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HIGH THEORY... NO CULTURE:
Or De-colonizing a Canadian Cultural Studies

by

Caroline Kingsman, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies

Carleton University

OTTAWA, Ontario

Submitted September 28, 1990

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"HIGH THEORY... NO CULTURE:
Or De-colonizing a Canadian Cultural Studies"

submitted by Caroline Kingsman, B.A.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to address some theoretical considerations for the study of Canadian youth subcultures. Drawing heavily from the groundwork laid by British cultural theory, this paradigm was found to be insufficient to account for the particularities of a Canadian conjuncture as it circumscribes subcultural authenticity as necessarily working-class and resistant; class is both a less prominent social definer in Canada than in Britain and a lesser index than regional, ethnic, gender, linguistic, generational and taste factors. British theory posed yet another problematic for its inability to theorize the crucial role played by taste and desire in subcultural consumption and production. Theory in Canada was also found lacking for its notions of authenticity based upon high and folk culture traditions, thereby restricting a culturally diverse indigeneity to national homogeneity. Canadian and youth subcultures were seen as homologous in their affirmative, diverse and relative practices of signifying indigenous social identities.

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Introduction

To begin, the direction of this thesis has grown from the distinct cultural problematics posed to the analysis of youth subcultures in Canada. What, for example, theoretical and/or methodological paradigms are available for the consideration of, say, skinhead culture in downtown Ottawa? What becomes particularly apparent is the paucity of Canadian literature which might lend itself to this subject. Furthermore, what has comprised these writings within a cultural studies framework - while acknowledging the difficulty of examining youth subcultures in Canada from this perspective - can be characterized largely as transporting or reproducing a logic of practice established within the works of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in dealing with working-class subcultures (most notably in Resistance Through Rituals (1976)).

What seems clear to the purposes of examining youth subcultures in Canada, however, is that such a study should be situated somewhere between a detailed analysis of subcultural behaviour and a consideration of Canadian culture itself. In considering the problems posed for the examination of subcultural activity within a Canadian context, two directions of study presented themselves: the British work on subcultural theory and the rather diverse body of work produced by Canadian writers on national culture.

Thus this thesis endeavoured to examine British subcultural theory for its ability to speak to the experiences of Canadian youth subcultures. However, while the British literature was of considerable help in elucidating the semiotic coherence of subcultures and, in turn, illustrating the complexity of the structural, cultural and biographical forces shaping subcultural practices, the circumscribing of class as the primary determinant of subcultural meaning proved somewhat problematic to the Canadian context as subcultures were seen as wholly class resistant in nature. (Indeed, this model has led to the dismissal of Canadian youth subculture as an anomaly with no real roots in Canada.)

Central to the class problematic is obviously the requirement of a recognizable working class, standing in opposition to a likewise recognizable bourgeoisie. Furthermore, the working class must feel itself to be alienated from a dominant culture. While not entirely irrelevant to the Canadian context, this paradigm may not be made to address the particularities of Canadian experience without considerable difficulty. Class is neither as easily recognizable in Canada as in Britain nor does it function to divide up society in the same way. Indeed, for good or ill, Canada is a much more consensual society than Britain and the great social cleavages tend to be centred on language, gender, race, and geography. This is not to say that

class is non-existent, but rather that class does not occupy the structuring centrality that British cultural theory has granted it in the British context. Furthermore, the concept of alienation holds as its mirror opposite the corresponding concept of "authenticity"; to the alienation of the bourgeois condition, the working class opposes an "authentic" and legitimate working-class culture. British cultural studies persistently inscribes this working-class authenticity in subcultures. However, this approach to authenticity tends, again, to dismiss Canadian subcultures (by virtue of their predominantly bourgeois constituency, and their reproduction of "foreign" subcultural styles) as "inauthentic" and, again, consensual. This suggests that Canadian subcultures may not be adequately understood through the lens of that concept.

To the British cultural studies, some Canadian observations on the question of culture were counterposed. What emerged was an identifiable pattern in Canadian cultural thinking around which indigenous culture was defined as either high or folk culture traditions. Furthermore, Canadian identity was also determined in comparison against a dominant and mass produced American culture; the latter was anticipated as posing the threat of homogenizing a nationally indigenous consciousness. However, due to the diversity of Canadian experience that is seen to shape Canadian identity, the concept of a unified national culture

proved somewhat contradictory to the concept of Canadian indigenuity itself. This cultural strategy was found further problematic to the notion of Canadian subcultures as they failed to adhere to the prescribed boundaries of Canadian authenticity. Indeed, the "Canadian" vision of national culture had much the same effect on the phenomenon of Canadian subcultures as the British theory, rendering them unauthentic.

In an effort to account for Canadian subcultures, it was necessary to jettison the notions of cultural authenticity as determined by either class or dominant notions about indigenuity. Though class never entirely disappears from Canadian experience, neither is it the key structuring moment. Likewise, the high and low cultural traditions could not be said to encompass all (indeed, not even predominant) indigenous cultural activity in Canada. Rather, subcultures in Canada are constructed much more readily in terms of the overall process of North American culture itself, of the divisions which have always riven it, and of the institutions which manufacture and service it.

In terms of overall processes, the distinction between high/folk culture as indigenously Canadian and North American mass culture does not work. North American culture is democratic and widely shared; it is not exclusive or hierarchical. This makes it somewhat homogeneous but the homogeneity itself encourages group differentiation. Subcultures are an affirmation

of both individualism and group differentiation, though of course they may also be expressions of alienation, revolt, rebellion, and disgust. Yet clearly subcultures cannot be seen solely in terms of class resistance.

However cultural diversity and indiginity were found to be a product not of any prescribed notions of cultural authenticity (around class or "Canadian-ness"). Cultural indiginity can be seen only in the way that subcultural members structure their expressions of experience around subjective desires and taste. While certain variables exert their force over the construction and operation of desire, the meanings of subcultural production (and consumption) may be derived only from the assemblage of its characteristic elements within the specificities of both subjective desire and objective constraints such as race, gender, geography, age, and language.

In fact, what became apparent was that certain structural homologies existed not only between the affective strategies of both British and Canadian theories for culture, but also between the structures of meaning at work in both indigenous Canadian culture and subcultures themselves; taste functioning as the key structuring moment.

To substantiate this argument, this project has attempted to pay close attention to specific subcultural practices within a

Canadian context.¹ Rather than offer some grand theorization or a detailed ethnographic study of a particular subculture, this thesis has attempted to lay some of the theoretical groundwork for the examination of both Canadian subcultures and Canadian culture itself by assessing the predominant paradigms available for cultural study.

¹Again, due to the limited volume of ethnographic material which addresses Canadian subcultures specifically, this thesis draws heavily on a personal knowledge and experience based on participant observation of local, Canadian subcultures.

Chapter One

Literature Review

The literature on subcultures is by now fairly extensive. Its focus, however, continues to lie with the work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (the CCCS or Birmingham Centre). Consequently, this thesis will be primarily concerned with work emanating from the CCCS and the tradition which it represents, variously called British cultural studies and, more simply, cultural studies. Amongst the writings exemplary of the tradition, the most notable and useful for our purposes are: Hebdige's Subculture: the meaning of style (1979), Brake's Comparative Youth Culture (1985), and especially Hall and Jefferson's Resistance Through Rituals (1976) within which the following articles are of particular significance: Clarke et al.'s "Subcultures, Cultures and Class", Jefferson's "Cultural Responses of the Teds", Hebdige's "The Meaning of Mod", Clarke's "Style" and "The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community". In an effort to contextualize subcultures in Canada, certain traditions of Canadian cultural thought will also be considered. These traditions are most exemplified by the work of George Grant, particularly Lament for a Nation (1978; 1969) and Time as History (1969), for his characterization of Canadian culture as oppositional in nature to a American, liberal and capitalist vision of progress.

The work of the Birmingham Centre on youth in post-war Britain can be located in the following manner: it is largely an attempt to comprehend more fully the cultural circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of delinquency and to interrogate the adequacy of both popular and theoretical assumptions regarding the conditions to which delinquency and youth subcultures may be attributed. The bulk of the Birmingham Centre's work has grown from an effort to analyze the media's role in reflecting (and in some cases precipitating) popular moral panics surrounding the "youth crisis". However, the Birmingham effort was rooted for the most part in a dissatisfaction with the predominant theoretical approaches to delinquency, typified by the American sociology of delinquency of the 50s.¹ This theoretical perspective was rejected largely for its insensitivity to the specificities and coherence of working class culture in Britain.

¹Moral panics may be characterized as the belief, uninformed by evidence and undisturbed by counter-evidence, on the part of certain 'respectable' social actors that some elements of popular culture are leading in the more or less short term to social and moral degradation. Recently, concern over satanism in rock music is an excellent example of a moral panic.

²A typical statement on American sociology can be found in Hall: "This was the period - the 1950s - of its massive dependence on American theories and models. But American sociology, in either its Parsonian theorization or its structural-functionalist methodology, was theoretically incapable of dealing with these issues. It was systematically functionalist and integrative in perspective. It had abolished the category of contradiction (...) It claimed the mantle of a science. But its premises and predispositions were highly ideological." (Hall, 1981, 20, in Culture, Media, Language)

American texts attempted to consider the problem of delinquency among working class youths in terms of the youths' presumed failure to integrate successfully into society.³ With emphasis placed on the failure of the individual, due to blocked opportunities for success, this blockage was not considered necessarily as a product of class inequality, but was rather seen as emanating from cultural problems within the working classes themselves. Socially structured systems of opportunity for success were accepted as egalitarian in nature and thus "failure" was attributed to problems of socialization and dysfunctional adaptation on the part of the individual.

The British culturalists shared with the American delinquency theorists the attitude that delinquency or subcultural activity was a solution, an individual's adaptation to his or her particular situation. Unlike American sociology, however, the British culturalists did not cast the subcultural solution as dysfunctional or deviant. On the contrary, they gave

³On this point Hall further notes that American sociology "responded to the question posed earlier - what sort of society was this now? - by giving a highly specific historical answer: all post-capitalist, post-industrial societies were tending to the model of the American dream (...) It celebrated the triumph of 'pluralist society', constantly counterposed to 'totalitarian society' (...) It did not deal with 'culture', except within the terms of a highly pessimistic variant of the 'mass society/mass culture' hypothesis. Instead, it referred to 'the value system' in the singular - into which (...) the 'brutal culture' of the masses was destined to be gradually and successfully incorporated." (Hall, 1981, 20-21)

it a particularly marxist reading.' Firstly, the extreme lack of social mobility open to British working class youth served only to emphasize the more pronounced structures of inequality at work in Britain. Secondly, the American school of thought located the problem with dysfunctional youths while neglecting those structural elements which gave rise to their "failure".

It is the latter observation that effectively upended the old work on delinquency in favour of an emphasis on the relationship between cultural elements and a particular way of life. The culturalist response was a consideration of those objective sets of conditions created by society which gave rise to structures of inequality - structures of inequality located within the conflicting cultural messages of class society. What they recognized was that working class culture exhibited a coherence and consistency of logic, given the material conditions of its existence. What proved problematic to the reproduction of bourgeois culture was the conflicting nature of working class culture. Youths were seen to be caught between the conflicting pressures of dominant (and institutionalized) bourgeois culture and their parent culture (the inner logic of their working class experience). British subcultural and delinquency studies

'Indeed, Cohen is extremely emphatic on this point when he states point blank: "I do not think the middle class produces subcultures, for subcultures are produced by a dominated culture, not by a dominant culture." (1972; 1981, 85)

comprised an attempt to rethink and to locate this inconsistency in terms of the ways the working class socially and materially organized themselves (and were organized).

Willis (1977) examines precisely this phenomenon in relation to the place of working class youths within dominant school culture. His consideration of "counter-school" culture situates these working class males within the given ecology of the school's structure. The "lads'" refusal to participate - rejecting entirely the school's curriculum and any semblance of school authority - may be understood in relation to their parent (working class) culture. Given their lack of economic and cultural mobility and the likelihood of their future working the "shop-floor" or factories, the nature of the information to be learned and the behavioural codes expected by the school hold neither meaning nor value for the boys. Rather, they believe in the inferiority of the school's values as they hold little relevance to the "real world" of physical labour as perceived by the boys. Willis points to the structural parallels between shop-floor culture and the boys' subversion of the school's ecology. In so doing they are replicating (whether consciously or not) the values and behaviour appropriate for getting along on the shop-floor. In terms of the response it evokes from the boys, the school actually prepares them for the outside world which awaits them. In creating a counter-school culture, the

boys are negotiating a meaningful space for themselves within the school system which reinforces and rewards (though inadvertently) the values and logic necessary for survival in the male world of physical labour. Willis' work is characteristic of the Birmingham Centre's approach to youth subculture and its interest in the ambiguities and internal logic at work in subcultural negotiation.

This perspective is in fact more completely fleshed out in Hall and Jefferson's Resistance Through Ritual (1976), one of the key texts produced from the Birmingham Centre in dealing with British youths. The text offers a detailed account of the rise of post-war youth culture in Britain and the phenomenon of working class youth subcultures in relation to dominant middle class cultures. This is followed by an analytic survey of different subcultural groups at specific historical moments. Resistance Through Ritual attempts to explain more precisely how working class youths negotiate a cultural space for themselves within a hegemonically bourgeois society which offers them neither material nor symbolic meaning.

What emerges from the material in Resistance Through Ritual is the role of ideology as an explanatory device. The authors' espousal of a class-based analysis reveals the 'symbolic', that is to say the wishful or purely imaginary, nature of the solutions arrived at by the youths examined. For these

predominantly working class subjects, the process of negotiating a solution despite their circumstance takes the form of a symbolic resistance to their ascribed status, an imaginary resolution to their material and cultural problems of existence. In Cohen's classic phrase: "(...) the latent function of subculture is (...) to express and resolve, albeit 'magically', the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture." (1972; 1981, 82) For example, a metaphoric transcendence of one's class position might be rendered by affecting styles of dress that connote an upward social location as with the mods of the 60s (Hebdige, 1976)³ or the Teddy Boys of the 50s (Jefferson, 1976). Nonetheless, while the relative autonomy of subcultural youths must be noted, they remain for the most part subject to the biographical, structural and cultural constraints of the positions they occupy within mainstream society, such that the subcultural solution truly is wishful and imaginary.

In some respects this imaginary response has a potential for real change (i.e., the winning of public territory for street youths). However, in the final instance these "magical" solutions serve only to solidify the subculture's marginal status within class boundaries. As with Willis' (1977) "counter-school

³On this same phenomenon, Cohen says: "the original mod life-style could be interpreted as an attempt to realize, but in an imaginary relation, the conditions of existence of the socially mobile white-collar worker." (1972; 1981, 83; italics in original)

culture," the "lads" affected a superiority over their academic instructors and peers yet the nature of this resistance served further to entrench their position within class culture.

Although these groups seldom overcome the objective sets of conditions surrounding them, subcultures do maintain a very wide margin of control over the forms of expression that their negotiations with dominant culture assume. Naturally, these forms of expression themselves assume the taste of the day. Consequently, while the reproduction of class and of class problematics are facilitated by such "informal agencies" as family and neighbourhood, the "generational specificity" of shared youth experiences varies according to the conjunctures in which they occur. Educational, work and leisure experiences of youths vary specifically from generation to generation.⁶ Because the nature of negotiation is always rooted in the specificities of the historical conjuncture from which it emerges, the stylistic expression (dress, argot, music, ritual) of this negotiation becomes the epitome of generational identity. Style may thus be seen as a product of a particular culture and of its class experience.

⁶Indeed, on the question of the relation between generational specificity and subcultures, Cohen goes so far as to see subcultures as the direct result of generational conflict: "The second outcome of generational conflict (...) was the emergence of specific youth subcultures in opposition to the parent culture." (1972; 1981, 82)

Clarke's (1976) analysis of skinhead culture attempts to examine this relationship. Specifically, he locates the behaviour and values of skinheads within a reaction to the specificities of working class experience in 60s Britain. Skinheads could be distinguished from previous youth cultures by their distinctive appearance (shaved heads, braces, work boots) and pattern of group activity characterized by their preoccupation with territory (the street corner, the pub, the football ground), their aggressive resentment of what they perceived as oppressive authority (police, adults, and "legitimate" society in general), and a marked racism and homophobia. These youths embraced not only an excessively violent image of "straight" masculinity but they also articulated an exaggerated working class tradition both visually and ritualistically:

The underlying social dynamic for the style (...) is the relative worsening of the situation of the working class, through the second half of the sixties, and especially the more rapidly worsening situation of the lower working class (and the youth within that). This, allied to the young's sense of exclusion from the existing "youth sub-culture" (...) produced a return to an intensified "Us-Them" consciousness among the lower working class young. (Clarke 1976, 99)

It is significant to note that in the above quotation, Clarke clearly makes the subcultural phenomenon of skinheads dependent first and foremost upon an economic and hence a class

condition. This is entirely typical of British subcultural analyses. Nevertheless, Clarke similarly argues that the skinheads' racist behaviour can be located within a xenophobic reaction to the increased visibility of East Indians within their neighbourhoods (102). Thus he reads the focal concerns at the core of skinhead culture in terms of a reassertion of the values and concerns of a lost working class community. Given the post-war decline of the social, material and organizational basis of working class community, the skinheads' attempted recovery of this community was largely symbolic in nature. It is in this sense that skinhead culture represents a stylistic recuperation of an imaginary space, the nostalgic space of lost working class community. Clarke's example also shows how subcultural negotiations, manifest through style, vary generationally as the skinheads valorize accoutrements not likely to be valued (or to be valued in the same manner) by the parent culture.

At the core of the Birmingham Centre's work on subcultural ritual is an investigation of how class relationships are expressed and reproduced through style and ritual. Hence, the Centre's preoccupation with class structures situated in relation to bourgeois hegemonic struggle, that is to say in the ways in which bourgeois authority is both maintained and circumvented.

While subcultures are not inherently political, that is to say that they spontaneously express no particular political

preference or leaning (indeed, skinheads can be either fascist or anti-fascist, punks both environmentalist and nihilist, etc.), what becomes apparent is the coherent and consistent relationship between the material and class basis of subcultures and the symbolic negotiations into which they enter. In short, whatever their political orientation, subcultures tend to draw their style consistently from a single coherent reaction to context. Consequently, as resistance is recognized as imaginary (and therefore as 'ideological' or wishful), style becomes the most manifest outward sign of its subjects' relationship to the cultural and material environment in which they operate. As this pattern of stylistic analysis is repeated throughout the ethnographies of Resistance Through Ritual, the role of style as a cultural indicator, as a tool for examining this consistency, becomes evident. Consequently, style will become the point of entry for subcultural analyses and the most spectacular styles will tend to draw the greatest amount of study.

If we presume that certain homologies exist between the material basis of subcultural activity and the form of expression that resistance to it takes, then style can be approached as a system of codes to be analyzed. As might be expected, the large body of work that exists on youth subcultures in Britain draws heavily from a structuralist tradition (though used to a

"culturalist" end).⁷ Hence, style functions as a language to be decoded. Consequently, the Birmingham Centre is largely concerned with exploring the semiotic coherence of subcultural practices.

This semiotic approach is appropriated by Hebdige in his study of subcultural style, Subculture: the meaning of style (1979). His work focuses, perhaps more intensely than that of his contemporaries, on the significance of style as a mode of subcultural expression (and opposition). According to Hebdige, the spectacular nature of style emphasizes the symbolic nature of subcultures for both what they do and do not communicate to us. Hebdige's analyses, however, are interesting in at least two ways. To begin with, they reveal the highly structured systems of meaning at work in subcultural style. In this respect, Hebdige operates firmly within the tradition of British cultural studies. However, Hebdige views these structured systems not merely as expressions of opposition to mainstream and parent cultures but also as expressions of difference amongst other

⁷Indeed, in his overview of the history of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Hall devotes several pages to the "impact of the 'structuralisms'". He is careful to note, however, that many structuralist strands affected the work of the Centre. Furthermore, unlike the structuralist tendency to discover structures operating independently of human agency, the Centre wanted to use the intellectual rigor of structuralism not to deny human agency but to situate it more concretely in the contradictory fields of its emergence. (Hall, 1981, 26-38)

youth cultures.' In other words, Hebdige begins to break from received subcultural theory in that he emphasizes the affirmative and not only oppositional aspects of subculture, in that he views subcultures as operating to differentiate themselves from each other and not just from mainstream and parent cultures. Clarke's notes on style also reiterate this point (1976, 182). Nonetheless, relying on an analysis informed by structuralism of the elaborate codes of visual and behavioural meaning constructed by 70s punk, Hebdige points to the symbolic nature of visual power and the manipulation of established signs. According to Hebdige, one can read punk's use of violent images (safety pins through cheeks and noses, chains, confrontational and sexually 'taboo' clothing, swastikas, etc.) as an attempt to shock and alienate non-punk onlookers belonging to either mainstream or parent culture. Indeed, these images do effect a highly visual reversal of the power roles between "mainstream" viewer and punk; the mainstream viewer is challenged to look but also threatened into looking away; hence, the controlling power of the gaze is removed from the mainstream and delivered to the subculture.

