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## **Chapter One**

### **Youth Cultures: A Critical Outline of Key Debates**

#### **Paul Hodkinson**

Youth cultures have been the subject of extensive academic research and writing for many years and scholarship in this area has included some of the most well known studies and theorists within the disciplines of sociology and cultural studies. In the early twenty-first century the cultural patterns and pursuits of adolescents continue to be the subject of intense research and debate. Originally inspired by the intense and fascinating discussions which took place at the 'Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes' international conference (University of Northampton 2003), this book represents an attempt to further inform and invigorate this important area of study. The chapters outline and engage with core areas of debate in relation to a variety of examples of contemporary theory and research. Our aim is to critically assess established approaches to the subject at the same time as demonstrating ways in which we might adapt and move on from them in the study of young people's lifestyles in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. While it is impossible to do justice to the rich and varied range of existing youth cultural research in a single chapter, this introduction provides a context for those which follow by offering a critical discussion of some of the most influential perspectives and points of debate.

#### **YOUTH CULTURE: BETWIXT AND BETWEEN?**

There is some level of consensus among theorists that, particularly during the last half century young people have occupied a period of the life course characterized by a degree of instability and transition. More specifically, adolescence is deemed to have constituted a liminal period of time, during which individuals break free from many of features of childhood without yet fully adopting all of the characteristics associated with being an adult. For pioneering psychologist Stanley Hall, adolescence was a response to the physical or psychological changes encountered during and after puberty. The transition of body and mind to an eventual state of adulthood was deemed, by definition, to be characterized by confusion, trauma and upheaval (Hall 1904). Meanwhile, sociologists understood the transition as one defined by socio-economic and cultural factors. For Talcott Parsons, the development of a distinct 'youth culture' in the United States was closely linked with breaking away from a relationship of dependency with the childhood family and moving towards marriage, parenthood and career (Parsons 1949). 'Youth culture' - dominated by the initial rejection of adulthood responsibilities in favour of 'having a good time' – was a mechanism which enabled young people to deal with the strains of their transition:

The period of youth in our society is one of considerable strain and insecurity... youth culture has important positive functions in easing the transition from the security of

childhood in the family of orientation to that of full adult in marriage and occupational status (Parsons 1949: 101).

Consistent with Parsons' emphasis on transition, the notion of youth culture as a response to the uncertainties of moving between childhood and adulthood has dominated much of the thinking on the cultural practices and patterns of young people subsequently (Cohen, P. 1997). In addition to the relatively general family- and occupation-related factors identified by Parsons, however, emphasis has also been placed upon a variety of social and cultural factors which conspired during the 20<sup>th</sup> century to further establish and reinforce very particular forms of adolescence, transition and youth culture. Most obviously perhaps there has been the development of a series of legal classifications associated with different stages of youth, notably the age at which young people can vote, have sex, smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol and drive motorcars. While such legal 'stages' vary between countries and can offer a somewhat confusing assessment of where, exactly, adolescence begins and ends (James 1986), they nevertheless offer points of reference and rites of passage in each context which have become symbolically important to transition processes.

If gradually breaking free from legal restrictions has served symbolically to mark the leaving of childhood, then the expansion of post-compulsory education has served increasingly to delay the onset of full adulthood, both symbolically and practically, through enabling significant amounts of time during which changes might be negotiated and identities developed (Valentine, Skelton and Chambers 1998). At the same time, general trends towards secularisation alongside the advent of the pill afforded young people moral space for experimentation unknown to previous generations. Lastly - and crucially - in spite of class and ethnic divisions, young people as a whole began from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to earn for themselves or to receive from their parents, significantly larger amounts of money than in the past, at a time when they had comparatively few financial responsibilities (Osgerby 2004). Disposable income rose particularly during the 1950s and 60s, a period when - as a result of the post-war baby boom - the numbers of young people were also particularly high. The prospect of so sizeable a social group, characterized by comparatively low responsibilities and high spending power inevitably led to the targeting of young people by expanding culture industries.

Whether in the form of the development of night time entertainment, of youth music and fashion or youth oriented magazines and television programmes, the increasing relationship between young people and particular kinds of consumption has been a key theme of recent scholarship on youth cultures. As we shall see later in this chapter, many contemporary youth theorists believe that, alongside the decline of traditional elements of belonging such as class and community, this expansion in the role of consumption has rendered young people's already uncertain transitions increasingly characterized by ephemeral and individualized tastes, practices and identities (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Such perspectives contrast, however, with much of the earlier scholarship on youth cultures, which placed emphasis on socio-economic position in explaining young people's cultural responses to their transitional situation. In contrast to the contemporary emphasis on ephemeral, individualized activities, it was argued by subcultural theorists that significant numbers of young

people resolved the uncertainties and marginalities they faced by forming distinct communities which offered belonging, status, normative guidelines and, crucially, a rejection of dominant values.

## **YOUTH CULTURE AS COLLECTIVE TROUBLE-MAKING**

### **Delinquency and Labelling**

The first identifiable body of sociological research on what now might be termed youth cultures was located as part of a drive to understand adolescent crime and deviance among US sociologists in the early to mid twentieth century. An ethnographic research tradition originating at the University of Chicago became famous for its attempts to explain deviant activities such as drug taking, petty crime and gang membership as collective normative behaviour associated with distinct social regions within the city, each with their own divergent moral codes (Park 1925). For the likes of Thrasher (1927) and, later, Whyte (1943), youth gangs in economically or ethnically marginalized areas of the city formed part of a defiant collective mentality which had developed among groups of young people within such sites of disadvantage.

