. Autistic Tommy was, then, left by his mother with the Acid Queen-a friend of the family—who introduced him to both drugs and sex. "Watch his body writhe," she screamed excitedly.

Tommy, described as a deaf, dumb, and blind freak, eventually developed great skill with pinball machines. He "becomes part of the machine." A wizard at the game, he was not distracted by buzzers, balls, and flashing lights. He played by "sense of smell."

Tommy was finally taken to a doctor who discovered he could see, speak, and hear, but had become a machine that did not feel. The doctor's prescription was, "Go to the mirror, boy!" The mirror was the mirror of Narcissus which reflected only idealized illusions. When Tommy attempted to

probe beneath his superficial image, his mother attacked him for peering into his inner self. In desperation, she smashed the mirror. His cure was miraculous.

From that moment, Tommy became a popular sensation. He left a devastating trail of people hypnotized by his messianic power. Everyone marveled at Tommy's seemingly supernatural ability to make his own images, to define his own illusions and realities, and to make his inner hidden reality match in appearance the exposed outer illusion.

Tommy became a gospel singer and preacher surrounded by disc jockeys, guards, and his loyal fans. A girl, Sally, was infatuated with Tommy and tried to touch him during one of his sermons. She was thrown from the stage by guards and her face was cut, requiring sixteen stitches. She, in the end, married a rock musician. Tommy was finally free—a messiah followed by many disciples. He founded Tommy's Holiday Camp, run by Uncle Ernie, where "the holiday is forever."

But this manipulation of society's illusions made everyone turn against Tommy in the end. "We forsake you," the crowd yelled. "Let's forget you—better still." Tommy's fate seemed typical of that in store for anyone who steps through the broken mirror of mass illusion to probe the inner world—from Socrates through Freud to McLuhan.

The Repression Mechanism

The complete line-by-line analysis of Tommy required several hours' work by the group. As the meanings developed, several women, who in the earlier test of their feelings had indicated strong aversion to the recording, became nauseous. Many reported agitation, anger, a sense of outrage and frustration. One mother reported she had refused to permit her thirteen-year-old daughter to purchase the album. At the time, she had not been certain as to why she felt so strongly against Tommy. The woman described her daughter's reaction to the denial as "near hysteria." When the idea of a drug-deprived addictive response was suggested, the mother reluctantly agreed to the similarity. This mother could not believe her daughter consciously understood what the album was all about—even though the young girl had heard it several times all the way through.

Since the album Tommy was much discussed among teen-agers at the time, interviews with roughly fifty were undertaken by college students several months after the record appeared in stores. Less than 2 percent of the teen-agers were able to give a coherent, even partial explanation of the lyrics' meaning. Yet 20 percent owned the record, anotber 40 percent planned to buy it, and 98 percent had heard the album at least once. All the teen-agers interviewed reported Tommy was one of the most significant album productions of the year.

Two years later, another survey of a hundred teen-agers was again made. Teen-agers were asked to explain what Tommy was all about. Roughly 25 percent of those who had heard the record gave a reasonably detailed account of Tommy's tragic and bizarre life. Their interpretations were remarkably close to the one developed a year earlier by the adult group. It appeared that when these teen-agers first purchased or heard the album, they were consciously uncertain as to what the story involved. The learning process, apparently, took several months. Once they were more or less consciously aware of what was going on in Tommy, they generally lost interest in the album.

All the students interviewed agreed they would never, under any circumstances, discuss what they knew of Tommy's adventures with their parents or any other adult. These young people identified with Tommy quite strongly—an autistic, ravaged child forced not to feel, hear, see, or speak the truth. Parents might well give these identification structures some careful thought.

What appeared to be occurring in Tommy, and in many similar rock music albums and singles, was planned ambiguity. Lyrics, orchestration, recording effects, the whole production—most of which required hundreds of hours of skilled labor—was designed to communicate meaningfully only at symbolic subliminal levels.

Teen-agers seem to "buy" the feelings produced by subliminal stimuli without any conscious awareness of specific meanings. A few eventually do discover what is going on, but the cognitive process appears to take weeks, even months, as the message slowly rises to consciousness. At the point where the market, or a substantial portion of it, can consciously

deal with the message, the record is commercially dead. But there are always new singles and albums being born to replace the fallen. As many as five hundred new recordings a week hit the promotion fan.

Who Tells the Story?