Yet, as Hebdige argues, what is so threatening about these images is precisely their lack of meaning, their existence as an

'Subcultural theorists distinguish parent and mainstream culture as the culture of one's class origin (parent) and the dominant culture of bourgeois hegemony (mainstream).

impenetrable system of hieroglyphics. The adaptation by punks of taboo dress, argot, music and ritual can be read as a refusal to communicate (the "pogo" as non-dancing, punk as non-music). Indeed, punk itself is largely an aesthetic of nihilism holding out hope neither for the present nor for the future. Punk's incorporation of a stylistic language with no discernible meaning to mainstream observers can ultimately be read as a refusal to negotiate. However, Hebdige also argues that this refusal to negotiate does nonetheless construct an impenetrable space for its subjects. He thereby points to the transformational potential of subcultural activity, that is to the fact that subcultures are not only symbolic solutions but that these solutions can sometimes involve genuine effects. Nonetheless, even for Hebdige, the elusive nature of subcultural style remains an in-language of cultural resistance in order to assert what little power its users are afforded.

However, the aforementioned also suggests the ambiguous and tentative way in which stylistic meaning is constructed. Clearly, as with the punks, neither overall style nor the specific objects manipulated within a given style can be taken at face value. Their meaning as signifiers cannot be decoded according to the conventional meanings of their components. Rather, everyday objects may be appropriated from the original context and reinscribed in new contexts so as to alter and blur

their meaning.

If one is to approach style as a language, then what proves interesting is the ability of subcultures to invert their vocabularies. The "mods" of 60s Britain are a case in point. For the most part unremarkable in appearance, one wonders what the general public perceived as so threatening about their style.⁹ As Hebdige points out "(...) there was something in the way they moved that adults couldn't make out." (1976, 88)

The style they created (...) consisted of 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 by being overtly (overly?) close to the straight world was nonetheless incomprehensible to it. (Hebdige 1976, 93)

This collection of signs to invert meaning is referred to as "bricolage - the reordering and recontextualization of objects to communicate fresh meanings." (Clarke 1976b, 177). As such, the potential for subcultural members to perform bricolage is by no means limited to objects alone. However, we might here identify a shortcoming of Birmingham work in the 70s in that it precisely neglects the potential for bricolage to be performed with respect to subcultural styles themselves. Indeed, it is difficult to think of the current revival of various forerunning subcultures

⁹The mods looked for all the world like clean cut young men in trenchcoats riding motor scooters.

(the skinheads, the mods, the teds, 60s psychedelia, etc.) in the late 70s/80s as anything other than a recontextualization of old styles within new historic conjunctures. It surely is not a pining after "lost community" or a sudden rediscovery of the relevance and meaning of yesterday's subcultures. Thus, particular styles themselves have been rendered signs and objects for appropriation by later generations.¹⁰ What the phenomenon of bricolage seems to lead to is subcultural intertextuality.

Brake's (1987) work is characteristic of this oversight. As with the Birmingham studies, he distinguishes the key feature of youth subcultures as located in the realm of purely symbolic power. In his examination of subcultures in Britain and the United States, he briefly includes a chapter on subcultures in Canada. First, he discusses the highly derivative nature of Canadian youth subcultures. Because, he argues, their elements are "borrowed" from British and American youth subcultures, their "oppositional force is highly muted." (145) He argues that due to the consensual nature of Canadian cultural hegemony, indigenous youth cultures (that is working class youth cultures) "have failed to develop in any large sense." (150) Furthermore, he constitutes Canadian subcultures as non-oppositional for the

¹⁰For example, skinhead style in its current revival obviously connotes "skinhead-ness" but also represents a different permutation of its original stylistic elements when utilized by middle class youths in downtown Ottawa in 1990.

most part, "resisting" mainstream values but not rejecting them.

Yet Brake exemplifies what appears to be a largely accepted attitude to youth culture in Canada. Within the established practices of subcultural study, Canadian youth cultures may be rejected as "largely derivative", inauthentic and hence unworthy objects for consideration. Likewise those industries which cater to these groups (especially by the late 80s) may be further rejected (by British marxists and Canadian conservatives alike) as American-based mass culture and therefore decidedly un-Canadian and non-resistant.

There are, however, additional difficulties which emerge from the bulk of work written on British youth subcultures due to its heavy reliance on the stylistic and consequently spectacular nature of subcultures. These are chiefly the exclusion of both the role of women in subcultures and the omission of girl subcultures themselves. McRobbie's studies of consumer girl culture pinpoint some of these oversights. As she points out (McRobbie and Garber, 1976), the Birmingham approach has been problematic for the way in which it circumscribes the boundaries of subcultural activity as largely male, resistant, spectacular, and working class to the exclusion of girls, the unseen/unrecorded elements of subcultures (members' home lives), less visually noticeable groups, and middle class youths. However, in one sense, her critique is largely a reaffirmation of

the agenda set by other members of the Birmingham Centre in their search for semiotically coherent subcultures. McRobbie merely widens the web of semiotic coherence: "This is not to say that women are denied style, rather that the style of a subculture is primarily that of its men." (McRobbie, 1980, 43).

In another sense, however, McRobbie does manage to suggest the possibility of subcultures (in this case female) which are not perceived as resistant (consumer girl culture, bedroom culture), and which are largely concerned to differentiate themselves from other subcultural groups. In this mode, McRobbie expands upon the break with received subcultural theory already apparent in some of Hebdige's work. Furthermore, McRobbie's observations imply a recontextualization of youth subculture within a larger, mass youth culture (a youth "parent culture") and also affirms the fact that youth cultures predominantly stand not in opposition or resistance to mainstream culture but in relationship to other subcultural phenomena.

The problem of examining youth subcultures within a Canadian context is the dilemma of locating a space for youth cultures within what might be described as a larger, National culture (if, in fact, this space even exists). This problematic might be further bracketed by the relationship between the popular media in Canada (which are inundated with American products and images) and what is perceived or recognized as Canadian culture "proper."

Much of what has emerged from the Canadian discourse surrounding our cultural identity boils down to a series of tensions in the struggle for position between cultural and economic centres over their marginal, impoverished and culturally outmoded (from the centre's perspective) neighbours.¹¹ Whether the contexts surrounding these tensions take the form of the struggle to survive in a hostile environment (Atwood, 1972), central Canada's economic and cultural domination over Canada's regional communities (Melnyk, 1981) or the American colonization of Canadian politics, economics and culture (Grant, 1978;1965), the recurring pattern produced is one of a marginal and somewhat muffled opposition to the doctrine of progress. A survey of writings on Canadian culture might reveal a corresponding pattern of oppositions that go something like this: margin/centre, "high" art and folk art/popular culture, survival/progress, Canadian/American, diversity/homogeneity, and Us/Them. What characterizes these dichotomies seems to express itself in terms of some ethereal pastoral vision of our historical past on the one hand and technology as an agent of progress on the other.

This recurring thematic is paralleled by Grant's (1969b) notion that technology is symptomatic of an ever pervasive will to power, realized through the American dream. The thrust of Grant's work is rooted in the particularity of a Canadian

¹¹This in itself is not an exclusively Canadian problem.

nationalism; he focuses on the extent to which Canada (and its social contract) has been co-opted by the language of modernity. While an historical account of modernity is familiar ground to the twentieth century reader, Grant's writings work towards situating North American (and within it, Canadian) society within these contexts. Grant's work takes on a refusal of the modern project not for what once seemed an emancipatory vision of modernity as the site for social and economic liberation, but for its inherent, self-effacing nature of historical development. More precisely, Grant explores the cultivation of technological dependency at the expense of what he, dovetailing Nietzsche, calls the "human project - work, ethics, reason, identity, all the major loci of human reality." (Kroker 1984, 27) The emergent modern and technological empire is grounded not in an ethics of progress for a more human(e) world, but becomes eroded into a secularized and debased pure will to mastery; technique for its own sake. For Grant, the concept of modern progress is stripped of its human(e) potentialities; the myth of progress becomes synonymous with the technological empire. To live in the modern world is to live under the constant pressure of the technological imperative. Grant argues that North Americans are the people "most exclusively enfolded in the exultation of doing which went with it." (1969b, 14) This modern perspective was firmly entrenched in the North American will by the end of the second

world war as we "would become the chief leaders in establishing the reign of technique throughout the planet and perhaps beyond it." (1969b, 10)

Grant's work in Lament for a Nation (1978; 1965) offers a synchronic analysis of these forces at work within a specific historical conjuncture in Canadian nationalism. To a certain extent, the modern project itself can be located as a source of Canadian duality between marginal and "mainstream" interests, the paradoxical nature of Canadian existence; the particularistic nature of Canadian society standing against the homogenizing influence of American, contractual liberalism. (Grant 1978, ix-x; 1965)

Furthermore, this vision of American culture as a threat to Canadian-ness is given full expression through the cultural policy of the Canadian government; the Massey-Levesque Report of 1951; the Broadcasting Act of 1968; and Vital Links (1987). Grant's negative vision of the modern project would seem to be fully realized through the prescriptive (and culturally limiting) strategies of culture that these documents both give voice to and legitimate.¹²

A consideration of the above literature provides a crucial

¹²What is proposed here is not a study of government literature on Canadian culture but merely the suggestion that these documents support a particular definition of Canadian culture which has come to dominate the debate on Cultural indiginity itself in Canada.

link to any consideration of youth culture within a larger Canadian, and North American, cultural milieu. The boundaries which this Canadian tradition establishes around cultural activity (as indigenous, communitarian-oriented and traditional) as well as those utilized by the British writers to circumscribe subcultural activity (as working-class, resistant and symbolic) become essential not only for what they say about culture itself, but also for where they situate Canadian youth subcultures in relation to these cultural elements.

Chapter Two

That Was Then, This Is Now: Post-War Youth Culture As The "Older Generation"

It has been noted in the preceding chapter that the body of work produced by the Birmingham Centre is essentially grounded in, and a product of, the historical conjuncture in which it emerged. Any evaluation of British subcultural theory's relevance to Canadian youth must then point to the divergences between the two contexts: Britain and Canada, youth in Britain and youth in Canada, British cultural theory of the 60s and 70s, Canadian youth of the 80s and 90s. Most importantly, these disparities can be located with respect to how youth itself, as a category, is circumscribed within these differing contexts. While the Birmingham Centre's work offers a useful set of tools with which to examine this question, the generational specificities of the subcultures examined in Resistance Through Rituals cannot necessarily compass the nature of Canadian subcultural activity in the late 80s and early 90s. That is, the demographic changes that have taken place have brought about fundamental differences between the experiences of youth during the post-war period and the present. These differences, in turn, have contributed to the self-reflexive character of contemporary youth subcultural expression (in comparison to its relatively "straight" and ingenuous post-war forebears).

Although youth culture cannot be attributed a universal or homogeneous status, British and North American cultures share certain normal perspectives and expectations regarding the nature of "youth" as a category. To begin with, youth is a relative and transitional period, marking the passage from childhood to adulthood. In this respect, youth is a problem for the process of socialization involved with the reproduction of dominant or widely accepted norms concerning the constitution of a "legitimate" and respectable adult life, and focusing chiefly on the acquisition of responsibility, self-identity, and independence. The conventional set of practices associated with the successful transition to adulthood are generally marked by the attainment of emotional and financial self-sufficiency; getting a job, leaving home, marriage and starting a family. However, this transition is not necessarily demarcated by a clear cut set of boundaries. Youth is seen as an ongoing process which entails a gradual tapering off of parental support.

The British culturists, in dealing with youth subculture, focused on its teenaged constituents as they grew in visibility along with the rise of a teenaged consumer market in post-war Britain. This phenomenon was approached largely as one of "(...) the most striking (...) manifestations of social change in the period." (Clarke et al. 1976, 9) Briefly, those principal factors affecting the emergence of, and the subsequent social

concern over, a distinct youth culture were isolated as: the rise in youth-oriented industries; the spread of mass communications; the disruption of traditional family structures caused by the war; mandatory secondary education and the resultant increase in the number of youths enrolled in school (and in most cases, out of the workforce); and finally, the pop cultural explosion. (Clarke et al. 1976, 18-20) What ensued effectively composed a reconceptualization of the category of youth surrounding leisure activities; as a time for recreation, relatively freed from participation in the adult world of work.

Born during the war, (youths) were seen as having the least experience of and commitment to the pre-war social patterns. Because of their age, they were direct beneficiaries of the welfare state and new educational opportunities; least constrained by patterns of, or attitudes to, spending and consumption; most involved in guilt-free commitment to pleasure and immediate satisfactions.

(...) "youth" was wholly and exclusively in and out of the new post-war world. And what, principally, made the difference was precisely their age. (Clarke et al. 1976, 22)

The product of this emergent culture, of course, sowed the seeds for the so-called "generation gap". Thus it is that the cultural stage is set for "moral panics" - large scale disapprovals verging on the hysterical, orchestrated by traditional, conservative or right wing elements - of what comes to be seen as

the "problem" of youth to come.¹ The appearance of such "delinquent" subcultures as the teddy boys, the mods, and the rockers was perceived by societal control culture as a "crisis" in the moral fabric of the country's culture. This combined with a prevalent post-war concern over the deleterious effects of mass, popular culture (television, rock 'n' roll) on youth.

In comparison, the factors influencing the rise of a discernible youth culture in Canada follow a similar, albeit more subdued, pattern of emergence. While prior to the war, mandatory education for children under the age of sixteen was in place, this was not widely enforced, as children were permitted to withdraw (with parental consent) if needed, for example, to work on the family farm. Given the economic situation of farmers during the 30s and Canada's pre-war status as an agricultural community, this phenomenon was presumably widespread. Prior to the war, any youth culture that may have existed does not appear to have been apprehended or recorded in terms which would make it recognizable to us as a youth culture. Furthermore, economic hardship wrought by the Depression, followed by the Second World War and the mass enlistment or conscription of young men,

¹Cohen makes a telling remark in this respect when he seeks to distinguish "between subcultures and delinquency. Many criminologists talk of delinquent subcultures. In fact, they talk about anything that is not middle-class culture as subculture." (1972; 1981, 85) The point, of course, is that for many subcultures are automatically delinquent and, therefore, automatically prone to cause moral panics.

severely impeded the emergence of a youth culture. In response to the subsequent baby boom of the late 40s and early 50s, an increasing number of consumer products and services directed at children (and later teenagers) appeared. The rise in availability of consumer goods for a teenaged market occurred in conjunction with and was facilitated by the rise in popularity of radio and television in Canadian homes. What is interesting here, though, is the difference in degree and nature of the "panics" which arose due to the influx of the mass media. The "problem" of youth was at first somewhat obscured by a wider concern over the effects of the media in general:

(...) a kind of moral panic which (...) becomes identified with the American media. So what is American and what is popular are seen first of all as synonymous and, second, seen to be of a lesser order in relationship to Canadian culture. (Straw 1987, 33)

For the most part, the seminal texts within British studies of youth culture address those visible groups which emerged in the 50s, 60s, and 70s (teddy boys, mods, skinheads, hippies, and punks). Perhaps the most readily apparent difficulty in utilizing this material in order to discuss Canadian youth at present is to be found simply in the time span that separates the groups examined: British groups of the 50s and 60s and Canadian youth in the late 80s and early 90s. In this respect, we might reasonably ask how the definition of youth is affected by the

nature of its constituency. Youth, that is to say young people, are no longer as demographically significant now as they were in the 50s and 60s. Indeed, as earlier suggested, the visibility of post-war youth (in Canada, at least) was due to the sheer force of numbers of young people. However, as numbers decline and as the qualitative experience of being young in a youth oriented culture changes, what are the grounds for a convincing comparison? We are no longer comparing constant entities but rather highly shifting relationships and to each relationship a different and specific type of analysis might seem appropriate.

Furthermore, the entire concept of a "youth culture" emerged to account for the experiences of baby boomers who are now today's yuppies. Is it logical to transfer concepts developed for one demographic, and apparently passing, phenomenon to another? Baby boomers, now approaching their forties and fifties, no longer constitute Canada's "youth" as such, though their attitude is still definitive of "youth culture". There exists, then, an obvious split between "youth" as an age category and "youth" as an attitude or ideology. Consequently, the socio-cultural markers of the circumstances surrounding the youth (young people) of today must be considered in relation to a culture dominated demographically by aging baby boomers, and the effects of this on the perceived boundaries and qualities of "youth" itself.

To begin with, the phenomenon of post-war youth subculture in Britain is largely equated with the teenage years. This is especially true of the Birmingham studies of working class, male youths as their relative passage to adulthood is presumed for the most part to be indicated by their entry into the workforce upon leaving secondary school. In the British context, this gives the subjects of the studies an age somewhere between 16 and 18. In Canada, however, the category of "youth" (in terms of "official", that is to say governmental youth research) refers to young people between the ages of 15 and 25 (Niece 1987, 39). This official definition is operable within the area of government programmes available to youth in the 80s. What occurs is the relative extension of the age limits which mark out the category of youth beyond the teenaged or adolescent years. The social climate for youth, then, has changed sufficiently from the 50s to the 70s to make the experience of youth fundamentally incompatible between these time periods save that at some point in the life cycle every adult was once a teenager. Thus any current approach to the category of youth must also consider the experiences of young people in the early to mid twenties. These people are not the classic youth of Birmingham studies and they do not occupy the same social spaces as "real" youth (teenagers) as defined by Birmingham. Simultaneously, they also do not occupy the classic spaces of adult culture. Indeed, these

"extended youths" will be found amongst post-secondary students, in career training programmes, on the job market, in situations of extended parental support, and so on.

The study of youth culture in Canada is further complicated by the fact that the extension of the classic boundaries of youth and the practices traditionally associated with that age category are no longer the exclusive preserve of the "young." For example, within the context of British literature, popular music, as a stylistic element, served to manifest and sharpen the cultural differences between generations. The music identified with the youth of the 50s, 60s and 70s was understood as radically different from the music appreciated by the previous generation of parents. It thus served to magnify generational difference. Of course, much of the pleasure in consuming the music was bound up precisely with the fact that parents did not like it and that it therefore created a separate identity for teenagers who typically consumed it in spaces as removed as possible from parental control (bedrooms, cars, restaurants, beaches, parties, etc.). Likewise, the rituals associated with the consumption and enjoyment of youth music (i.e., the purchase of records, nightclubbing, the use of drugs and alcohol, attending concerts, etc.) further served to demarcate these activities as belonging to the sphere of youth. However, in the early 90s, the former youth of the 50s, 60s, and early 70s

continues to engage in these activities, although with less vigour and frequency due to the strictures of age, parenthood, and careers.

That there exist factions of baby boomers approaching mid-life who continue to participate in leisure cultures once considered the sole territory of youth, serves to soften once clear-cut boundaries between youth and other age categories.² Consequently, the blurring of differences between age categories (youth and adulthood) also alters the meaning of entering the workforce. Where once entering the workforce meant the abandonment of youth culture, in a more or less short term, it now appears that one can be a member of the workforce and continue to engage in adolescent preferences. Work and subculture need no longer be incompatible.

The rather tenuous relationship between subcultures, leisure, and work examined in Resistance Through Rituals offers an additional area for consideration in the 90s. As earlier noted, subcultures are defined as an imaginary attempt to negotiate a position within and in reaction to real sets of conditions. As such, these strategies are recognized as "fated to fail" at a material level, as Clarke's analysis of counter-

²Perhaps it is the generational specificity of the experiences of these former youths - their growing up in a culture of youth - that accounts for their continued embrace of youthful cultures. It constitutes the only self-identity they know.

school culture and shop floor cultures tends to show. Clarke et al. contend that there "is no 'subcultural career' for the working-class lad, no 'solution' in the subcultural milieu, for problems posed by the key structuring experiences of class." (1976, 47). However, it would seem that this assumption cannot account for the situation of Canadian youth at the present time. Indeed, the key concept in Clarke's dismissal of a "subcultural career" is the idea that the subculture is ultimately a dead end. After all, it is only an "imaginary" solution which will eventually succumb to real conditions, as manifest by the abandonment of subcultural behaviour patterns upon entering the workforce. However, the strength of youth culture and of subcultures as a consumer market in North America, along with the increasingly important service industries that they generate (most notably fashion and music), offer a potential opening for those more industrious members of subcultures who have mastered the hieroglyphics of style. The successful generators of subcultural style may indeed operate at a symbolic level; nonetheless, fluency in the language of style can constitute a kind of "cultural capital" which may eventually be converted into real capital (Bourdieu 1984, 114). Opportunities are available to these individuals to market their knowledge of subcultural taste either at an entry level within (sub)cultural industries (as disc jockeys in clubs or on campus radio stations,

in bands, organizing and promoting alternative and small scale music concerts) or as small business entrepreneurs (creating and marketing jewellery, t-shirts or clothing through retailers on consignment or as street vendors,. Of course, the extent to which these "solutions" afford their progenitors any social mobility is uncertain. Access to such opportunities is undoubtedly more open to middle class than to working class youths in light of both the cultural and material capital required to bring such an undertaking to fruition. However, these solutions do exist and are by no means a novelty of the 90s, and they do tend to suggest quite the opposite of what Clarke affirms, they do point to some type of "subcultural career".

Furthermore, it is quite likely that the changing demographics of youth culture industries are opening up a particular space for the subcultural and entrepreneurial projects described above. Indeed, it seems that subcultures themselves have gone through phases of dominance and marginality and that current debates on youth must occur in the full knowledge of a renewed marginality of youth subcultures.

