From classlessness to clubculture
A genealogy of post-war British youth cultural analysis

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Abstract

This article surveys the field of British youth cultural analysis since the development in the 1950s of a so-called specific identity and distinctive set of experiences for young people. It outlines the main trajectories of sociological research, from the early positing of a classless youth culture, via various investigations into delinquent solutions, through to the establishment within a cultural studies discipline of a 'new wave of subcultural theory' in the 1970s. It also examines the challenges to this orthodoxy in an era of 'new times' and the recent return to sociology and ethnographic fieldwork. In so doing the article traces the main theoretical traditions from the initial influence of American subcultural theory, through symbolic interactionism and the reinvention of the problem-solving approach in the language of Marxism, to how the field has recently been reconstituted upon the terrain of 'post-subcultural studies'. It concludes by critiquing some current calls for the replacement of the subculture concept and argues that, while reports of the death of subculture are greatly exaggerated, the continued use of this concept in future research is perhaps likely to emphasise certain CCCS connotations of group coherence, consistency and commitment in addition to the postmodern traits of flux, fluidity and hybridization that are seemingly constitutive of certain youth cultural forms and activities in the new millennium.

CLASSLESS YOUTH CULTURE, DELINQUENT SOLUTIONS

Youth is not a biologically based period of life but a socially constructed hiatus between childhood and adulthood – the effect of one's transition thorough institutions, such as family, education and work. Youth culture, more specifically, refers to the way in which people within the age span of youth 'develop distinct patterns of life, and give *expressive form* to their social and material life-experience' (Clarke et al., 1976: 10, original emphasis). It was because of specific social changes taking place through the 1950s that 'youth culture', in terms of a distinctly new set of experiences for young British people, was regarded at the time to be a specifically post-war phenomenon.[1] 'This culture was defined in terms of leisure and leisure goods – coffee and milk bars, fashion clothes and hair styles, cosmetics, rock 'n' roll, films and magazines, scooters and motorbikes, dancing and dance halls' (Frith, 1986: 9). It was during this same period that the idea of the 'teenager' first became prominent in both popular and academic British discourse. Of the numerous social and economic factors that led to the creation of a teenage youth identity, three of the most causally important were held to be as follows.

First, as the 1944 Butler Education Act expanded the provision of secondary education and raised the school leaving age to 15 years, 'the increasing number of young people spending an increasing proportion of their youth in age-specific educational institutions from the age of eleven onwards [. . .] was seen, by some commentators to be creating the conditions for the emergence of a specifically "adolescent society"' (Clarke et al., 1976: 20). Second, after the first few years of post-war austerity, Britain gradually entered a prolonged period of affluence with a particularly pronounced rise in the real earnings of young people following on from full employment and a high demand for youth labour (see Osgerby, 1998: Ch 3). Third, this increasing disposable income for youth helped created the conditions for the emergence of the aforementioned leisure market aimed specifically at young people. By the end of this decade, a report felt confident in describing these patterns of youth consumption as 'distinctive teenage spending for distinctive teenage ends in a distinctive teenage world' (Abrams, 1959: 19).

The foremost, and perhaps still most famous, institutional proponents of British youth cultural analysis are the once postgraduate students of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), situated at the University of Birmingham. It is not, however, always appreciated that there was a well-established body of British based work on both the social and cultural aspects of youth considerably before the publication of the first CCCS papers on subculture around the early 1970s. An interview with a south London Teddy Boy and a wider discussion of this youth subculture can be found as far back as Fyvel (1961), while Willmott (1966) was soon to undertake a far more extensive and systematic qualitative study of adolescent males from London's East End. Empirical studies by David Hargreaves (1967) and Barry Sugarman (1967) were furthermore being conducted on the relationship between educational achievement, schooling subcultures and youth leisure activities. Although the pre-CCCS work is somewhat diverse, it is possible to isolate two contrasting strands that are particularly relevant to our concerns in this article: that which was influenced by the American tradition of research into working-class delinquent youth subcultures and that which too uncritically based its premises upon the widespread notion of a general, 'classless' youth cultural experience or, what amounted at the time to much

the same thing, a distinctive generational experience. We will look first at the delinquent tradition and then set the second strand within the context of its critique by the CCCS.