The question of who is saying what to whom in rock music is one of the most intriguing aspects of lyric symbology. Ostensibly, boy vocalists dominate the industry and often appear to be singing to girls—possibly the ones who might reasonably be the marketing targets. But this would seem to leave the boy audience out in the cold. In fact, both girls and boys identify with the vocalist, however, suggesting something far more complex and devious is involved.

The boy singer does not aim his lyrics directly at the gum-chewing, vacant-eyed teeny-boppers. This would invite disaster at the record shops. The singers and their lyric writers often project their sentimentality at the singer's mother—a symbolic subliminal identification. The girl record buyers can then unconsciously identify with their hero's mother, whom their hero worships and loves. The boy record buyers support the records as they unconsciously perceive the singer suffering the same maternal rejections they believe themselves to have suffered. They have no reason, therefore, for jealousy or envy when girl friends boost the record.

The technique appears often on million-seller recordings, Elvis Presley's 1957 hit pleads with a subliminal mother to "Let Me Be Your Teddy Bear."*

> ... Put a chain around my neck
> And lead me anywhere,
> Oh let me be your teddy bear.
>
> Baby let me be around you any night,
> Run your fingers through my hair,
> And cuddle me real tight.
> Oh let me be your teddy bear,

This hardly describes a popular teen-age mating ritual,. Even in America's maternally dominated society, few boys would submit to such a relationship with a girl friend. Humans often describe loved ones in verbalisms they project upon themselves—idealized realities, wishes, or fantasy fulfillments. Presley's "baby," then, became an unconscious synonym for mother while the highest paid star in the history of motion pictures assumed the role of a small infant.

The designation "baby," as used in popular music, is often a direct maternal reference. The euphemism for mother, sung by a quivering, immature male voice—pleading an unresolved Oedipal conflict intimately familiar to millions of young Americans—is frequently at the bottom of a song's financial success. These are the plaintive puberty pleadings of a maternally starved generation. The girl consumer identifies with the singer's love object—his mother. The boy consumer identifies with the singer and his sufferings. The formula is well proven and successful. Dad, of course, is totally ignored in this matriarchal game.

Bobby Curtola, another rock superstar, sang bis way into early retirement by skillfully manipulating young America's Oedipal conflicts. "Call Me Baby" was one of his early best-selling records.

> Call me baby, honey baby
> Put your loving arms about me honey baby
> Say it tender when we meet
> Say it soft and say it sweet
> Call me baby, baby, honey baby.

Is it conceivable a young man would want his sweetheart, girl friend, or lover, to call him "baby" and deal with him as though he were an infant child? Hardly! The song is aimed at Mommy, providing subliminal identification for the market.

Mommy's Many Pseudonyms

Paul Anka's first recording, "Diana," sold in excess of 8 1/2 million copies—the third largest-selling single record of all time. A national publicity campaign was launched over the enigma of Diana's identity. Several girl vocalists and actresses of the

early 1960s were considered as fantasy possibilities in publicity releases. Like most publicity department fantasies, however, these were simply nonsense—designed only to milk that high discretionary income from the pockets of teen-ager's parents.

Paul Anka, serving the Oedipal conflicts of North American teen-agers, serenaded his symbolic mother:

I'm so young and you're so old
This my darling I've been told
I don't care just what they say
'Cause forever I will pray
You and I will be as free
As the birds up in the trees
Oh please stay by me, Diana*

A handful of the hundreds of lyrics which utilize maternal identifications include Elvis Presley's "(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care," Joe South & the Believers' "Walk a Mile in My Shoes," Bobby Vee's "Rubber Ball" and "Sharing You," and Frankie Avalon's "Welcome Home." Only once In a while does Mother get into a song at the conscious level as in Jo-Anne Campbell's "Mother, Pleasel" and Roy Orbison's "Mama."

Father, as a symbol of dominance, authority, respect, and love, plays a limited role in mainstream popular American music. When he appears it is most frequently in the country and western field. One recording superstar, Jimmy Dean, made a fortune out of an idealized father projection in his "Big Bad John," followed by "Little Bitty Big John," and finally "P. T. 109," which dealt with John F. Kennedy's wartime experience. When the trilogy was completed, Jimmy Dean could have retired for three lifetimes to the French Riviera. All of which seems to prove that there is money to be made out of paternal, as well as maternal fantasies in the American dream.

