

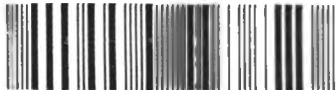
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## Stencilled Occasional Paper

DEFENDING SKI-JUMPERS: A CRITIQUE OF THEORIES OF YOUTH SUB-CULTURES

by

Gary Clarke



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The Search for Resistance: Origins and Limits

Resistance Through Rituals emerged at a particular moment as a condensation of particular intellectual and political trends and I would argue that this defining moment overdetermined the authors' approach. The forces and considerations of the early 1970's imposed severe limitations and restrictions upon the project, evident, not least, in the admitted neglect of 'straight' working-class youth.

Primarily, the project was written as an attempt to produce a politicised and more sophisticated version of labelling theory - a perspective on the sociology of deviance which emerged from the work of Howard Becker and was developed at the National Deviancy Conferences of the late sixties. (Becker, 1963; Cohen, 1971 and 1973; Young, 1972; Taylor and Taylor, 1973). Labelling and interactionist theory quite radically permitted a sympathy for the oppressed by suggesting that deviance is a social creation; the result of the power of 'moral entrepreneurs' to label others as deviant rather than inherently deviant or criminal acts. By developing concepts and theories such as deviancy amplification and the differential application of labels, and by exploring the socially and historically relative nature of deviance, labelling theorists shifted the emphasis away from essentially deviant actors to those with the power to label. This opened up the possibility of a 'New Criminology' (eg. Taylor, Walton & Young, 1973), Marxist theory of crime within the New Left. However, the resulting raid on the indexes for Marx's own references to crime remained unproductive and was restricted to attempts to revitalise Marx's discussions of the lumpenproletariat. Unfortunately, the logical move, a synthesis of labelling theory with a theory of the capitalist state did not occur due to the theoretical insecurity in this area. (3)

In the absence of a coherent stance on the relationship between base and superstructure such a fusion seems even more unlikely today and the potential uses of labelling theory have been lost - particularly since the development of the work on sub-cultures.

The major problem with the labelling approach lay in its inability to explain 'primary deviance' - the initial acts or gestures which are singled out and in turn go through the circuit of labelling, moral panic and amplification. This

INTRODUCTION

Pop music can be a force of either the most unmitigated idiocy or of extraordinary emancipation, but as a very young, highly exploitative and very fluid branch of modern capitalism it offers unique chances. There is certainly a delicious vulgarity, infuriating megalomania, desperate clamour for glamour, and a bewildering style. But over the last five years since the punk explosion and the international recognition of reggae music, beneath all the crap a surprisingly high proportion of the music has aimed at educating rather than anaesthetising the senses - in illuminating rather than obscuring reality, in heightening awareness rather than promoting stupidity... There have also been depressing band waggons of near-rapist heavy metal music, vogues for arty nihilism and the current phase of military flippancy, elaborate hair-does and pseudo-Latin vocalists keener on getting down and boogying than standing up and fighting. (Widgery, 1981, pp36-37-37, my emphasis).

Since its publication, the new sub-cultural theory contained in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' collection Resistance Through Rituals (Hall and Jefferson, 1976) has more or less become a new orthodoxy on youth. The collection and its near-relatives and spin-offs (eg. Mingham and Pearson, 1976; Willis, 1978; Hebdige, 1979) are firmly established on course reading lists. <sup>(1)</sup> at a time when youth has become a major focal concern of the state and of parties across the political spectrum. To a large extent, the acceptance of the literature and its acclaim are justified: the authors realistically outline the lived experience of post-war working-class youth sub-cultures in a sympathetic manner which was hitherto unknown. However, the approach has not been without its critics - many of whom are covered in this paper. Overall, this paper seeks to assess the value of sub-cultural theory especially in the light of recent developments among youth in the midst of a crisis in British capitalism. In particular, I shall conclude by questioning the value of decoding the stylistic appearances of particular tribes during a period in which young adults are the prime victims of a state policy of manufactured unemployment. I shall argue that a politics of youth or an analysis based on the signifying power of selected youth groups is especially inappropriate at the present. <sup>(2)</sup> If particular youth cultural styles once possessed a subversive defiance, they have been severely disfigured, dis-coded we might say, since the punk 'explosion'. The wardrobes of post-war styles have been exhumed, re-adapted and re-adopted in a way which makes conventional sub-cultural analysis virtually impossible. We need to focus on what working class youths actually do and what the appropriation of particular clothing means to youths themselves in these activities. The time has come to turn our eyes away from the stylistic art of a few - however interesting this may initially seem to be.

absence provided the starting point for the emergence of the new sub-cultural theory contained in the Resistance.. collection. The seminal paper by Phil Cohen (Cohen, WPCS, No. 2) and the subsequent work of the CCCS sub-culturalists defined the project as an attempt to explain this primary deviance through a specific analysis of the genesis of working-class youth sub-cultures in terms of their structural and cultural origins.

This concern for the genesis of subcultures, combined with an emphasis on style as their sole defining feature, effected the character of the analysis of youth in Resistance and in the subsequent work. The authors themselves admit that their analysis restricts them to the spectacular post-war subcultures, but they never fully explore the implications of this. I would like to argue that the concern for the frozen moment in which styles are born restricts the resulting politics of youth to a flashpoint of symbolic rebellion - usually within the metropolitan Garden of Eden. Consequently, the authors (and certain sectors of the left) remain exclusively concerned with the few "authentic" (and usually male) members of selected subcultures who are counterposed against what is presumed to be an undifferentiated "normalcy" or "straightness" among the vast majority of working-class youth. The absence of a concern for styles outside the moment of their first assemblage, for the way that the styles become popular and are continually reassembled, means that unfortunately the concern for working class youth has become all too often conflated with a concern for a few . These are the few who make it into the Sunday magazines or the coffee-table compendiums on "style".

Nevertheless, the authors are sympathetic to the lived experiences of those working-class youth chosen for "decoding". The literature certainly represents a major step forward, especially when compared with the debates of that time. In Marxism Today, for example, John Green (Green, 1974) dismissed a concern for youth as a diversion since it divided the working class, Meanwhile, John Boyd went so far as to suggest:

'youth revolt' and its cultural offspring is someone else's girlfriend whose father is Uncle Sam and current guardian is John Bull' (Boyd, 1973)

The uniqueness of Resistance Through Rituals lay in its break from

such limited conceptions of culture. It was an early expression of a continuing project at the Centre based around Gramsci's concept of hegemony. (Gramsci, 1971). Culture was seen as central to the understanding of domination, reproduction and change in the social formation. Cultures were an aspect of the state of play between the various agencies in the state and civil society, especially a dimension of relations of force between classes. Hegemony was not the simple radiation or imposition of ideologies from above, from a ruling group, bloc or class (or even from Uncle Sam!). The winning of consent involved struggle, and hegemony referred only to a temporary balance of forces, which was inherently unstable. It's only when consent is won and the dominant culture is able to represent itself as the culture, that the rule of the dominant class or bloc appears as natural, normal and eternal.

According to the authors of Resistance.. the political significance of the rituals of youth subcultures lies in their ability to resist, to win and create "cultural space", to negotiate and burrow spaces and gaps within the hegemony. Alternatively, in the case of Hebdige (Hebdige, 1979) subcultural styles are evaluated on the basis of their power to shock, to present a challenge to the normalcy and naturalness of "common sense mystifications".<sup>(4)</sup> The value of discussing working class youth in terms of such "symbolic resistance" by subcultures will be discussed throughout this paper.

Resistance.. also emerged in parallel with earlier attempts by social historians to produce "a view from below"; to defend working-class culture historically (e.g. Hobsbawn 1959; E.P. Thompson 1963; and see the discussion in Johnson 1979). Hence, the authors sketch continuities between the working class of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the activities of post-war youth through drawing, in particular, on Hobsbawn's concept of "primitive rebellion". Indeed, one strand in the Centre's work seeks to develop a theoretically informed history of the working class since the mid-nineteenth century - in other words the point where E.P. Thompson's Making of the English Working Class breaks off. This concern to re-assert class was still politically important even in the early 1970's. It was important to break the myth of classlessness rooted in the persistence of ideologies of embourgeoisement and affluence.<sup>(5)</sup> However, in the rush to re-assert class as the central structural feature

of society, considerations of gender and race were reduced to footnotes and any consideration of the specificity of youth in structural terms was lost. If anything, the specificities of youth in the essays seems to be in their consumption patterns - hence perpetuating the 50's myth of the young only as consumers.

