JOURNAL REPRINT

The following paper originally appeared in the May and June 1957 issues of the British journal *Wireless World,* and is reprinted here with the kind permission of its publishers. It considers in great detail, and in the opinion of the Editor, definitively, the interrelated problems of pickup design, stylus pressure, and record wear. Since his appearance in these pages last year, which aroused a great deal of interest, Mr. Barlow has increased his reputation in this country, so that he needs no further introduction.

Limiting Factors in Gramophone Reproduction*

D. A. BARLOW, M.Sc.†

1. Plastic Deformation and Wear of Groove Walls

THE STYLUS TIP in a gramophone pickup is usually spherical and much more rigid than the record, so that the problems of determining the deformation of the record groove wall have much in common with those associated with hardness tests such as the Brinell, in which a ball is pressed into the surface to be tested. Under light loads any material will deform elastically, giving a small area of contact. On releasing the load the material springs back to its original position undamaged. With increasing load, the yield stress of the material will be reached and permanent plastic deformation will begin; on releasing the load the material will not return exactly to its original position, i.e. the record is damaged.

The equations for the elastic range are well known and were deduced by Hertz; they have been expressed in convenient form by Hunt.[1]

$$p_m = \frac{0.45\, E_1^{2/3}\, W^{1/3}}{R^{2/3}}$$

$$\text{or } W = \frac{11\, p_m^3 R^2}{E_1^2}$$

Where p_m is mean bearing pressure between contacting surfaces in kgm/mm²

$E_1 = E/(1-\sigma^2)$

E = Young's modulus of record material (kgm/mm²)

σ = Poisson's ratio of record material

W = Load on stylus in grams

R = Stylus radius in mils (0.001 in.).

Because of the complex stress system, yielding occurs at a value of $p_m = 1.1$ times the simple tensile or compressive yield stress of the material. Hunt[1] quotes 11 milligrams as the limiting load for no plastic deformation for a stylus of 1-mil radius on vinyl. Although the stylus is supported by both groove walls at low signal levels, at extreme amplitude or acceleration one wall will be taking most of the load. As this is applied at about 45° to the surface, the playing weight must be increased by $\sqrt{2}$ before yielding can commence, i.e. to about 16 milligrams. In a modulated groove the stylus is in contact not with a flat surface but with concave and convex groove walls. This would reduce the load required for yielding by a factor of 0.77 if the driving wall were convex and the trace radius approached the stylus radius. However, at high frequencies where the trace radius may be small the inertia of the pickup will be a controlling factor rather than the stiffness, so that the load will be taken entirely by the concave outer wall (Fig. 1).

As the load on the indenter (stylus) is increased beyond the elastic range, yielding occurs not at the surface but below, at a distance of about half the radius of the circle of contact. With further increase in load, deformation will gradually spread throughout the area under the indenter. Eventually, plastic deformation of the surface will commence at the surface. With further increase in load, plastic deformation occurs over the whole of the area of contact (the condition has been termed "full plasticity") when the contact pressure is about three times the yield stress of the material. Further increase in load does not appreciably affect the contact pressure. This is the condition in normal indentation hardness testing, where the load must exceed the

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[1] Hunt, F. V., *J. Audio Eng. Soc.,* Vol. 3, No. 1, Jan. 1955.

[2] Davies, R. M., *Proc. Roy. Soc.,* Vol. 197, A1050, 22 June 1949.

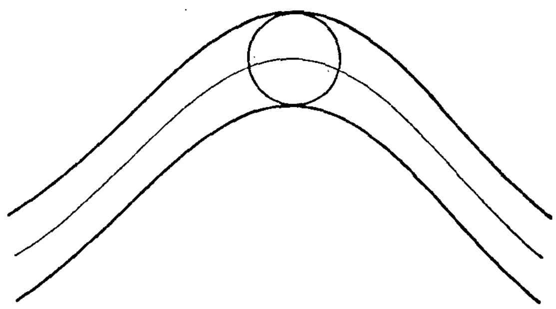

FIG. 1. Stylus supported by convex and concave groove walls.

minimum value for full plasticity for reliable hardness readings to be obtained.

From Hunt's results, the minimum load for full plasticity is 6-10 grams with a 1-mil stylus on a vinyl surface (Hunt's Fig. 2). Many commercial pickups therefore operate in the fully plastic range, and must cause considerable damage to the groove (Fig. 2). If each groove wall were deformed equally at all parts of the waveform, this would give no distortion and would not be serious. However, as the load is not taken equally by each wall, the deformation will be unequal, giving distortion of the waveform, with a decrease of low-frequency signals (where stiffness is operative) and an increase of high frequencies (where inertia is operative). Similar effects occur due to the elastic deformation of the groove walls, but in most if not all commercial pickups the elastic effects will be small compared with the plastic. A possible method of obtaining equal deformation of both groove walls would be to play the virgin record first at twice the normal tracking weight at a very low speed, so that the pickup arm could follow the whole of the wave form with negligible lateral loads, but this would hardly be practicable.