For many years, American culture has been discussed as a matriarchy. Women—both real and symbolic mothers—have long dominated the society, especially the children. Long-haired teen-age boys are precisely what mothers would have endorsed thirty years ago if their husbands had permitted them to get away with it. Long hair on male children used to be cut when the boy finished the Oedipal stage, rarely later than the fifth year.

Beatles Followed Bobbies

No discussion of popular music in America would be complete without mentioning the Beatles. The Beatles emerged from an evolution of musicians and composers that between 1956 and 1958, culminated in Elvis Presley. During a military service eclipse in Presley's career, a small army of Bobbies were hatched by the industry—Bobby Curtola, Bobby Vee, Bobby Darin, Bobby Rydell, Bobby Freeman, ad infinitum. The Bobby phenomenon died slowly during the early 1960s, when a brief, though intense, dance-fad period developed with Chubby Checker's 'Twist." Dee Dee Sharp, Bobby Rydell, Little Eva, The Orlons, and the Dovells promoted dance songs such as "The Fly," "The Pony," "The Hully Gully," "The Mashed Potato," "The Locomotion," "The Bristol Stomp," "The Hitchhiker," "The Limbo Rock" and "The Wah-Watusi."

These dance fads came into vogue after large investments and heavy promotion expenses, but few stayed alive long enough to yield either high or sustaining profits. Market segmentation and segment isolation began to evolve as a more dependable music merchandising strategy.

Teeny-boppers are young teens, thirteen to fourteen and preteens, eleven to twelve. Their music is called bubblegum, designed for fans still young or innocent enough to chew gum rather than smoke tobacco or pot. Toward the end of 1963, no bubblegum music appeared on national U.S. hit surveys. The market was wide open.

Already a phenomenal success in England, the Beatles' skilled marketing technicians invaded America. By January 1964, songs such as "I Saw Her Standing There," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "From Me to You," "She Loves You,"

"Please Mr. Postman," "All My Lovin'," and "Hold Me Tight" appeared in the top ten. During February, Ed Sullivan captured 94 percent of the Class A time Sunday night television audience when he featured the Beatles for only fifteen minutes on his national variety show.

The craze was on. Teeny-boppers drove their parents into distraction over the purchase of Beatles dolls, records, T-shirts, etc. The Beatles sold everything that could be attached to their name and image.

It is impossible to determine how much of the Beatles fad was actually created (in the sense of adding something new) and how much was merely a reflection of psychosocial dynamics already operating in Western society. Very likely, the Beatles both innovated as well as attached themselves to the undercurrents of the past.

Though the four Beatles were the only visible portion of the empire, there were several hundred skilled—though invisible -- technicians behind the scenes who created and manipulated the illusions. No one will likely ever know for certain which portions of what the public perceived as the Beatles was actually produced by the four young men or their staff. For example, the Beatles often recorded separately, and their four (or more) recordings were mixed electronically for the final album. The technique gave their engineers complete control over what finally appeared.

Plaintive Puberty Pleadings

An entire book could be devoted to a study of the lyrics written for the early Beatles music. It would probably make dull reading, however, as the puberty agonies portrayed become highly repitious. These songs did, nevertheless, tell the teeny-boppers what they most wanted to hear. And many parents probably felt a sense of relief when their kids dropped the ass-bumping sexuality of pre-Beatles groups. Once established, the Beatles became one of the few groups engineered to transcend market segmentation and achieve almost universal appeal. According to Beatles biographer Hunter Davies, every Beatles album, even before 1968, sold in excess of one million copies. The retail price became higher and higher as they milked the market for all it was

worth. One multimillion-seller album, Abbey Road, sold for ten dollars. A publicity release from the Beatles' management had the temerity to state that fans should be grateful they could obtain the record even at that price.

In 1968 the industry's most successful album was released by Capitol Records—Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. As a monument to electronic gimmickry, Sergeant Pepper was a work of art. The album—by the producer's own admission—required over four hundred hours to record. Perhaps strangely, the album reflected despair, hopelessness, and the futility and hypocrisy of modern life's illusions. To the uninitiated parent, however, the record appeared gay, light, and even humorous. Minor portions were perceived by the teen-age audience consciously, but the largest portion was heard only at subliminal levels.

Side One concerned illusion and means by which people hide truth from themselves. The side began with the business of show business, the greatest illusion of them all. Drugs were dealt with in the songs "Fixing a Hole" and "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"—a not so hidden reference to LSD.

Lush verbal imagery and musical phrase distortions conveyed the hallucinations from an acid trip:

"With tangerine trees and marmalade skies .. ."