The most influential text of the first strand is undoubtedly David Downes's (1966) *The Delinquent Solution*, which was itself a response to developments in American subcultural theory, in particular the work of Albert Cohen (1955) and his critics. Cohen, in attempting to account for non-utilitarian delinquency, had theorized the subculture as a 'problem-solving' device. This entailed the argument that lower working-class American youth, who had suffered educational failure, blocked-opportunities and 'status frustration', inverted respectable middle-class values by placing alternative emphasis upon delinquent activities that were valued within their own peer group. By so doing they gained the status denied them by the wider social system. But Downes understood that the English experience did not give rise to the highly cohesive delinquent gang commonly found in the US, and that a reformulation (rather than outright rejection) of the existing theory was consequently necessary. He suggested that the delinquency of the British 'corner-boy' was not so much due to 'status frustration', 'but to a process of disassociation from middle-class dominated contexts of school, work and recreation' coupled with a heightened desire for popular commercial leisure goals but with lack of opportunities for realizing them (Downes, 1966: 259). This theorization of subcultures as a collective form of problem solving surfaced continuously in analyses of British youth culture throughout the rest of the 1960s and again during the 1970s. Two studies should be mentioned here, both of which are undertaken within a Symbolic Interactionist theoretical framework where social reality is held to be defined through the shared negotiation of meanings and the ability of actors to perceive themselves in the role of the other; yet they still betray a debt to Downes's style of subcultural analysis.

In Jock Young's (1971) *The Drugtakers* we find an analysis of the interactions taking place between the police and a London marihuana-smoking Hippy subculture during the late 1960s. Young shows how initial attempts at social control unwittingly helped to intensify the original deviancy by uniting the drug takers against the police activity. This reinforced the 'labelling' of the subculture as deviant, effectively stereotyping it and segregating it more from the wider 'straight' society, leading to further and increasing policing, heightened deviance, and thereby creating a classic 'deviancy amplification spiral'. Stanley Cohen's (1972) text on the Mods and Rockers clashes of the mid-1960s has a similar focus, being concerned with how 'moral panics' – calls by the 'moral guardians' of society for tougher law enforcement measures and more stringent penalties for offenders – may intensify the social reaction to deviance and escalate the behaviour of these young 'folk devils' that such punitive measures were originally intended to eradicate. Even so, in both of these texts, the problem-solving approach was still relied on for structural explanations of the genesis of the initial deviance and, thus, of the subcultures themselves. Young, for example, begins from the premise that 'different groups in society have different problems', 'drugs are a common means of problem solving' and that 'groups select drugs which have psychotropic properties seemingly suitable for their problems' (Young, 1971: 41). And as Cohen was later to reflect on his own work, '*Folk Devils and Moral Panics* certainly relied heavily on labelling theory, but never suggested that the origins of the behaviour itself could be explained by anything other than a slightly tougher version (via Downes) of original subcultural theory' (Cohen, 1980: ii–iii).

As Cohen suggests, these types of texts were crucially aware of the importance of the class position of the deviant in any attempt at theoretical explanation. By contrast, although the writings of the second strand of pre-CCCS youth studies were not necessarily unaware of social and economic divisions within the young, they nonetheless tended to emphasise 'youth' itself as the unit of analysis rather than class. A case in point is Frank Musgrove's (1964) *Youth and the Social Order*. Despite its recognition of educational disparities and differential occupational rewards amongst young people, the promotional notes on the inside cover open with the unequivocal statement that 'the book deals with the status of Youth and the unequal conflict between the generations'. A quick glance at the chapter headings shows that all of them include one of the following concepts – 'youth', 'adolescent', 'adolescence', 'the young', and 'generation'; but, tellingly, these appear without any corresponding mention of class, inequality or even stratification. And when class did become part of the conceptual vocabulary of similar studies during the late 1960s, it was only to theorize certain youth as a replacement for class or as a type of class in itself. An example of this approach is that of Wilson (1970) who, in his discussion of the student protest movement, examines the fruitfulness of conceiving the relationship between university students and dons in terms of 'class'. Yet, even here, he does so by ultimately relying on such generalized concepts as '*the* youth culture', '*the* young', generational conflict, and the idea 'of youth as a *separate* stratum of modern society, with values and a way of life of its own' (1970: 218; my emphasis).