The ideal pickup would work entirely within the elastic range (16 mgm). Although it may not be possible to construct such a pickup it might still be possible to limit plastic deformation to the interior of the material, so that the surface of the grooves is undamaged.[3] The limiting tracking weight would be that at which plastic deformation just

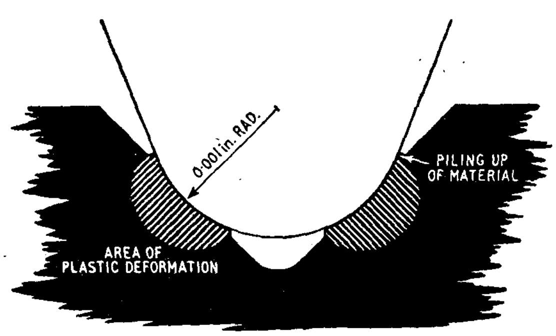

FIG. 2. Stylus-groove contact in the fully plastic range.

[3] Barlow, D. A., *J. Audio Eng. Soc.*, Vol. 4, No. 3, July 1956.

commenced at the surface. Unfortunately, this point cannot as yet be calculated. Under any stress system, all materials yield according to some function of the shear stress. The shear stress contours in a material under an indenter at the moment of sub-surface yielding are shown in Fig. 3; they will vary somewhat with the Young's modulus and Poisson's ratio of the material. The shear stress at the surface is 0.33 of the shear yield stress, and is proportional to the cube of the load while the whole of the material is elastic. To obtain surface yielding therefore, the load will have to be raised by some unknown factor, probably greater than $(1/0.33)^3$, giving 0.3 gram for a flat surface, or 0.43 gram for a record groove.

As the record moves under the stylus, the system is not the same as the static indentation case so far considered. Poritsky[4] has shown, for cylinders in contact, that the effect

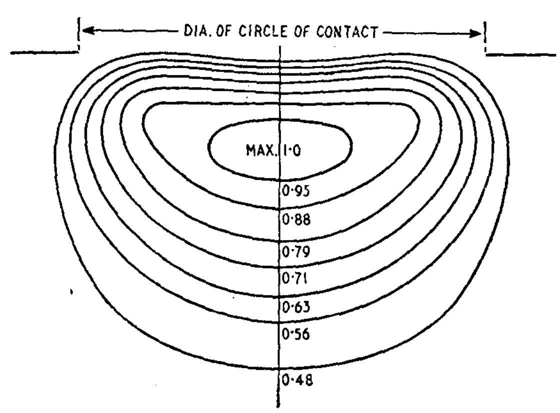

FIG. 3. Shear stress distribution in material under spherical indenter (after Davies[2]).

of an additional tangential force, as represented by friction, is to shift the point of onset of yielding nearer to the surface. The influence of stylus-groove friction would doubtless be similar and would affect yield loads, but if friction is low, as is probably the case, the effect would be small.

Scratch Tests.—Hunt's scratch tests were conducted by dragging 1-mil and 3-mil radius styli over flat vinyl surfaces. No trace was detected below about 6.7 grams for the 3-mil stylus; the corresponding load for the 1-mil stylus should be 0.75 gram, but no tracks were detected below 1.5 grams, probably because of the difficulty of detecting such very fine traces. The limiting loads for plastic deformation just to appear at the surface with a 1-mil stylus will thus be between 0.3 and 0.75 gm for a flat surface, or 0.4 and 1 gm for a pickup, say, half a gram.

Shellac Records.—From hardness tests, the yield strength of shellac is about twice that of vinyl. From cantilever loading tests, the modulus of elasticity of shellac is about three times that of vinyl. The increased yield stress is

[4] Poritsky, H., *J. Appl. Mech.*, Vol. 17, No. 2, June 1950.

therefore more than offset by the increased modulus, giving a smaller area of contact (and hence higher stresses) for a given load. The limiting load for no plastic deformation of shellac will thus be slightly less than for vinyl (for the same size stylus). For a 2.5-mil stylus the load will be about 90 milligrams, and the corresponding load for plastic deformation to just appear at the surface will be 1.75 grams. Loading tests on shellac with a 2.5-mil sapphire stylus showed tracks at less than 3 grams, corresponding to a pickup weight of about 4 grams. We may thus take the limiting load as about 2½ grams.

It will be noted that at low loads, for a given stylus, shellac will actually be damaged more than the vinyl, but around 15 grams for a 2½-mil stylus the track width or damage will be similar for each material, and above this load the damage to shellac will be less—the track width will be about 0.7 of that on vinyl in the fully plastic range. Shellac is therefore the better material for the old type of heavy pickup, but vinyl will be superior for lightweight pickups. This would explain conflicting reports on the relative damage of vinyl and shellac discs. There is no technical reason why, in these days of lightweight pickups, 78 r.p.m. records should not be made in vinyl.

Deterioration on Repeated Playback.—When any material is deformed the area of contact increases, and, beyond the elastic limit, the material work hardens until it is able to support the load, unless the load is so high as to cause fracture. Once a record has been played at a given weight, provided that this is not too great, there will be no further plastic deformation on continued playback (at the same weight); the record will sound the same as at the first playing, although it may be heavily deformed, and there is no knowing what the virgin record would sound like. The claim that a certain record sounds the same after 1,000 playings as it did with the first playback does not mean that it is undamaged.