Refusals by parents to face the truth or deal with realities were caustically dealt with in "Getting Better," the parental illusion of their idealized relationship with their children in "She's Leaving Home," which pictured parents after their daughter had run away from home:

> We gave her most of our lives . . .
> We gave her everything money can buy...

The song's narrator sings in counterpoint to the lyrics:

> She's leaving home after living alone
> For so many years*

* "She's Leaving Home" by Lennon/McCartney © 1967 Northern Songs, Ltd.

Side One concluded with a return from disturbed family relationships to the illusions of show business. Side Two opened with a song by George Harrison, "Within You Without You," which summarized the meaning of Side One.

The space between us all, and the people who
Hide themselves behind a wall of illusion.*

The next three compositions considered life without drugs or hypocrisy—the sterile, ritualized roles people play. The first "When I'm Sixty-four," ridiculed the life of an elderly couple; the second, "Lovely Rita," made fun of romantic love, extolling the tribulations of a Liverpool whore who procured through her respectable job as a meter maid. The third, deceptively titled, "Good Morning, Good Morning," desolately described the futility and banality of life. The reprise of Sergeant Pepper's theme changed dramatically. Sergeant Pepper was no longer the outrageously funny character who promised smiles and entertainment. Repeating the line four times, the Beatles sang "Sergeant Pepper's lonely." In summary, the final song, "A Day in the Life," questioned whether man could live without his illusions.

A Literature for the Young

Heady stuff for teen-agers? Jon Eisen in The Age of Rock compared Sergeant Pepper with T. S. Eliot's Wasteland in its near desperate reflections upon contemporary life. Dealing—for most of the fans—at subliminal levels, the Beatles became spokesmen for their generation who resisted the status quo. Their record company simply attached their resistance, quite normal resistance among the young at least since the times of Socrates, to the mass merchandising of music. The Beatles even, at one point, exposed themselves as illusions or put-ons created by their early manager Brian Epstein. They declared publicly that from Sergeant Pepper onward, they planned to be themselves both off stage and on. Their fans believed

* "Within You Without You" by George Harrison © 1967 Northern Songs, Ltd.

them, to the tune of tens of millions of dollars in record purchases.

At the subliminal level, Sergeant Pepper was heavily integrated with sex, drugs, and revolutionary politics. It is difficult to determine where the line or threshold lies between conscious and subliminal perception for any stimuli as complex as Sergeant Pepper. One thing is certain, however Parents never got the message, though most of them strongly rejected Sergeant Pepper without consciously realizing why Of course, this parental rejection plaved right into the marketing technique, virtually assuring the record's success.

"Jude" Hits Jackpot

One of the most popular recordings of 1968 was the Beatles single "Hey Jude"* and "Revolution." "Revolution" deals with politics and was sung by John Lennon—the symbolic father of the Beatles' archetypal family. Paul McCartney, who consistently portrayed a maternal role in the family, sang "Hey Jude," providing spiritual advice in the form of drugs as an escape route for pain.

Two meanings for "Jude" appeared as likelv svmbology is the song. "Jude" could have referred to Judas who betrayed Christ under the guise of friendship. Heroin, of course, at first seems to be a friend before it betrays the user into addiction. The second possibility involved the Apostle Jude who warned against those who call themselves Christians while living hypocritically in a morally loose society.

The haunting voice of McCartney sang, "Let her into your heart," "Her" meaning the drug and "heart" the pump that circulates drug-laden blood through the body—so "you can start to make it better."

During the lonely opening verse, the drug injection occurred. In the second verse, musicians joined to make the sound (life) more full and complete. The lyrics tell us, "Don't be afraid." "The moment you let her under your skin, you begin to make it better."

*"Hey Jude" by Lennon/McCartney © 1967 Northern Songs, Ltd.