Finally, I would like to argue that the new subcultural theory was itself conceived during a particular moment in the history of subcultures. Angela McRobbie (McRobbie, 1980) has already noted the authors' silences as regards their motives behind an interest in speeding mods or the drug-taking habits of hippies. Certainly Hebdige seems to possess a literally fantastic awe for both the mods and the "negro cool" of the black hipster stereotype (Hebdige 1979 and in Hall & Jefferson, 1976). Similarly, Paul Willis bears a strong admiration for the 'profane culture' of the bikers and hippies, (Willis, 1978a). However, I would argue that the search for potentially subversive subcultural elements among working-class youth was determined by a mood of despondancy and disappointment with the forms of politics arising out of the "1968 generation" and the relative weakness of recognisably political resistance in the early seventies. The collapse of the utopian dream blueprinted in OZ and elsewhere, combined with the failure of student radicalism, led many left academics to search for other groups pursuing a similar alternative lifestyle as themselves, particularly where elements of prefigurative class consciousness may have been present. As McRobbie has claimed:

The writers, having defined themselves as against the family and the trap of romance as well as against the boredom of meaningless labour, seem to be drawn to look at other, largely working-class groups who appear to be doing the same thing.  
(McRobbie, 1980)

McRobbie quite rightly suggests that the New Left's hostility to the family (and the sociology of the family) and "bourgeois" commitments to children explains why the family, girls and domestic life are absent in the literature on youth. I would go further and suggest that the hostility to "meaningless labour" led to a consideration of youth only in terms of leisure and that the search for alternative forms of resistance resulted not simply in the neglect but also a latent contempt for "straight" working class youth, defined as being wholly outside the subcultures discussed in the literature.

Sub-Cultural Resistance: Main Features of an Approach

In the previous chapter I argued that the new sub-cultural theory was overdetermined by its moment of inception. I would now like to examine the arguments in detail.<sup>(6)</sup>

The authors share the view that the distinct styles of post-war youth subcultures represent the collective expression of the shared lived experiences of youth in the social formation. As a consequence, youth subcultures are understood as problem-solving. They "magically resolve contradictions" or make "imaginary transformations". They provide a means of marking out territory or of winning "cultural space". However, the sole defining feature of subcultures is taken to be their style. The few activities of working class youth that are considered are only understood as an extension of the style or its collection of 'homologous' elements. Hence subcultures are seen as a highly structured hierarchy of artefacts and values which serve to differentiate a subculture from other subcultures, from the parent culture, and the wider society. Such styles are understood in terms of their "bricolage"<sup>(7)</sup> their ability to appropriate, re-order and recontextualise objects to create and communicate fresh meanings. So, each subculture is seen as an assemblage of different objects, meanings and signs which, according to the authors, provide both a resolution for youth and display a form of symbolic resistance. Great emphasis is placed on the "relative autonomy" of youth from the market in order to stress the creativity, "art" and "culture" of the subcultures evident in their ability to borrow and transform "everyday objects" or "objects of fashion" into a coded style. Examples include the teds' appropriation of the Edwardian suit (Jefferson in Hall & Jefferson 1976), the skins' appropriation of proletarian work clothes (Clarke in Hall & Jefferson, 1976), or the punks' borrowing of clothes pegs and safety pins (Hebdige 1979). These assemblages are in turn "decoded" by the authors.

However, authors differ in their interpretations of the relevance of style. Mike Brake, for example, reads subcultures primarily in psychological terms:

Sub-cultures arise as attempts to resolve collectively experienced problems arising from contradictions in



the social structure and (that) they generate a form of collective identity outside that ascribed by class, education and occupation. This is nearly always a temporary solution, and in no sense is a real material solution, but one which is solved at a cultural level. (Brake, 1980, p.vii).

Aside from what is meant by the "cultural level",<sup>(8)</sup> I find vague discussions of youth in terms of "identity" far too problematic. To some extent, such a view is latent in Resistance.. , and all too often the underlying psychology, be it in terms of individual or collective identities, is never fully explained or brought to the surface. Brake asserts that "Young people need an identity which separates them from the expectations and roles imposed upon them by family, school and work", although he is not clear exactly why this identity is needed. In the last instance, his argument rests upon the generation theories of Parsons and Eisenstadt (Eisenstadt, 1956; Parsons, 1954); subcultural styles are seen as a solution to the status deprivation associated with the period of transition between school and work and between families. Style is read as a means of developing a self and a status identity, so that it becomes "an objective statement about the actor's relationship to the world".

I would like to ask how does this identity relate to the identities supposedly imposed elsewhere?<sup>(9)</sup> Brake seems to be suggesting that the concept of "youth" is an identity which is developed in the sphere of leisure. I would argue, on the contrary, that "youth" is a category, involving a specific set of social relations, which is constructed (in racially and gender-specific ways) in the various sites of home, work, school, law, social security offices and other areas of state policy. Youth is a category which has been redefined throughout history, and cannot be seen in the simple terms of Brake - it is far more contradictory. For example, "youth" is not simply a phenomenon which is celebrated in "youth culture"; simultaneously, and in contradiction, the very rituals which celebrate youthfulness also resist that very identity. Young people, through their activities - sexual relations, smoking, drinking, staying up late, resisting school etc. - strive to reach adulthood, the stage at which the second-class citizenship of being "treated like a child" can be overcome.<sup>(10)</sup> An examination of youth in terms of this contradiction is urgently required, especially at a time of

deepening youthful dependency. Like Brake, the authors of Resistance explain the emergence of particular youth-styles in terms of their capacity for problem solving. Phil Cohen's "Subcultural Conflict and the Working Class Community" (Cohen, WPCS. No. 2) set the pace and most of the Centre's analyses are based on an amplification of the ideas, and consequently the problems, in Cohen's paper.

Cohen's complex analysis takes into account the full interplay of economic, ideological and "cultural" factors which give rise to sub-cultures. In particular, the connections between parent and youth cultures are dealt with in a manner far more sophisticated than in Brake. Subcultures are seen as:

....a compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents...and the need to maintain... parental identification.... (ibid., p.26)

Cohen explains the development of subcultures on the basis of the redevelopment and reconstruction of the East End of London which resulted in the fragmentation and disruption of the working-class family, economy and community-based culture. He suggests that the sub-cultures among working class youth emerged as an attempt to resolve these experiences:

...the latent function of subcultures is...to express and resolve albeit "magically", the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture. The succession of subcultures which the parent culture generated can thus all be considered as so many variations on a central theme -- the contradiction, at an ideological level between traditional working class puritanism, and the new hedonism of consumption; at an economic level between a future as part of the socially mobile elite or as part of the new lumpen. Mods, Parkers (sic), skinheads, crombies, all represent, in their different ways, an attempt to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in the parent culture, and to combine this with elements selected from other class fractions, symbolising one or other of the options confronting it. (ibid., p.23)

Subcultures are seen as collective solutions to collectively experienced problems. Mods are seen to correspond to and subsequently construct a parody of, the upwardly mobile solution, (Hebdige in Hall & Jefferson, 1976), while skinheads are read as an attempt to magically

recover the chauvinisms of the "traditional" working class community.

However, Cohen (and adherents) are imprecise as regards the necessity of a correspondence between actual structural location and the problem-solving option. Is it possible, say, to have an upwardly mobile skinhead? We are given little explanation of how and why the class experiences of youth crystallize into a distinct subculture. The possible constituency of a new style is outlined, but where do the styles come from? (For example, who designed the first fluorescent pink or leopardskin drape suite?) How do we analytically leap from the desire for a solution to the adoption of a particular style? This is a significant problem when it seems that both skins and teds seek to revive and defend the 'traditional' working class community, but through different styles. Further, since any discussion of life chances is regarded as a 'Weberian deviation', we are given no clues for explaining the different degrees of commitment to a subculture other than through some neo-positivist reference to the extent of the problems which stimulate its emergence.