It used to be the practice of record companies to monitor the original wax or lacquer disc before plating to make the master. If the original has been damaged in this way, the final record will not sound any different for being played with a very lightweight pickup. It would be interesting to know if the record companies still monitor the original disc before plating now that the original recording is usually done on tape. If we are to take advantage of very lightweight pickups which will not give plastic deformation of the surface not only must we purchase virgin records but it is essential that any monitoring at any stage during manufacture be done with equally light pickups (or with styli that are weaker than the groove walls).

Nevertheless, with heavy pickups progressive deterioration does take place on continued playback. This is due to creep and fatigue. At high stresses the material continues to deform slowly, so that on repeated replay the groove continues to be deformed slightly each time. Fatigue is the fracture of a material by varying or repeated loads at stresses lower than the static strength. As the highest stresses are sub-surface, failure will take place by sub-surface cracking, giving flaking and pitting of the groove walls. This gives the increase in noise characteristic of heavily played records. It is interesting to note that Max[5] obtains this type of failure on repeated playback of polystyrene and occasionally vinyl records at 10 grams load with a 1-mil stylus. If there is a rest period between replays the material partly recovers, and does not fail.

Wear.—Up till now we have been discussing damage or plastic deformation of perfect surfaces, although it is often referred to as wear. Wear may be defined as the attrition of contacting surfaces due to relative sliding. The nature of friction is as follows. Under light loads no two surfaces contact at more than a few high spots or asperities, however accurately they may be finished. Local pressures at these asperities are therefore high, and ploughing, welding and shearing occur on relative motion. This is the normal mode of wear of styli. If there is no bulk surface plastic deformation of a record, the stylus is supported by the asperities, which may be stronger than the bulk material[1,3] and will give a lower rate of frictional wear of record and stylus than a heavier pickup working in the fully plastic range, where the whole of the mating surfaces are in intimate contact. Diamond is known to give lower coefficients of friction with most materials than sapphire or cemented carbide; it might therefore be expected to give less frictional record wear.

Noise.—The noise level will depend on the tracking weight of the pickup as well as on other factors such as sensitivity for degrees of freedom other than lateral. Also Hunt[1] has pointed out that there are the following components in the noise from a gramophone record.

(1) *Surface roughness.* The grooves of modern records are very highly finished, the roughness as low as 50 A.U. (10^{-7} mm). This is as low as is obtainable on the most highly finished surfaces. In the case of shellac, the filler is of course responsible for considerable roughness, and hence noise. This can be reduced somewhat by the use of superfine fillers.

(2) *Welding and shearing of asperities.*

(3) *The associated plastic deformation.* This may also give rise to noise as plastic deformation is not a continuous process, but on a microscale, it occurs by discontinuous slip.

To reduce wear and noise, therefore, improvements can be made only to items (2) and (3), given a homogeneous record material. In addition to using a diamond stylus, the obvious method would be to use polytetrafluorethylene (p.t.f.e.) for the record[1] or the stylus, although its yield

[5] Max, A. M., *J. Audio. Eng. Soc.*, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 1955.

stress and modulus may be too low. This gives low friction with all materials, but if the pickup works in the fully plastic range a coefficient of friction of only 0.04 represents welding of stylus to groove over 25% of the contact area.[3] This will obviously give relatively high wear and noise level, so that the situation with more readily weldable materials, such as vinyl, can well be imagined. Polyethylene usually has a lower coefficient of friction than other plastics (apart from p.t.f.e.) but its yield strength and modulus may be too low; however, Smith[6] has used polyethylene and reports that it gives a lower noise level than vinyl. Polyethylene is said to be too expensive for records; polytetrafluorethylene would be very much more so. It would be interesting to know what proportion of the cost of a record is represented by the plastic and its processing—it has been said that the cost of producing a record pre-war was about 3½d. If so, a more expensive plastic giving lower noise level could obviously be used without appreciably increasing the cost of a record.

Other possible means of reducing friction would be the use of graphite for styli, or porous metal or ceramic impregnated with graphite, oil or p.t.f.e.

Another method of reducing wear and noise due to items (2) and (3) would be by lubrication of the record.[1,3] For this purpose, a solution of calcium petroleum sulphonate in a light petroleum fraction has been suggested. This would be wiped on to the record immediately before each playing, the solvent evaporating and leaving an absorbed film, only a few molecules thick, on the groove walls. This would probably give adequate boundary lubrication, and would not obscure the high frequencies. Flake graphite, as has been used in the past, would not be absorbed on to the groove walls, and would have no effect other than to increase noise by reason of particles trapped under the stylus.

[6] Smith, O. J. M., *Audio Eng.*, Vol. 32, No. 9. Sept. 1948.