THE CCCS AND ITS CRITICS

It was exactly these texts of the second strand, and the cultural ideologies through which their subject matter was distilled, that provided the targets for critique in the early theorizations of the CCCS, their seminal work here being *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson, 1976). The CCCS 'project', as it might be called, was to penetrate the ideological categories of thought prevalent at the time in both lay and academic discourse, such as 'affluence' (the absolute rise in living standards in late-1950s Britain), 'embourgeoisement' (the suggestion that the working-classes had become middle-class in their styles of life) and 'classlessness' (the assumed unimportance of socio-economic cleavages within groups such as 'youth', and thus the supposed irrelevance of class as an explanatory concept). This deconstruction exercise was intended to uncover the 'real' exploitative economic relations that continued to underlie such ideological mystifications as 'teenage youth culture'. In short, the CCCS were determined to reinsert social class at the heart of youth cultural analysis, and did so via what was called a 'double articulation of youth sub-cultures – first, to the "parent" culture (e.g. working class culture), second, to the dominant culture' (Clarke et al., 1976: 15). The relationship between the dominant and working-class culture was theorized in terms of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony – the process by which an alliance of dominant classes attempts to rule with the consent of subordinate groups by framing all definitions of reality within its own world-view. On this basis, post-war working-class deviant (or 'spectacular') youth styles (e.g. the Teddy Boys and the Mods, Rockers and Skinheads) were clearly distinguished from both middle-class radical youth movements – such as the Hippies – and more 'ordinary' or 'conventional' working-class youth, and theorized as a *resistance* to this process of hegemony.

In fundamental respects this 'new subcultural theory' or 'new wave sociology of youth', as it variously became known, was very much the old problem-solving paradigm, but reinterpreted within a Marxist perspective. Thus, the 'problem' became the historically specific socio-economic 'contradictions' facing the working-class parent culture, while the 'solution' for the youth of this class – the collective response – became the innovatory style around which a subcultural identity coalesced. Added to this analysis were, to explain the genesis of the style, the concept of bricolage (the recontextualization of items from the dominant culture, reassembled to express new, alternative meanings) and, to account for the non-random selection of material objects, the concept of homology (the cultural correspondences or resonance between the different levels of a subculture – its style, values, focal concerns and so forth). Finally, it was proposed that the subculture was merely an 'imaginary' solution as it did nothing to solve the material problems that were its source and that, furthermore, any element of resistance would be relatively short-lived; for deviant styles would ultimately be recuperated by the media and commercial elements of the youth market in their attempts to turn them into mass fashion. Notwithstanding this general framework for subcultural analysis, however, 'it is worth noting that "the CCCS work" was never as unified or coherent as some have claimed it to be' (Carrington and Wilson, 2004: 76). Evident within it, from the outset until the late 1970s, were different methodological strategies, theoretical reformulations and internal critiques. Let us now consider briefly each of these three areas.

First, in an influential paper by Phil Cohen (1972), there was a concerted effort to decode the meaning of subcultural styles by reading them as a type of text. The Skinhead look, for example, of shaven heads, Dr Martens boots and Ben Sherman shirts with braces was interpreted as a 'reassertion' of a traditional, working-class way of life that was, at the time, rapidly disappearing. Conversely, the smart, two-tone mohair suits of the Mods were seen as an 'imaginary' realization of the affluent lifestyle that was helping to erode the old proletarian communities. Both John Clarke and Dick Hebdige soon took up this form of analysis more systematically and with an explicit debt to the French theories of structuralism and semiotics as formulated by Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes respectively. Paul Willis (1977, 1978), by contrast, tended to eschew such post-war, continental cultural studies modes of enquiry and harked back instead to the classic methods of ethnography and qualitative interviewing as developed decades earlier by the Chicago School of Sociology.

Second, while the classical Marxist project is clear enough in Willis's work, it is not formulated in Gramscian terms as is found in, say, the theoretical essay by Clarke et al. (1976) that opens *Resistance Though Rituals*. Indeed, as Willis (1990: 156) was later to write, 'I have never used the term "hegemony" simply because it seems too general and malleable a concept to be of much use in the analysis of concrete living practices'. On the other hand, while Hebdige's (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* does open with a sophisticated discussion of both the Althusserian and Gramscian modes of Marxist cultural analysis, it ends by travelling far beyond this into a post-structuralist orbit where the meaning of style, or for that matter interpretation itself, can never be pinned down to any to final signified or by any transcendental signifier. Hebdige's book is also notable for its discussion of the Jamaican Rude Boy and Rastafarian subcultures and the impact of these styles on indigenous British youth in the post-war context of ex-colonial immigration to the UK. The result is what the author calls an attempt to construct 'a phantom history

of race relations' upon 'the loaded surfaces' of white, working-class British subcultures (Hebdige, 1979: 45).