One consequence of these absences is that the subcultures of Resistance are strangely abstract, non-contradictory and 'pure'. They are the abstract essences of subcultures. They are also, as Chris Waters has argued, quite static and rigid anthropological entities. (Waters 1981). There is an uncomfortable absence in the literature of any discussion as to how and with what consequences the pure subcultures are sustained, transformed, appropriated, disfigured or destroyed. It is also extremely difficult to consider the individual life trajectories of youth within the model laid down by Cohen. If each subculture is a specific problem-solving option, how are we to understand the way individuals move in and out of different subcultures? Cohen, for example, classifies Crombies and Parkas as distinct subcultures but wasn't the only 'problem' which distinguished them respectively from skins and mods the need to keep warm?

It may be that the immediate source of the abstractness of Resistance's subcultures was the absence or weakness of its field work, but there are theoretical reasons too. The fundamental problem with Cohenite subcultural analysis is that it takes the card-carrying members of spectacular subcultures as its starting point, and then teleologically works backwards to uncover the class situation and detect the specific set of contradictions which produced the corresponding styles. This can lead to the dangerous assumption that all

those in a specific class location are members of the corresponding subculture and that all members of a subculture are in the same class location. A basic problem is that the elements of youth culture (music, dancing, clothes etc.) are not only enjoyed by the fully paid-up members of subcultures. If we reverse the methodological procedure adopted by the Centre and start with an analysis of the social relations based around class, gender and race (and age), rather than their stylistic products, we can commence an examination of the whole range of options, modes of negotiation or 'magical resolution' that are open to, and used by working class youth as well as the limitations of access and opportunity. Such an approach would require a break from the authors' paradigm of examining the 'authentic' subcultures in a rather synthetic moment of frozen historical time. Any empirical analysis would reveal that subcultures are diffuse, diluted and mongrelised in form. For example, certain skins may assert values of 'smartness' which are considered by the authors to be restricted to the mods. The anthropological analysis of unique subcultures means that descriptions of the processes by which they are sustained, transformed and interwoven are absent. Similarly, the elitist nature of the analysis (that is, the focus on 'originals'), means that we are given no sense of how and why the styles became popular and how and why they eventually cease to be in vogue other than through a simplistic discussion of the corruption and incorporation of the original style.

By focussing on subcultures at their innovatory moment the authors are able to make elaborate and generalised readings of the symbols from a few scant observations of styles and artefacts. Consequently youth subcultures are seen not simply as 'imaginary solutions' but also as symbolic resistance, counter-hegemonic struggle or a defence of cultural space on a 'relatively autonomous' ideological level. For example Hebdige considers the mods to have created a magical yet temporary victory:

The style they created therefore, constituted a parody of the consumer society in which they were situated. The mod dealt his blows by inverting and distorting the images (of neatness of short hair) so cherished by his employers and parents, to create a style, which while being overtly close to the straight world was nonetheless incomprehensible to it.

(Hebdige in Hall and Jefferson, 1976) p.93

Similarly, the Teds reworking of the Edwardian dress is seen as a re-assertion of traditional working class values in the face of affluence (Jefferson in Hall & Jefferson, 1976) and the model-worker image of the skins is interpreted as part of a symbolic return to the 'traditional' working class community (Clarke in Hall & Jefferson 1976).

Some elements in the paradigm developed in Resistance Through Rituals have more recently been taken to extremes in Subculture: The Meaning of Style, in which Dick Hebdige presents a detailed analysis of post-war subcultures. (11)

Hebdige is the theorist of style and subculture par excellence. He wheels in the entire left-of-field band of gurus of art, literature, linguistics and semiology 'to tease out the meanings embedded in the various post-war youth styles'. Springing from the art-school tradition himself, Hebdige prioritises the creativity of subcultures, their 'art', 'aesthetics', the 'signs of forbidden identity' contained in the styles. The secret lies in the 'bricolage' of subcultures, in their ability to create meaning and transform 'everyday objects', as if they were a walking Andy Warhol exhibition. Since Hebdige's problematic is to witness and understand the transformative moment in which new meanings are created, (in the same way that the Resistance... project was set up to understand the emergence of deviant values) the resultant 'semiotic guerilla warfare' is restricted to a flashpoint of rebellion. This is necessary by definition in Hebdige since it seems that the symbolic potency of a style rests entirely upon the innovatory and unique nature of a subcultures' appearance. (12) Hence, for all the discussions of 'the subversive implications of style...the idea of style as a form of refusal... a gesture of defiance or contempt', when it all boils down, the power of subcultures is a temporary 'power to disfigure'. The politics of youth are not only restricted to a consideration of the symbolic power of style, but also, this is confined to the moment of innovation, since as we shall see, stylistic configurations soon lose their shock potential in Hebdige's analysis.

But what is the symbolic power of style in Hebdige's analysis? Quite simply it is a case of 'shocking the straights'. The power of subcultures is their capacity to symbolise 'Otherness' among an undifferentiated, un-theorised and contemptable 'general public'.

## Subcultures

warn the straight world in advance of a sinister presence - the presence of difference - and draw down upon themselves vague suspicions, uneasy laughter, 'white and dumb rages'. (Hebdige, 1979, pp 2-3)

This false dichotomy between subcultures and an undifferentiated "general public" lies at the heart of subcultural theory. The readings of subcultural style are based on a necessary consideration of subcultures at a level of abstraction which fails to consider subcultural flux and the dynamic nature of styles; secondly, and as a result, the theory rests upon a view of the rest of society as straight, incorporated in a consensus and willing undividedly to scream loud in any moral panic. Finally the analysis of subculture is posited upon the elevation of the vague concept of style to the status of an objective category. In Subculture the degree of 'blackness' of a subculture provides the yardstick, but generally, the basic consideration is (like the old song) "You either have or you haven't got style".

Such a dichotomy between the public or straights and the subcultures (even if it is not always explicit) is extremely surprising particularly in the light of the Centre's appropriation of Gramsci (Hall, Lumley, McLennan in CCCS, 1978). However, I wish to argue that in Hebdige's case, the straight-subculture divide is premised upon a misreading of the concept of "common sense". He quite categorically argues that ideology is not the same as false consciousness (Hebdige, 1979, p.12). In the use of the term "common sense", however, and in the treatment of the working-class "straight" culture, he constantly counterposes the stylists as possessing an (albeit inarticulate) creative and radical consciousness, while "the public" are drowning in "mythologies" and suffocated by the Daily Mirror. Despite the inclusion of the theoretical equivalents of 12-inch import disco mixes to supplement the analysis, he fails to comprehend the nature of working-class culture (which is rooted in a highly contradictory "common sense") except as a form of imposed false consciousness. As he puts it, "representations ...are shrouded in a 'common sense' which simultaneously validates and mystifies them" (Hebdige, 1979, p.13). Consequently references to "straight" working-class culture conflate "normalcy" and common sense. The working class are presumably locked in to a subordinate acceptance of capitalist

social relations and possess a bland culture of normalcy and naturalness. For Hebdige this is reflected in the very absence of style in their attire. The clothes of these undifferentiated normals "masquerade as nature". Further,

Each ensemble has its place in an internal system of differences - the conventional modes of sartorial discourse - which fit a corresponding set of socially prescribed roles and options... Ultimately, if nothing else, they are expressive of 'normality' as opposed to 'deviance' (i.e. they are distinguished by their relative invisibility, their appropriateness, their 'naturalness'). (Hebdige, 1979, p.101)

This presentation of normal and subcultural styles as necessarily approved is clearly rooted in the failure to examine the ways in which styles are dynamic and diffuse. However, holding this dichotomy is a necessary part of Hebdige's analysis if he is to suggest that subcultures are to signify "the Other" and subvert naturalness through "bricolage". The uncreative, bland and incorporated nature of working-class common-sense culture is consequently necessarily (and wrongly) overstated.

As Gramsci suggests, common-sense culture is highly contradictory. It contains the sedimentation of previous philosophies and is rooted in practical activity. It is not simply a form of mystification or ideological snow which falls from above. The crucial concept is that of "good sense" which requires closer attention - particularly if the current trend towards derogatory uses of common-sense (or its conflation with false consciousness) is to be halted. As we need to be reminded:

the healthy nucleus that exists in 'common sense', the part of it which can be called 'good sense'... which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent. So it appears that here again it is not possible to separate what is known as 'scientific' philosophy from the common and popular philosophy which is only a fragmentary collection of ideas and opinions. 13  
(Gramsci, 1971, p.328)

The Punky Reggae Party: Hebdige on Punk and Race

The most intriguing part of Hebdige's Subculture... lies in his break from an exclusive emphasis on class to assert the centrality of race in subcultural formations.