The third verse said, ". . anytime you feel the pain, Hey Jude-refrain."
"Refrain" means, in one sense, leave it alone. But, the inverse symbology means repeat the chorus or repeat the injeotion at the end of each good period when the pain returns. The verse explained that only a fool pretends there is nothing wrong with empty feelings and avoids being helped by the heroin. The reference to "cool" and *'a little colder" is curious. A common symptom of the deprived addict is being continuously cold. The message here is why be cold when "she" or "her" is available.
The narrator, or drug pusher, repeats his plea in the fourth verse, asking "don't let me down." All you need do is "go and get her" and "let her into your heart."
The fifth verse advised, "Let it out and let it in." Let out inhibited emotions and feelings, let the drag or syringe into your body. "You're waiting for someone to perform [synonym for trip] with." "Don't you know it's just you." You are all that is necessary. "The movement you need is on your shoulder," suggesting either the arm used for the injection or the monkey on your back or shoulder. The final verse counseled, "don't take it bad"—a bad trip should be avoided. "Make it better," by releasing inhibitions and fears. Toward the end of the song, a scream is heard for "Mamma!"—a cry for help, a plea for rescue from the drug addiction.
As the song progressed, a screaming, maniacal chant is heard in the background—providing a contrapuntal theme to the lyric. The chorus chanted, "you gotta break it"—an apparent reference to the habit—"you know you can make it," "don't go back," or in other words, Stay clean! Jude's future at the conclusion is uncertain. The audience never found out whether Jude had kicked the habit or gone on to another fix. The probability that the addiction continued, however, appeared far more likely. "Hey Jude" could, to put it conservatively, reinforce a tendency toward addiction, makig it appear a logical solution to a young person's normal conflicts with authority, society, and the maturation process.

Immortality May Be Forever

Any hope the Beatles would eventually run their course and disappear into limbo is purely wishful thinking. Their pervasive influence upon young people all over the world persists.

In 1973 two anthologies were released: Beatles 1962-1966 and Beatles 1967-1970. Both albums were million sellers within three weeks. A year later, both albums were still among the top hundred in Current LP Sales, according to Billboard. George Harrison's Living in the Material World and Paul McCartney's Red Rose Speedway were also released in 1973 and were instantly successful.

In interviews with young record purchasers in 1974, many admitted that in spite of the high cost of new Beatles records, they purchased them usually without hearing the music. None could explain why. Their behavior resembled that of either robots or Pavlov's dogs responding to bell stimuli.

Keeping the Beatles myth alive with manufactured rumors or pseudo-news about an eternally promised Beatles reunion, the news media helped perpetuate the mythological image. For example, a well-engineered publicity release in Newsweek of March 26, 1973, commented upon the new record releases of the folk heroes of the American dream-marketing industry:

> It was, as producer Richard Perry noted, the first time the three have played together since the Beatles. But any future reunion is pure conjecture. An awful lot of impure conjecturing was going on including the possibility, encouraged by business manager Allen Klein, that the three Beatles would remain in L.A. to record a real John, George, and Ringo album.

The above logic is much like the old question "Will she or won't she?" As long as no one is certain, she will be courted, pursued, indulged, and kept alive in our fantasies.

No one today questions the Beatles' impact upon Western society. They were successful in many languages, even reaching into the collective unconscious of such tradition-oriented cultures as the Russian and Japanese. The mythology follows each of the four young multimillionaires as they grow

older and journey from wife to wife and from one misadventure to another. They are viewed as the initiators of an important epoch of history, the founders of popular culture, and the beginning of an entire army of popular music heroes who exploited their tradition.

However, when anyone asks direct questions as to the Beatles' contribution to Western society, the answers are always vague, unspecific, and usually involve some aspect of the mystique. During several hundred interviews with both children and adults, no one appeared to have any exact idea about the specific differences in their lives that might be directly attributed to the Beatles. Every answer given by these respondents could have been said of other musical groups going back into the 1920s, 30s, or 40s.

A Value System Changed

The answer was amazingly simple and so shocking that no one had apparently put it together. The Beatles popularized and culturally legitimatized hallucinatory drug usage among teen-agers throughout the world.

Hallucinatory and addictive drugs had never before been a part of any society's main cultural value system. Even in places like Indochina, where the French legalized opium as a technique of population management and control, drugs were confined to a minority of users—usually the economically or politically disenfranchised. Certainly, drug usage had never before in the world's history been advertised heavily—as a record promotion technique—by popular music directed at adolescents.

An examination of best-selling music lyrics during the five years preceding the Beatles failed to turn up many song lyrics that could even remotely be interpreted as drug ballads. Pre-Beatles lyrics were crammed with overt and covert sexual symbolism. Death was not an infrequent symbolic entity celebrated subliminally in popular song. But drugs were simply not being pushed, even though drug usage was, as it had always been, apparent among American society's disenfranchised fringes. The Beatles became the super drug culture prophets and pushers of all time. Drugs, of course, ultimately

involve self destruction, and death, or withdrawal from reality.