2. Pickup Design; Continuity of Stylus-Groove Contact; Tracing Distortion

HAVING EXAMINED, in the first part of this article, the nature of record deformation and wear, we can consider the design of a suitable pickup. The limiting tracking weights are ½ gram for vinyl and 2½ grams for shellac. The lightest commercial pickups track at 2-3 grams for vinyl and 4-6 grams for shellac. It would be difficult to reduce the tracking weight to the desired value for vinyl, but it would be fairly easy to halve the tracking weight for shellac, as the design is in any case easier than for vinyl. If the desired low weight for tracking on vinyl could be achieved, the resultant pickup would doubtless be fragile, and have low output voltage, but before ruling out such a pickup as impossibly difficult and expensive, it should be remembered that only a few years ago pickup manufacturers considered that anything with a tracking weight of less than 30 grams was a fragile, expensive, specialists' instrument. With the advent of microgroove records, and the necessity of reducing tracking weights to about 8 grams, if reasonable record life was to be obtained, pickup manufacturers have produced, apparently without difficulty or complaint, pickups which not only operate at this weight but are fairly cheap and have a high output voltage; even record changers have been redesigned to treat records with more care.

The Arm.—This must have low friction and low inertia, particularly with warped records, and torsional resonance which will influence response must be avoided. A single vertical pivot bearing is at once the simplest and cheapest, is robust, has the lowest friction, and torsional resonance is avoided. If desired, an anti-vibration mounting can be used between head and arm to further reduce the effect of arm resonance. The only disadvantage of the single-point bearing is that very thin flexible leads must be used to reduce drag. To reduce the torque on the arm to a minimum, the armature should be positioned (at the correct angle for minimum tracking error) with the stylus on the axis of the arm (Fig. 4). To obtain the correct tracking weight the arm may be counter-balanced either by a weight or by a spring—in the case of a single pivot, a weight only is possible. The weight is much more convenient and more easily adjusted, but it is sometimes argued that a spring is better in that it saves weight and hence inertia of the arm. However, although the saving of weight is considerable, the saving of inertia is very small. Thus if the head is of mass m, distant l from the pivot, its moment of inertia about the point is ml^2; this must be counterbalanced by a mass of say $5m$, distant approximately ⅕ from the point, having a moment of inertia of $5m \times (1/5)^2 = \frac{ml^2}{5}$, i.e., for the convenience of using a counter-balance as opposed to a spring there is an increase of only 20% in the inertia. As the inertia of the tube forming the arm has been ignored the increase in the total inertia will be somewhat smaller. As the inertia of the arm will usually be only a fraction of that of the head, particularly if a magnetic head is used, there is no point in making the arm absurdly flimsy.

The Head.—The limiting weight of the head will depend on the degree of warping of the record to be played, the accuracy of the centre hole and the accuracy of the turntable. The inertia of a 60-gram head is not excessive at a tracking weight of 2 grams; it is thought, therefore, that at a tracking weight of ½ gram, a head weight of 15 grams would not be excessive. In a magnetic head it is doubtful whether this weight of magnet would give saturation in the size of gap likely to be used, but sufficient flux to give useful output should be obtainable. With shellac records, with the greater weight allowable, there should be no difficulty. Where a crystal movement is used there will be less difficulty in attaining a small head weight. The type of movement used is partly a matter of choice. The moving coil system is easily designed and has fewer objections than moving iron and crystal systems. The coil would preferably consist of several turns of fine wire giving a higher output voltage than a ribbon or single turn, so as to be well above the hum level picked up by the leads.[7,8] The coil would preferably be a bifilar push-pull winding, feeding into a centre-tapped coupling transformer, thus reducing hum. A strain-gauge system in which the electrical resistance of a fine wire is varied by the strain it receives is attractive, as it is simple and can be made in small sizes. However, circuit arrangements are a little complex, and the signal level would almost certainly be so low that noise and hum would be serious problems. Carbon composition strain gauges would be unsatisfactory, due to self-generated noise. Other methods, such as magneto-striction and frequency modulation, would seem to offer no advantages. The recently introduced magnetomotive system[9] consisting of a moving magnet with a stationary coil on a soft iron core is attractive, as the moving parts are simple and robust and high impedance with high output voltage is obtainable without a coupling transformer.

The tracking weight has been discussed by Mallett.[10] It is governed by three factors, the lateral stiffness, the lateral inertia and the vertical stiffness. The lateral stiffness is operative at low frequency so that the inner surface of the groove will take most of the load; at high frequencies the inertia of the moving parts is operative and the outer wall of the groove takes the load. In a complex waveform stiffness or inertia may be operative over different parts of the wave, but the full load will be taken at any instant by only one groove wall, so that stiffness and inertia loads are

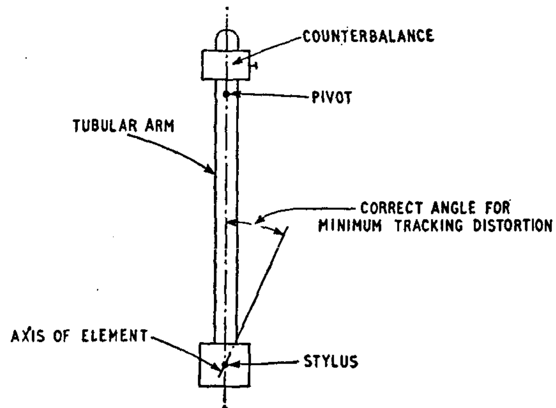

FIG. 4. Arrangement of pickup arm and head.