The clout of the post-war baby boomers as a consumer taste group became readily apparent with the widespread appearance of popular youth cultures across North America from the 1950s to the mid-1970s. This phenomenon resulted not only from the sheer

demographic weight of youth but also from youth's new relationship to leisure and consumption as a result of post-war prosperity and from the emergence of industries and services specifically catering to youth. As a result, sometime between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s in North America, youth culture effectively became the dominant culture. A subcultural phenomenon, with all its contradictions, fractions, and problems, nonetheless entered a period of cultural dominance. Youth culture ceased being a marginal phenomenon as the earlier notion of mainstream culture itself moved to the margins and began to seem quaint and undesirable. However, as the boomers grow up, start careers, and begin families, so the emphasis of the cultural industries has also shifted to keep pace with the age of their target consumers. Clearly, the primacy of this group now affects dominant culture in a new way. Specifically, by making a specific moment in youth culture (the youth culture of the 60s) the dominant culture, it makes all subsequent youth cultures (youth culture of the 80s and 90s) marginal.

This transition might be more clearly expressed as a shift in emphasis from youth culture per se to a culture of youth. "Youth culture" refers to those sets of cultural practices in which young people (for present purposes, aged 15 to 25) engage. On the other hand, "culture of youth" is used in a more mythical manner to refer to the valuation of youth (and youthfulness) as

an ideal by contemporary North American culture that emphasizes physical attractiveness, activity, and leisure. While some degree of overlap may occur between the rituals and activities associated with each, the former refers to a specific age group while the latter is not necessarily bound by generation. Nevertheless, the position of current North American youth culture (the current culture of North American young people) within the context of a dominant culture of youth (the mainstream culture of former youth) where aging boomers set a consumer precedent must be considered.

This latter phenomenon - the remarginalization of youth culture by an entrenched culture of youth - takes expression in a number of forms. For example, one can observe on television the resurgence of family-centred dramas and sitcoms (The Wonder Years, thirtysomething, Major Dad, Coach, Married With Children, The Cosby Show, The Simpsons, etc.). This resurgence is undoubtedly connected to an increasing preoccupation with parenting and family life on the part of the boomers. The same shift in attention is observable in the radio industry where, over the past few years, formats have switched from the music of the present/rock to the "hits" of the 50s, 60s, and 70s, that is to say towards "Classic Rock" or "Lite Rock". This is also true of the current repackaging and nostalgic revivals of spectacles such as Batman and Dick Tracey.

Clearly, youth culture no longer exists as a cultural formation to the extent it did in the post-war decades. This shifting of cultural emphasis away from youth thus relegates youth (and its subcultures) once again to the distant margins of dominant culture. One of the effects of this phenomenon is the extreme fragmentation of youth subculture, from the late 70s onwards, into small and diverse pockets of taste and style. As usual, musical tastes provide a reliable map to the dispersion. Hence, the highly marked heterogeneity of rap/hiphop, black reggae, white reggae, ska, new age, sludgabilly, new country, hardcore punk/thrash, heavy metal, industrial "music", post-punk folk, and acid house, to name but a few, attests to the twin phenomena of fragmentation and marginalization of youth culture. Indeed, each of these taste groups could be further subdivided into specific taste cultures. Nonetheless, their marginality with respect to the "mainstream" music industry is obvious in the fact that they tend to be produced and distributed by independent labels. Although independent production and distribution may give the artists greater artistic control over their material, in opposition to the presumed practices of the music industry, it also restricts their access to commercial radio and a wider audience. Consequently, these musical styles find their chief venues for airplay through non-commercial or independent radio stations such as CKCU-FM in Ottawa, CKLN-FM or CHRY-FM in

Toronto, and CFRC-FM in Kingston (all campus stations), and CBC-FM's alternative programming late at night.

Indeed, we may use musical style, since it is a tangible expression of subcultural concerns, to define the generational specificities of 80s youth and to locate their specific reaction to the prevailing culture (and subcultures) of the "mainstream", that is to say of the baby boomers. It is relatively safe to state that the "death of punk" in the late 70s or early 80s, marked the last appearance of musical styles markedly different from the styles of preceding subcultures. As a result, the music of subsequent subcultures, throughout the 80s and into the 90s, has tended, in terms both of stylistic elements and lyrical structure, to re-work old themes. Since punk, youth have tended to reclaim past subcultural styles as their own. By and large, the difference between the subcultures of the 50s, 60s, and early 70s and those of the late 70s-90s, might best be characterized as a distinction between post-war and postmodern respectively. The latter's case is marked by its use of parody, pastiche, and intertextuality.

The proliferation of postmodern elements in contemporary youth subculture can be seen as reflective of the social change of this period in much the same way as the Birmingham Centre found in the subcultures of its day a reflection of the post-war situation. The current generation of youth subcultures is

largely a response to the cultural restraints surrounding them in post-industrial society (expressed in a nihilistic and cynical vision of the future created for them by previous generations and articulated by the punks' battle cry of "No future now.") To an extent the musical genres which grew out of the punk movement carried on the legacy of punk's overt criticism of the "selling out" of the political activism of the 60s/70s youth movement:

You're out of touch with the
underground/Too conservative for the
weathermen/You've lost that radical look
you've found/Will you ever get it back
again?/Firebombing wouldn't suit a man of
your style, acts of protest,
demonstrations, riots/there was a day when
bureaucrats would flinch to see you
smile/But with your new look even priests
don't look so pious. (c) Og Music, 1985.

Critique often takes the form of direct ridicule as in the Forgotten Rebels' celebratory "Elvis is dead, the big fat guy is dead, dead, dead." or stylistic parody as in My Dog Popper's ridicule of hippy self-absorption in "Acid Flashback." However, what is often effected is a bricolage of previous musical forms, reconstructing them in conjunction with stylistic elements of the post-punk roots of their own generation.

Stylistic pastiche is not confined to musical style alone. The resurgence of previous modes of subcultural dress abound throughout the 80s. One example is the so-called "60s revival"

of the mid-80s, characterized by the wearing of paisley and brocade fabrics and loud neon colours, epaulette shirts, sideburns, long hair (particularly for men), and the vogue for assorted paraphernalia such as "lava lamps". What is distinctive about this group's predilection for 60s psychedelia is its disdain for the original musical form. While elements of original dress were appropriated, its musical counterparts were rejected for what was perceived as a structural facility and a naive humanism/optimism in favour of a more cynical and technically complex musical form in the 80s.

The vogue for pastiche and parody could be attributed to two key factors. On the one hand, this reaction was clearly rooted in the generational specificity of youth in the 80s. Their misanthropic distaste for the "cultural revolution" of the 60s/70s was fed largely by the narcissism and materialism that the "Woodstock generation" came to embrace towards the end of the 70s.¹ On the other hand, there was the sense that "(...) in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles" (Jameson 1983, 115). In this specific context, of distaste for the immediate past and apparent cultural exhaustion, stylistic innovation is achieved by

¹Perhaps the youth of the late 80s and early 90s see what those of the post-war generation refused to see: the way in which apparently counter-cultural styles can lead to conservative integration.

reworking old themes and by fusing old styles to create new ones.

The musical preoccupation of the 80s with textuality lends further weight to a postmodern reading of 80s/90s subcultural style as it is evidenced in the case of rap music. In particular, rap songs are composed largely of pieces of previously recorded materials sampled together; thus the "signified (...) is an effect produced by the interrelationship of material signifiers." (Jameson, 1983, 114) Furthermore, rap tends to address other artists both within the texts themselves and within the genre, effectively creating a dialogue between artists and works. This verbal self-reflexivity is one of the key formal characteristics of rap/hiphop as it is incorporated into the boasting, self-assured rhetorical tone of the "rap" (Bailey 1988, 23).

However, the example of rap, inasmuch as it is a constitutive element of various subcultures, can help us sort out the postmodern elements of current youth culture from the class elements. Hip-hop has emerged as a marginalized form of music and is, in turn, still largely neglected by commercial media that cater to a mainstream understood as predominantly white, middle class, and middle aged. Rap can, therefore, only be understood as a subculture in terms of youth rebelling against the "culture of youth". Rap originated and is popular among disenfranchised, black suburban youths and consequently, hip-hop emerged as a

specific strategy for a voiceless population. What is vital to rap's success among this subculture is that the means of its production are not controlled by the industry. Because it can be practised by the youths themselves with a minimum of technology (a voice is the minimal requirement), its production lies in the hands of both listeners and performers, quite literally offering them a vehicle for addressing their own specific concerns in its subject matter. Rap's inception has grown precisely out of youth's generational and racial exclusion from the mainstream, dominant culture.

What becomes apparent is the facility with which rap subculture may be situated not only within the contexts of a postmodern discursive strategy, but also within the British culturist approach to subculture as an imaginary solution to problematic class experiences. Clearly the "class" element comes into play in consideration of the cultural specificities from which rap music emerged, the contexts in which it is used, and the formal elements that it incorporates. The British model for subcultural study does point to the potential that too great an emphasis placed on the generational nature of subcultures tends to overshadow its essential class rootedness:

Indeed, what it disguises and represses - differences between different strata of youth, the class-basis of youth cultures, the relation of "Youth Culture" to parent culture and the dominant culture, etc. - is more significant for what it reveals. (...) It sustains certain ideological

interpretations - e.g. that age and generation mattered most, or that "Youth Culture was "incipiently classless" - even, that "youth" itself had become a class. (Clarke et al. 1976, 15)

While socio-economic factors play a key role in determining the particular life chances and experiences of youth, available information suggests that in some instances subcultures may indeed be "incipiently classless" and, furthermore, that age and generation do "matter most" in structuring the particular responses and activities adopted by youth. Baron's (1989) field study of delinquent punk subculture in downtown Victoria (British Columbia) is one example. His method for gathering data consisted of unstructured interviews with 35 of the subcultures's members, while his focal concerns were largely structured around the theoretical underpinnings laid out by American Functionalist approaches to delinquency and the British, neo-marxist approach to subculture. What his findings suggested was that, in fact, age and generation were more important factors in structuring the subjects' location within society than was class origin (311). "Thus, contrary to theoretical predictions, almost half of the members came from white collar backgrounds" (296) while the other half came from blue collar backgrounds. In addition, the previous theoretical literature on delinquency and subcultures fails to anticipate "the marginal class location adopted by members of a varied socioeconomic background" (297). That is, it

cannot account for the phenomenon of downward mobility as a factor of personal choice. What is significant about Baron's (1989) findings is that they suggest the need for a consideration of the limitations posed by the way that British literature circumscribes subcultural activity on the basis of class.

Chapter Three

Some Problems Arising From a British, Class-based Model

As earlier noted, the Birmingham project grew out of a specific attempt to address delinquency and subcultural studies within a social democratic approach to culture.

In Resistance Through Rituals, culture serves to unite an unequal social stratum. Thus, youth subculture as a set of practices is investigated predominantly within (and to determine its relation to) its working class contexts. Working class subcultures are interpreted here as symbolic attempts to transcend the material conditions of their existence. The nature of this opposition is somewhat paradoxical in as much as a negotiation of imaginary space -a resistance of class status - serves to further entrench its practitioners within their ascribed status. However, a series of problematics arises from this type of class-based analysis because of the way in which it produces subcultural activity as essentially resistant and working class. This paradigm displays a series of limitations, firstly, when encountering subcultural phenomena that do not fit neatly into the above categories (with specific lack of relevance to some Canadian subcultures) and, secondly, for the sets of assumptions that it sets into play surrounding the nature of class culture in Canadian society.

The Limitations of "Resistance" and "Class"

To begin with, the Birmingham group attempts to locate delinquent and subcultural activities within a logic of practice consistent with that of working class parent culture. Subcultures are then seen entirely as a product of working class "resistance" stemming, of course, from a perceived dissatisfaction with their cultural predicament. Yet it is mainly around these axes of class and resistance that British subcultural theory poses a preliminary set of difficulties.

With respect to the factor of resistance, the ethnographies from Resistance Through Rituals deal specifically with those elements of subculture that are readily observable - acts of aggression or violence, style, street life, public display etc. This has, in turn, created an exemplary model surrounding the nature of subcultural opposition, defining precisely how and what subcultures resist. What this preoccupation quite readily precludes are those subcultures which neither appear resistant nor are readily observable. McRobbie and Garber (1976, 213) contend that it is for this reason that girls are largely excluded from subcultural analyses. For the most part, girls are restricted by sexual taboos (real and imagined) against participating in street culture. For both women and girls, public visibility is both confused with and interpreted as

availability. Consequently, working class girl culture operates mainly within enclosed and relatively safe spaces (the home, dances, parties, clubs) and among female peers. Because girl culture is neither as public nor as spectacular as boy culture, it is less observable and thus fails to be analyzed by subcultural investigators. Furthermore, it may be argued that as a consequence of the relatively different or marginalized spaces girls occupy in relation to male adolescent culture, it follows that these patterns of negotiation are likewise differently structured. These differences fail to be analyzed along with the phenomenon itself. Their importance lies in the specific challenge which they pose to the received knowledge about subcultures. In addition, the authors argue (1976, 221) that working class girls' marginal position may be further articulated on the basis of gender itself. Thus, resistance may be understood not only in terms of class, but also with respect to the sexual subordination of females by male (adult and adolescent) culture. Interestingly, this would seem to open up resistance to middle class girls as well. "Teeny-bopper" or bedroom culture offers a safe haven through which to negotiate female space without the interference, threats, or sexual dangers posed by more public negotiations. Thus, resistance may be a function of gender, a factor which is largely overlooked by the Birmingham literature on youth (with the exception of McRobbie's

work, 1976, 1980, 1984).

The Birmingham School's chief focus on readily identifiable subcultural features and practices (largely "deviant" behaviour) among working class youths tends to reproduce the assumption that "(...) in our society, youth is present only when its presence is a problem, or is regarded as a problem." (Hebdige 1988, 17) In fact, the assumptions that subcultures are worth noticing only when they pose a problem or a threat tends to reproduce a classist perspective that isolates working class subcultures as a "problem" while middle class youth cultures are dismissed as non-oppositional. That they still may engage in deviant practices is given little attention by subcultural theory (nor are they generally considered to fuel "moral panics.") Fraternity or college culture is a case in point. In the early 80s at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, the tension between the university community and the local residents living in the campus area had escalated to the extent of a small-scale and local moral panic surrounding the threat to personal safety and private property posed by impending street parties during homecoming celebrations. The local media served to heighten these tensions and the likelihood of a confrontation as this coverage was perceived as a challenge by the students. What resulted was an increasing show of force and disciplinary clamping down on the campus community on the part of the local police force as the

dreaded weekend approached. Finally, the chief of police threatened to submit a request for the aid of the armed forces to deal with the anticipated incident. Perhaps due to the increased efforts of campus security, a hardening of university policy against student misbehaviour and the official strategies used by the administration to avert confrontation, the final homecoming weekend and subsequent street party were relatively uneventful. What is interesting in this case is that it parallels in several ways Cohen's (1972) analysis of the processes which generate moral panics among societal control culture in the 1960s in relationship to the seaside riots between the Mods and the Rockers. However, the Queen's University incident is significant because middle class activities so rarely become the focus of moral panics. Likewise, among the subcultural work of the Birmingham Centre, attention is usually focused on the more visible and easily recognizable working class subcultures. Of course, their potential, and tendency to be used as scapegoats by dominant control culture is precisely the reason behind this analytical preoccupation with working class groups. Certainly the Queen's example would not be accounted for within the British model for subcultural practices. While college or frat-house culture may be approached as subcultural in nature, the extent to which it exists "underneath the dominant culture" (Murdock and McCron 1976, 206,) might seem questionable. These types of

middle class formations are thus neglected by subcultural theory due to their seemingly more "conventional" appearance.

In addition, the element of resistance, said to be inherent within working class subcultures, would seem to preclude any possibility for "resistance" among middle class youths. The logic behind this rationale might go something like this: since working class youths are firmly entrenched in their class position their only course of action is symbolic resistance, while middle class youths, having more access to the means of social mobility and having a greater stake in the maintenance of the status quo, have little reason or inclination for opposing those expectations imposed upon them by dominant, bourgeois culture. Yet a consideration of the imaginary nature of subcultural solutions raises some immediate concerns. The overwhelming tendency here is to assume that middle class youths have a largely unproblematic relationship to bourgeois culture, or that they are particularly insensitive to the inconsistencies that exist between their own expectations (according to the inner logic of bourgeois culture) and their actual experiences. One might consider here the increasing number of young people in Canada with a completed university degree who are working in the service industries due to the limited employment opportunities available to them at present. Furthermore, at what point or at what level does resistance cease to be considered imaginary and

becomes real? If resistance can comprise material strategies, does it cease to be subcultural activity and constitute counter-cultural activity? For example, are student demonstrations or political protests to be approached as symbolic or real negotiations? Can the nature of this type of negotiation be determined only with respect to its end result (its success or failure)? For the most part, the gap between the symbolic and the real, between resistance and confrontation remains largely untheorized by the work of the Birmingham Centre.

As displayed by the British ethnographies of subcultures, the boundaries between sub- and counter-cultures, between failed and successful resistance, appear to fall along working and middle class lines respectively. That is, working class negotiations are perceived as ineffectual in the long run due to their symbolic nature. In this case, class consciousness finds expression through more disguised and highly coded stylistic devices (Murdock and McCron 1976, 203). Conversely, those middle class subcultures which investigate "alternative" methods of negotiation are seen to comprise not resistant but counter-culture. Again, the hippie movement attempted to explore alternative solutions to mainstream culture; new patterns of living, of family life, of work or even "un-careers". Middle class youths remain longer than their working class peers "in the transitional stage." (Clarke et al. 1976, 60) That middle class

youths are afforded more economic, temporal, and spatial freedom for negotiation suggests that their negotiations are optional strategies. Clarke et. al. (1976, 61) suggest that these groups are interpreted as "more overtly political in form" and that "even when middle class subcultures are explicitly anti-political, their objective tendency is treated as, potentially political."

This last statement poses an interesting problem to those elements of Canadian youth subculture which blatantly reproduce particular subcultural styles and practices outside of their "original" material conditions and are apparently not "overtly political." For example, two or three years ago in Toronto, there emerged a trend among young "punks" from upper middle class neighbourhoods to descend upon the downtown strip. The object behind this activity was to spend the day panhandling from passers-by in order to obtain enough money to purchase recordings. That this activity could be read in terms of some socially grounded, class experience in the sense outlined by Resistance Through Rituals would seem highly unlikely, especially in consideration that these young people returned to the comfort of their parents' Rosedale homes. Perhaps such practices have more to do with playing at street life or mastering the currencies of punk subculture than with class-based resistance. Arguably, these youths constitute a subcultural milieu as they:

exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their "parent" culture. (They are) (...) focused around certain activities, values, concerns, certain uses of material artifacts, territorial spaces, which significantly differentiate them from their wider culture. (Clarke et al. 1976, 13-14)

What becomes increasingly apparent is the extent to which the Birmingham work on subculture constitutes a series of selective strategies for interpreting youth culture, growing as it does out of the entre's particular historical concern with deviance and cultural labelling. The authors have chosen precisely those objects which facilitate the desired readings of class consciousness (skinheads, mods, teds). In particular, what a class analysis assumed is that subcultures are an expression of "feelings of subordination, discrimination, unfairness and hostility which are the essence of class opposition." (Murdock and McCron 1976, 281) British subcultural theory also fails to account for the diversity of subcultural choices that can (and are) made from within one particular class location. That is, if subcultures express working class resentment at bourgeois domination and if they express that resentment symbolically, why does the resentment take so many forms? Does one opposition breed one resentment, breeding many symbolic resistances? Or does each symbolic resistance rest upon a specific quality of resentment? Why then do some working class youths adopt "middle

class" subcultural styles (i.e. hippies)? Conversely, why do contemporary middle class youths choose to embrace "working class" subcultures (i.e. skinheads, teds, punks)? To the extent that class consciousness is not overtly expressed by subcultures, ("we are skinheads because we are dispossessed inheritors of a working class sense of community"), class status may not be coherently present in any subculture.

What a class analysis further overlooks is the fact that dissatisfaction with class status may be a secondary factor as far as some subcultures themselves are concerned. Indeed, rather than approaching subcultures as predominantly resistant - an expression of negativity - it might equally be the case that subcultures could be interpreted as affirmative in essence.

In his discussion of youth subcultures in contemporary Britain, Hebdige (1983) outlines the politics involved in punks' visual display as an attempt to reverse the subordinate position that they occupy (and have chosen to occupy) by using the very tools of their marginalization. The subversion of dominant cultural codes through outrageous dress not only connotes an extreme narcissism (considering the elaborate effort involved in the construction of these images) but also a simultaneous denial of the watchful gaze (signified by the poseurs' aloofness, their refusal to acknowledge the look). Thus, while connoting a "to-be-looked-atness," the inaccessibility of these avant-garde, and

particularly, as in the case of the punk, shocking appearances to the mainstream observer, effectively reverses the traditional power structures involving looking. The power of the voyeur is defused by the inaccessibility and complicity of the object of the gaze. What is significant here is the turning of the voyeuristic tables

Subculture forms at the interface between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance. It translates the fact of being under the scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched, and the elaboration of surfaces which takes place within it reveals a darker will toward opacity, a drive against classification and control, a desire to exceed. (Subculture) is both a declaration of independence, of Otherness, of alien intent, a refusal of anonymity, of subordinate status. It is insubordination. (Hebdige 1983, 86-89)

In other words, youth subcultures might be read as a celebration of those symbolic and material spaces that they do occupy rather than the resistance to those cultural spaces that they must occupy. Certainly this approach takes into account the more positive, upbeat and particularly fun elements that subcultural expression holds for its members. The point here is neither to refute that pleasure is socially and materially constructed, nor that its construction is rooted, in turn, in particular experiences, but to indicate that the British approach tends to overlook the pleasure principle of subculture. Clearly, subcultural practices must hold some level of enjoyment to youth.