After a convincing and sympathetic outline of black cultural forms, Hebdige suggests that youth subcultures provide a "phantom history of race relations since the war". (Hebdige, 1979, p.45). I shall return to this, but firstly I wish to begin by examining punk since it is central in the thesis.

Hebdige's analysis of punk is unique since it breaks from the theoretical tradition laid down by Phil Cohen. Rather than being seen as an attempt to retrieve elements of the parent culture in the light of the restructuring of the working class community,

the punks seem to be parodying the alienation and emptiness which have caused sociologists so much concern...(ibid, p.79)

This is achieved by,

celebrating in mock-heroic terms the death of the community and the collapse of traditional forms of meaning (ibid, p.29)

Thus, the cartoon characteristics of punk, the bondage trousers, ripped and zipped shirts, the safety pins, the leathers, the S & M clothing so vividly described by Hebdige, are seen as a parody of the poverty and the crisis which had been represented in the media. In doing so,

Punk reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth culture in 'cut-up' form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs. (ibid., p.26)

This reading of the "Anarchy-in-the-UK" aspect of punk is, it seems to me, fairly accurate and is well-documented by Hebdige. However, I would like to raise some objections. Firstly, Hebdige only concerns himself with the innovative punks, the original, "authentic" and "genuine" punks concentrated in the London area. This is characteristic of most of the Centre's subcultural theory - it usually explains why certain youths develop



a particular style say, in the East End, but youth subcultures elsewhere are usually dismissed as part of the incorporation and containment of subversive implications of that style. We are never given reasons why youths "in the sticks" are inclined to adopt a particular style. Hebdige's analysis of punk begins with a heatwave in Oxford Street and ends in a Kings Road boutique.

This metropolitan-centredness contradicts Hebdige's emphasis on creativity since most of the punk creations that are discussed were developed among the art-school avant-garde, rather than emanating "from the dance halls and housing estates". Hebdige's vision of punk is extremely elitist; despite the proletarian stance of punk (constantly emphasised by Hebdige), the concern is typically for the "art" of the innovators:

This is not to say, of course, that all punks were equally aware of the disjunction between experience and signification upon which the whole style was ultimately based. The style no doubt made sense for the first wave of self-conscious innovators at a level which remained inaccessible to those who became punks after the subculture had surfaced and been publicized. Punk is not unique in this, the distinction between originals and hangers-on is always a significant one in subculture. (ibid., p.122)

I would like to ask for whom this distinction is significant? Certainly most punks would have liked to have been one of the few regulars at the Roxy or the 100 Club in the early days of punk. However, I feel that accepting this distinction between "the faces" (the term for the elite mods) and what Hebdige terms, "the unimaginative majority" in each subculture is highly problematic. I cannot accept style as an objective category to be measured implicitly, by bona fide stylistic critics. The originals/hangers-on distinction is particularly problematic when there is no discussion of the restrictions on access and opportunity to become an authentic member of a subculture. Such questions are of great relevance in considering the relationship of girls to subcultures and the possible effects the recession may have on youth styles.

But what of the readings or decoding of these authentic subcultures? Hebdige admits, with some pathos, that

it is highly unlikely...that the members of any of the subcultures described in this book would recognise themselves reflected here. (ibid., p.139)

I would suggest that this is largely due to the failure to examine how subcultures make sense to the members themselves - a project which Hebdige sets up (chapter 7) but never achieves. Indeed this would require Hebdige to enter a different terrain. By defining subcultures in terms of their style and symbolic power, many analysts of subcultures elevate themselves (and not the youths themselves) to the privileged position of expert semiologists, those able to read the signs, to "decipher the graffiti, to tease out the meanings". This eliminates any question of intent, any consideration that the members of a subculture are knowing subjects. Rather than taking the meaning which style has for youths as the starting point, the self-images of youth are explicitly denied.

If we were to go further still and describe punk music as the "sound of the Westway", or the pogo as the "high-rise leap", or to talk of bondage as reflecting the narrow options of working-class youth, we would be treading on less certain ground. Such meanings are both too literal and too conjectural. They are extrapolations from the subcultures own prodigious rhetoric, and rhetoric is not self-explanatory: it may say what it means but it does not necessarily 'mean' what it 'says'. In other words, it is opaque: its categories are part of its publicity. (ibid., p.115, My emphasis)

Thus, we can only assume that subcultures are only allowed to speak through their clothes. Earlier and more crudely, Phil Cohen drew on linguistics to make a similar point:

Delinquency can be seen as a form of communication about a situation of contradiction in which the "delinquent" is trapped, but whose complexity is ex-communicated from his perceptions by virtue of the restricted linguistic code which working class culture makes available to him. (Cohen, WPCS 2, p.31)

To return to punk, although Hebdige correctly chastises Taylor and Wall<sup>14</sup> and produces an interesting analysis of the Bowie-ites, he makes the fatal faux-pas in (expertly) judging punk as a reaction to glam rock which "tended to alienate the majority of working class youth". (Hebdige, 1979, p.62). Glam consisted, in Hebdige's eyes, of either contemptible teenybop or the music and styles of Bowie, Lou Reed and Roxy Music,

whose extreme foppishness, incipient elitism, and morbid pretensions to art and intellect effectively precluded the growth of a larger mass audience (ibid., p.62)

This is simply wrong; glam-rock did achieve a popular mass audience. Further, punk was not simply 'proletarian' in style; it drew heavily on the glam-rock forms - particularly its use of make-up. Also several punk bands produced cover-versions of glam hits, Bowie remained popular with the punks, and Marc Bolan and Lou Reed contested for the title "Godfather of Punk". In addition, rather than being "an attempt to expose glam rock's implicit contradictions...an addendum designed to puncture glam rock's extravagantly ornate style" (ibid., p.63), punk emerged via "pub rock" as a response to the excesses of technobores" among "pomp-rock" and the "progressive scene", against the Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Yes, Genesis, and Emerson, Lake and Palmers of the world and not a reaction to Alvin Stardust, Mud, Roxy Music and co.

Let us now turn to the question of race. Hebdidge argues that youth subcultural styles represent a coded recording of race relations since each subculture can be interpreted as a symbolic adoption or rejection of the presence of black culture, Hence the hipsters, beats, mods, early skins and punks can be seen as emulations and accomodations of black style while the later skins, glam rock and the ted revival are seen as a retractions into a purely white culture, either out of "chauvinism" or in response to an increasing black consciousness reflected in the politicisation of reggae music.

Hebdige claims that the reader can either take or leave the "phantom history" thesis. I would generally accept that stylistic links are evident (White rock and pop music for example in all its forms has constantly drawn on black musical forms), but as the thesis stands it has major problems. I would have preferred a much broader analysis of the impact of black culture on white working-class youth culture as a whole rather than taking connections with a few elite members of a white subculture as evidence. For example, a discussion of racism among the subcultures is particularly absent.

Hebdige's site of the "phantom history", that of subcultural styles, has several notable absences; blackness is only understood to be expressed through early soul music and reggae while other elements of youth culture - particularly the long hippie period - are missing. More significantly, Hebdige's analysis forbids any analysis of the connection between black

ulture and the straights. To read Hebdige, soul music ended after the mods when for example, Tamla Motown has dominated turntables for over 20 years) and funk and disco music are something to be sneered at. Consequently, Hebdige fails to fulfil the potential of his analysis since he examines only select areas of articulation as opposed to the massified appropriations of black music.<sup>15</sup> Hence he (wrongly) suggests that black and white links were absent during the early seventies and that,

Left to its own devices, pop tended to atrophy into vacuous disco-bounce and sugary ballads. (My emphasis)

The problem is that Hebdige tends to equate black culture with Jamaican culture (hence Asians are particularly noted by their absence.)<sup>16</sup>, Jamaican culture which is unproblematically imported. Although he presents an excellent and sympathetic account of Rastafarianism, we are given no account of its transformation as it became a youth subculture. Further, Hebdige tends to equate reggae with the armagidion sound of the roots-rockers variety while there is no mention of the lighter "Lover's Rock" which also fosters black solidarity and is particularly popular among black girls. Clearly, forms of non-Rasta black culture require examination<sup>17</sup>