Weaving together aspects of Park, Thrasher and Whyte's work with the Robert Merton's writings on strain theory, it is perhaps Albert Cohen's introduction to his study of delinquent boys which best summarises the youth subcultural theory with which this US tradition of youth research is frequently associated. Whereas Merton had explained deviant behaviour in terms of the rejection of dominant means and/or goals at an individual level (1938), Cohen - based at Indiana University - drew upon the Chicago approach in attempting to theorize youthful delinquency as a collective phenomenon (Cohen, A. 1955). For Cohen, delinquent subcultures emerged as a result of the 'mutual gravitation' of those who suffered similar 'problems of adjustment' as a result of their adolescence and their disadvantaged background. Such individuals responded to their lack of status or direction by forming alternative sets of collective norms, rituals and values which rendered status-worthy the characteristics, abilities and attitudes they shared (Cohen, A. 1955: 65-6). Subsequently, the gaining of status among fellow subcultural participants would be accompanied by a further loss of status within society as a whole. Similarly, Howard Becker argues that the labelling of deviant groups as such serves to prevent members from being accepted as members of 'normal' society and to increase their attachment to the subcultural group, whose 'self-justifying rationale' contains 'a general repudiation of conventional moral rules, conventional institutions and the conventional moral world' (Becker 1963: 39).

Understandings of youth cultures in terms of deviancy amplification and labelling were also developed in the context of the UK - in relation to drug-taking subcultures (Young 1971) and in respect of mass media reporting of violent encounters between mods and rockers (Cohen, S. 1972). Stanley Cohen's famous study asserted not only that the sensationalist media labelling of mods and rockers intensified the appeal of such groups to young people, but also that the behaviour of mods and rockers began to resemble the initially exaggerated media caricatures: 'the societal reaction not only

increases the deviant's chance of acting at all, it also provides him with his lines and stage directions' (Cohen, S. 1972: 137).

### **Symbolic Warfare**

The notion of adolescence as a form of collective subcultural rebellion also permeates a separate, though related tradition of theory and research on youth cultures associated with the Centre Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University. Consistent with the explosion of youth-oriented culture industries during the 1950s and 60s, the specific focus in many of the Birmingham studies was upon subcultures based around distinctive music and style; groups such as teds, mods, skinheads, bikers and punks. The interpretations of the CCCS theorists were not uniform, but the prevailing view was that such subcultures represented an enactment of stylistic resistance; a subversive reaction by young people to a contradictory situation in respect of both age and class. In addition to the general uncertainties of youth, subcultural participants are deemed to be caught between the traditional working class culture of their parents and the hegemonic values of capitalism and consumption (Clarke et al 1976). In different ways, subcultures are said to have resolved this situation through combining working class consciousness with an embrace of a hedonistic consumption specific to the development in the post-war years of a strong generational 'youth' consciousness. Consistent with this, youth subcultures are regarded as 'a compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents... and the need to maintain the parental identifications which support them' (Cohen, P. 1972: 26).

Crucially subcultures were also regarded as a means of winning space and as a form of collective defiance. In particular, Phil Cohen, Clarke and colleagues and Hebdige (1977, 1979) all regarded the creative, active manner in which subcultural styles were assembled to have a particular symbolic importance. Although it is recognized that style subcultures could not have emerged without the development of a youth consumer market, the latter is credited only with the provision of raw materials, subcultural styles having been assembled creatively by working class youth, through a grassroots process of bricolage whereby consumer objects were combined and symbolically transformed (Clarke et al 1976). Thus, for Hebdige, the symbolic value of scooters, conventional smart clothes, medical drugs and even metal combs were hijacked by mods, who turned such everyday objects into symbols of subcultural hedonism and intimidation – subversive parodies of all that was conventional (Hebdige 1979).

Yet crucially, such symbolic rebellion was not regarded as an antidote to working class marginalisation or as a serious challenge to the fundamental relations of power. Rather, it is argued by Clarke and colleagues that:

when the post-war subcultures address the problematics of their class experience, they often do so in ways which reproduce the gaps and discrepancies between real negotiations and symbolically displaced 'resolutions'. They 'solve' but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unresolved (Clarke et al 1976: 47).

Consistent with the findings of Paul Willis' ethnography of counter-school 'lads', then, cultural rebellion was deemed ultimately to reinforce rather than to resolve the material subordination of working class youth, who - as Willis put it - invariably would go on to get working class jobs (1977).

Meanwhile, for Hebdige, the symbolic creativity and subversion represented by youth subcultures would ultimately fail even to transform power relations within the culture industry itself. Initially generated by active practices of grassroots appropriation and bricolage, subcultural styles subsequently would be recognized for their profit making potential, at which point watered down versions would be mass marketed to the general public and the styles would lose their political significance. As Hebdige puts it, 'Youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions, by creating new commodities...' (1979: 96).

### **Discussion**

The subcultural approaches originating from Chicago and Birmingham offer invaluable and sophisticated insights, many of which retain significance and it is because of this that they are given such weight here. The emphasis by Cohen, Becker and others on alternative value systems, labelling and the amplification of deviance have currency well beyond the gangs and delinquents they were first used to describe, something demonstrated in the elements of such theory taken on and applied to style- and consumption-based youth groupings by the CCCS and also in more recent studies of youth cultures (e.g. Thornton 1995; Hodkinson 2002). Meanwhile, the CCCS' analysis of the relationship between young people's active consumption practices and the youth consumer industries, and their emphasis on the importance of class position has had an extensive and lasting impact within and beyond the field of youth subcultural studies. Such formulations have served as the primary yardstick against which a range of recent youth cultural research has been outlined (Muggleton 2000; Bennett 2000; Hodkinson 2002; Nayak 2003; Huq 2006; Laughey 2006). Nevertheless, a number of elements of this approach have been subject to criticism.

Some have suggested that the CCCS' interpretation of subcultural styles had more to do with their own neo-Marxist theoretical agenda as with the empirical reality of subcultural participants (Redhead 1990). Paul Willis' work on counter school 'lads' (1977) and motorbike boys (1978) consisted of in depth ethnographic research comparable to the approach pioneered by Chicago sociologists, but this sort of methodology did not characterize the work of those with whom the CCCS' work on style subcultures is most commonly associated. The explanations provided by the likes of Phil Cohen, Clarke and colleagues and Hebdige tended to be based upon the theoretically and historically informed textual interpretation of subcultural styles. It is indeed ironic that an account which constituted so important a step in the development of an empirical tradition of work on 'active consumers', largely excluded from its analysis the subjective perspectives and experiences of young mods, skinheads and punks, many of whom, as Hebdige was happy to accept, were unlikely to recognize themselves within his account (1979).