If one were to survey any given group of youths as to why they participate in particular subcultures, their responses would surely include the pleasurable and entertaining aspects of subcultural practices. Therefore, subcultural theory needs to address the ways that taste, pleasure and consumption as style both interact and serve as indicators of their particular cultural grounding.

Looking for "Class" in Canada

If we are to address the elements of class analysis which are pivotal to British subculture theory within a Canadian context, what immediately follows constitutes a debate over the presence or absence of a Canadian working class resistance. It is this search for the exact nature of class within the Canadian social formation that provides a major source of difficulty to any direct application of British subcultural theory in a Canadian conjuncture. It has been argued that:

(...) theorizing about the state borrows heavily from the works of European Marxists, and it is not clear that their imposition on the analysis of Canadian society does not contradict the Marxist materialist requirement of specificity. (...) contemporary state theory in this country suffers from the lack of a clear depiction of Canadian civil society. (Gaucher 1987, 167)

What shall be endeavoured here is not a precise definition of the exact nature of the Canadian state and its constituents, but an elucidation of how this specific preoccupation with class and the search for resistance tends to structure and facilitate a particular set of assumptions about how class society operates within a Canadian context. Moreover, an analysis of subcultures based on class is inclined to obscure the particularities of Canadian social conflict and the diversity of levels at which economic and cultural struggles for position occur within a national context; the key problem with a class-based analysis is that it tends to problematize Canadian cultural diversity as an indication of consensus rather than envisioning it as a potential source for opposition and change.

In its articulation of the subcultural process as a potential site for struggle over the realm of ideas, the Birmingham Centre turns to the Gramscian concept of hegemony to theorize the often contradictory relationship between the appearance of the state and its essence (Clarke et al. 1976, 38-42). The Birmingham trajectory is particularly concerned with explaining the state's management of consensus at social, political and economic levels which are not mutually exclusive through its apparent response to the demands of particular interest groups, thereby minimizing the use of overtly coercive measures to secure and maintain power, measures which might

threaten its "democratic" and responsive appearance. That is, the state is seen as a terrain of ideological reproduction (and hence, class struggle) through its apparent response to certain demands, chiefly those of the bourgeoisie - at the expense/repression of other groups which remain marginal or in conflict with the dominant ideological interests, comprised mainly of the working classes - which, in turn, find expression through state apparatus. What emerges as a crucial element from both a Birmingham and a Gramscian conception of the operation of hegemonic power is that it is never a given factor (Clarke et al. 1976, 40-41). Rather, it must be worked for or sustained entirely depending on the balance that exists between dominant and subordinate groups (classes). Given the necessary tendency to undergo constant transformation due to political, economic, cultural and historical pressures, the exact nature of hegemony at any given point in time can only be evaluated through its status at a specific historical conjuncture.

If the project is to evaluate the relevance of the Birmingham Centre's appropriation of Gramscian theory to a Canadian context, this amounts to posing a series of questions to the Canadian nation state. Can Canada's state formation be seen to provide an historical bloc which sustains hegemonic control over divergent or conflicting interest groups? Does this hegemony take the form of an alliance of class factions? Is

there a singular "Canadian" ideological framework which dominates both the public and the private discursive arenas? If so, is its basis to be located purely in economic interests? A rather oversimplified response might be to argue that Canada exists as a nation in which the liberal democratic tradition has developed the means with which to bring about cohesion between Canada's dominated and dominating classes through the successful manufacture of a widespread "consent" to the state's logic of practice (which, no doubt, would be seen by Marxists as neither democratic nor liberal).

However, this theory must be grounded in the materiality of Canadian life (Gaucher 1987, 167). Certain elements of Canadian society have posed very tangible difficulties to defining Canada as a distinct and coherent national unity; the physical vastness of the Canadian landscape combined with the sparse and uneven distribution of its population has contributed to regional imbalances in economic, political and cultural development. As British colonial domination began to taper off, American colonization of Canadian technologies of manufacturing and processing (whether information or natural resources) began. Historically, Canadian development and expansion advanced over a period of European economic, industrial and intellectual modernization from which emerges a distinct Canadian condition as Frye (1982, 15) points out. That is, our passage from a pre-

nation state to a post-nation state "without ever having become a nation" thus rendering difficult the isolation of any emphatically Canadian and consistent ideological mythologies at work structuring a unified, national consciousness. There is no dominant definition of nationhood in Canada around which class could cluster. Instead, the struggle is to define the nationhood.

With respect particularly to class factors, Canada's historical and economic development is marked by an absence of a feudal stage. Therefore the "obstacles to capitalist development were more easily overcome in Canada than in most European countries." (Comack 1987, 277) This would seem to support the argument that Canadian society is "thoroughly bourgeois" in nature. Gaucher (1987) situates the historical roots of the Canadian bourgeoisie in, for example, their creation in Canada as a consumer class for British surplus production, serving to soak up surplus capital through consumption and resource investment. "Furthermore, the most common immigrants - the small landholding class, petty entrepreneurs, and skilled workmen - were already the products of the transformation of pre-capitalist populations which had occurred in Britain." (1987, 187) Gaucher's thesis is that consequently the marketplace has served as a major means of discipline in sustaining dependent and bourgeois Canadians (1987, 183). In addition, Palmer (1987) accounts for the highly

selective immigration policy adopted by the Canadian state to its immigrants, granting entry to those desirable cultures whose interests coincided with those of the state's developing economic interests, while excluding others.

However, the assumption behind the concept of a predominantly bourgeois Canada is that Capital's relationship to Labour has not been particularly contradictory and that there has been a marked absence of class conflict or class struggle within the national arena. Comack (1987) points to the inherently simplistic nature behind such an assumption. This is to suggest that there has been no working class resistance in Canada, making the task of bourgeois domination all the easier to sustain. Rather, she says, certain historical factors have entrenched a capitalist class interest particularly:

(...) the monopolisation of Canadian industry; the increasing rationalisation of the production process through mechanisation (...) and the subsequent de-skilling of the labour force. Each of these developments contributed to the erosion of workers' control (...). Therefore, in terms of the dynamics of class and class formation (not to mention the problems of control stemming from the material base), the struggle for control over the workplace was at the heart of the rise of industrial capitalism in Canada. (1987, 229)

What ensued was an uneven development over the Canadian territory, resulting in the industrial centre's economic exploitation of resource development within regional margins.

Hence the uneven development distribution of class factions across the country.

While it may not be appropriate to speak of an institutionalized conception of class conflict within a Canadian context, this is not to say that class differences do not exist. Rather, these differences in economic status are articulated largely in terms of different interest groups entering into a struggle to gain a voice within a firmly rooted ideological hegemony which has marginalized them in the first place. It is interesting to note at this point that these silences of class are reproduced by the very fact that "(...) Canada does not use class categories in its various information-gathering agencies." (Clement 1987, 110) That is, class lines most often coincide with and are identified along regional, linguistic, ethnic, religious and gender-specific lines. Thus, for large segments of the population, ethnicity or nationhood is a more powerful definer than class. This points to one of the key differences between Canadian and British societies. Canada has been a multi-ethnic society much longer than Britain, due largely to immigration patterns. This has introduced a tradition quite unfamiliar to the British experience; for example, the mixing of such diverse groups as Hutterites, native peoples, Quebecois,, and Hudson Bay Co. officials never happened elsewhere and drew on differing notions of class. Must questions of power and

control then be polarized around class conflict? Or might class be considered a secondary characteristic to other cultural definers of social position? In particular, class status may be seen as entrenched in and relative to such boundaries as region, race and gender. To attribute all cultures in Canada to predominantly similar sets of oppositions and class-defined agendas is to erroneously neglect the vital differences of these groups. Quebec's cultural and economic agenda is necessarily different from that of the West or Canada's Atlantic provinces. Likewise the predicament of Canada's native peoples is dissimilar in nature to that of, say, Vietnamese refugees on the West coast.

Comack points to the potential for class analysis to neglect the specificities of the formation of Canada's "working class." More specifically, class analysis tends to encourage the following assumptions:

that without a sustained national working class presence, Canada has been deviant, differential, and bereft of class consciousness. Such exceptionalist arguments are problematic to the extent that they assume either a preconceived, fixed image of a monolithic, homogenous working class or at least some ideal notion of what class formation and class consciousness should look like. (1987, 232)

How, in fact, are we to define class in contemporary Canada? Class status indicators might be determined by occupation, income, family background, education or taste patterns of

consumption. What may have once appeared to be clear cut boundaries within British culture seem blurred in the face of advanced North American consumer society. While one of the above categories may indicate a particular class membership (i.e. income), it need not follow that other indicators to class status (education, taste) must correspond. This, in turn, suggests another area of investigation... What are the key indicators of social status within contemporary North American culture? What precise elements serve to reflect social and economic position within a diverse and highly stratified social formation?

Chapter Four

The Politics of Style

To what extent is style a relevant issue to the question of North American subcultures? To begin with, let us reiterate the propositions put forward by the British literature on youth and the way style works. Firstly, style operates as a language, a spectacular means of expressing lived relations and generational identity through the selection of distinct sets of objects, focal concerns, and rituals which differentiate youth subcultures from their parent culture and from dominant cultures. Secondly, the language of style is semiotically coherent; that is, the organization of stylistic elements works as a system of meaning, whose elements signify in relation to each other and to the contexts in which they are situated. Thirdly, whatever particular message style expresses, the message is also always consistent with the space occupied in class society by the originating subculture. As such, style articulates something approaching class consciousness. Finally, because a subculture's class status in society is firmly rooted by objective sets of conditions (school, family, work, etc.), style is a symbolic resolution offered to the conditions which, for the most part, youths are unable to transcend. Hence, style is an expressive, semiotically coherent class-based imaginary strategy of the young.

Style and Authenticity

When addressing Canadian subcultural styles, what repeatedly presents itself as problematic to this type of analysis is the fact that much of what constitutes subculture in Canada consists of elements which seem "British" or "American" in origin, tone, look, and meaning. This, however, poses a particular problem to the Birmingham tradition. If British subcultural styles are replicated in Canada, that is to say, taken out of their original contexts, what then is the relationship between subcultural formations in Canada and their class basis? In other words, if style is class-based, how can it be imported and replicated? Is the same class bias to be found in Canada? If not, does that mean that style can exist and operate without ready reference to class? And if the latter, is there a flaw in the Birmingham definition of style? More often than not, the typical response to the existence of British and American styles in Canada is based on a series of assumptions: that subcultural formations in Canada bear little relationship to working class culture because, as we all "know", Canada is a predominantly bourgeois social formation and Canadian civil society is consensual in nature. In other words, this response assumes that bourgeois ideology and values have become so dominant, or that oppositional working class values are so weak, or some combination of both, that

indigenous subcultures (and it is now irrelevant to specify them as indigenous "working class" subcultures) have failed to emerge. In Canada, then, the grip of the bourgeoisie is so powerful as to have extinguished even the faintest glimmer of authentic subculture. Presumably, in the absence of authenticity, Canadian youth have turned to the imitation of "foreign" subcultures because an indigenous oppositional discourse has survived, emerged, and flourished in both Britain and the United States. Why the United States is seen as less bourgeois than Canada is not entirely clear, particularly in light of the unambiguous triumph of capitalist property relations in that country. Furthermore, why it should be possible for Canadian youth, their authenticity stifled under the weight of bourgeois values, to even recognize imported subcultures so as to imitate them is also unclear. What is it that prevents Canadian youth from inventing their own subcultures but nevertheless encourages them to "imitate" others? Should this process of recognition/imitation but non-invention indeed be the case, is not the recognition and imitation of these subcultures by Canadian youth significant in and of itself? Does it not bear out precisely what the British culturalists demand, an imaginary solution to real conditions? Too heavy a reliance of the British model demands "authenticity" and in failing to find it, dismisses the entire enterprise as "bourgeois." Both Gaucher (1987) and Taylor (1987) lay out the

theoretical groundwork behind these assumptions. This might be a serious objection were it not for the fact that the working class and resistant subcultures of Britain rely heavily on the use of objects and styles which originate outside the boundaries of white, working class or British culture. For example, the teds were imitations of the American James Dean image.

Consequently, because Canadian subcultures are not seen to replicate the precise sets of concerns articulated through such texts as Resistance Through Ritual, these subcultures are not deemed to be oppositional in nature; they have no bearing on class culture. Hence, these subcultural formations constitute an empty pastiche of "foreign" styles; they comprise merely a pattern of commodity consumption. As a result, youth subcultures in Canada are dismissed because of their failure to correspond to a reading based on British subcultural theory. However, what happens if we begin with the assumption that the problem lies not with Canadian youth, but rather, with the British paradigm's inability to account consistently for different subcultural forms? Brake's (1987) survey of contemporary youth subculture exemplifies the problems posed by the above approach. Brake seems to assume that youth subcultures in Canada are not genuine because they do not meet the criteria prescribed by the British literature; in particular they fail to have any obvious class bias. Specifically, he contends that (1987, 145) youth culture

in Canada is largely derivative and uses elements of borrowed culture, and any oppositional force is highly muted. To begin with, his first assumption seems to be that genuine subcultures only exist in either the United States or in Britain. Therefore, the only recognizable subcultures that exist in Canada are "borrowed" from these locations. Brake clearly reproduces this logic in his observations about youth culture in Canada as he isolates only those groups in Canada which replicates British styles, namely mods and punks (1987, 160). He completely neglects other subcultures: skateboarders, winter subcultures such as hotdoggers, and particularly the possibility for rural youth subcultures. Another problem is his presupposition that British styles are wholly indigenous and untouched by foreign culture while Canadian groups are rendered void of any significant meaning. Brakes's analysis conveniently neglects the presence of "borrowed" or "derivative" objects in use among certain British subcultural groups. Consider the mods' consumption of American soul music or the teds' hero worship of such American pop icons as Jimmy Dean or Elvis Presley after whom they attempted to model themselves (Hebdige 1979, 84). To dismiss Canadian subcultural practices as inauthentic is to neglect the quintessential message behind the Birmingham Centre's work: the importance of context, the consideration of whole ways

of life.

Brake's chapter on Canadian youth culture assumes that those "British" subcultural styles can only create meaning within their original contexts. Consequently, he also assumes that while subcultures can create new meanings for found objects, subcultures themselves cannot be inscribed within new contexts. However, foreign subcultural styles carry an iconography of their own which in turn can be manipulated. Brake neglects the potential for a particular style to function as a signifier within a larger network of meaning which might be inflected with indigenous focal concerns.

For the most part, the model for dismissing Canadian subcultures as "foreign" may be applied with equal fervour to American subcultures which have crossed our borders. One such invasion is the rise of rap culture in Canada's urban centres. Rap has been noted as an indigenous, American subcultural

Indeed, there is an unfortunate tendency amongst British subcultural theorists to standardize or normalize their own experiences born of a specific historical/cultural moment and then to approve or disapprove of other people's subcultures on the basis of whether it measures up or not to their expectations. This reification of the theorist's own experience is especially troubling in a discipline such as cultural studies which attempts to be constantly sensitive to questions of content. In the Canadian context, this attitude amounts, unfortunately, to a new wave of British colonialism as again we are reminded that everything true, genuine and interesting happens, not here, but over there, and as again Britain is held up as the necessary model to which we must aspire. Canadian theorists can be forgiven for being exasperated with and contemptuous of the representatives of this backward-looking attitude.

phenomenon, its roots lying among black youth from Brooklyn and the Bronx. Yet, regardless of its point of origin and despite its neglect by the "mainstream", hiphop is growing in popularity with Toronto's suburbanites through largely underground venues. Bailey outlines the contexts of hiphop's use by West Indian immigrant youth in Toronto:

Canadian hiphop music and its other cultural articulations - clothing, speech, gesture - work here as a metaphor for assimilation. If West Indian youth choose to acclimatise themselves to this country it tends to be through Black American culture (...) this tends to be the process of building black culture in Canada; take from America and inflect with something from "home." (Bailey 1988, 19)

The above is a precise definition of the nature of the bricoleur. That local rap artists in Toronto are appropriating hiphop, and using it to address their own experiences, and have furthermore gained a following for their performances at local community centres illustrates how "foreign" styles may be used to speak to a particular locale.

Brake mistakenly assumes objects are consumed only in ways that are consistent with their intended use; that production maps consumption. This is not only untrue with respect to specific subcultural styles (as objects) but also with respect to objects which are presumed to serve a specific iconographic function within youth culture itself. Rap's unconventional use of music and music technology is a case in point, specifically for the way

in which objects are recontextualized for purposes other than their intended use. "Scratching" is a characteristic formal device of rap created by the manual movement of a record back and forth underneath the stylus. Used as a percussive instrument to create rhythm, scratching recontextualizes the function of the record/turntable. In this case objects for consumption (the record, the turntable) are transformed into objects of cultural production.

Brake further overlooks the ambiguous nature of contemporary consumption as commodities are not always put to use by subcultures without a certain degree of critical distance. For example, a subculture's musical texts cannot be taken at face value. Contrary to what the proponents of pop music censorship might think, the following lyrics are not the product of a satanic, death-worshipping cult.

I don't like the nametag between your toes/
 I don't like the snot hangin' outta your
 nose/ I don't like the stains on your
 pantyhose/ Just your cold stiff body when I
 hold you close/(...)/ Baby, baby I'll hold
 you close/ Quick, quick before you
 decompose. (c) Rebel Tunes, 1978

Rather, this independent release enjoyed an immense popularity among Southern Ontario punks in the early 80s, certainly for its shock value, but primarily for its hilarious send-up of necrophilia and its comment upon the use of sex to sell all manner of commodity. What Brake again fails to acknowledge is

the tremendous tendency among youth for ironic consumption. This is largely responsible for the gleeful purchase of old musical kitsch, Dean Martin, Doris Day and Julie London records being a case in point. Articles are consumed with a certain degree of humour, a sense of fun not discernibly related to class position. Furthermore, ironic consumption may often be stretched to its self-reflexive limits from within a subculture itself, finding expression through self-parody. Consider the West Coast skinhead group Polkacide (the name suggests suicide-by-polka). This band consists of shirtless skinheads performing in lederhosen and assorted other Eastern European peasant-type paraphernalia. The band's style offers a fusion of polka, ska, and hardcore, their songs addressing such questions as "who stole the kishka?", played at a frenetic pace and further rendered noise-like by the feedback from the sheer volume of the performance.

Style, Meaning and Subcultural "Solutions"

The notion of ironic consumption suggests a specific methodological problem which arises when attempting to read youth cultural activities and style at a semiotic level; the interpretation of subcultures must take into account that different subcultural groups make use of objects in different ways. This makes it difficult to discover a single coherent

semiotic position between subcultures or even within a single evolving subculture. Just as objects from "straight" culture may be used ironically, so may objects from other subcultural groups. As in the above example, Polkacide's fusion of both polka music and hardcore is inflected with a certain ironic distance from the guileless reproduction of skinhead culture in 80s Los Angeles. Again, that conventional social groups tend to overlook this element tends to be the driving force behind moral panics surrounding the use of "obscenity" in pop music! It is presumed that lyrics are always used or consumed in a "straight" fashion, overlooking the persuasive element of sarcasm that is required for the correct reading of some of these musical texts.

That subcultural style functions much the same way as a linguistic system has laid much of the groundwork for British subcultural theory's semiotic readings of particular subcultures. As Resistance Through Rituals illustrates, the stylistic elements of specific groups (be they mods, teds, skinheads, etc.) are firmly rooted in their temporal and spatial particularities. Yet, if we are to take this approach to style, we may turn to Saussurean linguistics for its isolation of two fundamental dimensions of language: "langue" and "parole."

The distinction between langue and parole is more or less that which pertains between the abstract language-system which in English we simply call "language", and the individual utterances made by speakers of

the language in concrete everyday situations which we call "speech". (...) The nature of the langue lies beyond, and determines, the nature of each manifestation of parole, yet it has no concrete existence of its own, except in the piece-meal manifestations that speech affords. (Hawkes 1977, 20-21)

Quite simply, langue may be thought of as the set of rules and conventions that govern the structure of speech: its grammar, syntax and orthography. Parole, on the other hand, is the concrete form that these conventions take at any given point in time. Thus, subcultural styles may be thought to function as parole inasmuch as they manifest themselves differently from time to time, according to generational specificities. For example, within the British theoretical approach to subcultures, working class culture takes expression through forms which arise from the interplay of historically specific biographical, cultural and structural forces. Thus, the working class parent culture is understood as a langue of which the various subcultures are the historically contingent parole.

Two questions arise then. Are subcultural styles (parole) subject to the same structuring sets of conventions (langue) that operate in "mainstream" culture? Secondly, is it reasonable to assert that all youth subcultural styles are structured by the same governing sets of rules for expression (i.e. the same langue)?

In consideration of the former, the idea of bricolage might prove helpful. Objects are "found" and appropriated from mainstream culture and recontextualized, thereby providing new meanings/uses for them. For example, the mods' use of the "motor scooter, originally an ultra-respectable means of transportation, was turned into a menacing symbol of group solidarity." (Hebdige 1979, 104) Bricolage, however, is not the sole preserve of subcultures. Mainstream culture abounds with similar practices: the fashion trend of hatpins by women as a weapon for self-defence; the fashion trend of retro-dressing or wearing "vintage" clothing; the antique industry which recontextualizes such old objects as tools for interior decor, etc. What seems clear at this point is that the structuring principles of style function much the same for subcultures as for dominant culture. That is, an object's transformational potential depends entirely on the relationship between its "old" meaning and its "new" meaning. The motor scooter-as-menace can only derive power by virtue of its difference from the motor scooter-as-respectability.