Generally, Hebdige's own accounts of the black/white nexus are far tooenuous and brittle and, of course, restricted to the level of style:

For example, one of the characteristic punk hair-styles consisting of a petrified mane held in a state of vertical tension by means of vaseline, lacquer or soap, approximated to black 'natty' or dread-lock styles. (Hebdige, 1979, p.66)

Nevertheless, elements of black and white musical fusions cannot be denied although it should be noted that black culture is transformed when it is adopted by whites. For example the reggae of white bands like the Clash or the Police is not the same as that of say, Black Uhuru. However, since punk there have been conscious attempts to adopt black styles, as evident in the explicitly anti-racist stance of "Two-tone" bands such as the Specials which unleashed the possibility of reggae and dub for white audiences, notably found in UB40. However, more recently, soul, disco, funk, latin and salsa have become the latest areas where rock and pop have appropriated black styles and it would be a mistake to see punky-reggae (predominant five years ago) as the only viable form of youth culture.<sup>18</sup>

Subcultures and Working Class Culture

In this section I shall argue that, despite relying heavily on the work of Gramsci, an inadequate conception of working-class culture underlies subcultural theory. As I have already argued (Section 2), there is an uncomfortable absence of a satisfactory outline of "common sense" as the basis of working-class culture, and this has in turn produced an overstated dichotomy between subcultures as static anthropological entities and an untheorised and undifferentiated "normalcy" among the rest of the working-class.

As the Corrigan and Frith essay in Resistance suggests (Corrigan & Frith in Hall & Jefferson, 1976), we need to re-locate youth subcultures within working-class culture as a whole. In particular, I would argue that the relationship between youth and parent cultures requires a closer re-examination - particularly since "fashion" styles often possess a cyclical history. For example the parent culture tends to adopt styles which were originally developed among youth cultures. In the case of punk, the subculture stimulated a move back to straight-legged trousers, smaller collars on shirts and shorter hair among "straights" of all ages. In contradiction, youth subcultures draw upon styles from previous eras in the parent culture such as Oxford bags, flat soled shoes, ties, gaberdeen maccs or the current trend in pedal pushers or knickerbockers, in order to define youth against the styles adopted by parents. Such paradoxical stylistic strategies have become more prominent as the appropriation of second-hand clothing has become more widespread.

However, any future analysis of youth must transcend an exclusive focus on style. The Centre's subculturalists were surely right to break away from a crude conception of class as an abstract relationship to the forces of production. However, subcultures are conceived as leisure-based careers (Hebdige, 1979, p.195), and the "culture" within "youth sub-culture" is defined in terms of the possession of particular artefacts and styles rather than as a whole "way of life", structured by the social relations based around class, gender, race and age. Consequently we are given little sense of what subcultural groups actually do, and we do not know whether their commitment is full time or just, say, a weekend phenomenon. We are given no sense of ages, income (or source of income),

the occupations of the members of a subculture, or an explanation as to why some working-class youths do not join the subcultures discussed. Consequently the members of the subcultures are reduced to the status of dumb, anonymous mannequins incapable of producing their own meanings and awaiting the arrival of the code-breaker of their secret identity.

Even if we accept that it is possible to read youth styles as a form of resistance, the Centre's claims that subcultures "operate exclusively in the leisure sphere" consequently mean that the institutional sites of hegemony - those of school, work and home - are ignored. Surely these are the sites in which any resistance is located and they need to be considered in order to examine the relationship between working-class youth and working-class culture in general. Paul Willis' Learning to Labour presents such an analysis through an examination of boys' resistance at school to explain the reproduction of a shop-floor culture of masculinity (Willis, 1978b).<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, Willis' categories of "the lads" and "the earoles" tend to reproduce the dichotomy between deviant and "normal" working-class youth which underlies the rest of the literature. Hence, "the lads" are the focus of attention in the study, while the modes of negotiation (probably based around instrumentalism) adopted by "the earoles" are ignored, since they are presumed to be unproblematically incorporated into state schooling.

I wish to argue that, generally, the literature's focus on the stylistic deviance of a few contains (albeit implicitly) a corresponding <sup>treat</sup>ment of the rest of the working-class as incorporated. This is evident, for example, in the distaste felt for youth deemed outside subcultural activity - even through most "straight" working-class youths enjoy the same music, styles and activities as the subcultures. Such disdain is also evident for selected cults such as Glam, Disco and the Ted revival since they lack "authenticity". Indeed, there seems to be an underlying contempt for "mass culture" (which stimulates the interest in those who deviate from it) which stems back to the work of the Marxism of the Frankfurt School<sup>20</sup> and, within the English tradition, to the fear of mass culture expressed in The Uses of Literacy (Hoggart, 1958). As Simon Frith has argued, the dichotomy reflects the assumption of the state, that youth is significant mainly as a problem of public order. Hence:

Working class culture is divided into the 'rough' and the 'respectable', and the rough are seen as having most class consciousness. Thus youth's street deviants, from Teds to skins, are taken to express working class values (even in the act of racial assault) while the majority of 'ordinary' teenagers are considered to have no positive political interest at all. (Frith, 1981a)

I am not attempting to revive some crude argument that the emphasis on youth subcultures divides an essentially united working class. I merely wish to suggest that the "new" subculture politics is simply an inversion of the Left's previous stance. Rather than being seen as a diversion from the "historic destiny" of the working class (or an expression of "false consciousness") youth subcultures have been seen as the expression of the working class in struggle. Consequently, the subcultures are seen as non-contradictory, all subcultural styles are seen as subversive transformations, and youths' activities are seen as empathetic forms of class expression, no matter how violent or racist they may be.

Of course, the Centre's use of the concept of "hegemony" in the theoretical overviews, means that any accusation of understanding working class culture through an incorporation would be rejected as too simplistic. However, I wish to suggest that the richness of the theoretical chapters is lost in the ethnographies, in particular the sense of a general struggle involved in the winning of consent. Hegemony now appears as an imposed value consensus, reflected in stylistic normalcy.<sup>21</sup> The treatment of post war subcultures as the resisters and rupturers of hegemony or the only expression of the working class implies that the rest of the working class (especially girls) are locked in passivity. This is evident in the failure to examine youthful activities defined as "normal", but I wish to argue that it is also evident in an "historicist" treatment of working class culture, and in the ways in which 'the death' of subcultures is understood

To some extent, what I shall term "historicism" is rooted in the attempts to draw together cultural studies and social history - particularly the analysis of "primitive rebellion". By historicism, I refer to the tendency for the analysis of youth to rest upon an essentialist conception of the working class (and its culture) which seems unchanged since the nineteenth century and is, to some extent, typified by the East End male. This has consequently resulted in romanticised accounts of working class

culture, classically found in Geoff Pearson's discussion of the "paki-bashing" skins as if they were the younger brothers of the Luddites and Chartists (Mungham & Pearson, 1978). I would agree with Stan Cohen's suggestion that subcultural analysis posits resistance as the defence of an essential, leisure-based culture against simple, one-dimensional historical trends - the destruction of the community, the erosion of "traditional" forms of leisure (such as the embourgeoisement of football)<sup>22</sup>. This forms the backbone of the analyses. However, the Centre offers no explanation as to why the culture is so defensive and nostalgically conservative. Neither, unfortunately are we given any indication as to whether or not this culture continues when the community is disrupted and re-located within the new housing estates.

Nevertheless, as Hebdige has recently argued,<sup>23</sup> a form of cultural conservatism tends to pervade the working-class as a whole - as evident in the rituals of the Labour movement. However, I would argue that we need to examine the forms of "popular memory" which pervade society as a whole,<sup>24</sup> The desire to return to a mythical past as a "magical resolution" is not restricted to the skinhead subculture - particularly in the absence of left constructions of a future possible society.<sup>25</sup> For example, the "Swing" and "Gatsby" revivals, popular among many working class youths in the early seventies, involved a magical return which has been hitherto ignored. Further, the hippie movement constructed its own forms of nostalgia in Britain. I would, rather tentatively, suggest that this involved a conflation of a return to a whole-food pre-industrial age (see the work of bands such as Jethro Tull, Family, Stackridge, or Folk-Rock bands such as Steeleye Span or Fairport Convention) with a return to a mythical Garden of Eden in a long Edwardian summer, complete with an assemblage of Victorian antiquaria, Sergeant Pepper, Lord Kitchener posters and other elements of a middle-class quintessential Englishness. Since the hippies are absent in Hebdige's "phantom history", it would be interesting and rewarding to examine how this nostalgia combined with Eastern mysticism to produce a reaction to a black presence which would neatly fit into Hebdige's theory. In any case, what I am arguing here is that assumptions about a working-class past should be replaced by a developed understanding of the role of 'memory' within working-class culture as a whole, and, indeed, within the whole society.