The sophistication of the analysis of Hebdige, Phil Cohen and others is underestimated by Gary Clarke's suggestion that it had emanated from 'a few scant observations of styles and artefacts' (1981: 83). Clarke was surely right, however, to emphasize that such theorists were unable empirically to explain how subcultures emerged or to outline the processes through which young people were recruited to them. One consequence of this, according to Sarah Thornton, is that there is little to corroborate the suggestion that culture industries only became involved in the promotion of subcultures *after* an authentic period during which they style was spontaneously created by young people (1995). A further problem according to Gary Clarke was that, rather than studying the variety of responses of marginalized youth to their apparently contradictory social position, the CCCS took as their starting point the response of the most stylistically spectacular youth – or 'card carrying' subcultural members - and then proceeded to read off class, youth and other factors as the explanation (Clarke 1981). The result is that the motivations, practices and social backgrounds of subcultural participants were essentialized, while both non-subcultural youth and so called 'part-timers' were either excluded from the analysis or dismissed as dupes of the culture industry (*ibid.*).

That subcultural theory tended to present an overly fixed impression of the cultural boundaries between groups of young people – and that it has placed emphasis on an untypical deviant or spectacular minority, are criticisms often repeated (Bennett 1999; Muggleton 2000). Sure enough, both the Chicago and CCCS traditions tended to seek out distinctive or deviant minority groups and to place emphasis on collective systems of norms and boundaries rather than to detail the complex positioning and movement of different individuals in relation to these. As a consequence, differential and changing levels of individual commitment were underplayed and, according to a more recent article by Phil Cohen, 'the majority of young people who did not take drugs, drop out, run away from home, become wildly promiscuous and engage in street violence or petty crime were pushed to the sidelines of academic concern' (Cohen 1997: 194).

Perhaps the most significant group who were excluded from subcultural analysis were young women. Angela McRobbie and Jenny Garber criticised their colleagues in the CCCS for focusing on largely outdoor spectacular subcultural activities, something deemed systematically to have excluded a largely separate female youth culture which, as a result of the specific restrictions and risks faced by teenage girls, was based largely around pop music, magazines and teenage bedrooms (McRobbie and Garber 1976). The cultural activities of ethnic minority youth also were covered only partially by a subcultural theory focused largely on the class resistance of white youth. Although not entirely invisible, the main role for minority youth in the 1970s CCCS accounts were as influences on white subcultures, as targets for racist aggression or as the subjects of media moral panic (Huq 2006; Nayak 2003). Meanwhile, for other theorists, the unrepresentativeness of subcultural theory was a more general problem. Everyday aspects of youth culture across the boundaries of gender, race and class were systematically excluded by a subcultural theory enticed only by the spectacular and deviant (Clarke 1981; Frith 1983).

The potential value in recognising and understanding youth who are either stylistically, normatively or criminally 'deviant' and indeed of those strongly committed to clearly demarcated collective groupings must not be forgotten about amongst all this criticism. Detailed research has continued to demonstrate that some young people do become strongly attached to substantive and distinctive cultural groupings whose particular norms and values dominate their identity and lifestyle for a period of time (e.g. Thornton 1995; Sardiello 1998; MacDonald 2001; Hodkinson 2002). It is therefore not helpful that, at times, critics of subcultural theory have become so purist as to imply that any study which is focused on spectacular rather than mundane youth activities or that emphasizes the importance of collective values more than individual differences must automatically be dismissed for being insufficiently critical of the CCCS approach (see for example Laughey 2006). Nevertheless, it is equally clear that a focus on collective deviance is insufficient in itself to make sense of the complexity of identities, values and practices which make up youth culture and also that significant changes have occurred in society since the 1970s.

### **FRAGMENTATION, INDIVIDUALISATION AND UNCERTAINTY?**

If the study of youth cultures prior to the 1980s was dominated by socio-economic marginalisation and spontaneous subcultural defiance, then in more recent years the field has been awash with the themes of fragmentation, fluidity and consumerism. In this respect, studies of youth culture have been heavily influenced by developments in general social theory. Whether under the guise of the condition of postmodernity (Harvey 1989), 'risk society' (Beck 1992) or individualisation (Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2000; Bauman 2001), leading theorists repeatedly have emphasized the breakdown, especially in Western societies, of previous forms of certainty, stability and community alongside the simultaneous expansion and diversification of media and consumer culture. A variety of previous sources of security and direction, including religion, social class, place and the stable nuclear family are argued to have declined in significance, leaving individual biographies increasingly unpredictable and subject to changing tastes, circumstances and choices. In particular, an ever-increasingly range of globalized media and consumer goods offer temporary and partial sources of identification to individuals who increasingly lack fixed or stable sources of belonging or direction. Rather than having their lives and identities clearly set out by tradition, ideology or community, then, individuals are deemed to live out DIY identities which are both multiple and ephemeral, while the superficial sources of belonging to which they seek to attach themselves are little more than 'momentary condensations in the ever flowing stream of seductive choices' (Bauman 1992: 24). For Beck, the decline of previous sources of stability and direction renders individual biographies increasingly subject to anxiety and risk (1992).

As set out previously, youth has for some time been regarded as a stage of the life course characterized by uncertainty. Yet, while subcultural theories emphasized the role of underlying factors such as socio-economic position and community as sources stability and collective defiance in an otherwise liminal period of life, more recent theorists have emphasized the declining significance to youth culture of ascribed

factors such as class and of clearly bounded collective groupings. Furlong and Cartmel emphasize that the expanded significance of leisure industries and the increasing length of transitions from childhood to adulthood have led to a situation in which 'traditional sources of social differentiation based on social class and communities are thought to have weakened' and 'young people are seen as attempting to find self-fulfilment and ways of identifying with other young people through their consumption of goods, especially fashion' (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 61). It is suggested, then, that an already transient age-group may be experiencing the kinds of individualized fluidities described by Bauman, Beck and others in a particularly concentrated fashion.