Third, as argued in an internal critique by Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber (1976), the output of the CCCS up to that time had tended to neglect the gendered dimension to youth culture and subcultures. This article claimed that the male writers, though their too-close identification with their object of study and the assumption that it was implicitly a masculine phenomenon, had rendered girls 'invisible' within subcultural theory (see also McRobbie, 1980). McRobbie and Garber further attempted to estimate the extent to which girls were either present but marginalized within, or actually absent from, male-dominated youth groups. While they tentatively concluded towards the former hypothesis, they also suggested that 'the important question [. . .] may not be the absence or presence of girls in the male sub-cultures but the complementary ways in which girls interact among themselves and with each other to form a distinctive culture of their own' (McRobbie and Garber, 1976: 219). The far-reaching implications of this for future feminist work on youth was to direct research away from subcultures and towards female consumption of more 'conventional' popular cultural forms.

For a brief period in the early 1980s, this CCCS approach was retrospectively subjected to a spate of small-scale critiques. What was seen as the predominant problem with the CCCS portrayal of subcultures can be summed up in the words of Stanley Cohen as being 'the nagging sense here [. . .] that these lives, selves and identities do not always coincide with what they are supposed to stand for' (Cohen, 1980: xviii). There appear to be two main, related reasons for this sense of doubt as to its validity. First, with the important exception of the work of Paul Willis, there was a conspicuous absence of primary, qualitative data collection. There is to be sure a section in Hall and Jefferson (1976) entitled 'ethnography', but much of this relies on a reading of secondary, literary sources rather than any first-hand observation of the objects of study. Second, the employment of a semiotic methodology and Marxist perspective were held by some to be imposing a set of interpretations *upon* the subcultural participants. As Stanley Cohen (1980: xviii) again remarked, on the principle of textual analysis, 'this is, to be sure, an imaginative way of reading the style; but how can we be sure that it is not also imaginary?' And as Nicholas Dorn and Nigel South (1982: 16) said of the theoretical framework, 'male youth cultures were interpreted as systems of resistance to dominant ideologies without much regard to the question of the relationship between the meaning of youth cultures for participants and that for sociologists'.

Chris Waters (1981: 30) also noted how the CCCS tended to portray subcultures in terms of 'static' and 'frozen' categories; or as Gary Clarke (1982: 8) put it, in a subsequent critique made from within the Centre, they 'are strangely abstract, non-contradictory and "pure"'. As Clarke went on to say, this was due mainly to the emphasis placed upon the 'genesis' of subcultures (for it is supposedly at this point that resistance is most acutely expressed), the effect of which was to relegate to the margins any account of change and transformation in subcultural forms. The purity of the resistance was also directly related to the claim by the CCCS that media and commercial interests did not contaminate subcultures until *after* these groups 'had surfaced and been publicized' (Hebdige, 1979: 122). This, in turn, had led to a sharp theoretical dichotomy being posited between the resistance of the 'first wave of self-conscious innovators' (1979: 122) and the anodyne fashion statements of those who merely conformed to the styles after they had been stripped by the market of their

radical potential – an effective demarcation between the authentic and inauthentic member that Clarke (1982: 14) found 'particularly problematic'. It is important to identify these specific weaknesses in the CCCS work for we will note that while some of them began to be addressed in youth studies from the late 1970s onwards, their ultimate resolution appears to have been achieved within what has only relatively recently amounted to a wholesale reformulation of subcultural theory.

'NEW TIMES' FOR YOUTH CULTURAL STUDIES

The year 1990 saw the publication of two books that, in different ways, illustrated some of the fundamental changes that had taken place in youth cultural analysis since the concluding contribution to the CCCS corpus of work on subcultures just over a decade earlier. The empirical concern of Willis's *Common Culture* was the 'symbolic creativity' or 'grounded aesthetics' of 'ordinary' youth consumption – 'the creative element in a process whereby meanings are attributed to symbols and practices and where symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings' (1990: 21). Given that such creative appropriation had previously been accorded (through the concept of bricolage) only to the members of 'spectacular' subcultures, this might at first appear to imply an extension of existing aspects of subcultural theory to youth in general. Moreover, in the afterword to the book, Willis asserts the relevance of the concept of homology to the data and states that the analysis is not incompatible with a hegemonic perspective. Yet there is otherwise nothing of the wider Marxist theory with which the CCCS and Willis were inextricably associated. Indeed, as Willis remarks in a telling passage that is highly reminiscent of exactly that notion of a distinctive youth culture that *Resistance Through Rituals* had originally set out to critique:

> Our main ethnographic materials are drawn from working-class experience. We have not systematically explored class differences. However, we would hold that many of the processes which we discuss hold true as tendencies in middle-class experience too [. . .] there are, therefore, many commonalities in youth experience and it is these we try to highlight. (Willis, 1990: 8)