Let us now examine the treatment of the "incorporation" of youth cultures:

The death knell of a style in youth culture is its appropriation by younger age groups, 'bubblegum' groups, or its mass production by chain stores. This popularization means that the style has been robbed of its authenticity and its message. Another complication is separating the part-time and full-time adherents, separating the righteous from the poseurs. In a subculture with literary and artistic affiliations, there are core members at the centre of the culture, often creative artists, but followers and peripheral members who may adopt the lifestyle, or appearance, and who may or may not be perceived as 'real' members (Brake, 1980, p.72, my emphasis)

Each subculture moves through a cycle of resistance and defusion... subcultural deviance is simultaneously rendered 'explicable' and meaningless in the classrooms, courts and media at the same time as the 'secret' objects of subcultural style are put on display in every high street record shop and chain-store boutique. Stripped of its unwholesome connotations, the style becomes fit for public consumption. (Hebdige, 1979, p.130. my emphasis).

As mentioned earlier, subcultural theory concerns itself with the original authentic members of a subculture and their creativity rather than how the styles become used among youth more generally. As I argued in Section 1, this was outside the original problematic of the literature. Major problems arise, however, where subcultural studies, focussing on the genesis of styles, are regarded as the study of youth per se, even of its cultural aspects.

The above two quotes reveal the consequent logic of this conflation: the diffusion of a sub-cultural style is seen as the main reason for its loss of subversive power. Subcultures are brought back into line, rendered meaningless, "incorporated" within the consensus, as their creativity is adopted by the ranks of the "artless" working class. It is true that subcultures do lose their popularity but the discussions of the "incorporation" of styles are inadequate for various reasons. Firstly, the "creativity" of the initial members of a subculture is overstated and the "relative autonomy" of youth from the market is inadequately theorised. Within the accounts, the "moment" of creative assemblage is before the

styles become commercially available. However the innovators usually have a firm stake in the commodity market themselves. For example, the partnership of Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood has been central in manufacturing and selling both punk ("Cash from chaos" - McLaren) and the "Warrior-chic" of the eighties. If we are to speak of the creativity of working-class youth in their appropriations from the market, the movement from stylistic assemblage to marketing needs to be reversed. As Hebdige himself notes, "in the case of the punks, the media's sighting of punk style virtually coincided with the invention of punk deviance". In the light of this, I can see little point in an analysis which worships the innovators, yet condemns those youth who appropriate the style, when it becomes a marketed product and is splashed across The Sun's centre pages. Surely, if we are to focus on the symbolic refusal contained in items of clothing such as bondage trousers, we ought to find out when and how the style becomes available - either as a commodity or as an idea to be copied, for example, by attaching zips and straps to a pair of old school trousers. Any future analysis of youth should take this breakthrough of a style as its starting point and not as the end of the analysis. It is true that most youths do not enter into the subcultures in the elite forms, described in the literature. Large numbers do draw, however, on particular elements of subcultural styles and create their own meanings and uses from them. The concept of "bricolage" does not simply apply to an exclusive few. Most youths (and adults) combine elements of clothing to create new meanings. If anything, what makes subcultures outstanding, is not the obviousness of their bricolage (which Hebdige argues). An examination of working-class youth will reveal that the forms of clothing adopted by the "normals" involve the capturing of elements drawn from government surplus stores, sportswear (such as training shoes, track suits, rugby shirts, "Fred Perry" tops, hunting jackets, rally jackets, flying suits, etc.), elements of subcultural styles clothing appropriated from different eras via the second-hand clothing markets, and finally the mass market styles which themselves involve forms of recontextualized meaning, be it ski jumpers or work overalls. Obviously, girls are less free to experiment, but a closer examination is required since women's fashion cannot be simply conflated with an unchanging cult of femininity. In particular, it may be possible for our semiologists to make detailed readings of the bricolage which passes off as "accessories" in the fashion pages.

If we are to consider the "symbolic refusals" contained in items of clothing we should not only be concerned with reading the styles of sub-cultural mannequins during their leisure time while dismissing other styles as if they were as bland as the SDP. Instead we should focus on the diluted "semiotic guerilla warfare" in particular sites: in particular, those of school, home and the workplace. This is evident, for example, in the stylistic disruptions of school uniform, the non-regulation jumper, earrings (on boys and girls) hair that is too long or too short, the trousers that are too wide, too straight or that should be a skirt, the shirt or blouse of an unacceptable colour or with a collar that is too short or long, the wearing of plimsoles in class and so forth. Similarly, a youth does not have to adopt the complete uniform of a subculture to be sent home from work or on training scheme, to annoy parents, to be labelled "un-masculine" or "un-feminine", to be refused service in a bar or cafe, to be moved on by the police and so forth. Clearly, the diffusion of styles cannot be classed as a simple de-fusing and incorporation of the signifying practice of an elite few; an entire library of "texts" awaits our semiological readership - everywhere.

Girls and Boys; Romance and Sexuality.

One out of every four people is Chinese but one out of every two people is a Nolan! 26.

The absence of girls in the literature on youth subcultures (due to the exclusive focus on immediately observable and **spectacular styles**) has rightly become the major critique of the approach (McRobbie, 1980; Frith, 1981 a & b). Since girls have not been regarded as part of the male street clans, they have been implicitly defined as being outside the working-class. Hence, in Hebdige's "phantom history", the forms of resistance and the magical resolutions, transformations and nostalgic returns adopted by working class girls, are conspicuously absent. In this section I seek to argue that any consideration of youth necessitates the centrality of gender relations within the analysis.

"Doing Nothing" is one of the most interesting essays in the Resistance... collection. (Corrigan in Hall & Jefferson, 1976). However, combined with the authors' emphasis on style, the literature has taken "doing nothing" far too literally and has consequently tended to ignore the activities of working-class youth. Corrigan's account typically ignores girls and never raises the possibility that killing time in the streets and shopping centres, and the masculine rituals of violence and vandalism, may be purposively orientated towards initiating some kind of sexual encounter. (For example what is going on in the photograph on page 97 of Resistance?) Although I would tend to accept the arguments by feminists that the youth culture of working-class girls is over-determined by women's subordination and the eventual prospect of marriage, the actual encounters between boys and girls or young men and women have not been adequately covered. Many of the feminist critiques have begun by noting the absence of girls in the accounts of subcultures and consequently begun to theorise "girls' world" as a separate or marginal entity, when in fact gangs of girls do come into contact with gangs of boys. A conceptual and theoretical absence has been mistaken for a physical absence of girls from the cultural spaces of youth.

Hence, girls are taken to be secluded within "bedroom culture" interested only in "teenybop", and only hit the streets on the way to a

dance.<sup>27</sup> Since girls are denied access to the subcultural solutions described in the literature, girls have been taken as absent or spatially separate, and denied an "authentic" (sub-)cultural form. Consequently, subcultures are taken to be exclusively male (and rock is taken as a male phenomenon) since "the streets" remain taboo for women since their presence is associated with prostitution. I do not wish to deny that the spectacular styles tend to be male-dominated (although the balance has been slightly redressed by punk), nor that girls have less room to experiment than boys; however, the absence of a discussion of sexual encounters means that the reproduction of marriage is not understood. How do we theoretically and conceptually leap from marriage as a fantasy in the pages of Jackie to actual marriages, if a discussion of courtship rituals is absent?