For David Muggleton (1997), who draws on the postmodern theories of Jameson (1991), Harvey (1989) and others, the centrality of increasingly complex, fluid and diversified culture industries makes it increasingly unlikely that young people will commit themselves to clearly bounded subcultures. Previous boundaries between different collective youth styles are deemed to have become increasingly insignificant by ever-more frantic turnovers of fads and fashions and a general proliferation of commercially marketed styles, most of which disconnected both from distinct groupings and from ascribed characteristics such as class or ethnicity. As a consequence, collective stylistic deviance, rebellion or 'authenticity' are deemed increasingly impossible and their pursuit unfulfilling. Instead, young people each develop eclectic individual portfolios of tastes, interests and social networks, which cut across genres or communities (*ibid.*). In a later publication Muggleton accepts that some young people continue to adopt what appear to be collective styles, but emphasizes the liminality, internal diversity and external overlaps of such apparent subcultures, as well as the importance to their participants of individual rather than collective difference (Muggleton 2000).

In addition to the general expansion of culture industries, the onset of digital media are argued by some to have acted as a catalyst for the kinds of fragmentation and instability of identities described by Muggleton and others (Turkle 1995; Castells 2001). Research on young people's personal homepages and their use of social software such as online journals and more recently Myspace.com, for example, has placed emphasis on the significance of such media as individual-centred portals of communication (Chandler 1998; Reed 2005). Elsewhere, both Wellman (1997) and Castells (2001) suggest that even ostensibly group-oriented discussion forums lend themselves to the pursuit of 'weak' attachments to multiple groups rather than to the exclusive, stable commitment evoked by traditional notions of community. Other forms of new media, from digital television to mp3 players, also have an apparent orientation to distinct individual portfolios of tastes and interests rather than collective or subcultural styles (Rosen 2005; Bull 2005). Mobile phones and iPods also tend to be individually owned and controlled, rather than shared between household members, something which also applies to the increasing presence of televisions, games machines or computers within personal bedrooms (Livingstone 2002). As we shall see later, however, the impact of new technologies can be highly contingent upon the context in which they are used and not all theorists are entirely convinced as to their individualising credentials (Osgerby 2004).

Some of those who have emphasized the apparent fluidity and instability of contemporary youth cultures have focused upon the notion of 'neo-tribalism' as a means to make sense of it. While their individual explanations differ somewhat, both Maffesoli (1996) and Bauman (1992) make use of this term to refer to the increasing propensity of loose-knit and ephemeral elective cultural groupings, characterized by partial commitment and porous boundaries. For Andy Bennett, the term's emphasis on individual movement between loosely bounded genres, styles and groups makes neo-tribe preferable to subculture in capturing 'the shifting nature of youth's musical and stylistic preferences and the essential fluidity of youth cultural groups' (1999: 614). Although some have questioned whether 'tribalism' - with its traditional implications of highly committed collective identity - is the most appropriate term to describe such apparently superficial cultural groupings (e.g. Hesmondhalgh this volume), there is little doubt that the term has gained considerable currency within youth cultural studies.

Another term regarded by some as a more effective tool than subculture to make sense of the music related activities of young people is 'scene'. Although it has a somewhat complex history the academic use of the term essentially signifies the clustering of musicians and/or fans around particular focal points, whether these be related to local identity (Shank 1994) or musical genre (Harris 2000: 25). Although the link here to theories of postmodernism and individualisation is not direct, 'scene' is clearly felt to recognise fluidities, overlaps and individual differences in music practices in a way which subculture does not (Bennett and Peterson 2004). Nevertheless, the term is also lauded for its flexibility, including - according to Kahn-Harris (previously Harris) - 'everything from tight-knit local music communities to isolated musicians and occasional fans' (Harris 2000: 25). It is easy to see the attraction of such inclusiveness, given the apparent internal complexity and external overlaps of many contemporary youth music cultures, but such imprecision has prompted some to question the value of 'scene' as a theoretical device (Hodkinson 2002; Hesmondhalgh, this volume).

Neo-tribe and scene - discussed at length in David Hesmondhalgh's contribution to this collection - are not the only conceptual focal points for youth cultural theorists influenced by theories of fragmentation and fluidity. Others include 'lifestyle' (Jenkins 1983; Shields 1992, Chaney 1996; Miles 2000), Bünde (Hetherington 1998) and 'proto-community' (Willis et al 1990). There are various differences in the use of these terms, but all tend to be used to describe loosely knit, overlapping and transitory identifications and in this respect they often are contrasted with subculture. Meanwhile, for Steve Redhead, 'club culture' is proposed as the concept 'which supplements "subculture" as key to the analysis of the histories and futures of youth culture' (Redhead 1997: x). Redhead argues that the fragmentation of audiences and consumer groups has rendered the already questionable concept of subculture insufficient as a means to understand youth cultures by the mid-1990s. Meanwhile the increasing centrality of clubbing to the leisure practices of young people from various backgrounds prompts Redhead to ask: 'are we now in an age of club rather than subcultures?' (ibid. xi). Consistent with Redhead's emphasis, a variety of researchers, perhaps most notably Thornton (1995) and Malbon (2000), have conducted detailed and valuable research focused upon club culture as a distinct and increasingly

important element of youth culture (also see Rietveld 1998; Chatterton and Hollands 2003; St. John 2003; Jackson 2004).