A more tangible example might be provided by hippie counterculture of the early 70s and its valuation of such ideals as anti-materialism/spirituality, inner/beauty, communal living and the taking up of "un-careers." However, the currency of these values as stylistic elements that are reflected through the subculture, gains meaning for the subculture only in relationship

to the cultural opposites to which the movement reacted: materialism, outer/surface beauty, the nuclear family and professional careers (Clarke et al. 1976). In classic Saussurean manner, the meaning of these concepts only takes place around their opposition. To a certain extent, the stylistic elements of the hippie counter-culture are structured according to the same signifying processes as those elements of "legitimate" culture. They may be different articulations - different dialects - but they emerge from the same language.

On the other hand, the British punk movement of the mid 70s seems to mark a distinct change in the way style as parole relates to langue. The elements of style which punks claimed for their own and the specific sets of practices in which they engaged might be seen largely as a refusal to speak the same language as either mainstream or parent culture, that is, as a refusal to negotiate. Perhaps the only unifying theme recurring throughout the punk style was the anarchic confusion of conventional ideas about culture itself, a denial of conventional means of signification. Punk's music negated the notion of "music" per se: non-melodic noise produced by untrained musicians who quite literally do not know how to play their instruments. Punk's concerts rejected established codes of performance and spectatorship; performer and audience routinely hurling both physical and verbal abuse at each other, fighting as social

contact (i.e., slam dancing), the performer joining fights amongst the crowd, the hurling of bottles, and "gobbing" (great expectorations) to show appreciation. Punk's visual style relied only on the coming together of old, rejected fashions, its stylistic elements comprised of the mainstream's cultural detritus. "The rule would seem to be: if the cap doesn't fit, wear it." (Hebdige 1979, 107) Punk boredom was the only really acceptable emotion, excitement came only from anger or violence. The general attitude of punk is encapsulated in the oft-repeated statement: "Sex is boring." At every level, punk was either sheer confusion or simple nothingness, often both at the same time.

Punk's refusal to comprise a "style" in the conventional sense was marked by its saying nothing so loudly. Punk had something to express - a void, emptiness. Within a linguistic framework punk style operated on the level of pure parole, severed from any readily identifiable organizing langue to anchor it. Punk was a language which amounted, as far as the rest of the world was concerned, to absolute gibberish.

Punk's use of seemingly empty signifiers suggests that stylistic expression need not assent to any governing rules of structure. It is for this reason that punk remains so inaccessible to the common observer. Punk simply refused to play by the rules. In fact, it refused to engage with these rules,

period. This is not to imply that the punk movement was in no way connected to and rooted in specific historical conditions; rather what little meaning has been attributed to them might be explained in terms of punk's

(...) refusal to cohere around a readily identifiable set of central values. It cohered, instead, elliptically, through a chain of conspicuous absences. It was characterised by its unlocatedness - its blankness. (Hebdige 1979, 120)

In fact, the punk phenomenon might be read not as an imaginary solution to whatever real and materially unresolvable problems its young encountered, but as an articulation of these problems. Punks attempted no "solutions" because they saw "no future" in it. Instead punks accentuated and revelled in their dislocation from society, their otherness:

The punk ensembles (...) did not so much magically resolve experienced contradictions as represent the experience of contradiction itself in the form of visual puns (bondage, the ripped tee-shirt, etc.) (...) more precisely it expressed itself through rupture. (Hebdige, 1979, 121-22)

This perspective, which views punk as an affirmative rather than a resistant strategy, might allow us to re-read other subcultural groups. For example, skinheads of the 60s could be recontextualized as an affirmative process, as the articulation of the space they occupied within both dominant and parent cultures. Instead of looking backwards with a nostalgic longing for some lost sense of community (which, no doubt, they never

experienced), perhaps they were really looking forward to the cultural and material territory that they saw as both their present reality and as necessary to defend against its future erosion.

This shift in perspective is laden, however, with significant consequences for subcultural theory. It does not dispense with the question of class, but by looking to affirmation first and foremost, it devalorizes the centrality of resistance as key to understanding the meaning of subcultures. Consequently, if the meaning of subcultures now consists more in their affirmation than in their resistance, then the whole question of how working class youths may have been so alienated as to have been goaded into subcultural resistance, becomes significantly less compelling. Furthermore, with the devalorization of the concept of resistance, its status as an "imaginary" activity is also called into question. Indeed, far from being an "imaginary" process of resistance, subcultures might well be a practical process of self-affirmation. Rather than being the expression of alienation from both parent and mainstream cultures, they might well be a process of distinction internal to youth culture. The rage or energy or style of subcultures might not primarily be directed against the culture of adults as against the particular inflections of culture rendered by other youth. Indeed, how can one account for the simultaneous existence of so many youth

subcultures without recourse to some mechanism of internal differentiation?

Let us first consider the imaginary element of subcultures. As noted above, Resistance Through Rituals highlights the symbolic nature of subcultural responses. As such, subcultures are not ideological in and of themselves but express ideological conditions of existence. However, in consideration of youths' negotiation of symbolic space, the authors neglect any potential for symbolic negotiations to yield any effect on reality such that they might afford their practitioners real power.² However, punk subculture proved otherwise as it effectively subverted the traditional economy of the music industry within its own subcultural practices. Garage bands and "amateurs" became "professional" musicians and icons. "Examples abounded in the music press of 'ordinary fans' (Siouxsie of Siouxsie and the Banshees, Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols ...) who had made the symbolic crossing from the dance floor to the stage." (Hebdige 1979, 110-11)

²This oversight is rooted in the class-based preoccupation with resistance. The Birmingham Centre attempted to find sites of resistance among working class youths. Due to restricted class mobility, the solutions that these young people arrived at were presumed to operate only on an imaginary or symbolic dimension as they afforded little immediate opportunity to transcend the materially determined class status of the young people.

Furthermore, under some conditions, certain struggles are explicitly ideological in nature. Consider the feminist movement within which the winning of symbolic space has had quite real, tangible repercussions for women (i.e., the gaining of a voice through which to speak about and among themselves). In particular, when the cultural negotiations of women/girls gain access to the media, the potential to effect change and mobilize audiences have some very "real" material effects:

Punk propelled girls onto the stage and once there, as musicians and singers, they systematically transgressed the codes governing female performance (...) These performances have opened up a new space for women as active participants in the production of popular music. (Hebdige in Lewis 1990, 2)

Lisa Lewis (1990) examines the rise of "female address" videos on MTV. Her thesis is that images of women have traditionally been controlled in the video industry by men. However, the access gained and the control over the production of their own videos by such artists as Cyndi Lauper, Pat Benatar and Janet Jackson have challenged traditional male spaces both in the industry and within the video texts themselves, disrupting the "ideological dominance" of the traditional male address. In her discussion of the elements of "style imitation" that takes place among groups of girl peers as part of the logic of consumer girl culture, she indicates the potential effect that these artists and these modes of address might have on the female audiences:

The hegemonically controlled entry of women into modes of cultural production, both as authors and as audiences, has been undermined by their engagement in the struggle over authorship and meaning on MTV. (Lewis 1990, 12)

Style as a Process of Taste and Consumption

The concept of a cohesive working class formation has proven somewhat problematic to the identification of a dominant Canadian social and cultural order. Such a project is rendered more confusing by using the concept of class as it is discussed within British cultural theory to address contemporary Canada. One of the trajectories of the culturalists' work has been to locate British subcultures as an articulation of the historical structures and cultures of post-war Britain. Thus, one of the overwhelming conjunctural disparities between the period addressed in Resistance Through Rituals and Canada in the 90s is the differential cultural perceptions of class itself. That is, class boundaries are more rigidly defined with respect to the former than to the latter. Within the British literature class is considered for the way that it:

broadly structures young individual's life chances (...) it established certain orientations toward careers in education and work - it produces the notoriously "realistic" expectations of working class kids about future opportunities. It teaches a way of relating to and negotiating authority. (Clarke et.al. 1976, 49).

An individual's class position is seen to determine the biological, structural, and cultural factors which shape his/her experiences. Thus economic class determines or is coterminous with social class.

In addressing a Canadian context, this model largely applies to the case of those groups whose occupation indicates a clearly located class position (i.e., "blue collar" workers, those working in the "professions"). However, when analysis is directed away from these extremes of social and economic position, the middle area becomes more difficult to address in terms of specifically demarcated class structures. This is due to the fact that within the more subtly graduated social hierarchies that exist in this middle territory, economic class and social class cease to have a direct correspondence. As suggested in the previous chapter, the distribution of economic wealth in Canadian society tends to coincide with ethnic, gender, linguistic, and regional lines. These are some of the factors that give rise to some of the inconsistencies between social and economic class. For example, men and women of identical occupations may occupy different economic positions despite their similar social status. Likewise, individuals of equal economic class do not necessarily have the same access to corresponding social classes due to factors of ethnicity. Clearly within Canadian society, class itself does not operate with the primary organizing power that

the British literature attributes to it. Furthermore, this tenuous relationship between economic and social class is readily apparent in terms of individuals who work at similar occupations but cover a range of varied positions in terms of the social class associated with the precise context of their occupation and the precise nature of the taste publics with which they deal. For example, the social status derived from retail work at Holt Renfrew differs considerably from that derived from retail work at Zeller's.³

Within cultures whose class distinctions are quite tightly bound, upward mobility depends on a corresponding increase in both economic and cultural capital. For those individuals who possess a high degree of cultural capital (i.e., knowing how to conduct oneself with the "right people") an upward movement is facilitated by an increase in economic capital. However, because cultural capital is intricately linked to educational capital which in turn tends to remain somewhat fixed, movement to a superior economic class does not necessarily result in movement to a corresponding social class. In this case, upward mobility takes place more often between generations than within generations:

³This suggests a specific area of investigation which blurs once clearly defined class boundaries: cultural capital. Indeed, identical economic status can yield fairly divergent social status. Hence, cultural capital, in this case prestige, can be at least as important as economic capital.

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The embodied cultural capital of the previous generations functions as a sort of advance (both a head start and a credit) which, by providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture from the beginning (...) and to dispense with the labour of deculturation, correction and restraining that is needed to undo the effects of inappropriate learning. (Bourdieu 1984, 70-71)

Bourdieu points to the complexities surrounding the movement from one class to another by showing how both cultural and economic capital find expression: through taste. For Bourdieu, taste serves both as a key indicator of social origin and as a means of circumscribing social trajectories. (Bourdieu 1984,6) Although Bourdieu's analysis of the social hierarchies of taste in French culture is directed primarily at locating the aesthetic roots of authentic high culture and low culture as correlatives of aristocratic and working class cultures respectively, his work does suggest the transformative potential of different types of capital.

However, taste as a tangible expression of capital, whether cultural or economic may, under certain conditions, facilitate social movement since cultural capital can attract very high

economic rewards.⁴ Similarly, economic capital may in some circles be directly converted into cultural capital, in which case it would take the form of the ability to consume appropriate objects, to join appropriate organizations or clubs, and so on. Furthermore, cultural capital is also subject to change in currency, and particularly to devaluations (Bourdieu, 1984, 142). For example, one might say that the value of a university degree has been subject to considerable "inflation" as it no longer yields the same currency on the job market as it did approximately 30 years ago. Thus it follows that hierarchies themselves are subject to processes of transformation and reorganization.

What emerges then as a key difference between European and North American class boundaries is their respective status as fixed and floating indices of social position. Most North Americans tend to differentiate social and economic status not in terms of specific class membership but on the basis of the consumption of particular commodities and participation in particular activities. In a society which is ever-increasingly consumer and service oriented, differences in social and economic position take expression through, and are perceived in terms of,

⁴The success of both the entertainment and fashion industries depends to a great extent on the deployment of taste as a system of socially and economically based references among the employees of those industries as well as among their targeted taste publics.

hierarchies of taste cultures. Undoubtedly, this is one of the products of a mass mediated society, in view of the media's role in the widespread dissemination and subsequent democratization of culture in North America. Indeed, inasmuch as the media have provided a common culture, they have tended both to homogenize us and to sharpen distinctions amongst us. On the one hand, the sharp distinctions between high and low culture are not operative in the common media culture of North America: everything is virtually equally available to everyone and the marketplace, along with factors such as stardom or celebrity, rather than social status, tends to determine which cultural artifacts are widely distributed and prized and which are not. On the other hand, it is also the very commonality of our shared media culture which opens the door to sharpened individualization and distinction. Indeed, in a context of vastly shared references, to which all have virtually equal access, questions of personal style in the manipulation of the references become extremely noticeable. Style is precisely the process of differential manipulation of common symbols whereas taste is both the authority to impose a style - a backlog of knowledge and of acknowledged success - and the marker of group membership. Indeed, it is not enough to adopt or to imitate a style; an adolescent's mother may well purchase all the appropriate accoutrements and still miss the point of the taste group.

Beyond the accoutrements, beyond the style, beyond the differential symbol manipulation must stand the appropriate attitude and the ability to bring one's personal symbol manipulation in line with the group norm. In a sense, taste is a group norm as it operates to define and stabilize a style and to impose it upon claimants to group membership. The right attitude is precisely the willingness to conform to the norm.

As a result of its homogenizing and democratizing tendencies, North American culture has increasingly enveloped a variety of taste cultures and corresponding taste publics rooted in race, gender, age, class, and regional distribution. Consequently, it can no longer be assigned a specific location in terms of a high/low culture dichotomy which was thought to delineate clearly the specific economic and cultural capital of its users. Furthermore, divisions between different taste cultures and their corresponding publics are overlapped and assimilated into one another. Culture as it manifests itself through taste can no longer serve as a fixed index but must be approached as a point of intersection for an entire network of references to highly fragmented and predisposed taste formations. This facilitates not only vertical but also horizontal mobility.

Bourdieu specifically investigates the social construction of taste as a means of reifying and legitimating aristocratic class structures through the "social hierarchy of the arts" and

its subsequent "social hierarchy of consumers" (1984, 1-2). However, despite North American culture's departure from the rigidly codified structures of European class, Bourdieu's discussion of the complexities of taste can be used to elucidate some of the ways in which taste works among subcultural groups. The most obvious of these is that subcultures operate according to Bourdieu's discussion of taste.

Inasmuch as subcultures in North America are symptomatic of the highly fragmented mass of existing taste publics, they may be considered as strategies for expressing the position of their members relative to other taste groups. Although subcultures may be approached as responses, whether resistant or not, to "mainstream" or dominant culture, they serve predominantly to demarcate their members from other youths.⁹ In fact, within subcultures themselves there exist highly structured signals that serve, among members, to distinguish what are considered to be essential differences between particular group orientations. For example, to outsiders, local skinheads appear to have yielded entirely to a uniformity of dress that leaves little room for experimentation. However, the tensions that exist between skinheads of different political orientation (racist vs non-

⁹In their obsession with resistance and class, the Birmingham Centre neglects to emphasize the fact that the "seaside riots" occurred not between youths and older generations, but between youth subcultural groups, the mods and the rockers.

racist, fascist vs socialist) finds expression through an attention to minute detail. In specific, particular value systems are declared by conforming to a surprising system for determining specific individual or group affiliations revealed by the particular colour of bootlaces and braces. As Bourdieu argues:

Consumption is (...) a stage in a process of communication that is, an act of deciphering, decoding which presupposes practical and explicit mastery of a cipher or code. (Bourdieu 1984, 2)

In particular, these types of codes function to circumscribe group membership as the individual must attain a certain degree of competence with these cultural systems in order to maintain any credibility within the group. What is perhaps the most consistent characteristic of subcultural taste is its consistent centring around the notion of "cool", although this expression itself is fairly dated. Nevertheless, "cool" functions as a quality of manner, setting the standards for acceptable dress, practices, consumption, and focal concerns. Of course, it is an elusive and ambiguous quality precisely because it is never made explicit. Indeed, this is perhaps the one rule of cool.⁶ Bour-

⁶What is clear from any discussion of cool, however, is that it depends upon an enormous store of knowledge obtained through painstaking observation and practice. To this, however, must be conjoined the illusion of effortlessness. Indeed, the cool individual must never betray the slightest trace of effort. The whole point of the cool attitude is to make whatever the activity look easy, unplanned, as though emerging spontaneously and naturally from the deepest depths of one's inner self. The more

dieu's discussion of the subtleties of manner among the "aristocracy of culture" seem somewhat analogous:

Manner, by definition, only exists for others, and the recognised holders of the legitimate manner and of the power to define the value of manners - dress, bearing, pronunciation - have the privilege of indifference to their own manner (so they never have to put on a manner). By contrast, the "parvenus" who presume to join the groups of legitimate, i.e., hereditary possessors of the legitimate manner, without being the product of the same social conditions, are trapped, whatever they do, in a choice between anxious hyper-identification and the negativity which admits its defeat in its very revolt: either the conformity of an "assumed" behaviour whose very correctness or hyper-correctness betrays an imitation, or the ostentatious assertion of difference which is bound to appear as an admission of inability to identify. (Bourdieu 1984, 95)

Subcultural taste functions in much the same way. Taste is transmitted through manner. It simply does not suffice to master the codes of "good taste", the individual must also not betray the fact that this predisposition might not have come naturally. Manner implies not just the consumption of the correct objects but makes crucial the assemblage or arrangement of these objects. For example, this means that there is no one punk "look." Rather it is the result of negotiating the correct sort of objects and

effortless, the more cool. The other immediate result of cool is to create instantaneous in-groups and out-groups, those who can "be" cool and those who can not or will not. Cool is the eroticization of competence and a strategy for social differentiation.

putting them together in a highly structured and contrived yet apparently haphazard and careless way. Hence the adolescent preoccupation with the importance of specific items, with name brands, as exemplified for example in the crucial preference for "Levi's" over generic brand jeans.

What might prove the definitive element here is the way that subcultures take this in-groupness to extremes. The specific codes of manner and taste not only circumscribe group membership from within but are adopted precisely for the reason that they are inaccessible to more conventional groups. Subcultures, in fact, create their own aristocracies, their own cultures, which in turn, reflect taste "ideologies."

Again, the way that style operates within subcultures is somewhat analogous to the way that taste serves to indicate aesthetic preferences and thus social position within conventional cultures; that is to say that both at their pertinent levels, create in-groups and out-groups, both indicate belonging and exclusion, both indicate adherence to certain practices and attitudes. However, it might be argued that the point at which subcultures diverge from the mainstream, as outlined in Bourdieu's model, is more closely tied to the nature of the objects to which style and taste refer within each group, than to the process by which taste and style operate. More specifically, Bourdieu's analysis of the distinctions of taste is

grounded in the following notion:

To the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumer. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of "class." (1984, 1-2)

Hence, for Bourdieu, taste is always overdetermined by class; it is at most an indicator of class. Consequently, as class varies, so does taste and, inversely, as taste varies, so does class origin. It is possible, therefore, for Bourdieu to rank tastes hierarchically, much as one might rank classes economically. However, what is interesting about subcultures is that while social hierarchies may exist within them, they themselves cannot be situated vertically in relation to each other on the basis of class. In short, to attempt to construct a social map of subcultural style as a function of class would prove next to impossible precisely because subcultural style confuses the boundaries between high and low culture; objects tend to signify a particular user orientation within a high-brow/lowbrow dichotomy. Yet it is clear that while style works within subcultures to reveal aesthetic predispositions, the objects on which it works are not endowed with the same sets of symbolic meanings as in mainstream culture. Again, one need only consider the mods' fetishistic use of motor scooters as an

instrument of leisure, desire or fun. Hence, we may draw two conclusions from the preceding. The first is that Bourdieu's analyses of taste work well as long as one remains within a stable and clearly defined class system. In other words, Bourdieu's is a class-centred analysis. When transferred to systems not organized around class, Bourdieu's system tends to produce intellectual interference. The second is that subcultures operate without clear or specific reference to class and that some other organizing principle or principles become necessary.

To a certain extent, subcultures have consistently used style either to displace or to disguise class or to reorganize the traditional hierarchies of taste which so effectively operate within conventional culture: the mods subverted the respectable connotations of "good taste" in such a way that they no longer served as reliable indicators of social and moral fibre (if, indeed, they ever did); the hippies outwardly rejected the hierarchies of taste as prescribed by bourgeois culture; punks effectively disguised any semblance of class elements behind an indecipherable appearance. Subcultures subvert traditional processes of taste and the meanings of consumption, both of which exist within dominant culture as clearly defined, concrete, and restrictive sets of cultural practices.

The difference between subcultures and the mainstream lies in the way that subcultures renegotiate the signs to which taste or style refer. Within the mainstream, taste is an indicator of class. Within subcultural activity, taste or style indicate something slightly different: the ability to create style. It was previously suggested that "cool" is a quintessential yet elusive element of subcultural style. At a purely cognitive level, what style signifies is cool. Yet "cool" is precisely the creative ability to master and display competence in the processes of articulating a particular personal aesthetic sense. It is important here to bear in mind that these subcultural practices have little, if anything, to do with the rules governing conventional aesthetics. Again, style may exist as pure parole, without langue. Style (parole) is meaningless in conventional culture without its structuring system of referents (langue); speech is rendered nonsense without a grammar. Yet among subcultures, taste and its expression take precedence over meaning; the act of speech takes precedence over language; the signifying process takes precedence over the signified. What subcultures seem to value above all are the creative and highly idiosyncratic processes that are involved in consumption. Subculture fetishizes creative ability at the level of style.