Consequently the positive forms of negotiation and resistance that girls adopt in these courtship rituals are absent. For example, girls aren't simply locked into romance. Engagements are broken, boys are "wound up" or "chucked", and men's sexual advances are resisted and rejected. Clothing styles aren't simply used as a form of attraction for boys and I would tentatively suggest that they may inspire confidence among women and play up men's fear of failure. The forms of solidarity, sisterhood, mutual support and resistance that already exist among working class girls require further explanation. Forms of "good sense", resistance and negotiation require as much exposition as the detailed descriptions of oppression. Girls are selective in the choice of men they associate with and quickly acquire the skills needed to resist men:

One respondent told me of how he went down a line of waiting girls to be brushed off with a crude "Piss of - Dracula!"<sup>28</sup>

I would tentatively suggest that a strong sense of solidarity and mutual support exists among working class girls in response to the dangers posed by men or drinking too much. This is evident in the phenomenon of "Girls' Night Out" which stretches across all ages (women in factories tend to refer to themselves as "The Girls") and usually takes place on quiet nights in midweek when there are fewer men about. The collective taxis home, dancing around circles of handbags, staying overnight at friends and the singalongs involved, all seem to indicate that an autonomous and supportive women's culture already exists among the working class.<sup>29</sup>

Within the literature on subcultures, the focus on the signification of styles has meant that the uses of styles in gender relations have been

swept under the carpet. For example in a typical put-down of the "straights", Hebdige denies the sexuality of punks:

Punk dances bore absolutely no relation to the desultory frugs and clinches...intrinsic to the respectable working class ritual of Saturday Night in the Top Rank or Mecca. Indeed, overt displays of heterosexual interest were generally regarded with contempt and suspicion (who let the BOF/Wimp in?) and conventional courtship patterns found no place on the floor in dances like pogo, the pose and the robot. (Hebdige,1979,p.108)

Considering the sexual symbolism of punk attire, I find this quote absurd. Further, the phrase "Boring Old Fart" (BOF) does not refer to one's sexuality but to one's taste in music. Similarly, wimp does not only refer to "wetness" (which Hebdige claims) but usually the term refers to inadequate masculinity. Also, like "gobbing", the pogo was soon passé and became restricted to the few rows closest to the stage or to student parties, and, after all, the pose and the robot were "witnessed only at the most exclusive punk gatherings". (My emphasis)

An alternative approach to youth requires an examination of the meaning which youth culture has for the youth itself. The major problem facing working-class youth is how to kill time, yet I wish to suggest that "Doing Nothing" usually involves complex rituals (such as the art of looking "coy") and long apprenticeships in the art of courtship. Clothing styles require an examination not in terms of their semiotic value but in terms of their use in "doing nothing". None of the authors consider the pleasure of "dressing up" (a central feature of the working-class weekend or night out) or explain styles in terms of their power to attract more friends and acquaintances, to appear as "different" (which is the explanation youths themselves tend to give) or to appear a more "interesting" person. Consider the following:

I was aware of the fact that you had to wear certain clothes to be accepted in teenage life. It's the age when you are starting to mature and starting to become sexually aware and you realise that you've got the body to sell. You didn't quite realise it in this way... You'd see the gangs of kids a bit older than you walking around with girls and they'd all have a certain type of clothes on.. when you

see that you just know that you've got to have those clothes as well. At that time it was something like a Ben Sherman shirt, Prince of Wales check trousers and brogue shoes. Then came the Rupert trousers and Oxford bags. And then the collars on the shirts became round and then they became long and so on. 30

Such memories reveal the extent to which male sexuality involves pressures to adopt styles which have been hitherto seen as confined to women. It is likely that most working-class young men interpret their appropriation of styles and fashions (and peer group pressure to do so) in such a way. Subculture theory outlines the role of styles in formulating a "magical resolution of contradictions"<sup>31</sup> However, in failing to examine the specificity of youth as a transitory stage, the most significant magical resolutions are ignored by the authors: here I refer to romance and marriage.

As many mainstream sociologists recognised long ago,<sup>32</sup> marriage is the principal means of 'escape' for working-class males and females. It provides a means of obtaining the physical, sexual and leisure space denied at home. It provides the independence which students take for granted. The significance of marriage and romance for girls has been adequately covered elsewhere<sup>33</sup> although the reasons why boys marry has been ignored or has been seen as a purposive entry into "patriarchal" marital relations. What I seek to argue is that the importance of romance and marriage within boy's life trajectories requires consideration. Youth is a "site" of cultural reproduction as much as a site of cultural struggle.

Youth culture and styles require a re-examination in terms of their contributions to gender relations. As Frith (1981) has suggested, romance has been assumed to be aimed at women whereas the majority of pop songs are addressed to men:

I'm sure that pop romance of all sorts means more to men than women. In youth culture it is the boys who draw the sharp distinction between "casual" sex and "true" love, who possess their partners with a special fervour. Girls' fantasies are about babies, home-making; they have no illusions about husbands. (Frith, 1981b, p153)

This inversion of the orthodoxy on romance is challenging. Romance needs considering not only as a form 'for' women, but as a means through which men make sense of their relationships with women. Indeed, the male fantasy of man as protector and provider is central in men's understanding of their relationships with their wives and crucial in the reproduction of culture.

Consequently, male romance needs to be considered in relation to youth culture. As Frith suggests, we need to consider pop music in terms of the way in which it is appropriated and given meaning:

Pop love songs don't 'reflect' emotions but give people the romantic terms in which to articulate and so experience their emotions. (ibid.)

The social use of pop songs lies in the way they "provide a conventional language for dating". They are "useful for couples negotiating their own path through the stages of a relationship" (ibid.) Songs can be used to deal with happiness, frustration or the end of a relationship, records can be dusted and played to bring back memories of a lost relationship or to remember the early stages of a relationship. Married couples tend to possess a piece of reflection in "our song" played or requested on anniversaries and such, be it Flanagan and Allen's "Underneath the Arches", a Beatles ballad, or even "Anarchy in the UK".

Clearly, youth culture needs to be read as more than the soon-incorporated stylistic gestures of defiance of a few; future analysis needs to consider all youth in terms of the meanings attached to that culture and their relation to the reproduction of culture in society.



Conclusion: Beyond a parody of the crisis

This paper has argued that we need to move away from analysing youth in terms of the semiotic defiance of subcultural styles at their inception. I suggest that future research requires an examination of the meanings and uses the artefacts have for working-class youth within social relations - particularly sex-gender relations. Consequently, attention should be focussed on what youth actually do, such as hanging around chip shops, babysitting, part-time jobs etc., rather than "reading" the stylistic nuances of a chosen subculture. Where styles are considered, the analysis should fully take into account their importance for working class youth after what has been taken to be a moment of incorporation.

As the recession deepens, and particularly since the riots of last summer, youth has become a metaphor for the crisis in the same way as it symbolised social change in the 50's and 60's.<sup>34</sup> The political economy of youth is beyond the limitations of this paper although it is clear that youth is a crucial locus in the current restructuring of capital.<sup>35</sup>

I would like to conclude by examining the significance of what has been taken to be "youth culture" in a period of crisis. Since working-class youth are now denied the sources of income which financed the spectacular subcultures of the sixties and seventies, a de-emphasis on style could be expected - the relative cheapness of the attire could explain the current popularity of skins. However, the removal of the restrictions imposed by wage-labour mean that youth is more free to experiment with dyed mohican haircuts or long, one-sided fringes. On the whole, the absolute distinction between subcultures and "straights" is increasingly difficult to maintain: the current diversity of styles makes a mockery of subcultural analysis as it stands.

Punk and Two-Tone had two very important consequences. Firstly, in disinterring the entire wardrobe of post-war styles, they 'dis-coded' or freed styles and greatly expanded the field of stylistic options among an increasingly self-reflexive and stylistically mobile youth. Since punk, virtually any combination of styles has become possible. To name but a few of the styles and subcultures which can be blended and diluted, there currently (Autumn, 1981) exists: revivals of Skins and Mods and of Teds,

Rude boys, Suedeheads, a psychedelic revival, Rockers (both the traditional type and the younger, denim-clad heavy metalists), Rastafarians, Soulheads (short-haired blacks), Disco, Ant-people, Northern Soul, Jazz-funkateers, Bowie-freaks, Punk (sub-divided into: Oi, , "hardcore" or "real" punk, and the avant garde wing), Futurists, New Romantics, Glam Revivalists, Beats, Zoots and so on....

The second change resulting from punk has been a re-definition of youth. The "New Wave" eroded the distinction between "teenyboppers" and youth which was largely based on the progressive LP/pop single distinction of the early seventies. Punk made singles and single-artists acceptable. Much to the industry's delight, the current stars - Madness, Adam and the Ants, and the New Romantic bands - "cross over" conventional market categories. However, the possible effects of this, such as the potential for nurturing some degree of solidarity among youth have yet to be considered or realised, but this may be important if class-based politics becomes increasingly meaningless to unemployed youth.