Steve Redhead's *The End-of-the-Century Party* is, by contrast, a form of cultural analysis best described by the author 'as a contemporary archaeology of discourse on pop' (Redhead, 1990: 8), but one that is firmly entwined with mapping out the changed contours of youth cultural discourses. In the face of claims made during the 1980s that a media-fuelled obsession with style over substance and image over ideology had heralded the 'death' of serious rock music and resistant youth culture, Redhead is concerned to re-emphasize the potential rebelliousness of youth culture and the political significance of pop music. Yet, in an attempt to come to terms with the new 'Acid House' or 'rave' explosion, he is also keen to reject the relevance of pre-1980s CCCS theory, not only to contemporary conditions but the context of its own construction. Furthermore, he does so with a wilful embrace of concepts and theories becoming known at the time as part and parcel of 'postmodernism', and which dissolve the very distinctions – authentic/synthetic; innovation/manufacture; reality/image – upon which subcultural theories of resistance were predicated. 'Such explanations', he writes, 'can now finally be laid to rest' (Redhead, 1990: 2).

How, then, did we get to this position where substantial shifts in the field were beginning to destabilize the dominant Marxist paradigm and consumption was being elevated in importance over productive class relationships? Initially, such piecemeal critiques as discussed in the previous section had negligible impact upon the considerable academic popularity and power that the CCCS paradigm quickly achieved, mainly because they were not overtly hostile to its general premises. Even by the beginning of the 1990s it was still possible to assert of Hebdige's (1979) work (and of the CCCS subcultural paradigm by implicit extension) 'that it has not yet been superseded by any work of similar scope which challenges its structuralist perspective' (Beezer, 1992: 115). And yet the 1980s *did* see the publication of important books on youth subculture, but their reception was somewhat muted because they did not fit comfortably into the dominant cultural studies-led thinking of the time. Martin's (1981) text, for example, despite being influential in certain sociological circles, committed the heresy of a 'Weberian deviation' at a time of unwavering Marxist orthodoxy.[2] But this and other such important exceptions aside, 'with the demise of punk, it was no longer enough to focus on the "spectacular" – visible and audible – forms of youth culture' (Cohen and Ainley, 2000: 95), and so subcultural analysis gave way to more numerous considerations of 'ordinary' youth.

Some of the CCCS writers themselves had in fact already undertaken this move away from the 'spectacular'. Willis's (1977) ethnography of a group of working-class youths, known collectively as 'the lads', demonstrates how their socialization into a masculine culture emphasizing pride in heavy manual work leads them to reject the middle-class ethos of their school. Yet this conscious rejection of the academic to enter into a 'counter-school culture' also prepares them for their future as unskilled labour for capital. Rather similar conclusions, but with regard to teenage girls, were made by Angela McRobbie, whose concept of 'bedroom culture' 'was devised as a means of addressing the alternative ways in which girls organize their cultural lives, and to account for their absence from street-based, male-dominated youth cultural activities' (Lincoln, 2004: 94). This home-based consumption of 'pop fandom' cultural forms together with a wider 'culture of femininity' (McRobbie, 1978) based around teenage fashion, romance and glossy magazines, was understood as a form of resistance to the official school curriculum but also an effective preparation for the girls' forthcoming roles as wives and mothers, that is, as *domestic* labourers. While Lincoln (2004) has recently returned to and 'updated' McRobbie's bedroom culture concept, feminist work on youth culture in the intervening period consecutively embraced what, with continued reference to and apologetic borrowing from McRobbie, I might term the 'three Ps': pleasure, production and post-structuralism. Let us look briefly at each of these in turn.

First, a Frankfurt School-style consideration of cultural consumption in terms of passivity, mass manipulation and 'false needs' gave way to an analysis of popular texts that allowed an appreciation of 'the ambiguous pleasures that they offer' (Nava, 1992: 193). McRobbie's 'Dance and Social Fantasy' article is one example of such an approach, which allows female 'forms of fantasy, daydreaming and "abandon" to be interpreted a part of a strategy of resistance or opposition' (1984: 134). Second, there was a shift of focus from the private, 'hidden' aspects of female consumption towards women's role in the more visible aspects of cultural production. By writing about young women working on second-hand clothing stalls in ragmarkets, and those with creative and aesthetic roles in design, media and marketing, McRobbie (1989, 1993)

was drawing attention to a hitherto ignored 'entrepreneurial element' to subcultures that did not accord with prevailing notions of the purity of youth resistance. Third, the rigidity of Althussarian-influenced textual analyses of female interpellation into patriarchal ideology gave way to a post-structuralist and anti-essentialist emphasis on the multiple, complex and contradictory positioning of the subject through discourse and the deconstruction of the monolithic category of 'women' through 'difference'. This led to ethnography being 'virtually abandoned' (Cohen and Ainley, 2004: 85) until the point at which McRobbie eventually called for a focus on 'different, youthful subjectivities' (McRobbie, 1994: Ch. 10), one that combined post-foundational fundamentals with an emphasis on lived experience through ethnographic practice. Maria Pini's (2001) case study of rave culture, in which this phenomenon is viewed as having both 'liberating' and 'oppressive' tendencies for women, is perhaps the prime example to date of such a theoretical and methodological marriage.