complementary. The maximum stiffness load is reached at maximum amplitude; the maximum inertia load may not always be reached at maximum amplitude, depending on the waveform; the maximum load due to vertical stiffness when vertical amplitude is greatest is at the mid-point of the wave. These three components of load, therefore, lateral stiffness, lateral inertia and vertical stiffness, are largely complementary rather than additive. Vertical inertia is not in itself important as will be shown later. Longitudinal movement of the stylus must be a minimum, otherwise distortion and rounding off the steep wave fronts will occur. Lack of longitudinal rigidity is the probable reason for needles trailing rather than being set vertically.[11] A vertically set needle will vibrate longitudinally if it is not rigid in that direction. The maximum angle of the trace to the direction making a tangent to the groove at the stylus contact must be less than the half angle of the groove (approx. 45°), otherwise the stylus will ride up the groove wall regardless of tracking weight. The angle of the trace in the 33⅓ r.p.m. extended play records appears to approach this limit as a result of the greater amplitudes employed.

Lateral Stiffness.—This must be such that the lateral load for the maximum recorded amplitude is not greater than the tracking weight, i.e., lateral compliances must be more than 6×10^{-6} cm/dyne for vinyl and 4×10^{-6} cm/dyne for shellac. This should not be difficult to arrange.

Resonances.—There will be a number of resonances due to the mass of the armature, head, etc., with the lateral, vertical, and longitudinal compliances of the suspension, and record-stylus. The armature should be sufficiently rigid longitudinally for resonances with this compliance to be ignored. The other resonances are examined below. Any damping material must be added with caution, as it may cause intermodulation distortion.[12]

Lateral Low-frequency Resonance.—This is the resonance

7 Baxandall, P. J., Letter, *Wireless World*, Sept., 1950.
8 West, R. L., Letter, *Wireless World*, Sept., 1950.
9 Wittenburg, N., *Philips Tech. Rev.*, Vol. 18, Nos. 4/5 and 6, 1956/57.
10 Mallett, E. S., *Electronic Eng.*, May, 1950.
11 Rabinow, J., and Codier, E., *J. Acous. Soc. Amer.*, Vol. 24, No. 2, March, 1952.
12 Roys, H. E., *Audio Eng.*, May, 1950.

of the mass of the head and arm and the lateral stiffness of the movement, and the frequency is given by

$$f_1 = \frac{1}{2\pi\sqrt{M_p C_a}}$$

where M_p is the lateral effective mass at the stylus of the head and arm (gm), C_a is the lateral compliance of the movement (cm/dyne).

The effective mass at the stylus is:

$\frac{I}{l^2}$ where I is the moment of inertia about the particular axis, and l is distance of axis from stylus (cm).

This resonance has been used in cheap pickups to boost the bass; it should, of course, be below the recorded range in a high-quality pickup. For vinyl with a head weight of 15 grams, the resonance would be at about 17 c/s; for shellac with a 75-gram head, the resonance would be about 9 c/s.

Lateral Mid-Frequency Resonance.—This is the resonance of the mass of the movement (coil or armature) with its own lateral stiffness (restoring force), and generally occurs at the mid-frequencies. Unlike most other resonances, it is not deleterious. It is a series resonance and at the resonance frequency the stylus point impedance tends to zero (Fig. 5). It simply means that at this frequency no power is required to move the armature except that required by damping. The physical significance of this can be easily seen—the stylus will always try to move at this frequency so that at lower frequencies it tends to return to the mid-point faster than the trace allows, so that it is always pressing on the inner wall of the groove; at high frequencies it tends to return to the mid-point slower than the trace allows, so that it is always being forced back by the outer wall of the groove. This resonance is given by

$f_2 = \frac{1}{2\pi\sqrt{M_a C_a}}$, where M_a is lateral effective mass of element at stylus.

Lateral High-frequency Resonance.—This is the resonance of the mass of the element with the compliance of the record and stylus. It is well known that if this frequency is in the audio range, excessive noise will result from shock

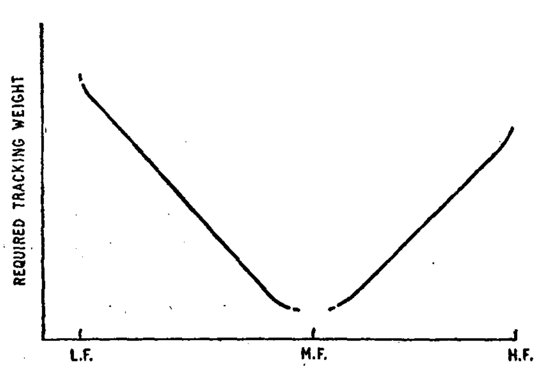

Fig. 5. Effect of lateral resonances on required tracking weight.

excitation of this resonance, and there may be accompanying distortion, even if the resonance is thoroughly damped. This resonance is given by

$f_3 = \frac{1}{2\pi\sqrt{M_a C_n}}$, where C_n = lateral compliance of stylus and record materials (cm/dyne).

For this resonance to be above say 20 kc/s, M_a must be less than about 1 milligram for vinyl and 3 milligrams for shellac.

Lateral Inertia.—The maximum accelerations recorded are about 1500 g for microgroove records and 500 g for 78 r.p.m. records.[13] The corresponding limiting lateral effective mass at the stylus is 0.33 milligram for vinyl, which would be hard to achieve, and 5 milligrams for shellac, which would be easy to achieve.