Perhaps this approach can direct us to one of the key problematics within the body of subcultural literature produced

by the Birmingham Centre. The British model privileges style as an index of class over all factors. The ethnographies of subcultural style concentrate on the decoding of signifiers in an attempt to arrive at some of the precise meanings of the symbolic practice of subcultures. What is needed, then, is a shift in focus away from the invariably class-bound meanings or "solutions" of subcultures towards an examination of the relationships between the way that taste operates within dominant culture (both bourgeois and working class) and subcultures.

For example, the notion of subcultural identity has been addressed within Resistance Through Rituals in terms of its class problematic. The teds' preoccupation with territory, and their extreme sensitivity to insult, particularly when directed at their appearance, is interpreted by Jefferson as a defence of the symbolic group space that they occupied as a response to the declining status of their working class parent culture (1976, 82). But to approach style as the articulation of personal and group aesthetics shifts the emphasis to acknowledging that subcultural identity is constructed around style as a process of personal expression. One of the key recurring and structuring focal concerns of youth groups is a narcissistic preoccupation with minute detailing of style. The operative word here is expression, display being an essential element of subcultural style. Hence the tendency to identify subcultures on the basis

of outward appearance, their "spectacular" nature. Subcultures may occupy public spaces for any number of reasons: to mark territory, to escape the confines and supervision of home and family life, for lack of anywhere else to be, etc. But what Resistance Through Rituals overlooks is the overwhelming amount of pleasure derived from display. Subcultures also congregate in public to be seen: "image serves for members of the groups themselves as a means of marking boundaries, of articulating identity and difference." (Hebdige 1988, 30) Subculture as an expression of stylistic competence, as creative process, would seem to explain the constant tensions that arise when two subcultures come into contact with one another. The mutual antagonism that exists between mods and rockers, hippies and greasers, "frat-rat" and "townies," new wavers and heavy metal fans might not be read solely in terms of class and territory, but also in terms of the relationship between identity, pleasure, and desire. Certainly this is consistent with the way that style predominantly functions within North American youth culture to demarcate different taste groups from one another.

Chapter Five

Musical Youth: Some Problems in Identifying Subcultures

For the most part, identifying subcultures depends entirely on the degree to which a "mainstream" or dominant culture can be isolated for comparison. As already suggested, North American youth culture and its industries have proven problematic to a consideration of youth subcultures as mapped out by British subcultural theory around notions of resistance, class, and authenticity. Given the pivotal role of musical taste in identifying and differentiating subcultural styles, both for academic analyses and among youths themselves, the above difficulties may perhaps best be grasped with specific reference to the relationship between the particular consumer practices of youth and the popular music industry in North America. In fact, the problems posed to subcultural study by the complex nature of the "mainstream" musical culture are exemplary for the way in which they illustrate the blurred and generally untheorized boundaries that are thought to mark out a supposedly uniform and identifiable mainstream for alternative youth cultures.

Indigenous Subcultures in Canada?

It has been previously noted that the rise of hiphop culture among black youths in Toronto suburbs illustrates the way in

which "foreign" cultural products may be adopted and adapted by local individuals in order to meet or speak to their particular concerns. In fact, the formal elements around which rap performance has evolved have facilitated and heightened its potential as a means to address the cultural interests of both performers and audiences. For example, the minimal equipment and/or musical technology allows for an increased personal control by the artist over his/her material while rap's direct address allows for the performer to quite literally engage with the listener and for the audience to respond. However, this thesis also points to the other pertinent areas for investigation: firstly, it suggests something quite indicative of the nature of "mainstream" culture in Canada and of its general addressee: and, secondly, it points to the difficulties of locating and defining indigenous subcultural practices given the global orientation of contemporary youth culture (or simply culture itself) within a North American context. Furthermore, the question of why suburban Toronto youths have turned to hiphop in the first place cannot be reduced to a simple matter of either choice or necessity.

The selection of this particular mode of cultural expression by these youths is obviously related to the voluntary choice of and preference for rap music over musical forms available within both black and white contemporary culture. However, given the

particularities of black suburban immigrant youth in Toronto, it might be suggested here that these youths are also predisposed to adopt and identify with rap music. Bailey (1988, 20-21) discusses some of the ways in which hiphop both draws on and encapsulates certain oral traditions present historically and currently in black culture: the use of "verbal combat" in urban black America, often as "controllable representations of black, uncontrollable violence"; the use of a "rap" within other musical forms (American Rhythm and Blues) , the "toasting" of Jamaican deejays between and over music); the tradition of idiom and dialect that can be traced to the attempts of slaves to effect a type of linguistic escape from white surveillance. However, Bailey also suggests that the selection of hiphop by Toronto youths can also be seen in terms of the absence of any popular culture that might address the experience of these youths:

The generations-old black communities in Canada, in Nova Scotia and parts of rural Ontario, lack the cultural visibility that would make them identifiable to black immigrants. In the central cities, and certainly in the suburbs, young black immigrants had to look to the United States for a culture with which they could identify. (Bailey 1988, 18)

While this somewhat reductive account is by no means intended as exhaustive of the relationships between young immigrant blacks in Toronto and the cultural objects that they select for their own, it does point to the two key elements that come into play when

considering the cultural predicaments of Canadian youth. Firstly, it suggests that black youth "have no firm tradition of black culture to fall back on." (Bailey 1988, 26) Quite obviously, certain youth subcultures in Canada must necessarily rely on "foreign" cultural products due to the simple fact that dominant culture in Canada, whatever it may be, has failed to offer acceptable modes of cultural practice or consumption that either speak to the focal concerns of, or provide meaning for) particular groups that exist as strong, definable cultural formations. At the very least this suggests that, again, dominant culture in Canada has a tendency to neglect or preclude these particular voices and, at most, that this exclusion constitutes racism by virtue of its negligence. The options available to immigrant, or in many cases, non-white youth, in Canada seem to be limited to either cultural "assimilation" or indigenous cultural production.

The hiphop example also underscores the interpretive limitations of subcultural arguments based on "authenticity" What subcultural theory seeks out is something "authentically Canadian." In terms of the British literature, that authenticity is to be found more specifically in "working- class" culture. As a result, this notion of authenticity is highly restrictive and itself verges on the racist and sexist, as it excludes types of "authentic" experience not based on a working-class status.

Furthermore, that immigrant youth should choose to integrate into Canada by borrowing from both the United States, their "native" cultures and pieces of "home", shows the true nature of Canadian popular culture. It is not something emerging pristinely untouched from within our national borders and isolated from the rest of the world. It is profoundly North American. That is, North American popular culture, through its ability to address the cultural preoccupations of particular groups regardless of their locale, is international in nature. Consequently, hiphop culture provides an important clue as to the nature of those subcultures which make use of popular culture: to be Canadian is, to a certain extent, to be North American.

Clearly the search for indigenous youth culture in Canada must take into account the relationship between Canadian youth and youth culture itself as it has come to comprise a large share of the international culture industries. That is, youth cultures rely to a great extent on a North American, popular, and heavily mediated culture industry (the press, music, fashion, films, video, etc. Again, the music industry provides a useful illustration. Indeed, to define youth culture in Canada as North American in flavour by no means implies that this situation is an exclusively Canadian predicament. Rather, the pop music market is largely dominated by American multinationals. "Even highly industrialized countries such as France have had their markets

invaded by foreign, notable American products." (Barac 1989, 80) This factor renders the question of purely indigenous youth subcultures somewhat redundant whether they be Canadian, American or British.¹

One interesting and surprising outcome is that not only have North American products penetrated foreign markets but foreign and particularly indigenous musical forms have (although to a consistently lesser extent) begun to penetrate North American markets. For example, Third World products, both African and South American musics, have become quite marketable within the current music scene. In addition, the established folk traditions of other countries have been fused with contemporary styles (i.e., Irish folk and punk in The Pogues music) which in turn have experienced considerable success on the alternative music scene. The result - similar in nature to hiphop's Toronto inflection - has given rise to an increasing trend among independent musicians and audiences for a "home grown" sound, a return to musical roots in conjunction with contemporary technology to create a distinctive sound (Ottawa's Uncle Vic

¹The nationality of the music multinationals is now more "international" since RCA was bought by Bertelsman GmbH of Germany and Columbia by Sony of Japan. Nonetheless, these "foreign" acquisitions of American cultural industries teach us the following: if you want to be part of popular culture on a global scale, you have to own or be affiliated with an American cultural industry. The sad truth of the matter is that few people want to listen to German or Japanese popular music, but the whole world apparently loves the American product.

being a case in point). So, although North American popular music may be seen to dominate foreign markets, even the "indigenous" nature of North American pop itself has become questionable.² Rather, what seems significant is that the project of isolating indigenous cultural forms or influences on the basis of their points of origin is rendered meaningless by the complexities of the music industry as a producer of international culture. Rather, the question of cultural authenticity must take a subordinate position to a consideration of the cultural contexts and institutions within which certain objects (i.e, music) are put to use by particular subcultural groups.

Subculture and Mainstream: Some Contemporary Considerations

Furthermore, the difficulties of rooting out particular cultural practices within a pervasive North American music industry proves even more confusing when attempting to define a specific "mainstream" against which to situate subcultures. As earlier noted, the youth culture industry has become highly fragmented, especially with respect to isolating musical tastes. This is further confounded by the difficulty in identifying

²What is more, none of this is clearly related to class. On the contrary, it emerges from the internal requirements of the record industry and the evolution of the music audience.

specific markets for specific products, musical styles, genres, etc.

The appropriate audience for any particular music cannot always be defined ahead of time (consider the new listening alliance made up of "high-school kids, housewives, and adult assorted contemporary types.") (Grossberg 1984, 254)

This suggests the problematic nature in isolating a definable "mainstream" music culture. Again, this has to do with the effects of the changing consumer demographics (of youthful consumers) and its effects on the popular music industry itself; in particular, "the failure of the baby boomers to accept and arrive at traditional notions of adulthood." (Grossberg 1986b, 64) A once very specific youth audience has been transformed into a diverse cultural industry centered around youth not as age but as "attitude."

Some elements of an identifiable "mainstream" music might be isolated around particular musical styles, periods or genres (60s rock, 70s disco) or around musical formats (top "40", "lite" rock and "classic" rock). In these instances, the mainstream is defined in terms of the most widely marketable range of products within the pop music industry. However, as Grossberg points out, the musical mainstream as rock and roll has "exploded" into an almost maddening proliferation of sounds and styles with no musical centre, (1986b, 68) What seems apparent is that the youth culture of the 60s/70s has become mainstream culture. In

fact, it might even be argued that the mainstream has become subcultural in the sense that it no longer exists as a consumer hierarchy based on predominant taste publics or generational factors. The fragmentation of the once dominant taste orientation of the music industry was catalyzed not only by demographic changes but also by other social and technological factors in the 80s:

(...) widespread youth unemployment further reduced the already diminishing purchasing power of youth (...) the introduction of inexpensive cassette recording machines had given rise to the unforeseen practice of "home taping" (...) In addition to this, the widespread popularity of home video and video games has further cut into industry profits to the tune of billions of dollars.
(Barac, 1989, 28)

In an attempt to recuperate losses from a reduced market, the music industry was forced to respond by widening its net, so to speak, to include more marginal taste groups among the targeted consumer groups. Arguably, the mainstream - as such - no longer exists. It has been replaced with a series of highly diversified taste groups, a series of varying clusters of styles, genres, and localities which overlap, intermix, and are frequently fused together to create new musical products, rendering the market even more diverse.

This dismantling of the mainstream around a now highly complex cartography of musical tastes tends to reinforce a

reading of North American youth culture as the property of a specific moment in post-war capitalism. Indeed, the tendency within subcultural theory has been to understand subcultures not only as resistant but also as a genuine expression of youth's felt alienation and rebellion. The theory, therefore, required an alienated subject capable of being alienated, of recognizing that alienation, and of constructing symbolic responses to it, but incapable of altering the conditions or outcome of the alienation. However, what is equally obvious is that "youth culture" was and is also a marketing strategy on the part of cultural industries, it is a way of fragmenting and dividing the audience such that the audience will recognize itself in youth cultural products and wish to consume them. The case of the music industry shows this quite emphatically: yes, there may well be adolescent predispositions to existential anguish and emotional turmoil, to alienation, revolt, and rebellion but there is also an industry which gives shape to the predispositions, structures them, channels them, and ultimately manufactures them. Elvis Presley and electro-pop, Johnny Rotten and Boy George, heavy metal and cowpunk may well be the manifestations of the same underlying adolescent predispositions to revolt under the grip of capitalist alienation but to view them only as such reduces them to the indifferent expression of an unvarying prior cause; it robs the adolescents themselves of any creative or

transformative power. To view them as such obscures their genuine textual differences, their appeals to markedly different audiences, the specific modalities of pleasure which they produce, the apparent practices to which they give rise, etc. If our cultural hero is no longer the alienated adolescent suspended between nostalgia for lost community and a lifetime of capitalist exploitation but rather a member of shifting audiences or taste groups, capable of recognizing pleasure and responding to it, traversed by desires broader and more expansive than impotent resentment at alienation, capable of learning and playing, unbounded by any specific age constraints, then we begin to come closer to the reality of subcultures in North America. Class is not gone, it is simply no longer the deadly structuring principle. It finds its place again amongst the multitude of possibilities for inflecting meaning.

Further, should we cling to the new cultural subject rather than to the old one of standard subcultural theory, we will ask ourselves how the pleasure was produced and came to be recognized. In other words, we will be interested in the relationship between taste and cultural industries and amongst taste groups. We will be less interested in the relationship between subcultures and the monolithic fact of class. We will reintroduce into our analysis some of the play and pleasure so obviously to be found in the taste groups themselves.

Youth culture, then, was not simply a property of youth's alienation, rebellion, etc. Youth culture is also a marketing strategy which constructed youth as "different" in order to market commodities to it. It is not youth that constructed its own culture out of the depths of its own lived experience for, at any rate, that experience included commodity capitalism. However, the problem with too strict a reading of this sort is its inherent tendency to assume that youth culture was somehow thrust on the young from above. Of course, youth culture was marketed to the young by an industry controlled by adults. In addition, youth culture as a widespread phenomenon owed its success to the emerging youth culture industries and to the media, without which it could not have attained such rapid popularity. Yet it would seem equally the case that these industries merely capitalized on pre-existing affinities of post-war youth for certain types of consumer behaviours, leisure activities, fashions, and musical tastes that were displayed by their peers who were to become the generation's stylistic progenitors.

In fact, the relationship between the popular youth cultural industry and subcultural style would seem to lend credence to this interpretation. Particularly, the logic of the music industry with respect to the "independent" music scene illustrates the different economies of taste at work in both

fields. For example, subcultures often claim new or "progressive" musical styles as their own. Consequently, they rely heavily on independent or comparatively relatively non-commercial venues (clubs, small galleries, independent radio and particularly the independent recording sector) for access to "their" music:

Without the capital resources needed for mass advertising campaigns, indies tend to cater to more specialized markets and subcultures; their marketing strategies are accordingly oriented not towards taste manipulation but to consumer information and responding to consumer demands. (Barac 1989, 30)

Thus, some of the indies play a vital role in promoting and marketing domestic music that generally emerges from the local cottage industry.³

Because the commercial youth market is structured around the constant influx of new musical styles and tastes, in turn stressing novelty and product turnover, independent record labels often provide the major companies with a pool of pre-tested, "original" talent from which to monitor trends on the music scene. Thus, the independent companies are often used by bands to break into the industry and as a "stepping stone to break into the majors." (Jackson 1989, 37)

³For example, Og Music has operated out of Montreal for the past eight years, fostering anglophone "post-punk" bands from the Ottawa-Montreal and Toronto-Windsor circuits and developing a strong regional public amongst the alternative music scene.

Yet this in itself suggests the tenuous relationship that exists between subcultures and the highly commercial music industry. Generally a particular band will be rejected by its supporting subculture should they be seen as "selling out" or becoming too popular. Whether this has to do with a subculture's preference for remaining on the fringes of youth culture or with the tradeoff that bands are often forced to make between artistic control and commercial success is unclear. Clarke elaborates on the diffusion and defusion of subcultural styles as they are co-opted by the mainstream for mass marketing:

As far as the Youth Industry's concerns go, the styles exist as a potential exchange value in the youth market only if they can be sufficiently generalized to meet similar "needs" of their consumers on a broader scale (...) The symbolic elements, characteristically dress and music, are separated out from the context of social relations, as the elements most amenable to "promotion" for the broader base of the youth market. (Clarke 1976b, 187-88)

An example can be seen in the attention British punk received from the commercial music industry and the interpretation of this attention by many as the "death of punk" as an original and authentic subcultural force. Certainly the punk movement's increased visibility and popularity in the late 70s gave rise to a series of highly commercial and pop-oriented bands which capitalized on the sexually transgressive style of punk culture (Culture Club, The Human League, and within a distinctly North

American context, Madonna). However, Grossberg suggests the contradictory nature of punk's operation within the commercial industry: "punk did acknowledge rock and roll's status as a commodity and the apparent inevitability of its co-optation." (1986b, 61) In addition, he cites how particular bands dealt with these multinational companies in a way that suggested commercial success did not necessarily result in a watering-down of their oppositional force:

(Punk) was not, however, anticapitalist; for the most part, it substituted small capitalists for big ones and, if Malcolm McLaren (manager of the Sex Pistols) is taken as an example, it used capitalist practices to beat the system (e.g., the Sex Pistols were paid by a number of record companies without ever releasing a record. (Grossberg 1986b, 58)

That the commercial youth industry co-opts subcultural styles does not in any way preclude that subculture's existence as a fringe group. Just as hierarchies of taste operate within dominant culture, so do these similar hierarchies of style operate within any given subcultural milieu. For example, early 80s punk fashion in Toronto could easily be identified at several social and economic planes simultaneously: "real" punk street culture, used clothing stores which catered to a distinctly hardcore clientele, Queen Street West fashion boutiques, and commercial chains which offered a safer, less shocking version of the "London streets" look. What seems apparent, then, is that

the commercial industry's absorption of subcultural styles does not necessarily reflect a shifting orientation of a given subculture. Rather, the subculture's relationship might be seen as one of a series of cultural and economic (and in some cases, political) distantiations or a variety of cultural and economic permutations and combinations.

That the entire question of subculture within a given context in North American popular culture proves so problematic for working towards a definition of subculture foregrounds the key assumptions made by British subcultural theory around notions of class, resistance, and authenticity that tend to obscure other equally significant forces at work within youth culture (race, gender, locality, pleasure, taste, the politics of pop). The temptation here is to argue for a shift in emphasis from elements of class and ideology to an emphasis upon the politics and economies of the youth culture industries in terms of specific taste markets. Yet to do so might tend to eclipse the more political or overtly ideological leanings of particular subcultural groups which operate outside or under the surface of mainstream culture. To reduce subcultural style to mere fashion or taste cultures neglects a strong potential for style to function as an expression of personal politics. For example, subcultural styles are often used for their currency as popular political symbols (i.e., skinheads as neo-nazi racists, hippies as political activists, etc.).

What indeed proves problematic to any consideration of subcultural practices in North America, then, is precisely where to draw the line between subculture and dominant culture, between alternative and commercial culture. Around which modality is subcultural difference constructed: class, race, gender, ideology. style? Grossberg suggests that the "gap" between difference and identity:

remains abstract and untheorized, the assumed difference between authenticity and co-optation remains constitutive and equivalent to the difference between subcultures and mainstream, margins and center (...) Paradoxically, at the moment of its visibility, when it becomes available to be studied and interpreted, (subculture) has already begun its dissolution into the mainstream.
(Grossberg 1987, 147)

More specifically, subcultures (and mainstream cultures) have been approached largely in terms of the boundaries that they mark. However, it is the precise nature of these boundaries which is taken for granted and thus neglected. As both McRobbie (1980) and Grossberg (1986) suggest, subcultural theory's focus on leisure and style has overlooked the more conventional contexts of culture which subcultural youths often dovetail: domestic support culture, the kids at work, their points of entry into subcultures, and their growing out of them. As such, subcultural theory has largely comprised a selective strategy for dealing with subcultures.

Chapter Six

Subculture as Canadian Culture

The Birmingham Centre's approach to youth subculture has been largely diagnostic in nature, isolating particular subcultures for study and attempting to determine what types of boundaries these groups mark out for themselves. Yet, what can be said about the spaces, be they material or imaginary, that Canadian youth subcultures occupy with respect to their Canadian cultural contexts? Might these subcultures in fact be seen as somehow Canadian in tone? It should be remembered, however, that this thesis has already argued that questions of indiginity and authenticity are largely irrelevant to an understanding of subcultures in Canada particularly in light of the way in which subcultural tastes, consumption, and related practices operate within the contexts of the North American culture industries. Consequently, how may youth subcultures be located within a larger, Canadian cultural milieu? Perhaps more importantly, where might these subcultures be located within the traditional discursive strategies that have been developed for addressing Canadian culture itself?