While it is true that 'the notion of ethnic cultures does not feature *centrally* in the work of the CCCS' (Valentine et al., 1998: 19; my emphasis), Hebdige's (1979) theoretical discussion of the influence of black style upon the formation of white British subcultures was nonetheless taken up extensively, ethnographically and in 'concrete' rather than 'phantom' form by Simon Jones (1988), also affiliated to the CCCS. If, in much of the work so far discussed in this section, it appears that 'the boundaries of "resistance" and "collusion" became increasingly blurred and dissolved altogether' (Griffin, 1993: 157), then so too did Jones's account of the involvement by white youths in Rastafarianism question the polar oppositions previously predicated between deviant subcultures and incorporated youth culture. As he writes, 'the mass marketing of Jamaican music in more radicalised forms [. . .] has rendered subcultural theory's counterposition of "authentic", "underground" forms of consumption to "straight" or conventional forms, highly problematic' (Jones, 1988: xxv). Roger Hewitt's (1986) documentation of the Caribbean creole or 'patois' speech employed by white London children in both all-white and white–black interaction contexts provides another ethnographic example of ethnic cultural borrowing. As with Jones's (1988) Birmingham-based study of Reggae music, the hybrid outcomes of 'the penetration of creole-derived features into the local vernacular' (Hewitt, 1986: 150) are intensified by their being white appropriations of a 'cut 'n' mix' Afro-Caribbean culture (Hebdige, 1987), the various forms of which were themselves redeveloped 'as part of a diaspora', 'and consumed in circumstances far removed from those in which they were originally created' (Gilroy, 1987: 154, 157).

These revisions and developments to youth cultural analysis did not, of course, take place in a socio-political vacuum. The 1980s saw the political rise of the New-Right in both Britain and America and a concomitant crisis of the Left, with world events eventually culminating at the end of the decade in the complete collapse of Marxism as a viable alternative to a rampant global capitalism. While analyses of class were not abandoned, they did become subsumed to more pressing questions of consumption in an age where attention had been diverted away from economic inequalities towards the analysis of style-based, mediated, market-segmented identities. Although these and other changes gradually became recognized as symptomatic of a 'postmodern' epoch, some were also subjected to analysis in Britain under the umbrella term of 'New Times', the argument of which more specifically was 'that Britain and other advanced capitalist societies are increasingly characterized by diversity, differentiation and fragmentation, rather than homogeneity, standardization and

the economies and organizations of scale which characterized modern mass society' (Hall and Jacques, 1989: 11). The way in which these events opened up for some young academics a general space in which to challenge the whole CCCS framework for subcultural analysis, and how these changing cultural characteristics fed more specifically into new accounts of youth culture and subculture, is the theme of the next, and final, section.

THE EMERGENCE OF POST-SUBCULTURAL STUDIES

Although the Marxist paradigm at least remained in place for perhaps much of the 1990s, the later years of this decade onwards did witness as its replacement the gradual delineation of a specific field of 'post-subcultural studies'. This field should not in any sense be regarded as comprising a unified body of work, for it is more clearly defined by what it is a reaction to. In this sense post-subcultural studies (or theory) can be said to equate to a post-CCCS studies (Weinzierl and Muggleton, 2003). We have seen that it has also been stimulated by the debates surrounding the term postmodernism and the emergence of new cultural forms such as clubculture that could not be adequately accounted for within the constraints of existing theory. The following three characteristics can be regarded as germane to the designation of this new field. First, a new generation of academics has emerged to reject the structuralist and post-structuralist principles of cultural studies and re-embrace the classic sociological methods of ethnography and qualitative interviewing. Second, in the wake of the collapse of the CCCS perspective, the field has become multi-paradigmatic with a variety of frameworks vying for recognition. Third, there has been in some areas a questioning, not only of orthodox theory but also the continuing relevance of the very concept of subculture itself owing to its CCCS connotations of a cohesive, coherent collectivity.