Vertical Stiffness.—The need for vertical movement is of course to allow for the pinch effect. The groove is cut with a chisel-edged stylus and traced with a spherical stylus, as a consequence of which the stylus of an ideal pickup must move vertically at twice the frequency of the trace. The maximum vertical amplitude is about 1/9th of the lateral for microgroove and 1/6th for 78 r.p.m. records. The vertical stiffness must therefore be not greater than 9 times and 6 times the lateral stiffness respectively, i.e., a compliance of 0.67×10^{-6} cm/dyne in each case.

Vertical Resonances.—Although the pickup may not generate any voltage for vertical movement, vertical resonances are best avoided in the recorded range, or, rather, at twice these frequencies, as the vertical movement takes place at twice the recorded frequency of the trace. Where the lateral loads are not shared equally by each groove wall, as is always the case except at zero amplitude, any vertical forces will cause movement of the stylus not vertically but at some angle—in extreme cases up and down the side of one of the groove walls, and will thus generate a signal, even though true vertical movement generates no signal. The normal vertical movement may therefore generate a signal, although it may be very small, but vertical resonances may be serious.

Vertical Low-frequency Resonance.—This is not the resonance of the mass of the head with the vertical compliance of the movement or cantilever, and should be below the recorded range. It will be about 50 c/s for vinyl and 22 c/s for shellac (corresponding to lateral recorded frequencies of 25 and 11 c/s) for the pickup considered here.

Vertical High-frequency Resonance.—This is the resonance of the vertical effective mass at the stylus point with the compliance of stylus and record, and should be above the recorded range, i.e., above 40 kc/s (corresponding to 20 kc/s lateral). The vertical compliance of record and stylus is unknown, but will probably be about half the

[13] Cosmocord Ltd., Private communication.

lateral, as the load is now taken by both walls of the groove. The limiting vertical effective mass at the stylus will thus be about 0.5 mgm for vinyl and 1.5 mgm for shellac.

The above two resonances will influence each other's frequencies slightly, but as they are a long way apart the interaction will be very small and can be ignored. With suitable design there will be no other vertical resonance, and the stylus will maintain contact with the groove at all times, except when severe tracing distortion occurs, due to overmodulation, when the trace radius approaches the stylus radius. When this occurs, and contact with the groove is not maintained, there will obviously be acoustic rattle or needle-talk, and the output may be affected. In addition, when the stylus point is free, there may be a further vertical resonance, falling in the mid-frequencies (see later). The vertical inertia of the system is not, in itself, of importance, as the high-frequency resonance is above the recorded range.

Cantilever Movements.—To achieve the above very small effective vertical masses in practice, a cantilever type of movement is essential, as only the cantilever and stylus contribute to the vertical mass, the axis of the generating element being vertical. In most other designs, the whole of the element must move vertically, and the total mass is limited to the allowable vertical mass. The cantilever movement has the added advantages that vertical movement is obtained with the minimum of longitudinal movement, and the system can be easily designed to minimize damage due to accidental dropping on the record. The use of a cantilever, however, introduces its own lateral, vertical and torsional resonances. The lateral resonance can probably be avoided, as the cantilever must be stiff laterally if appreciable signal loss is to be avoided. The torsional stiffness could be increased for a given cantilever mass by making it of tubular form, and its magnitude reduced by placing the stylus tip as near as possible to the axis of the cantilever. Vertical resonance of the cantilever will occur when the stylus is not in contact with the groove, and in any practical design this resonance will fall within the audio range. However, when the stylus tip is in contact with the groove, and provided the generating element itself has negligible vertical compliance, there will be no resonance in the audio range. Considering vertical movement only, the system has two degrees of freedom, Fig. 6(a), and the only resonances will be the low and high frequency ones already listed. If there is appreciable vertical compliance between armature and head, the system will have three degrees of freedom, Fig. 6(b), and there will be three resonances, the additional one of the mass of the armature with the cantilever compliance being within the recorded range. The armature vertical compliance can be made very small if the top end of the armature forms a cup-and-cone bearing with the head; in the case of a torsional crystal element it may be firmly fixed to the head.

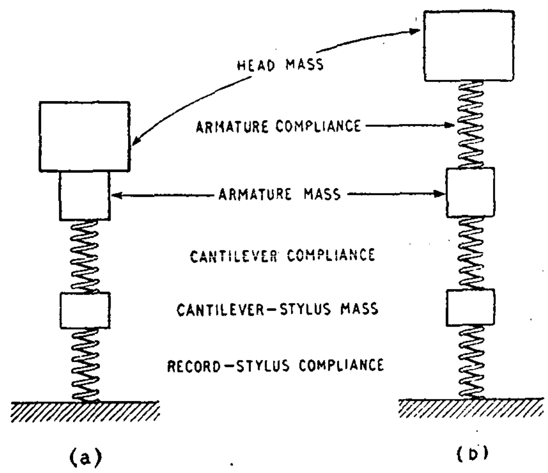

FIG. 6. Vertical systems with two and three degrees of freedom.