Western society, especially England and North America had been well primed for expanded drug usage through years of conditioning by pharmaceutical, alcohol, and tobacco advertising. Media long ago established a culturally accepted legitimacy for the use of chemical solutions for problems of emotional adjustment. For the music industry to expand one step beyond household psychogenic products to hallucinatory drug utilization by teen-agers was so simple that even a child should have been able to figure it out. Children did figure it out, of course. No one outside the industry got wise to what was going on, nor did they even suspect how the marketing plan worked.

The Bridge to Happiness

According to Billboard, "Bridge over Troubled Water" sold over 5 million copies during 1969 as a single recording. The album sold over 4 million copies—the second highest seller during a single year in the history of record sales. (The Beatles' Sergeant Pepper was the first.) "Bridge," however, as single and album, received a total of five of the recording industry's Oscar equivalents—the Grammy Awards—in 1969.

Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel won best-selling single best-selling album, best-engineered single, best-engineered album, and best composer.

Paul Simon, the composer, claimed he took a month to write "Bridge" and another month to record the composition. The rather simple, unassuming final recording lasted four minutes and fifty-two seconds—rather long for the average single. For Simon, this was a major project. His other hit records were composed, so he claimed, in only a day or two.

As Simon explained in an interview with Jazz and Pop Magazine, "I wanted to create a feeling of comfort. The words are relaxing, warm, almost euphoric. My music has always been different from what's normally on the top ten. I've been quite successful. I hadn't recorded for about a year and a half. The listening public wondered where I was. I knew the song would be successful. I don't buy the American Bandstand success formula. I've always done my own musical

thing. The secret to me has been a genial fusion of music and lyrics."

Whether the above statement was written by Simon or one of his many publicity writers is irrelevant. The usual vague, meaningless euphemisms for reality—relaxing, warm, euphoric, musical thing, genial fusion—says nothing really about what the composer was doing in "Bridge."

As a very skilled merchant of symbolic values in both words and music, Simon knows better. Illusions are a tough business. In order to reap the millions of dollars he has taken from teen-age record buyers, in the most competitive business in the world, Simon must be a skilled professional. He, his financial backers, musicians, arrangers, and electronic technicians must know precisely what they are doing—or they simply won't succeed. The hundred or so invisible specialists who surround them put everything they had into the song, along with the quarter of a million dollars of capital investment required to launch a new record nationally.

Bridge," at first hearing, is crude—almost amateurish. The beat is weak and undanceable, even phlegmatic. Neither cracking drums, electric guitars, nor a hard-driving bass were utilized. At the beginning, a weak, psalm-playing piano appeared. After the initial verse, faraway violins, vibraharp, softened bass, and echoing drums formed the background. Indeed, at the time "Bridge" was released, it seemed to have done everything wrong—just the opposite of current trade practices. There is simply no way to explain the success in terms of what was cognitively perceived by music fans. (See Appendix A.)

A Feeling Massage

"Bridge" dealt primarily with feelings in its target audience, massaging these feelings with subliminal stimuli. When trying so probe the subliminal level of the lyric, the first question was simply, Who is talking to whom about what, and why? Specifically, who was "I"—the person singing? A list of people representing both personal and occupational relationships for teen-agers was prepared. All those included were individuals with whom teen-agers were likely to have a close, familiar, intimate, and trusting relationship—the kind and

quality of relationship suggested by Art Garfunkel's voice on the recording. Included were twenty-two possible designations for "I"—mother, father, motel owner, brother, sister, drug pusher, hairdresser, boyfriend, girl friend, sweetheart, mechanic, minister or priest, gas station attendant, teacher, etc. The list was presented to roughly fifty teen-agers who were asked to check off the single most likely candidate for the "I" in "Bridge."

After they learned what they were supposed to do, roughly 30 percent of the teen-agers refused to play the game. Many rationalized that they could not make up their minds. Others in this group simply refused to try. Avoidance behavior was clearly apparent.

Roughly another 55 percent provided varied answers - mother, father, etc. These appeared random and spread out across the entire list.

Roughly 15 percent of the students cited drug pusher as the "I" in "Bridge."

The reader may consider this possible interpretation as absurd. For a moment, however, consider the hypothetical possibilities.

If the "I" or the singer is a drug pusher, what he is describing in the song is a drug trip. His customer—or addict—is the young audience bewildered by the fast-paced, automated, depersonalized, lonely, complex, and powerful society.