As Robert Hollands (2002: 155) correctly notes, 'the first real alternative youth cultural paradigm to challenge sub-cultures [in terms of both CCCS theory and the concept itself] came out of Steve Redhead's post-modern inspired work'. From 1991 to 1995 Redhead was a co-director of the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture (MIPC), a research centre situated at Manchester Metropolitan University. He was also editor or co-editor of a number of its key publications (e.g. Redhead, 1993; Redhead et al., 1997) to which the MIPC postgraduates – like those of the CCCS two decades earlier – were major contributors. Accounts of the clubculture phenomenon found in these works tended to revolve around such notions as 'the evaporation of meaning' or the 'undoing' or 'disappearance of the self' in the rave event. Yet as Pini (2001: 54) argues, these types of explanations – postmodern or otherwise – tend towards the 'totalitarian' in their 'assumption that club cultures *can* be reduced to, or read in terms of, a singular meaning structure'. This reading in the MIPC texts, moreover, 'despite continued reference to keeping alive a tradition of ethnography [. . .] provides very little room for the actual voices and actions of young people engaged in club-cultures' (Hollands, 2002: 156). The absence of indigenous meanings is a familiar complaint but one that cannot be so easily levelled against later ethnographic and qualitative investigations into dance music scenes and urban subcultures, three of which by Sarah Thornton (1995), David Muggleton (2000) and Andy Bennett (2000) are respectively discussed below. By taking up and employing existing theories and concepts that had

not previously been applied to empirical studies of youth culture, these works all aided in the development and advancement of a post-subcultural studies.

On the basis that it 'carefully and clearly makes a contribution to theoretical debates about the possibilities and problems of the application of the work of Pierre Bourdieu in the sociology of culture' (Redhead, 1997: 102), Thornton's (1995) *Club Cultures* arguably still remains the most influential of these studies. By taking and, one might say, 'inverting' the meaning of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Thornton uses the term 'subcultural capital' to denote the 'hip' or cool' status that accrues from legitimating one's 'underground' tastes through a process of distinction from those valued by the 'mainstream'. What is important here is that the exclusivity of one's tastes is never fixed, for they are forever in need of being demarcated from a constructed mainstream through continual classification and reclassification. Such a diachronic account clearly contrasts with the overtly static portrayal of subcultural tastes produced by the homological analysis of the CCCS. 'Mainstreaming' as it is understood here is not, however, intended to suggest the *incorporation* of the underground by media and commercial interests. For in dispensing with the CCCS notion of a 'media-free space' in which subcultures germinate, Thornton proposes that various media aid in the very definition and construction of incipient movements *as* subcultures in the first instance.

Because clubbers construct their understanding of the mainstream in terms of mass cultural tastes, it is not difficult to comprehend why Thornton's respondents view themselves as members of a heterogeneous minority in relation to a homogenous majority. Yet the notion of subcultural capital does not appear particularly well equipped to account for some of the more complex ways in which boundaries are constructed within both clubbing and subcultures, for example, in relation to the duration of membership and age of participants within the scene, as well as the exclusion of identifiable individuals from the general process of homogenization. For this reason I would agree with Rhoda MacRae (2004: 59) that 'some of Thornton's theoretical adaptations [are] unconvincing and insufficient for understanding collective processes of distinction'. My own exploration of the hierarchies of taste operating 'inside subculture' (Muggleton, 2000) was located within a Weberian tradition of sociology as a deliberate counterpoint to the Marxist perspective, and drew specifically on the work of Alfred Schutz to explain the process of 'typification' by which such boundaries are drawn between who is perceived as a 'genuine' or 'pseudo' participant. It is not an exposition of Schutz that is the point here but the shift from an objectivist CCCS view of this division to one that sees the distinction between the authentic and inauthentic member as an inter-subjective (and wholly relativist) construct.

Andy Bennett's (2000) monograph on local appropriations of urban dance music global genres, such as house, hip-hop and bhangra, is indebted to Michael Maffesoli for aspects of its analysis. As Bennett explains, Maffesoli's concept of the 'tribus' (reformulated by Bennett as 'neo-tribe') is able to convey convincingly the fluid, amorphous and multiple conceptions of the individual and collective expressions of stylistic and musical based identity found within the clubbing context. 'Thus, for many enthusiasts, clubbing appears to be regarded less as a singularly definable activity and more of a series of fragmented, temporal experiences as they move between different dance floors and engage with different crowds' (2000: 83). These complex receptions of black and Asian musical styles, themselves a product of 'genre

mixing', recall our earlier discussion of the hybrid outcomes of the relocation of ethnic forms in new cultural contexts, and require a consideration of what have been termed 'new ethnicities', forged within urban contexts. '"New ethnicities" not only challenge what it means to be "black" but they also call into question the dominant coding of what it means to be British' (Back, 1996: 4). In so doing they provide the potential to decentre 'essentialist' notions of the black subject and, furthermore, facilitate the conjoining of the hitherto mutually exclusive modes of identification of black and white, and possibly also those of black and Asian (Sharma et al., 1996).