Interestingly, however, while Malbon's interactionist approach leads to a qualified endorsement of the potential value of 'neo-tribe' as descriptor for what are deemed temporary, diverse and context-specific unities of clubbing, Thornton's study - for all its criticism of the CCCS - places its emphasis squarely on the consistent collective labelling and classification practices of clubbers and the role of media in constructing a subculture with shared tastes, ideologies and boundaries (1995). While valuable use is made of Bourdieu's work on cultural classification and distinction, there is little doubt that Thornton's work owes a considerable debt to subcultural theorists in the deviance and labelling tradition such as Becker, Albert Cohen and Stan Cohen. The same could probably be said of my own study of goth culture, in which the overall group distinctiveness, commitment, identity and relative autonomy exhibited by this group were deemed to justify use of a reworked notion of subculture rather than an emphasis on individualism and fluidity. Drawing upon the work of Thornton and McRobbie (1989), as well as an emerging literature on 'virtual communities' (Jones 1995; 1997), I sought particularly to emphasize that, while they may sometimes encourage individual difference, commerce, media and the internet also have the capacity to be used in a manner which reinforces group commitment and boundaries among young people (Hodkinson 2002; 2003; 2006). While the typicality or otherwise of 'substantive' groupings such as the goth scene within what some regard as a largely individualized youth culture remains open to question, an emphasis on collective identity, values and systems of status can also be found in other studies (e.g. Sardiello 1998; MacDonald 2001; Brown 2003a), as well as some of the contributions to the present volume.

Studies of the significance of ethnicity and diaspora in youth culture, meanwhile, have been notable for combining elements of post-structuralist theory with an emphasis on the continuing significance of factors such as class, locality and ethnicity. Particular emphasis has been placed on the shifting, 'hybrid' cultural identities of second and third generation minority youth in countries such as the UK, constructed through a complex combination of transnational cultural flows and everyday national and local contexts (Hall 1988; Gilroy 1993a; Gillespie 1995; Back 1996). Academic attention, for example, has been devoted to the development of ethnically eclectic cultural forms such as bhangra, whose mixing together of traditional Indian sounds with elements of UK dance music is deemed an expression of the complex post-structural identities of its producers and consumers (Back 1996). Emphasis also has been placed upon the localized mixing and fusion of musics and styles initially associated with youth from different ethnic backgrounds. Rupa Huq, for example, outlines the development of post-Bhangra sounds such as 'bhangramuffin' and 'raggastani' which explicitly draw upon the Afro-Caribbean genre of raga music (2006). Huq also emphasizes the tendency for localized Bhangra and post-Bhangra events to attract youth from diverse ethnic backgrounds (ibid.).

Crucially, at the same time as emphasising some of the fluidities, multiplicities and uncertainties of identity - and hence the partial fragmentation of ethnicities - work on youth and ethnicity has tended to provide a consistent reminder of the continuing

stabilities and fixities associated with factors such as socio-economic position and place (e.g. Back 1996; Gillespie 1995). Recent examples of this include Huq's work on the role of localized cultural policy interventions which encourage music making among disadvantaged youth (Huq this volume) and Nayak's study of extensive significance of locality, class and educational context to the ethnic identities of white youth in the North East of the UK (2003).

The continuing significance of locality is also something which has been emphasized by some advocates of otherwise individualistic accounts of youth cultures in a more general sense. Andy Bennett for example, draws upon a range of ethnographic research in asserting that locality continues to act as a relatively stable base for otherwise unstable and transient neo-tribal youth identities:

If... neo-tribal forms of musicalized expression represent highly fluid and transient modes of collective identity, at the same time they are not so fluid and transient as to cancel out any form of meaningful interaction with the local environments from which they emerge. (Bennett 2000: 84)

Consistent with this, some studies have focused specific ethnographic attention on the significance of local contexts to young people's cultural practices and identities. An emphasis on the development of locally or nationally distinct manifestations of global genres, styles and associated cultural practices has been a significant part of this (e.g. Shank 1994; Pilkington 2004; Kahn-Harris 2004; Huq 2006). Such work has been invaluable in demonstrating a subtle and complex balance between globalising factors such as media, commerce, travel and migration on the one hand and inherited or ascribed elements of local or national contexts on the other.

### **Unspectacular Youth**

While their tendency to emphasize individual fluidity and complexity contrasts with the notion of subculture, 'post-subcultural' theorists sometimes have been criticised for continuing to focus on spectacular or deviant youth activities, whether in terms of spectacular dress and music or activities such as skating, graffiti, clubbing or drug-taking (Laughey 2006). In contrast, a growing body of research has sought explicitly to place greater emphasis on the everyday cultural activities of young people. Within the CCCS itself, it was McRobbie and Garber's writings on female youth culture which came closest to doing this (1976). Attempting to explain the absence of teenage girls from subcultural theory, they suggested that rather than joining predominantly street-based and exclusive spectacular subcultures, girls tended to respond to the growth of cultural industries by becoming involved in peer-based activities centred upon the bedroom. Reading magazines, listening to music, collecting and displaying rock or pop posters, trying on make up or clothes and talking about boys were all regarded as core activities of an everyday and largely unspectacular female youth culture (ibid.). While this bedroom culture is regarded often as having been linked to the 'teenybopper' phenomenon and, hence, dominated by the idolisation of mass marketed pop stars, the bedroom also is regarded as having been central for the minority of girls involved in rock 'n' roll subcultures such as that of the Teddy boys:

Whereas the response of many boys to the rise of rock 'n' roll was themselves to become active if highly amateur performers... girl participants in this culture became either fans or record collectors and readers of the 'teenage-hero' magazines and love-comics (1976: 214).

The contemporary relevance of so clear a dividing line between male and female youth cultures has since been questioned as has the apparent implication that female consumption activities were more 'passive' than those of their male counterparts (Lincoln 2004). At the very least, the range of public cultural activities in which young girls involve themselves appears to have broadened in recent years, though bedroom culture remains highly important and at the same time, some public spaces and activities remain male dominated (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Nevertheless, McRobbie and Garber's chapter, alongside subsequent work by McRobbie, represented an important moment both for the development of knowledge about female youth culture and for the turning of the spotlight on the ordinary, everyday activities and settings of young people (see McRobbie 2000).