> When you're weary, feeling small,
> When tears are in your eyes . . .*

"Bridge," therefore, becomes symbolically a drug user's guide to withdrawal into a syringe-injected hallucinatory drug experience—most probably heroin—but this could be also interpreted as speed or amphetamines. The lyric extols the promise of drug relief from depression, loneliness, and uncertainty. The music symbolically forms the trip itself. The verses are sung in two-part harmony, indicating to the audience subliminally that two people are on the trip—the listener and their drug-peddler guide.

*© 1969 Paul Simon. Used with the permission of the publisher.

The pusher is talking, much like a physician on a television pharmaceutical advertisement, to weary and alienated young people whom the world forces into tears. He is "on your side" when "times get rough" and when "friends can't be found."

The pitchman drug pusher claims he acts as "a bridge over troubled water"—a support to help the audience over the turbulent rapids of day-to-day life. The first verse provides a come-on, an opening pitch, much like the warmup used by insurance or encyclopedia salesmen. The second verse is a stronger focus upon the product through symbolic archetypes and imagery. The third verse really gets down to business, presenting a hard sell, deep in meaning and subliminal significance.

The musical arrangement during the first and second verses suggested a feeling of agitation, discomfort, imbalance, and insecurity. As the music moved into the third verse, parallel with the lyric story line, it conveys a feeling of euphoria, security, and relaxation as the drug takes effect.

A Search for Security

In the first verse the music begins with a lone piano chording, as Simon specified in the published arrangement, "moderato ...like a spiritual." The spiritual piano is sustained throughout the arrangement, alternately dominant and passive in the background. The piano symbolizes unconscious remnants of childhood feelings such as love and protection derived from Mother or the Sunday School sense of security in being watched over by Jesus.

As Art Garfunkel's voice begins in the first verse, he sings of "being weary, small, of tears, of being down and out." In the published arrangement the piano is directed to play "rubato"—a rhythmic give and take, a lingering or hurrying over notes. Time (meter) is bent. The piano reflects the audience's unstable state of mind or emotion.

In the second verse the listener is still "down and out," but now "on the street." The street of life is where the troubled water swirls, the place where society rushes frantically to nowhere. The street is loud, impersonal, and cold. The pusher promises. "when evening falls so hard, I will comfort you."

Evening is symbolic of death and darkness, perhaps the colorlessness of American society.

The pusher declares his willingness to "take your part"-become the audience, suffer for them while they escape through drugs. "When darkness comes and pain is all around," the pusher will provide "a bridge over troubled water." The line, as sung, includes a brief pause before and afterward.

"And pain is all around." Pain in the young audience's minds must be avoided at all costs. Harsh realities and dark images of death must be somehow put aside. As the second verse is sung, the orchestration produced a vague discomfort and feeling of uneasiness.

The rhythmically unstable piano joins a low-key, quiet vibraharp at the beginning of the second verse. The discord literally jars audience attention, as the chord is in a different key from the song. At this point, the electronic bass plays a series of dominant notes which slide from a low E-natural up two octaves to an A-flat. The sliding notes move from an extreme low to an extreme high, unconsciously elevating the audience to a higher plane in the arrangement's subliminal background.

And Finally the Needle

The third verse involves the actual syringe injection and the comforting assurance that—if needed again—the pusher will be available with more. A long pause appears between the second and third verses, suggesting the time it takes to prepare for a drug injection.

To "sail on" is to be free of fear and inhibition, to achieve the escape sought in the second verse. "Sail" conveys a feeling of light, liveliness, grace, and freedom—as opposed to the second verse's death imagery. "Sail" even suggests the flight of a bird—the release from reality and its pain, free of the social gravity that forces individuals into the dirt of the second verse's "street," energy—not weariness; feeling big, tall, significant—not "feeling small." "Sail on by" is opposed to the second verse's "Lay me down."

"Silvergirl," in the first line of the third verse, is one of the teen-age euphemisms used to describe a hypodermic syringe.

In "Bridge" the pusher speaks to the syringe as he injects the drug. "Sail on silvergirl." "Silver" refers generally to the shiny needle and "girl," of course, to youth, fertility, rebirth through drugs, and the narcotic itself.

"Sail on by" carries the drug from body into mind. "Your times has come to shine," the pusher says to both the audience and the syringe—time to work or "shine."