As Les Back remarks on the variety or styles and genres through which these new ethnicities are expressed, 'the boundaries between these cultural forms are fast becoming more difficult to identify. They do not exist as mutually exclusive "subcultures" but rather provide a variety of resources that can be switched into and out of by black young people. The result is a kind of *diasporic code-switching*' (Back, 1996: 217; original emphasis). Such an observation may appear entirely consistent with those made by Bennett and provide support for his employment of the neo-tribe concept as a replacement for that of subculture. But while neo-tribe does suggest an alternative to the static, abstract and essentialist categories of CCCS subcultural analysis, we should guard against any uncritical celebration of its Maffesolian connotations, particularly that of cultural hybridization as decoupled from more modernist, 'underlying', structural markers of identity and inequality. This is especially important within the contested contexts of multiculturalism. As Claire E. Alexander (2000) remarks of Asian youth identities, to mount a critique of essentialist accounts of the exotic 'Other' in the name of fluidity [. . .] 'is not to insert in this space a perhaps more fashionable, but no less simplistic, account of a celebratory hybrid culture, captured in the notion of "the new Asian cool"' (Alexander, 2000: 25). To mobilize such a liberal discourse or politics of hybridity serves merely to obscure socio-economic relations of global exploitation and racialized forms of terror and oppression (Sharma et al., 1996; Hutnyk, 2000).

A rather different point of conceptual critique is that while certain subcultures may well exhibit neo-tribal tendencies, this does not entail them *being* neo-tribes, particularly when other subcultural formations have apparently continued to display the more coherent and group-cohesive characteristics as originally emphasized by the CCCS. Paul Hodkinson's (2002) study is indicative in this context for its inclusion of four indicators by which '(sub)cultural substance' can be discerned in the contemporary gothic scene. These are: (i) the 'consistent distinctiveness' of its values, styles and tastes; (ii) a strong sense of a 'shared identity'; (iii) a 'commitment' to the group by its members, and (iv) the way in which a network of specialist enterprises run and staffed by gothic members themselves gives the organization of the group a 'relative autonomy' from external 'or non-subcultural' commercial interests (Hodkinson, 2002: 28–33). I would, however, argue that Hodkinson's findings could be read as complementary rather than antithetical to those of my own case study (Muggleton, 2000). *Inside Subculture* certainly concurred with certain of the theoretical claims made about the fragmented, transitory and hybridized quality of some 'liminoid' youth styles. Yet it placed at least equal emphasis on how some individuals could be highly committed to any one of a range of *relatively* identifiable groupings that, despite being far more nebulous than the CCCS connotations of the concept had led me to believe, were nonetheless 'still characterized by at least a minimum degree of distinctiveness from other, less similar, types of liminal subcultures' (Muggleton, 2000: 73)[3]

As a final point and by way of conclusion, then, it might be adduced that the future of the subcultural concept is rather more secure than has often been suggested by those seeking to (over) state the postmodern case. While the group centred characteristics of subculture were clearly exaggerated by the CCCS, it is no less true that recent revisionist theories have also over emphasized the prevalence and intensity of such features as flux, fluidity and hybridization. A continued use of the subculture concept should, therefore, in the words of Paul Sweetman (2004: 79; original emphasis), allow us to appreciate 'the way in which coming together as a group – however temporary and fragmented the group is – can provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identification *as well as* a sense of individual identity or style'.

Notes

1 See, however, Osgerby (1998: Ch. 2) and Bennett (2000: Ch. 1) for a summary of compelling evidence that suggests aspects of a distinctive British youth culture existed before 1945.
2 The phrase 'Weberian deviation' is taken from Gary Clarke (1982: 8). Another text of this period, Aggleton's (1987) case study of middle-class, sixth-form students who rebelled in both behaviour and dress codes, perhaps fits in more comfortably with the sociology of education or the consideration of youth transitions rather than that of youth culture *per se*.
3 Thus, I provide interview extracts from a self-identifying 'gothic' and a 'punk', along with other more 'open-ended' yet still relatively distinctive classifications such as 'punk-ish', 'mod-y' and 'more with the metal crowd' (Muggleton, 2000: Ch. 4).

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