Although rather less focused upon the domestic sphere, Richard Jenkins' investigation of the range of youth 'lifestyles' in Belfast also represents a shift away from the previous focus on group-based spectacular or deviant youth activities (1983). Dividing youth within the area into 'lads', 'ordinary kids' and 'citizens' on the basis of a variety of factors, Jenkins emphasizes that only the former group constituted an identifiable deviant group, the other two comprising loosely-knit ordinary networks of friends and couples engaged primarily in mundane everyday activities. Paul Willis and colleagues' work on *Common Culture* also examines ordinary youth cultural activities, but places particular emphasis the everyday use of consumables such as fashion and music (1990). While some of his 1970s CCCS colleagues had contrasted the extreme creativity of spectacular subcultures with over-generalized notions of a passive mainstream, over a decade later, Willis and his colleagues illustrate the 'symbolic creativity' of everyday uses of cultural commodities. Consistent with the work of theorists such as John Fiske, *Common Culture* includes wide-ranging examples of the active use by ordinary young people not only of popular music and fashion but also television programmes, magazines, computers and pubs (Willis et al 1990). The conclusions of the book in relation to fashion are broadly representative of its authors' celebration of young people's cultural consumption in general:

...young people don't just buy passively or uncritically. They always transform the meaning of bought goods, appropriating and recontextualising mass-market styles... they bring their own specific and differentiated grounded aesthetics to bear on consumption, choosing their own colours and matches and personalising their purchases (ibid.: 85).

The book's approach is invaluable in dealing squarely with the cultural politics of ordinary consumption practices and in challenging the active subculture versus passive mainstream dichotomy set up by some variants of CCCS subcultural theory. Nevertheless the rather generalized celebration of youth creativity on offer here also runs the risk of encouraging a rather uncritical endorsement of consumer culture.

More recently, research by Dan Laughey has sought explicitly to focus upon the range of music related activities engaged in by a variety of young people, rather than upon specifically identifiable groups or subcultures (Laughey 2006). Laughey catalogues the music use of his respondents in terms of its intensity, the media outlets and spaces (both public and private) via which consumption takes place, the complex ways in which genres are made sense of and the role of social networks including family and peer groups. On the basis of intensity and breadth of music use, the study divides young people into four categories – clubbers, surfers, exchangers and drifters. The attempt here to recognize and categorize the range of different patterns and networks of cultural activity among young people is a useful development even if some elements of Laughey's typology are a little unclear. Yet the overall explanation of how and why young people become clubbers, surfers, exchangers or drifters and of the extent of any general patterns based on contextual factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, community and so on are a little undeveloped, save for a general endorsement of 'situational interactionism' and an emphasis on the specificities of the individual contexts of his respondents.

### **Discussion**

It is clear that youth culture has changed significantly from the heyday of the baby boomers in the 1960s. Already significant in those days, the massive subsequent expansion and diversification of youth-oriented culture industries has been of key significance to such change, as has the rapid development of media and new media in recent years. While previous sources of identity such as class, ethnicity and gender have in many cases become less all-important either as sources of influence, belonging or constraint, many young people have indeed looked towards the shifting and unstable spheres of leisure and consumption as the primary focus for their quests for belonging and fulfilment. While for some, such consumption appears to have consisted of committed involvement in groupings characterized by some of the key features outlined in previous subcultural theories, it seems likely that, for the many, youth culture is somewhat less focused upon such commitment to a single grouping, consisting instead of social networks of various complexions, as well individual sets of tastes and interests which to some degree crosscut genres, styles and activities.

Nevertheless, there are some difficulties with the emphasis on such fragmentation, fluidity and individualisation within some recent writings on youth cultures. The extent of the desire to oppose and avoid the notion of subculture has tended to mean that 'post-subcultural' (or, as I prefer, 'anti-subcultural') explanations, sometimes do not go far enough beyond demonstrating the inadequacies or over-simplifications of the CCCS and/or the Chicago tradition. Having been developed and justified largely negatively, in opposition to the CCCS version of subculture, for example, the detailed positive implications and applications of concepts such as neo-tribe, scene and club-culture sometimes have been left unclear, as have the elements of difference and overlap between one replacement term and another. Indeed, the apparent competition to coin the best replacement may ultimately have acted as something of an unhelpful distraction, not least because of the confusing number of apparently rather similar concepts on offer. It specifically is important that the desire to avoid the structural determinism and clear-cut collective identities with which subcultural theory was associated does not lead theorists to settle either for under-theorized (and arguably

rather obvious) assertions that young people's identities are changeable and complicated, or for sweeping assumptions about electivity, individual distinctiveness and consumer choice.

Even though the extent and character of their influence may have changed, the significance of 'structural' shaping factors on youth cultures must continue to be outlined and understood (Carrington and Wilson 2004). Amongst others, ongoing studies of youth, ethnicity and/or place have offered consistent reminders of the continuing importance of such factors to many young people's practices, networks and identities. The continuing significance of identifiable youth groupings must also be pursued, in spite of the complexity of individual identities. That collective boundaries are sometimes porous and changeable and that membership may sometimes be partial and temporary, ought not to prompt abandonment of efforts by researchers to identify groupings or networks, to explain their emergence and to understand the nature of role they play in young people's lives. Maffesoli's oft-quoted statement that 'it is less a question of belonging to a gang, a family or a community, than of switching of one group to another' (1996: 76) arguably has been rather uncritically adopted by some as a sort of premise for 'post-subcultural' youth research when actually the extent of its appropriateness is far from clear. Meanwhile, the role of new media and technologies in relation to young people's patterns of identity and community continues to be somewhat unclear with those studies emphasising individualisation and/or fluidity (e.g. Castells 2001) somewhat balanced by others describing the facilitation by the internet of relatively bounded, committed groupings (e.g. Watson 1997; Hodkinson 2003, 2006). Needless to say, although technologies ought not to be treated as neutral tools, a great deal depends upon the contexts of their use (Kendall 1999) and in this respect more empirical research is needed. Finally, if, in spite of the qualifications above, there is something of a tendency towards increasing fluidity and instability among youth cultures and towards the increasing centrality of commercial goods and services, then - consistent with the theoretical accounts of Beck (1992) and Bauman (2000) - youth cultural studies must research and outline the negative as well as the positive consequences of this (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Theorists must be particularly cautious of celebrating young people's 'liberation' from old categories into a world of active consumption and choice. Serious consideration must be given to the variety of insecurities which accompany so-called 'disembeddedness' and also to the possible commercial manipulation and material exclusion which may result from the cementing of identity, belonging and status to the purchase of consumer goods.