"All your dreams are on their way" is a separate sentence, yet on the record sounds like a subordinate clause, part of "Your time has come to shine." Simon, apparently, handles the phrasing like this to catch the audience off guard and more easily reach into their unconscious.

The pusher vocalist speaks to his audience after the injection. "All your dreams are on their way." He is heavily pitching the drug, emphasizing its miraculous results. "See how they shine" described the audience's fantasies and dreams as these illusions come alive and true. "If you need a friend, I'm sailing right behind." The pusher and his drug-loaded syringe are right there with you, audience, so don't feel alone.

The last sentence of the third verse differs from the last sentence of the first and second verses. The drug pusher pitches, "I will ease your mind." This might be called the punch line of the drug pitch.

After the users (audience) have tried the drug, after their fantasies have become realities, after they have escaped from the harsh brutalities of life, and after the drug trip is over, the pusher will ease their minds by relaxing their anxieties about drug usage, coming dow.n off the trip, and assure a drug source for the next trip to ease the "troubled water."

After the electric bass's low to high slide in the second verse, the bass works throughout the rest of the song, serving as mbdued background. At the start of the third verse, the drums are consciously apparent at the beginning of the drug trip. The drums produced a muddy and unreal tempo, quite different from straight timekeeping. The drums, however, usually remained buried deeply in the background under the other instruments.

Only the snare drum intruded upon consciousness with any clarity, but it also remained an unclear, though steady, background echo. The snare copied the heartbeat at seventy-two

beats per minute (4/4 time) during the first two verses. The snare tempo induces a state of prehypnotic suggestibility as the listener perceives the snare only subliminally.

Bass and drums work similarly during the third verse—a thumping seventy-two pulses per minute, carried into the fantasy of "the shining dream" during the third verse.

Violins entered the third verse, adding another fantasy dimension to the music. By increasing the volume of musical background, the subliminal dimensions of the drug trip expanded. The faint piano, however, presented a constant nagging reminder of the audience's once stable and secure past. The at first subdued, then dominant bass, drums, violins, and vibraharps carried the audience along on their trip where "all your dreams are on their way."

Loneliest Scene in Town

In response to subliminal meanings for words and music, one of America's most repressed forms of sexual communication appears in teen-age dancing. One of the readily observable effects of highly amplified sound or music is isolation. People in a crowded room can be totally isolated from one another by simply increasing the music amplifier's volume level. No one communicates even through eye contact. Speech is not attempted. There is very rarely physical touching. Each individual sits staring into an empty space—usually a very small, unoccupied space. Communication disappears. Each appears carried away by his or her very own, very personal, and very secret fantasies.

When couples dance to highly amplified rock, a similar isolation occurs. Many of the dance movements—pelvic actions, self-touching, and leg and body movements—are frankly sexual. Everyone appears not to notice, however, and the secret is well kept. No touching is permitted, not even with eyes.

The partners skillfully avoid looking at or physically touching their companion. Each appears entirely alone. This isolation is often described by the phrase "doing your own thing." Any overt gesture that involved touching, intimacy, or gentle caressing during these dances would be considered crude, uncouth, and annoying—a violation of both privacy and protocol.

There is a strong resemblance to these teen-age dances and the relationships observable at a drug party. Anyone who believes marijuana is a party turn-on makes a serious error. Hallucinatory drugs are more accurately described as turn-ins. One of the most effective ways to wreck a party is to introduce pot or hash. Individuals rapidly end up doing their own thing alone. The party fragments quickly from group interaction to individual trips deep inside each person's head. The participants sit on the floor giggling nonsense to themselves. The inside fantasy deludes individuals into believing they are eloquent and sensitively communicative, but it is only another fantasy.

Even today, Americans' unwillingness to deal with the realities of drug usage is astonishing. Should the reader still believe the power of a popular record is insignificant, consider how much advertising media would have to be purchased by an advertiser to reach the audience for any of the records cited in this chapter. Then compare the selling power of the most creative, subliminally loaded, powerful, and most expensive ad possible to create. The selling power would still not even begin to approximate the high-credibility source impact of a single release by an established music group. Why these drug fantasies, designed to appeal only to the unconscious, sell records is not entirely clear nor is it logical or reasonable unless you are willing to accept Freud's notion of the human "death wish" or "death instinct." Nevertheless, death and self destruction are clearly successful subliminal merchandising techniques in alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and other products. Why shouldn't they sell records? Just think—it all began with the Beatles.