Another interesting development has been the increasing amount of semiological readings that have been conducted by cult-leaders themselves. For example, the unification of black and white colours in the style of the "Two-Tone" movement was consciously intended to be part of the anti-racist struggle. More recently, Adam Ant's theatrical images of pirate/indian/highwayman have been consciously used to symbolise a defence of the oppressed. Similarly, Malcolm McLaren's piracy/"Go for gold" image for Bow wow has been explicitly theorised as an attempt to irritate monetarist belt-tightening<sup>36</sup> Even the latest trend in zoot suits has been understood as being one in the eye for austerity.<sup>37</sup>

Such analyses reveal that subcultural theory has had an impact - although the stylist's own readings seem more down to earth than, say, Hebdige's flights of fantasy. I would argue that the politics of youth cultural styles is not contained within the semiotic value of particular artefacts. Rather, I wish to tentatively suggest that the very existence of a youth culture, the quest for "good times" and "good clothes" contains an element of resistance as part of a struggle over the quality of life. State monetarism involves an attempt to lower working class expectations, to "tighten our belts", yet the youth culture represents an anchor for

refusal, to resist a return to austerity by expecting a certain standard of living during youth based on good clothes, records, nights out or whatever. I'd suggest that such relatively high expectations explain the growing feelings of frustration and anger among youth. Note, for example, that articles looted during the riots tended to be those associated with youth culture such as clothes, records, radios and tape-decks.

The decadence and the glamour of the new romantics may be important in this - particularly since the style has become widely accepted by "straights" since its diffusion from the elite London clubs. Further (particularly since the popularity of the Human League), girls have become increasingly central and dominant within the cult and may be becoming more selective in their choice of partner and rejecting "drab" patriarchs - although, of course, a great deal of empirical work is required to verify this.

But where does unemployment fit into this? As Frith has recently (though rather polemically) argued:

The state's fear (evident in every MSC report) is that the more successfully the young do survive nonwork, the less they'll ever be willing to do "real" work. Hence the ideological and physical crackdown (which black youth have long experienced) on any suggestion that the young unemployed are enjoying themselves.

If the young learn to enjoy 'unearned' leisure, then the concept of leisure itself is thrown into question.

Frith's argument goes on to challenge conventional wisdom:

Youth's most disruptive political demand is not the right to work, but the right not to work. (Frith, 1981b)

This crisis in capitalist social relations demands an analysis of the culture of unemployed youth - the means by which unemployment is negotiated, survived and transformed into leisure and how this relates to conventional "youth culture". Forms of negotiation such as home-taping records and radio programmes, jobs in the "black economy", second hand clothes, daytime TV, lie-ins and reduction in cinema charges etc. for the unemployed require closer examination. Obviously "doing nothing" reaches a new importance and I would like to end by focussing on a local example in Birmingham.

The recent introduction of a 2p flat fare for under-16s (and anyone who dares to pass themselves off as under 16 - and many do) has resulted in a moral panic concerning the way in which youth kills time by riding around on buses - particularly the circular routes. Usually clad in the semiotically innocent ski jumper<sup>38</sup> youth have appropriated the upper decks as an area of cultural and physical space. Alternatively, the cheap fare provides the opportunity to "do nothing" in the town centre.

When is the West Midlands County Council going to appreciate the misery it is causing shoppers and shopkeepers... They have nothing better to do than cause havoc among shoppers and shopkeepers. We are having to pay pounds more to finance the 2p policy that helps them play their game. (Mailbox letter in Birmingham Evening Mail, November 4th 1981).

We have seen nothing yet.. Wait till the school Christmas holidays - children will flood into Birmingham city centre to lark about in the shops. I'm sure that shopkeepers won't thank these generous councillors who think that the 2p fare is marvellous. Shop assistants have enough trouble spotting shoplifters without having to keep an eye on children as well. What the stores gain on the roundabouts they will lose on the swings. Why should children be given this ridiculous concession? In no way is it necessary. (Mailbox letter, October 21st)

The autumn letters pages of the Birmingham Evening Mail were bursting with a moral panic over the buses, orchestrated in relation to a campaign against rate increases in the area. However, the main focus has been on youth. Assorted letters complained about noise, truancy from school, youths occupying seats, unemployed youth wasting time and not looking for jobs, overcrowding in the town centre - with the possibility of theft or "trouble" - youths smoking, drinking or glue sniffing on buses and so forth, as Birmingham youth have created new meaning from the conventional activities of shopping and public transport.

The 'ski-jumpers' are, however, a particular example of a much wider argument. We need analysis of the activities of all of youth. We need to locate the crucial contemporary shifts and continuities in youth activities have for the young themselves. I hope that this paper has shown that youth culture is not the overworked topic it seems initially to be. Indeed, it is time to examine what has hitherto been regarded (by Wiggery at least) as 'all that crap'.

Postscript. Some Points of Clarification. April 1982

I took the ski-jumper as an example of one of the many forms of style among supposedly "straight" youth which have been ignored due to their failure to draw attention from the media or cultural studies. These styles consequently never reach the status of the drape suit or the (omni-present) leather jacket. The "moment" of the ski-jumper has since passed (I'm still not sure if they ever were popular outside the Midlands) and the "style" has mutated into abstract winter patterns or, more recently, into a row of World Cup footballers. Such are the problems of the contemporary!

More significantly, the abolition of cheap fares in Birmingham (since March 7th - little thanks to Lord Denning) has put a block on the short-lived culture of "doing nothing" with the aid of public transport - although the practice has not entirely disappeared.

Finally, although I'd accept many of the points raised by Phil Cohen in New Socialist No.3, (which presents a critique of Frith's arguments discussed in my conclusion) I still feel that it is necessary to examine empirically how youths manage to kill time and how the strains of unemployment are managed and survived as the state tightens our belts.

FOOTNOTES

1. For example, Resistance has this year been included in the AEB A-Level sociology syllabus.
2. In other words, the politics of Widgey or Hebdige.
3. See the near-legendary Miliband-Poulantzas debates in numerous editions of the New Left Review, reprinted in Robin Blackburn (ed.), Ideology in Social Science, Fontana, 1972
4. I shall discuss the adequacy of this conception of "common sense" in section 2.
5. The theoretical overview, 'Subcultures, Cultures and Class' by J. Clarke, S. Hall, T. Jefferson and B. Roberts in Resistance, presents an excellent, historically-situated analysis of the relationship between hegemony and ideologies of embourgeoisement.
6. In this chapter I shall focus particularly on the theoretical overview of Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts in Resistance, and Hebdige's Subculture and Mike Brake, The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures, RKP, 1980. I have included Brake within the new subcultural theory since he has a similar perspective to the Centre's. His book is a development of an earlier position (critiqued in Resistance) in the light both of punk and the Centre's work.
7. The concept is borrowed from Levi-Strauss and developed by John Clarke in the essay on 'style' in Resistance.
8. It seems common these days to find Althusser's discussion of the political, ideological and economic levels extended to include this untheorised "cultural level".
9. Also, we need to ask, to what uses is this identity applied?
10. See Paul Willis, Learning to Labour, Saxon House, 1978, where entering work is the resolution of childhood for "the lads" in the study. The work of Angela McRobbie suggests that marriage is a comparable resolution for girls (e.g. McRobbie, 1978)
11. D. Hebdige, Subculture. The book has received favourable reviews both inside and outside academic circles. See, for example, the reviews by Stephen Hayward (Time Out, Aug. 31st 1979, No. 487), Ian Penman (NME, 24th Nov., 1979) and Trevor Jones (Tribune, 28th Sept., 1979).
12. Note the contempt in which Hebdige holds revivals, such as the re-emergence of the Teds in the 1970's.
13. For a recent discussion of the value of "good sense" see Terry Lovell, 'Ideology in Coronation Street' (Lovell, 1981).
14. I. Taylor, and D. Wall, 'Beyond the Skinheads' in Mungham and Pearson, 1978. Taylor and Wall, writing in defence of the "progressive rock" of the seventies, suggested that Glam rock (particularly Bowie) was part of a manufactured conspiracy to destroy the skin subculture.
15. An examination of such areas is of vital importance if we are to break away from Hebdige's exclusively male "phantom history". For an excellent discussion of Soul music, see Haralambos, 1974.