One additional point is worthy of note before I provide a summary of the chapters to come. As well as affecting the patterns of identity of young people, extensive social changes in recent decades also have prompted questions about the distinctiveness or coherence of 'youth' and 'youth culture' themselves. Most notably, while tendency for youth transitions to begin earlier and end later (Furlong and Cartmel 1997) is rendering the youth culture increasingly broad and diverse, activities and lifestyles once regarded as the exclusive preserve of 'youth' increasingly are practiced across the range of physical age categories (Bennett, this volume). Whether prompted by the nostalgia of previous occupants of youth culture, by the expansion of commerce or by a more fundamental process of individualisation which has universalized some of the

characteristics previously associated only with adolescence, the increasing ubiquity of youthful characteristics and activities presents a crucial challenge to youth cultural studies which only is starting to be substantially addressed. Clarification of what, exactly, we wish to refer to when we evoke 'youth' and of the extent to which and ways in which physical adolescence retains cultural distinctiveness, must be substantially addressed both in theoretical and empirical terms. In this particular volume, Andy Bennett's contribution offers some valuable initial thoughts in relation to such questions.

## **AN OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS TO COME**

The contributions to this book do not, of course, cover the entire range of research and theory which pervades the contemporary study of youth cultures. However, as a collection they build upon the broad debates and discussions briefly outlined here in a variety of different ways, covering extensive ground and taking a range of perspectives on some of the key points of controversy within youth cultures.

The collection begins by addressing some of the questions outlined at the end of the previous section regarding the coherence, makeup and boundaries of contemporary youth culture itself. Reflecting upon both academic and media discourse about youth culture, Andy Bennett asks whether the latter concept continues to have meaningful currency in a time of shifting boundaries and rising uncertainties. Critically discussing media suggestions that young people increasingly take the form of conformist consumers and that older people are increasingly engaging in leisure practices previously regarded as the exclusive territory of youth, Bennett asks whether youth culture denotes an age-specific category or whether it has - or should - become a far more general descriptor denoting particular attitudes or approaches to life.

While Bennett's concern is with the currency and implications of the notion of youth culture itself, the emphasis in David Hesmondhalgh's contribution is with the conceptualisation of youth cultural practices and identities – and more specifically those relating to popular music. In light of the current unpopularity of theories of subculture among many youth cultural theorists, Hesmondhalgh provides a detailed critical discussion of some of the concepts which have been proposed as alternative ways to make sense of young people's use of popular music. Strongly criticising recent use of 'neo-tribe', 'scene' and 'subculture' itself, he rejects the notion that the relationship between popular music and youth culture can be understood through reference to any single term. At the same time, he proposes that, although they only represent partial solutions, the notions of 'genre' and of 'articulation' may have greater explanatory power than subculture, scene or neo-tribe.

If some of the CCCS theorists have been criticised for imposing theoretically driven frameworks upon the practices of young people, then the study of youth cultures in more recent years has been dominated by in-depth ethnographic methods focused, in the best traditions of interpretivism, upon accessing and recounting the experiences of insiders. Bearing this in mind, Rhoda MacRae's chapter considers the particular recent trend for such ethnographic studies to be carried out by so-called 'insider

researchers' (Hodkinson 2005). MacRae considers the advantages and disadvantages of different levels and types of 'insider' and 'outsider' research, drawing upon existing literature and reflecting on her own experiences of studying youth club cultures from the initial position of a stranger.

The following three chapters begin the book's case-study-led examination of youth cultures by developing distinctive examinations of power, commerce and politics. Drawing upon recent research of the consumption of T-shirts by metal fans, Andy Brown's focus is upon the much discussed relationship between youth subcultures and commercial culture industries. Brown outlines and revises the cyclical model of grassroots appropriation and commercial incorporation associated with some CCCS theorists. Central to his argument is that, rather than being dominated by the spontaneous or subversive transformation of miscellaneous consumer raw materials, subcultural styles and identities often involve the non-appropriative consumption of objects already encoded with subcultural meanings. According to this view, far from resulting in the decline of subcultural identities, the deliberate commercial marketing of pre-packaged subcultural music and style should be regarded as integral to such communities. Subculture, then, is recast as a collective form of youth activity centred upon niche consumerism and the metal scene is presented as a longstanding example.

While Brown's concern is with the role of commercial culture industries, Rupa Huq discusses the apparent incorporation of elements of youth music culture by policy makers and educationalists in the UK and France. Huq refers to research on three cases in which hip hop has been used as a means to educate and/or pacify young people. While recognising that such projects may be regarded a form of incorporation, Huq defends their legitimacy and value, rejecting what she regards as a tendency for academic analysis of hip hop to centre upon simplistic distinctions between grassroots authenticity and mainstream appropriation. The situation is more complex than this, according to Huq, not only because the projects she describes appeared to enable rather than to constrain youth creativity, but also because by encouraging localized versions of hip hop, they served to challenge the US cultural domination of the genre.

Wolfgang Deicke's contribution also integrates the issues of politics, commerce and resistance. Questioning what he regards as a tendency for youth cultural research to equate 'politics' with only 'progressive' youth activities, and to assume an incompatibility of 'commerce' and 'politics', Deicke demonstrates how – through a '*Kulturkampf*' by subcultural means - the far Right has been able to achieve positions of near (sub)cultural hegemony in some East German communities. While the successful marketing of styles may strain the exclusive nature and distinctiveness of subcultural identities, he argues that 'diffusion' does not necessarily lead to the (political) 'defusion' of style.