The cantilever would best be made in a hard rigid plastic, perhaps phenol-formaldehyde, as this would have the greatest stiffness/weight ratio of any practical material, this being proportional to modulus/(density)^2. Sapphire and diamond would be too heavy for tips, at least for microgroove, so that a one-piece replaceable plastic moulding could be used for stylus plus cantilever.

Soft Styli.—In passing, it should be noted that the usual objections to soft needles will not apply here; as the yield stress and modulus of the stylus will be appreciably greater than those of the record material, there will be no serious deformation of the stylus, and fairly accurate tracing with reasonable life would be obtained. Conditions would bear no relation to those of the conventional thorn under, say, 40 gm playing weight, under which the point is deformed to contact almost the whole of the groove, with consequent distortion and top loss. The other conventional objections to thorn are the possible embedding of either sharpening or other dust with consequent abrasive wear of the grooves, the thorn acting as a lap. The possibility of dust from sharpening being embedded is much exaggerated; every day in industry, millions of sandpapering and grinding operations are carried out on all types of material and particles of abrasive are virtually never embedded in the work. It is possible to get embedding of abrasive, particularly with certain soft and ductile metals, but it occurs only with unsuitable grinding conditions, and virtually never occurs with the free-working non-metallic materials. Regarding the embedding of ordinary dust, if the record is cleaned sufficiently well each time for the noise due to dust to be inaudible, it is difficult to see how such dust as remains could become audible, and the rate of wear, if any, would be extremely small. Further, it is by no means certain that abrasive wear by such means actually occurs; for lapping to take place, the lap must normally be much softer than the material to be lapped. In the present case, the plastic will be harder than vinyl or (unfilled) shellac.

The relatively low modulus of soft styli, compared with sapphire or diamond, will increase the stylus-record compliance, which will lower the lateral and vertical high-frequency resonances. Again, a high-modulus plastic must be chosen, when the effect will probably be slight, but, if necessary, a further reduction in mass at the stylus point must be made.

Tracing Distortion.—This is by far the most serious form of distortion in record reproduction. It can be very distressing on shellac records, and is tolerable on vinyl only by reason of the elastic deflection of the groove walls, which reduces the tracing distortion but introduces a further type of distortion which is less serious. Severe record damage will result from overmodulated traces, however light the pickup. When the trace radius is equal to or less than the radius of the stylus at the point of contact with the walls, the stylus is required to change its direction instantaneously, which requires infinite deceleration and acceleration thus giving groove deformation and rattling. On 78 r.p.m. records an elliptical stylus is essential to reduce tracing distortion to tolerable limits. Thus a 3-mil bottom radius/1-mil lateral radius stylus can be used, reducing the tracing distortion by a factor of 6; the tracking weight must be reduced to about half that for a 2.5-mil stylus. With microgroove records no such course is possible, and tracing distortion is more serious than on 78 r.p.m. records played with an elliptical stylus.

The high tracing distortion of microgroove records is due to the excessive high-frequency pre-emphasis used, as the de-emphasis in playback only partly offsets the distortion caused by pre-emphasis. The NAB characteristic, giving 16 db rise at 10 kc/s is particularly bad—to quote Hunt, it "effectively guarantees excessive distortion." As a result, the A.E.S. standard curve, giving 12 db rise at 10 kc/s, was adopted. The purpose of the pre-emphasis is of course to reduce surface noise; as the noise of good vinyl records is barely audible, it seems that even the 12 dB rise could be reduced without surface noise becoming objectionable. The noise level is reduced by about 6 dB for the 12 dB boost; if this were reduced to 6 dB, there would be an increase of 3 dB in noise level, which would be barely noticeable, with a reduction in tracing distortion by some factor approaching 4, which would be a very noticeable improvement. If there were no pre-emphasis, the noise level would be 6 dB higher than the A.E.S. standard, which would still be very much lower than shellac, and tracing distortion would be drastically reduced. This point has been well made by Viol.[16]

An attractive alternative to dropping pre-emphasis would be 78 r.p.m. microgroove records—there would still be sufficient playing time per side that breaks would come between movements of symphonies, etc. The use of high-frequency pre-emphasis perhaps has more justification for shellac records where surface noise is high, but even here the gain may be largely offset by the increased tracing distortion. In any case, with a lightweight pickup, say less than 10-15 gm, there is no reason why 78 r.p.m. records should not be made in vinyl.