The Search for "Canadian" Culture

To speak of Canadian culture is to engage in many of the same procedures which make it possible to speak of subcultures. It is a process which depends on isolating a characteristic set of practices, focal concerns, and stylistic expressions across an expansive and heterogenous range of cultural manifestations. Again, as with subcultural theory, the search for "Canadian-ness" itself is predominantly a diagnostic process. Canada's cultural mappers have, for the most part, been preoccupied with the question of our "difference"; what is it, they have asked, that makes us different from Americans or Europeans or anyone else? What is the distinction that makes us truly ourselves? Difference or distinction have, consequently, been key elements in reflection on Canadian culture. Furthermore, the "other" against which we, as Canadians, are most consistently defined tends to be the United States. Indeed, examples are not difficult to find of the "us/them" rhetorical strategy which seems so characteristic of the Canadian culture debate. Atwood's thematic treatment of Canadian literature isolates the "central symbol" for Canadian experience as the struggle for survival in a hostile environment (1972, 32). Significantly, though, she juxtaposes her discussion of this theme against the American myth of the frontier or the unknown virgin territory to be conquered

which structures the American ideology of individualism (1972, 31). Likewise, Frye would concur with Atwood that our relatively isolated physical environment has been the principal factor in shaping the Canadian imagination. His argument rests heavily on a comparison of the Canadian and American geographies. While the American frontier "has been an open ended horizon in the west", the Canadian frontier has been all-surrounding, stemming from the St. Lawrence gulf and seaway and the Great Lakes, and further fragmented by our regions' geographic isolation from each other (1982, 58). Palmer (1987), for his part, investigates our cultural differences from the United States in terms of immigration and ethnicity, that is to say in terms of our "cultural mosaic as opposed to their 'melting pot'." As for Mathews (1988), he discusses the communitarian founding social contract of Canada in terms of the American individualistic founding social contract.

That this characteristically Canadian preoccupation with self-identity should take form around a supposed opposition between cultural differences of Canada and the United States is tangible evidence of the difficulties of articulating the precise nature of the Canadian imagination. That Canada was colonized by two founding nations, the French and the English, and in turn developed from two distinct cultural and economic centres, Upper and Lower Canada, belies the notion of one distinct and uniform

Canadian nation. As Frye points out, "(...) the necessity of recognizing the major social elements at the beginning meant that nobody could ever possibly know what a 'hundred per cent Canadian' was" (1982, 81).

This initial cultural duality is multiplied by the particularities of the Canadian landscape. Again, Frye, among others, has suggested that the geographical isolation of Canada's regions has furthered the development of regionally distinct communities: "Everywhere in Canada we find solitudes touching other solitudes: every aspect of Canada has strong separatist feelings, because every part of it is in fact a separation." (1982, 59) Thus, he sees Canadian culture in terms of regional interpenetration. Yet if Canada's status as a coming together of regions is obvious in geographical terms, it is equally true in economic terms. Indeed, Canada's economic development as a staples producing colony has largely contributed to the fragmentation or regionalization of the country. As Clement argues:

(...) the centre of Canadian manufacturing and finance is located in the "golden triangle" between Windsor, Toronto and Montreal. The rest of the country is heavily reliant on key resources typically foreign-controlled and destined for external markets. For the North, it is mining and minerals, followed by traditional furs; in British Columbia, it is wood, pulp and paper, mining, fish, agriculture and some hydro; it is natural gas, petroleum and potash, along with grain, on the Prairies; it is mining and

pulp and paper in the Northern areas of Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec, along with hydro; in Atlantic Canada, it is pulp and paper, agriculture, fish, some coal, and hydro. These regions feed the golden triangle and U.S. markets with their resources and, in turn, consume the manufactured products from these centres. (Clement 1987, 101)

What has grown out of this economic imbalance between Canada's industrial centre and its marginal suppliers is both an economic and cultural centralism. Indeed, as the uneven development of local Canadian economies progressed, so did the felt need for a single ideology or culture that would bind the parts together. This has resulted practically in what may be termed a centralist prejudice, a belief that all culture flows from the centre and must be imposed on the margins. Melnyk argues that the national support systems for cultural development (art councils, funding agencies, regulatory bodies) tend to "reinforce central authority and keep regional culture in a state of dependence." (1981, 19) Furthermore, these institutions are not predisposed to furthering regional identities.

Canada's cultural diversity has also tended to fall along regional lines also with respect to ethnicity. In particular, the waves of immigration into Canada were largely determined by the necessities of regional development. That is, immigration policies reflected not an interest in fostering cultural diversity but the desire and need for workers to develop Canada's

resources. Hence the immigration boom of 1900-1920 centred around an influx of workers who settled and developed the agricultural lands of the West. Conversely, post second world war immigrants from war-torn Europe and Mediterranean countries helped to foster industrial expansion as Canada's economic centres required "skilled industrial and urban-oriented immigrants." (Palmer 1987, 90)

What these factors suggest is the essentially pluralistic or non-unified nature of the Canadian population which is both central to and problematic in any discussion of notions of "Canada". Consequently, the particularities of Canadian experiences reveal themselves as a series of tensions articulated as a struggle between dominant and subordinate interest groups: national/regional, federal/provincial, metropolis/hinterland, English/French/multicultural, white/"other", as well as male/female.

This inevitably points back to the paradoxical nature of "Canadian" culture. Indeed, the distinctive element in these tensions with respect to national culture is to be found in the fact that they represent a constant dialogue (or lack thereof) between centre and margin; they represent a perpetual contestation of any and every proposed definition of Canadian-ness. Indeed, each of these voices threatens to drown out the other should a balance, not necessarily an ideal balance of

equality but a balance of force, between them cease to exist. Blum and McHugh (1985) address this concern with respect to Canadian nationalism. Drawing on a Grantian vocabulary, they locate at the root of a nationalist spirit the belief in the Good, that is to say a belief in the particularity or difference of Canada. Again, the idea of difference operates not only in terms of external but also of internal differences. Yet to speak of a national identity -a single unifying image of Canada to which all would assent - is to extinguish the nature of local and indigenous diversities. The problem remains one of defining the common element, the sameness, which all Canadians share and which binds them together while not diminishing their particularity or difference from others which is the source of the "Good" in Canada. In effect, what is required is sameness in difference and difference within sameness. In this respect, Blum and McHugh stress the importance of maintaining a belief in the particular as opposed to an allegiance to the universal, that is to say in clinging to the difference rather than to the sameness, such that the sameness may be said to be precisely the faith in difference. Frye also sees these tensions between unity and identity as definitively Canadian since they take their respective expressions through nationalism and regionalism (1971, 111).

The tensions between these modalities yield two corresponding strategies for addressing Canadian culture as it is

tied to notions of Canadian identity. One strategy realizes identity through cultural differences from within, stressing national identity through diversity and indiginity. It is, therefore, concerned with celebrating the "diversity" of Canada. The other strategy realizes national identity through differences from without and is concerned with questions of self-definition achieved by comparisons with other national cultures.

It is perhaps this latter, more reactive strategy which permeates the popular Canadian self-consciousness; that is that Canadian culture is usually apprehended first and foremost in its difference from American culture; it is understood and expressed firstly as a reaction to something else. This reactive strategy (realizing national identity through differences from without) takes a very concrete and material form: State-run or mandated support mechanisms for national culture. The chief function of these State-inspired cultural agencies (the NFB, the CBC, the Canada Council, etc.) is to produce a national vision of culture which must also be palpably different from American culture.¹

¹The Massey-Lévesque Commission Report of 1951 is exemplary of this requirement as it is redolent with indignant denunciations of American "culture" and impassioned defences of Canadian "Culture". A few brief examples may suffice to give the tone of the entire Report. On the subject of Canadian broadcasting, the authors state: "We are thus (...) concerned with radio broadcasting in that it can open to all Canadians new sources of delight in arts, letters, music and the drama. Through a fuller understanding and a heightened enjoyment of these things Canadians become better Canadians because their interests are broadened; they achieve greater unity because they enjoy in common more things, and worthier things." However, on

Consequently, these agencies are given explicit mandates to foster national unity through cultural expression.² Thus, culture is seen to serve a political or ideological function in terms of promoting national unity by interpreting Canada and Canadians to Canadians. One might even add that culture in Canada is not so much the spontaneous expression of a lived experience as the willed result of a political calculation.

Clearly, the strategy of State mandates influences, as it was intended to, the type of culture that Canadians consume as their own. That many Canadians should then find their "own" culture to be inferior, boring, or embarrassing is hardly surprising. Nonetheless, the strategy of State mandates can result in forms of cultural expression to which their consumers may not wish to assent. Indeed, in attempting to foster a national identity, cultural policy necessarily proceeds by isolating those elements and formations which are most unambiguously Canadian in tone. This may result in, for example, the stereotypical images of the North, native people, the

the subject of American-style broadcasting, the authors state: "That such a system may produce excellent programmes is undeniable (...) But such a system may also produce many programmes that are trivial and commonplace and which debase public taste." (in Roger Bird, ed., 1988, Documents of Canadian Broadcasting, 214)

²Indeed, the mandate of the CBC as expressed in the Broadcasting Act of 1968 could hardly be more eloquent on this matter. Section 2(g)(iv) specifically mandates the CBC to "contribute to the development of national unity".

Prairies, and French Canadian culture not because it is part of the secret agenda of the cultural agencies to perpetuate stereotypes (though it may well be) but because the production of Canadian culture defined reactively to American culture requires that the agencies fasten onto cultural elements which unambiguously confirm the necessity for the agencies' existence. Hence, if the agencies must produce Canadian culture without seeming to fabricate or impose it, it is very useful for them to find pre-existing elements of an emphatically and unambiguously Canadian culture which they can then claim merely to re-circulate or to reproduce. Consequently, what emerges both from a facile interpretation of Canadian-ness and from the role of the public sector in forming cultural policy is that the identifiable Canadian-ness which everyone apparently wants takes its most visible expression in two tendencies: high art and folk art.

Indeed, the roots of this mandated and reactive Canadian-ness can only be found in these two tendencies. On the one hand, folk art is the lived expression of Canadian culture as it existed spontaneously and naturally, before the intervention of any social forces, in its pristine relationship to itself and its natural context. This is hardly an original thing to discover as virtually every national culture in the world would lay claim to some type or manifestation of folk art. Folk art generally expresses the existence of the nation before it was aware of

itself as a nation and is celebrated by the nation once it has come to awareness of itself. On the other hand, high art is the lived expression of Canadian culture's revolt and struggle against American mass/popular culture. Indeed, in its simplest expression, if American culture is base and vulgar, then Canadian culture, precisely because it is different from American culture, must be noble and high. However, high art, because it typically depends on a high degree of technical skill, a vast array of learned references, and an intellectual interpretive strategy, can also claim to be the place in which the deepest meanings of Canadian-ness, only glanced in folk art, are worked through and expressed. Of course, high art, precisely because of its difficulty both of production and of reception, is also the preserve of an intellectual élite which means that this élite not only stands to gain the most from the existence of the State-mandated cultural agencies (they staff them and derive legitimacy for their views from them) but also enjoys a monopoly on the definition of Canadian-ness. From the point of view of the élite, this is only as it should be for the mass can never be entirely trusted to like what it should and is all too prone to express a preference for precisely that against which it must be protected, American mass/popular culture.

Folk art is most evident in certain indigenous traditions and practices (i.e., native art, crafts, "ethnic" festivities,

etc.). Its chief venues to the public consist of museums and locally sponsored festivals. High art is most evident in certain intellectualist traditions and practices (i.e., the paintings of Emily Carr, the National Ballet of Canada, Canadian "literature") and gains access to the public through the appropriate public and private institutions (i.e., galleries, performing arts centres, educational institutions, etc.)

This should by no means be understood to imply that Canadian cultural production occurs only along these lines. As previously argued, different cultural forms and practices overlap, interpenetrate, and create new cultural forms. Furthermore, it should also be remembered that cultural production does not necessarily determine the nature of its consumption. Rather, "Canadian culture" has come to the public's attention in these two forms either as high art or as folk art, either in "multicultural" displays of Canadian-ness on State-orchestrated occasions such as Canada Day or in Group of Seven exhibitions.

The important thing to note is the manner in which the high/folk art dichotomy effectively elides and eliminates middle/low or popular culture in general as something un-Canadian in both origin and tone. Again, the point is not that culture in Canada is necessarily either high or folk. It is that high and folk culture have been used so as to exhaust the cultural field, thereby excluding another huge, and no doubt dominant, area of

cultural expression: popular culture. If the indices of national culture are to be high and folk culture, then the products of the popular culture industry (music, television, radio, film, etc.) will likewise be dismissed by "Canadian" aesthetic standards and hierarchies.

What seems clear is that the two predominant tendencies of high and folk art consist of types of cultural production over which individuals are claimed to have a relatively high degree of control: painting, literature, crafts. In short, the individual subjectivity of the artist, independently of the fact that all artists work under specific conditions and within given traditions, seems to be much more affirmatively present. The notion of individual creativity and control begins to break down when confronted with the more "commercial" cultural industries. Consequently, even the notion of Canadian "content" undergoes determination in terms of the high/folk art standard. Thus Stompin' Tom is more Canadian than Corey Hart, the films of Don Shebib more Canadian than those of David Cronenberg or Norman Jewison, the Beachcombers more Canadian than Street Legal, CBC radio more Canadian than Top 40. Clearly, if Canadian content is defined by the extent to which artifacts reflect or speak to a putative Canadian experience, then to be Canadian, the cultural artifacts must necessarily reproduce those cultural traditions through which Canadian-ness has been defined. This is perhaps

the greatest power of the State-mandated cultural agencies: they not only establish regulatory frameworks and grant or withhold legitimacy, they also define the very nature of Canadian experience. Indeed, by laying claim to the power to define Canadian-ness, they have necessarily already arrogated to themselves the power to define that which was Canadian so that it became legitimate to represent it.

Furthermore, our preoccupation with cultural products and images which confirm our Canadian-ness to us has also helped to polarize taste hierarchies around an aesthetics of realism. Indeed, when culture takes on an overtly representational function, it must express itself in an overvaluation of realist aesthetics. The practice of realism may well be thought of as the product of a representational mandate which has nothing specific to represent, which has no uniform or culturally grounded mythology from which to draw.

More often than not within the realm of aesthetics - and particularly within the realm of the "popular arts" - Canadian style is associated with a realist practice: rendering a form that attempts to document everyday experience by focusing on the material elements of experience. This takes expression in the Canadian cinema, for example, in an overwhelming tendency for location shooting, an objectivist approach to the objects/characters, a "documentary" shooting style, realistic or

"believable" characterizations, a sparseness of action, camera movement and dialogue; all of which leads to a "low budget" look.¹ However, this particular tendency in the Canadian cinema, and in other Canadian art forms, is perhaps most distinguished by its eschewal of the aesthetic and commercial "excesses" associated with the classic Hollywood tradition. At this latter end of the aesthetic spectrum lies a more overtly "fictive", fantastic, and idealist approach. Yet why should these two extremes either be seen as mutually exclusive or be aesthetically partitioned along national lines? Why is a particular aesthetic practice isolated as American in tone? Surely, the same cinematic and aesthetic dualisms exist, and overlap, across American culture in general. That is, high brow and mass cultures cannot be attributed either American-ness or un-American-ness. It would be absurd to suggest that only one mode of cultural expression is available to the American public. What then gives rise to these selective aesthetic strategies in

¹Robert Fulford, writing on Canadian television, has observed precisely this documentary or objectivist urge in Canadian culture: "Even when it [the CBC] finds money for drama, the plays it produces are heavily journalistic - "For The Record," the most admired drama programme of the last ten years, is a collection of problem plays about public issues; "Wojeck," the most admired series of the 1960s, concerned a crusading coroner fighting the political Establishment. The characters were given fictional names and put in fictional situations, but the audience understood that these programmes were extensions of the documentary tradition, public-affairs shows with stories tacked on." (Saturday Night, April 1987)

Canadian culture?

It is as though a significant misunderstanding were operative in discourse on Canadian culture. There is no objective reason for aesthetic styles to follow national boundaries. Indeed, what the example of Hollywood surely shows is that "style" is the result of available conditions. There is little doubt that Canadian filmmakers, if confronted with a Hollywood studio or with Hollywood-level equipment, would and have produced non-documentary fiction films. Indeed, the rise and triumph of the documentary style can just as easily be attributed to a specific conjuncture of events and interests. Hence, these cinematic styles are not so much the expression of ineffable lived experience as of individual interests in relation to available conditions.

The Canadian cultural discourse, however, is inextricably wedded to the notion that there is something out there, some naturally occurring ontological feature of the landscape called Canadian culture which strives to find expression and which must only be given an outlet through the cultural agencies. Unfortunately, all the examples available, including those of the cultural agencies themselves, tend to indicate that culture is at least as much the result of the functioning of the agencies as it is of lived experience. By denying that fact, by denying that they do more than simply give voice to a prior urge, the cultural

agencies and those who defend them commit a crucial and self-interested error. They establish the parameters not of that which may objectively be expressed but of that which may legitimately be expressed. They themselves establish the parameters of Canadian-ness, they do not find and reflect them. They institute a system by which some can be rewarded and others punished for their conformity or non-conformity to the parameters which they have determined. They even go so far as to claim that those parameters are part of a national vision or style rather than the result of a particular socio-historical conjunction. Hence, they come to the conclusion that one style is Canadian and another American. They reserve for themselves the moral privilege of preferring the Canadian style and deny filmmakers the opportunity of using other styles on pain of discovering themselves to have been judged un-Canadian. And in such an event, they would of course be denied the sanction of the cultural agencies which defend the flame of Canadian culture.

To begin with, Canada's physical and cultural proximity to the United States has facilitated the overwhelming influx of American-produced images through the mass media. This is especially true of the more commercial cultural industries (music recording, radio, television, cinema, video, etc.). More specifically, "the disproportionate volume of every kind of foreign, principally American, product flowing into Canada (has)

made it difficult for our own products to be seen and heard." (Vital Links 1987, 11) Quite simply, the disproportionately high volume of American products that is consumed by Canadians is consumed via the mass media. Because those American products which we consume are seen as part of the culture industry, they are associated with commercial interests over purely cultural (elitist) interests. Thus they are seen as reflective of commerce rather than of culture. The fact that the "Canadian" aesthetic tradition - historically characterized as realist - differs so noticeably from the bulk of American cultural products serves to magnify their apparent difference.

To a certain extent, the differentiation of Canadian folk and high cultures from American mass culture on the basis of national origin reflects the traditional intellectual prejudices against the "low brow" qualities and tastes that mass culture is presumed to embody. It is hardly surprising in this connection that one should so readily speak of the industries of cultural production. The point of course is not that this sector is not industrially organized, it is that culture is conjoined with industry in the phrase "cultural industries" in order to show just how much it has been debased, not in order to question the nature and role of culture in all its sectors of production.

Within the commercial arts, culture has been implemented by governmental policy to serve an educational function - we have

always known that high culture was supposed to be good for us - through its institutionalization. Thus the National Film Board was mandated to interpret national culture and identity in order to bring Canadians closer together. Likewise, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

was established as a Crown corporation to develop a national broadcasting service for all Canadians in both official languages which would primarily be Canadian in content and character. (Ostry 1987, 46)

Indeed, that publically-owned cultural agencies were organized to interpret Canada to Canadians for the sake of national unity necessarily meant that the interpretation of what "Canadian" meant was firmly in their control. That is, the function of the agencies was, and still is, to select specific ideas or characteristics and re-present them to Canadians. Here culture is not only overtly propagandist in nature but also serves a somewhat medicinal function; it is good for what ails Canadians. Thus the stage was set for a qualitative reading of Canadian culture as enlightened, genuine, tasteful, and generally to be taken seriously. This might help explain the dismissal of American popular culture for its supposed superficiality, impurity (being commercial), and frivolity.

A similar type of associative process has imbued American culture as a key agent of modernization and rapid technological change. More precisely, technology has provided the greatest

vehicle for the American cultural and economic domination of Canada's culture industries. Likewise, technological innovation is recognized for its globalizing effect on culture. Again, that face of American culture with which Canadians are perhaps most familiar has become imbued with connotations of technological immediacy and hence threatens to overshadow Canadian culture. Thus a Canadian fear of Americanization has largely been located around the notion of American mass culture as the epitome of technologically-mediated cultural imperialism. Perhaps nowhere is this more vehemently argued than in George Grant's dystopic interpretation of the "modern project" as marking the "end of Canada as a sovereign state." (1978, 2)

Technology, Modernity, and Canada

Grant "laments" the passage of a sovereign Canada with the observation that the post-war threat of Americanization was fully realized by the 60s with Canada's full status as a "branch-plant of American capitalism." (1978, 9) Grant reads this loss in terms of a vision of Canadian nationalism predicated on "the sense of common good standing against capitalist individualism." (1978, x) Thus Grant envisions the Canadian social contract as essentially communitarian in nature and the sense of common good as rooted in the human(e) project.