The themes of gender and ethnicity are touched upon in a variety of chapters throughout the book but are particularly important to the contributions of Brill, Mendoza-Denton and Gidley. Dunja Brill's chapter takes as its starting point the tendency noted by theorists such as McRobbie and Frith for youth music cultures to be male-dominated and characterized by dominant ideologies of masculinity. Against this context, Brill examines the operation of gender within the goth scene, a

subculture which often is regarded as transgressive with respect to gender, as a result of its stylistic emphasis on femininity and gender ambiguity. Drawing upon her own research on the goth scene, the chapter questions an 'ideology of genderlessness' among subcultural participants, arguing that, while male 'androgyny' is celebrated by the group as a form of subcultural transgression, the same does not apply for females, who are expected to adopt styles of dress which ultimately reinforce traditional notions of femininity.

Norma Mendoza-Denton's chapter also draws upon research of female youth but its core focus is upon ethnicity and language. In particular Mendoza-Denton is concerned with the way in which Latino gang girls used distinctive minority (Spanish) language practices as a means to construct and reinforce affiliations. The chapter describes a number of features of 'anti-languages' which had emerged among gang members in Northern California and which marked out belonging and status. From particular conventions on story-telling, to the use of language games and the circulation of poetry, Mendoza-Denton demonstrates that language conventions operate alongside signifiers such as t-shirts, cars, bandanas and makeup in the construction and performance of clear-cut collective identities.

Ben Gidley's contribution shifts the discussion of ethnicity across the Atlantic to the United Kingdom where, as discussed earlier, there has been a tendency in recent decades to focus upon emergent 'new ethnicities' among second and third generation minority youth. While many studies have focused upon the particular mix of 'host' and 'parental' culture for youth from particular ethnic groups, Gidley examines the apparent emergence of a 'youth multicultural', featuring the development among inner city youth from a variety of backgrounds of cultural signifiers and practices which draw from and combine various ethnic identifiers and fuse local practices with global styles. According to Gidley, ethnic difference remains highly important in some situations, but such difference is increasingly played out and negotiated in spaces characterized by intercultural dialogue.

Consistent with Gidley's emphasis, space and place are of key importance to studies of contemporary youth cultures – both in terms of the availability of venues for cultural activity (space) and larger scale questions about the relationship between local youth practices and national or global mediascapes (see Skelton and Valentine 1998). Such questions are addressed particularly directly by two of the contributions to this volume. Stewart Varner's concern is with the availability of non-commercial cultural space to young people in Western societies where territory increasingly is controlled either by commerce or by public policy. Whereas some studies have focused usefully upon the appropriation by young people of public spaces as a response to this (McKay 1998; Rogers forthcoming 2006), Varner discusses a case study in which a group of young music fans in Pittsburgh set up and operated their own gig venue. Operated as a voluntary democratic cooperative, the *Mr Roboto Project* sought to offer a safe space and a non-commercial source of community for youth. While outlining such idealistic aims, Varner asks whether the project should be regarded as a significant progressive intervention or whether, consistent with the views of some non-members in the local music scene, it became a somewhat

exclusive space largely confined to the servicing of members of a particular subcultural group.

Pete Webb's contribution, meanwhile, places emphasis on the development among young people of place specific inflections of global genres of music and style. Webb's contribution shares with Ben Gidley a focus on the global style of hip hop, but rather than focusing on inter-ethnic relations, Webb examines the way in which the local music 'milieu' within Bristol appropriated and adapted the style, eventually forming a new genre which was labelled 'trip-hop'. Focusing on key musicians, record labels and venues within the locality as well as the role of the UK music press, Webb outlines the development of trip hop and goes on to discuss its subsequent decline as a result of the impact within and outside the locality of an emphasis in the national music industry upon a UK version of hip hop focused upon faithfulness to the core stylistic features of the global genre.

The impact of new technologies on youth cultures has in recent years become an issue of particular importance. In this book, it is addressed by three chapters which focus in very different ways on young people's use of computer related technologies. Arguing against claims that the internet encourages the dissolving of collective boundaries in favour of a proliferation of fluid, multiple and even fictitious selves, Eric Chamberlin shows that young people's use of 'community' web-sites can facilitate some of the features associated with youth subcultures. Although they were somewhat diverse in terms of their music and style affiliations, users of the 'Pin Up Punks' web site Chamberlin investigated displayed strong social bonds, upheld a clear value system and identified strongly both with one another and with the site itself. The chapter suggests that, rather than being regarded as part of a separate 'virtual' world, use of such sites should be understood as something strongly connected with 'real life' identities, something illustrated by the tendency of Pin Up Punks subscribers to meet up and get to know one another face-to-face as well as online.

The significance of off-screen context to young peoples uses of the internet and to the practical and symbolic significance of the technology to their lives is even more central to Silvia Ferrero's contribution. Through reference to young people's access to and use of online technologies in two schools in Alghero in Northern Sardinia, Italy, Ferrero raises important questions about optimistic proclamations of the liberatory impact of ICTs for young people. Ferrero reports that young people's access to and use of ICTs was severely restricted by the availability of equipment and controls on its use by schools. She also emphasizes that the specific context of their schools and the general context of their locality prompted feelings of pessimism and disillusionment among young people with respect to such technologies. The chapter serves as an important reminder of the significance of institutional and localized contextual factors to young people's experience of and attitude toward technologies such as the internet.

In the final chapter of the book, however, we are reminded by Nic Crowe and Simon Bradford that for significant minority of young people online technologies are utilized regularly as a means to play out of fictional roles in virtual worlds. In the online role-playing environment 'Runescape', identity is highly flexible and users frequently

adopt characters whose characteristics and biographies contrast with their own. Nevertheless, Crowe and Bradford argue that, rather than being entirely liberated from their 'real-life' identities, the fictional identities constructed and 'lived' by role-players are continually informed by elements of everyday identity and experience. Meanwhile, at the same time as playing out the roles of their characters, players simultaneously are living out a parallel form of youth identity and belonging as gamers who associate themselves with Runescape, participating in regimes of status and value associated with that community. Even at the heart of the digital revolution where the trying on and casting off of consciously fictional selves is fairly central to young people's daily existence, then, their identities retain elements of stability, continuity and community.

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