Dutton[17] has shown that for a given maximum level of tracing distortion, disc diameter, and average groove spacing, there is an optimum speed of rotation of the turntable, giving the longest playing time. He states that at a groove speed of 16 in./second, on standard 78 r.p.m. records, tracing distortion is apparent (this is rather an understatement), but that quality is not noticeably impaired at 22 in./sec. The corresponding velocities for microgroove records (presumably allowing for high-frequency pre-emphasis, etc.) are stated to be lower by a factor of 1.6, i.e., 10 in./sec and 13.75 in./sec respectively; at this latter speed distortion is about 4% and it increases very rapidly to about 16% at 10 in./sec. On the basis of a minimum speed of 10 in./sec., a 12-in. disc gives a maximum playing time of 22 minutes at an optimum speed of about 33⅓ r.p.m. However, if we take the preferred minimum speed of 13.75 in./sec., the maximum playing time is about 16 minutes at a speed of about 45 r.p.m.; 33⅓ r.p.m. gives a playing time of 15 minutes, and 78 r.p.m. gives 14 minutes. In other words, on the basis of work done by a well-known record manufacturer, if good quality is to be obtained, 15 minutes is about the limit of playing time, for a 12-in. disc, and the speed of rotation makes very little difference. In fact, the differences are so small that the trouble and expense of changing speeds and obtaining new turntables (usually more expensive than for 78 r.p.m., owing to the need to reduce rumble) was quite unjustified—the microgroove vinyl 78 r.p.m. record was the obvious choice, and speeds were doubtless changed only because the Americans had already done so. It has been argued that the slower speeds have the advantage of giving more margin for squeezing in an extra minute or so to enable the item to be completed; this is justified if the passage is a quiet one, but this does not often happen at the conclusion of a work. The fact that most 12 in. l.p. discs run for 20-25 minutes, and some for as much as 32 minutes, shows that this advantage is in fact a very serious disadvantage if high quality is to be obtained; with 78 r.p.m. microgroove discs, excessive squeezing in would be prevented by the label. There are even some gramophone enthusiasts who consider that on certain l.p.'s, the musicians were persuaded to hurry through the work in order to squeeze it on to one side of a very long playing l.p. disc, when it would have been better to take two sides.

14 Watts, C. E., Reported in *Wireless World,* Dec., 1949.

15 Pierce, J. A., and Hunt, F. V., *J. Acous. Soc. Amer.,* Vol. 10, No. 4, July, 1938.

16 Viol, F. O., *Proc. I.R.E.,* Vol. 38, No. 3, March, 1950.

17 Dutton, G. F., *Wireless World,* June, 1951.

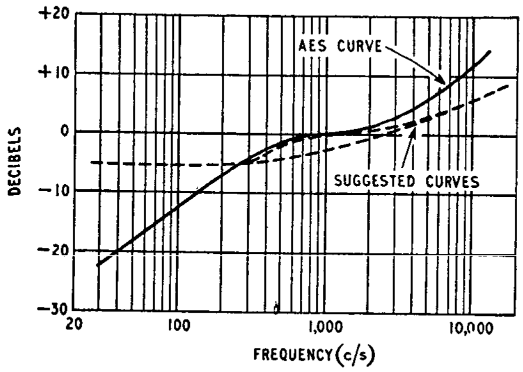

FIG. 7. Suggested revision of recording characteristics.

If high-frequency pre-emphasis were not used on microgroove discs, it would be possible to go to a lower minimum groove speed, say 8½ in./sec, for good quality, when a playing time of about 26 minutes would be obtained on a 12-in. disc, run at 22 r.p.m.

On the subject of recording characteristics, it is interesting to note in passing that Hunt[15] has pointed out that the maximum output for both speech and music drops off at rather more than 6 dB per octave below 250-300 c/s, i.e., the usual bass cut in recording is unnecessary. The advantage of no bass cut is obvious—less equalization required, i.e., less waste of precious output volts from the pickup, with the elimination of hum and rumble problems. There is some doubt about published curves for maximum output, as it is possible that transients and organ notes reach higher levels; nevertheless it would be interesting to know if bass cut is really necessary to avoid overcutting, or whether it is simply a hang-over from the days of acoustic recording, when the recording equipment unavoidably gave such a cut. The suggested recording characteristics are given in Fig. 7.

Returning to the problem of tracing distortion, together with pinch effect and the need for vertical motion of the stylus, the whole difficulty would disappear if the original groove were impressed with a spherical stylus, a duplicate of the reproducing stylus, instead of being cut with a chisel. As the area of contact of the groove with the stylus would now be greatly increased, deformation and wear from existing pickups would be almost eliminated. The limiting tracking weight for an impressed groove is difficult to calculate but would be about 0.9 gm for vinyl for *the elastic range.* With a comparatively slight reduction in existing tracking weights of the best pickups, there would be no damage whatsoever to record grooves and frictional wear of both groove and stylus would be very low. It might be necessary to use very close tolerances on dimensions of both recording and reproducing styli, to avoid an oversize stylus being forced into the groove, or an undersized one from "skating," but this would be a very small price to pay, especially as the reproducing stylus would be virtually everlasting for normal users. Alternatively, a V-groove could be impressed with a conical stylus, which would give a greater contact area and hence even higher limiting tracking loads. By making the bottom radius of the reproducing stylus larger than that on the recording one, skating would be avoided and a universal stylus becomes possible.

An impressed type of groove would doubtless require considerably more power for recording than a cut groove, but this might be offset by recording at a high temperature, either by means of a heated stylus or by heating the blank. Thus the normal hard type of recording wax or lacquer could be impressed while hot and soft. There are doubtless other difficulties, but the advantages to the record user would be so great that every effort should be made to produce impressed-groove records.

The impressed type of groove, with the high tracking weights possible without serious groove damage, makes the acoustic gramophone once more possible as a high-quality reproducer. Although there may be many limitations on the quality obtainable, some improvement in design is doubtless possible, and it should be remembered that the best acoustic gramophones have a clarity of reproduction which is not matched by many commercial radiograms.