This is consistent with Grant's vision of the modern project which both encapsulates and functions as the driving force behind a de-humanized, capitalist American dream. Simply put, this dream is based on the belief in the rights of the individual above all else whereby historical process (as progress) becomes overvalued as the apex of human progress. Grant isolates this belief as the primary facet of modernity as yet "another upward step in the march of evolution." (1969b, 6) Thus the very nature of modernity is to constantly rewrite the present as that which is passing away and therefore as that which has already passed. The past comes to signify its place as a phase in the modern drive towards constant change and evolution. Thus the present evokes the future. The modern concept of time expresses itself as historical temporality reduced to pure process. In modern society "meaning is not found in what is actually now present for us, but in that which we can yet bring to be." (1969b, 20)⁴

⁴Indeed, Grant does not so much define modernity as argue against it. The definitive characteristic of modernity is not the triumph of a technological imperative; it is the recognition and full assumption of the fact that the rules of human and social conduct come not from a divine transcendence but from human and social interaction itself. This is also a significant part of Nietzsche's concept of the death of God: God no longer commands us. But if God dies, according to Nietzsche, so too does the specific notion of "Man" which God's existence presupposed. Hence, Man dies too. Nonetheless, for Grant to equate modernity with technology is a gross distortion. Technological developments do accompany modernity but as consequences not as preconditions. One could argue, as Habermas has ("Science and Technology as Ideology, 1968), that technology

The danger, Grant argues, in this reconceptualization of time as progress is the overwhelming tendency to "will (...) for the sake of willing itself." (1969b, 19) That is, our will to mastery is directed not only at the physical environment around us but also to ourselves. This leads to an internal colonization as with Nietzsche's end of rational man. In this sense, time as progress comes to occupy the central core of modern man's consciousness, "neither desiring nor thinking." (1969b, 15) The Grantian reading of a Nietzschean rationality can be traced historically through the progress of scientific methodologies of instrumental rationality which have come to dominate the very nature of this methodology, excusing itself from ethical responsibilities. Grant interprets man's end as an historical agent (and the end of his freedom to "make" history) as yielding

has become autonomous within modern societies and that the specific form of rationality appropriate to technological thinking (instrumental rationality) has come to dominate all other types. However, even Habermas, who is very pessimistic on this matter, does not see the triumph of instrumental rationality as a reason for rejecting modernity nor as an opportunity to pine for the past. Indeed, he remains optimistic because instrumental rationality is only one type of reason amongst many. The other types can always be rehabilitated and reactivated. Furthermore, he identifies instrumental rationality itself as an absolutely intrinsic and indispensable part of the human project. So, unlike Grant, Habermas does not believe that reason is or ever was single. Hence, he does not see it as changing totally from one thing to another. Grant, in denouncing the technological imperative believes himself to be denouncing all of rationality. How could he be anything but unhappy? This makes him yearn for a past that never was, a past in which reason is unified and single. Naturally, as all such nostalgia, Grant's yearning impedes our ability to deal with the present that is.

to serve as a mere instrument to the modern project, to the unfolding progress of time as historical process.

In as much as the will to progress becomes an all-encompassing vision of life, we are enveloped within the language of willing. For Grant, this means a series of tensions between the past and the future, between the language of "Good" and the language of willing:

For it is Grant's contention that technological society rests on a series of exclusions (religious morality, mythic consciousness, natural law, the tragic imagination); and a series of actualizations (pragmatic morality, historical consciousness, positive law, and instrumental reasoning). (Kroker 1984, 41)

Once enfolded in the will to technique we, in turn, become further colonized from within:

(...) to mastery of non-human nature be added the mastery of ourselves. The desire for "mastering ourselves" (which generally means the mastering of other people) results in the proliferation of new arts and sciences directed towards human control, so that we can be shaped to live constantly with the demands of mass society. These can be seen applied to the computerised bureaucracies of the private and public corporation, through mass education, medicine and the media, etc.

(Grant 1986, 16)

Thus Grant envisions technology as the apotheosis of the modern project, of the language of willing through which man both asserts his mastery over and becomes an agent of technological

process. Furthermore, technology (or the will to technique) also articulates the American liberalism of capitalist democracy as a menace to the "(...) root of what is most distinctive in Canadian politics - the centrality of community, ethnicity and history." (Angus 1989, 141) Grant sees this threat of Canada's full participation in the American technological empire as having an irrevocably homogenizing effect on the diversity of Canadian cultural existence; a tradeoff of particularity of place and some essential human good for a uniform, global culture:

The argument that Canada, a local culture, must disappear can (...) be stated in three steps. First, men everywhere move ineluctably toward membership in the universal and homogenous state. Second, Canadians live next to a society that is at the heart of modernity. Third, nearly all Canadians think that modernity is good, so nothing essential distinguishes Canadians from Americans. (Grant 1978, 54; 1965)

Canada and it's subcultures

Thus far, we have isolated two traditions for approaching Canadian culture: the culturalist approach, embodied by governmental policy and much discourse on culture, and the anti-technological approach, incarnated principally in the work of Grant and his followers. Although each position adopts a slightly different agenda - the need to intensify existing differences for the culturalists versus the need to resist

American-led technology and modernity for the Grantians - they nonetheless share much common ground. Indeed, both approaches tend to imagine "Canada" negatively, that is to say in terms of its "Other"; they find something which is not Canada and against which they can define something which is Canada. For both perspectives, the "Other" is the United States or, more specifically, the mass produced and seemingly homogenous culture which originates with American multinationals driven by a technological imperative. At the root of this menace lies the homogenizing potential of the "Other"; for the Canadian culturalist this threat is cultural whereas for the anti-technologist it is socio-political. Indeed, the culturalists fear that Canadian culture, which they see as separate from politics, will be absorbed into the American pattern whereas the anti-technologists fear that the Canadian pattern of life itself, a social contract which they see expressed in culture, will be absorbed into the American contract.⁵

⁵It is significant to note, in this respect, that government policy does not so much aim at creating a culture which is different from American culture but rather at a Canadian culture which can compete with American culture on broadly shared terms of cultural production and value. It is, however, precisely the idea of competition which offends the anti-technologists. They do not want Canadian culture to compete with American culture because that would require it to adopt many of the same strategies of production and circulation. On the contrary, the anti-technologists want Canadian culture to be so different in its conception, creation, circulation, and consumption that the very notion of comparing it to American culture would be out of the question.

This brings us back to the question of subcultures. Exactly what position does each tradition, by virtue of its own logic, ascribe to youth subcultures in Canada? We might presume that from the Canadian culturalist perspective, youth subcultures would be highly problematic. Indeed, youth subcultures in Canada are largely consumers and, as such, are not seen as consumers of "Canadian culture". In other words, they delight not in the wrong practice (consumption) but in the consumption of the wrong culture (American rather than Canadian). This is clearly because their subcultural activities tend to coalesce around the consumption of products (i.e., popular music, fashion, etc.) generated by cultural industries which are themselves dominated by American images and American corporations whose agendas are set solely by the marketplace. Thus, it might be argued from the Canadian culturalist position that youth culture is both a product of and a major contributor to the American cultural invasion of Canada.

However, we have already seen in earlier chapters that the relationship of youth subcultures to the youth culture industry is itself problematic, for at least two reasons: a) the cultural industries themselves no longer target youth subculture as a specific regions as they once did in the 60s and 70s because young people are no longer the demographic force they used to be and b) the products of the cultural industries are not

necessarily consumed by young people in the manner in which their producers may have intended. Concretely, if we take the example of music, this means that most youth subcultures are nowadays unable to find "their" music on major record labels or on commercial radio stations. As a result, they turn to alternative suppliers, chiefly independent record labels, local and indigenous "live music" scenes, and independent radio stations. Due to the modesty of their operations, independent recording companies are largely forced to concentrate on local or regional markets. Hence, these companies are predominantly Canadian owned and operated. Furthermore, they tend to draw their talent from a local or regionally-specific pool. Likewise, non-commercial or "alternative" radio stations attempt to fill the gaps left open by commercial radio stations. That is, their programming tends to be oriented to the particular and varied needs of the taste community in which they operate. Therefore, while these musical venues may not adhere to a culturalist notion of "Canadian content", they nonetheless serve to foster and promote local talent and address the particularities of indigenous Canadian communities. In short, "Canadian content" is a bureaucratic notion used by cultural agencies to control cultural production; it is not a notion which adequately describes that which is produced or consumed in Canada. Its function, then, is not so much to foster cultural production in general as to foster the

specific type of cultural production which will by its very existence justify the work of the cultural agencies and legitimate the social position of the élites who staff and operate them.

If so far, we have shown how the problematic nature of the relationship between youth subcultures and the cultural industries does not justify the suspicion that subcultures are forces of Americanization within Canada, then we can equally show how the second factor - ironic consumption or the fact that production does not map consumption - also does not justify such a suspicion. It has been noted earlier that youth subcultures cannot always be relied upon to make use of the products of the culture industries in the manner for which they were intended. Let us again consider the example of hiphop. Hiphop originated from a specific moment in black, urban, American experience. Nonetheless, it has been appropriated by Toronto followers who have inflected it so as to address and reflect their focal concerns and experiences as urban, black youths in Toronto. This is equally the case as regards the subcultural bricoleur and the fashion industry. For example, punk style depended entirely on retrieving cultural relics or current fashion discards. Thus "(...) the most unremarkable and inappropriate items - a pin, a plastic clothes peg, a television component, a razor blade, a tampon - could be brought within the province of punk

(un)fashion." (Hebdige 1979, 107) It would seem to follow, then, that Canadian punks, while refusing to partake in "Canadian culture", also prefer to maintain some distance from the more commercial or popular elements of mass culture.

In addition, the sheer diversity of subcultural expression in Canada suggests that the "homogenizing effect" of American mass culture anticipated by both the culturalists and the anti-technologists has failed to occur in the apocalyptic fashion foreseen. Just as subcultural meanings and the use of particular objects are not uniform, neither are the political or socio-cultural concerns of subcultures necessarily consistent. Consider the current co-existence within the Ottawa skinhead community of neo-nazi, white supremacist skinheads and anti-racist, feminist, "environmentally aware" skinheads.

The logic at work in the Canadian culturalist perspective is similar in tone to that of Grant's anti-technological perspective. According to the latter, the Canadian social contract has been reformulated along the lines of an American, liberal vision of capitalist democracy driven by the "will to power". If Grant's worst fears have been realized, then the Canadian "mainstream" might indeed be characterized by "pragmatic morality, historical consciousness, positive law and instrumental reasoning". However, youth subcultures may, in some instances, be interpreted precisely as responses to this occurrence. That

is, because dominant society has failed to provide youth a meaningful space and because the experiences of these youths negate the "truth" of dominant liberal ideology, dominant culture is perceived as empty, hypocritical and meaningless, offering them "no future". For example, some of the youths in Baron's study expressed their disillusion with Canadian society's agents of social reproduction and thus questioned their inherent value systems: "Education was resisted because it only qualified them for menial, low-wage employment or was viewed as an ideological tool to shape their consciousness." (Baron 1989, 301) In this instance, subcultures may indeed be a direct expression of the contradictory messages behind the mainstream's ideological prescription for success and the actual (lack of) availability of opportunity (i.e., high levels of unemployment) to achieve this success. In extreme cases, subcultural resistance to the mainstream "(...) means the adoption of marginal socio-economic locations." (Baron 1989, 311) That these "solutions" are in some cases preferred alternatives to being successfully channelled into "useful" members of dominant society tends to support the view that subcultures comprise alternative "maps of meaning (...) objectivated in the patterns of social organization and relationship through which the individual becomes a 'social individual'." (Clarke et al. 1976, 10-11) Furthermore, subcultures address the particular focal concerns of youth

precisely because their experiences are predominantly neglected by the mainstream (i.e., Toronto youth listen to rap because there is no strong Canadian tradition of black culture in which to partake).

In conclusion, the major problematic posed by these two selective strategies for approaching Canada and its cultures lies in their rather narrowly defined notions of culture; federal policy of the culturalist approach isolates cultures as historically-rooted and institutionalized products (high and folk cultures) while the Grantian, anti-technologist stance necessarily invests Canadian culture with an oppositional force against the modern project. More specifically, each tradition erroneously identifies culture in terms of unified and consistent practices. Thus these selective strategies fail to consider and thus cannot account for the very indigenous and diverse ways in which culture can both assert itself and be consumed. Furthermore, it is those cultural practices which both of these Canadian discursive traditions eschew (through the consumption of popular culture) which yield a considerable potential to address or inflect a "whole way of life" of a particular group. (Williams 1981, 10) Clearly then popular culture and its use by subcultural groups work in such a way as to reflect the plurality of Canadian identities.

Chapter Seven

De-colonizing Canadian Cultural Studies: Canadian Culture as Subculture

The direction of this thesis has grown out of a particular interest in reconciling British cultural theory with the diverse body of work produced by Canada's cultural thinkers in the somewhat naive hope of arriving at a more specific Canadian cultural theory. However, the historical, political, and intellectual specificities from which these two traditions have emerged marks, predictably, their divergent nature as each charts discursive boundaries around their respective subjects. That is to say, that while the work of Canadian philosophers, historians and cultural mappers tends to address questions of Canadian identity and nationalism that are rooted in Canadian history as well as our particular cultural problematics, the Birmingham Centre is based quite firmly in a British marxist, historically and materially grounded discourse. Hence their seemingly mutual incompatibility. The theoretical tone of British theory's ideological and strategic preoccupations renders a reading of both the philosophical and/or moralistic thrust of Grant's anti-technological lament and the elitist implications of Canada's cultural policy that suggests their crucial investment in such hegemonic strategies. Similarly, a consideration of the historical specificities to which British cultural theory speaks, from the standpoint of a contemporary Canadian conjuncture,

diminishes the effectiveness with which British theory might be used to address questions of both culture and class in Canada. Consequently, any attempt to effect a theoretical transition from the specific to the general is frustrated by these theoretical and conjunctural disparities.

However, it has been attempted in the preceding chapters to draw out these problematics by examining the phenomena of youth subcultures in Canada. To approach this subject from either the British or the Canadian perspectives is to relegate Canadian youth subculture to the fringes of what may be considered - by both sets of standards - positive, authentic, uniform or coherent and consequently, of any significance. Yet this endeavour should by no means be limited to an explanation of the ways in which both traditions in cultural thinking have failed to account for subcultural activity in Canada (though, indeed, they have). More important, rather, is the manner in which these two traditions have adopted strategies for approaching and defining culture that limit the relevance of these traditions to their respective objects of study. How, then, might this failure be accounted for? Furthermore, what might be said about the relationship between the application of British cultural theory to subcultures and the Canadian culturalists' rendering of Canadian culture?

To begin, what is significant is the similarity between those affective strategies adopted by both Canadian and British

culturalists? Both, for example, are concerned with questions of cultural authenticity. From the perspectives of both Canadian cultural policy and the anti-technologists, authenticity is defined in terms of indigenous national culture. Hence their attempts to define identity through some shared element of cultural consciousness. Yet despite the fact that both traditions are concerned with indigenuity or diversity as an expression of the particularity of Canadian experience, their respective cultural strategies are paradoxical. That is, the remedy that they prescribe to cure the ills of Canadian culture (i.e., the homogenization of American popular culture) actually restricts or limits the diversity of cultural expressions available to "Canadians". A similar type of strategy for thinking about culture can be observed at work within the British context. More precisely, the British approach to culture refers to "that level at which social groups (...) give expressive form to their social and material existence". (Clarke et al. 1976, 10) Because this expressive form is seen as a function of class, subcultural activity is, in turn, viewed as primarily an articulation of working-class experience. Thus both class and class-based resistance become the primary means by which subcultural authenticity may be determined. However, this approach might be exposed as an affective strategy of culture in consideration of the existence of subcultures (in Canada, at

least) whose constituents do not display a uniformity of class origin. This inability to account for the cross-class basis of some subcultures is rooted in British theory's search for consistency (i.e., class and resistance) across a diversity of cultural practices.

This inability stems primarily not from British theory's conception of culture, but from the effect rendered on the cultural object of study by its investigative strategy; that is, British theory assumes that cultural objects and activities express cultural experience in a clear and consistent fashion. If subcultural styles and objects function as indicators of class and resistance, then subcultural theory's reading of style and practice necessarily must reflect this resistance. Subcultural artifacts are presumed to operate according to a consistent and reliable set of meanings. Yet to approach culture as a signifying practice requires the recognition that the meaning of cultural signifiers (objects, artifacts) is determined only by their placement in relation to other signifiers (objects, behaviours, contexts). Thus cultural meaning is never a given but is, rather, purely relative. For example, subcultural style reveals something about its bearer. However, the meaning of style, as an assemblage of cultural objects, is never fixed. Meaning can only be arrived at through a consideration of the internal logic of individual or subjective tastes and desire as

well as the objective biographical, structural and cultural factors that come into play in the construction of desire. Thus British subcultural theory's assumption that subcultural objects always function as a reflection of class is contradictory to the very way that culture operates. This contradiction results directly from subcultural theory's inability to account for the role played by desire in subcultural activity.

This ambiguity of strategy is paralleled by Canadian theory's disavowal that products of an American-dominated culture industry may either be put to some indigenous use or made to address "Canadian" experience. Given the assertion, by Canadian culturalists and anti-technologists alike, of the importance of "Canadian" culture to Canadians, how might one account for the overwhelming popularity of "American" cultural products in Canada? In other words, if "Canadian" culture is something both with which Canadians should identify and which they should prefer to American culture, why is this not the case? The most obvious answer lies in the culturalist account of the economic disadvantage of Canada's cultural industries. That is, there are simply more "American" products available to Canadians than "their own" culture. However, it might also be argued that Canadians prefer American products because they speak to Canadians in a way that "Canadian" products do not. Certainly the former are more accessible to the public - both

intellectually and commercially - than either the Canadian high or folk culture traditions. Mass culture is more democratic than the "Canadian" traditions imposed by the culturalists. That is, mass culture may speak to particular taste groups and individuals in any variety of ways. For example, individuals may well consume "popular" music seriously, taking it at face value. But, as previously illustrated, they may also consume pop music ironically (i.e., to make fun of it). Furthermore, pop music may be recontextualized to create new meanings (as in the musical texts of rap). Similarly, the Canadian consumer is free to use popular culture according to his/her own particular, specific and indigenous needs and desires. Clearly, cultural consumption (as a consideration of subcultural processes shows) is not simply a matter of passively ingesting those products which the culture industry feeds us, one object yielding a lexicon of meanings across any given consumer group.

Neither subcultural artifacts nor objects within Canadian culture can be ascribed a general or fixed set of meanings. One might further argue that a certain affinity exists between the irregularity of youth subcultures and an anomalous "Canadian" culture itself. Earlier in this thesis it was suggested that punk subculture functioned as parole without a governing langue, a set of signifiers without a concrete set of signifieds. Yet this model might be further modified to speak to Canadian culture

as it exists within a larger context of North American popular culture.¹ More precisely, the relationship of Canadian to North American culture might be articulated in terms of the parole/langue paradigm. Indigenous Canadian culture arises not from cultural policy, but from a series of biographic, cultural and structural forces acting on and coming into play with subjective experience. If cultural expression may be regarded as parole, the corresponding langue which governs it (the system of meaning) is likewise a highly personal creation.² Like style itself, the production of indigenously meaningful culture lies in the hands of its user (whether "Canadian" or punk). The particular cultural products which originate from the North American culture industry might be seen as a variety of paroles (articulations) delivered unto the structuring langue of the bricoleur. Canadian culture, as parole, is governed by a diverse and unfixed langue of Canadian subjectivities and, hence,

¹North American popular culture is used here to refer to the mass of "American" styled and/or produced culture which has now become global in its popularity.

²That is, people are given, or choose, a product which they proceed to interpret and use according to their own tastes or desire. This might be thought of as choosing a langue through which to articulate the specific meaning desired.

indigenuity.³

This model, then, addresses the problematic posed by both British cultural theory and Canadian theory. That is, both authentic subcultural identities and indigenous Canadian cultural identities are a product of diversity. Just as subcultural identity cannot be generalized (in terms of class and resistance) because there exists no common set of subcultural preoccupations, experiences and expressions, Canadian identity can be seen as a series of articulations (reflecting or expressing particularity or indigenuity) without a common voice (i.e., a unified national culture) through which to speak.

The advantage to approaching Canadian culture as a subcultural process is the utility with which some of the Birmingham Centre's key concepts for addressing subculture may be appropriated and modified to prove meaningful to a Canadian conjuncture. It is important to note, however, that these concepts (in their British specificity) must not merely be reproduced and applied to a Canadian context. Rather, they must be adapted to speak to Canadian particularities. Again, the notion of culture as a set of relative cultures cannot be overly stressed. The notions of cultures in struggle for position

³This paradigm might be further used to explain the global popularity of North American culture itself as a vehicle for personal expression (parole) governed by the internal logic of indigenous cultural experience (langue).

(whether cultural, economic or symbolic) might thus be read neither in terms of working class/bourgeois oppositions nor Canadian/American oppositions but, instead, as a series of tensions between margin and centre expressed around such axes as taste, ethnicity, gender, language and region. Marginality is therefore articulated not only by class but equally by these variables in conjunction with the particular structural and cultural forces at work at any given time and place. Finally, style, taste and desire may begin to be theorized not only in terms of these elements, but also taking into account how individuals, as cultural or social actors, conceptualize their own identity.

Furthermore, to read culture as essentially affirmative in nature is to problematize the similar cultural perspectives of the British and Canadian theories which valorizes culture itself as a reflection of uniformity (either as class experience or national experience respectively). To envision the Canadian imagination in terms of an "identity crisis" is to see Canadian culture as essentially disadvantaged in comparison with other, apparently homogenous, national cultures. Such a strategy of culture defines Canadian experience as somehow rooted in some place and time other than here and now, thus impoverishing both Canada and its cultures.

To address questions of Canadian culture or subculture within a Canadian context, at present, would seem to require a consideration of either British cultural theory (from which Cultural Studies in North America has derived a great deal of its intellectual currency) or the work of Canada's "canons" of cultural thinking (as they both are informed by and inform national policy on culture, and, perhaps most notably, are articulated through the voice of Grant's "lament"). Yet to interrogate their respective applicability to and accuracy in addressing Canadian culture(s) reveals not only their inaccuracies or misrecognitions. Most important, it reveals the extent to which our intellectual traditions have been colonized by these academic compradors. If the project of Canadian cultural studies is to prove a meaningful and truthful endeavour to the specificities of Canadian experience, what seems apparent, then, is the necessity of breaking free of those selective and affective strategies which cannot or will not address the particularities of indigenous, cultural experience in Canada. In effect, what is needed is a de-colonizing of cultural theory in Canada.

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