



The University of Birmingham



Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
University of Birmingham
Birmingham 15.

Stencilled Occasional Papers

THE SKINHEADS AND THE STUDY OF YOUTH CULTURE

by

John Clarke

Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies
University of Birmingham.

The Skinheads and the Study of Youth Culture

by

John Clarke

Department of Cultural Studies
University of Birmingham,
P.O.Box. 363,
Edgbaston,
Birmingham B15 2TT

© DES & author

This paper is not really about the Skinheads as such, but uses them as an example to try to fill out a more theoretical approach to the analysis of youth culture.¹ This approach is based on three theoretical points

- (1) that youth cultures are class based;
- (2) that cultures represent both the subjective experience of a structural situation and a collective response to the problems of that structural-cultural situation.
- (3) that English working class culture has evolved as a subordinate culture, subordinated to the structural and cultural control of the bourgeoisie. By saying that it is subordinate, we mean that it is neither totally controlled by the dominant culture nor totally free from that control, but that it enters negotiations with that dominant culture at strategic points, and as a consequence the expression of the central values and concerns of the working class occur in displaced forms, typically in those areas where the dominant structural and cultural arrangements are at their weakest.

In applying these understandings to the analysis of youth culture we have identified four main areas of interest:

- (1) the class situation of the bearers of the youth culture.
- (2) their relation to their parent culture
- (3) their relation to other youth cultures, and
- (4) the "meaning" of the cultural style itself.

1. The class situation

Skinheads first emerged as a formalized style early in 1968, and had their original roots in the East End of London. The

Revised version of paper for National Deviancy Symposium, York, Sept. 1973. (The quotations throughout are taken either from 'The Paint House' (1972) or from my conversations with a number of ex-skinheads in Birmingham).

1. An outline of this approach is in J. Clarke and T. Jefferson (1973).

significance of this location is that the East End perhaps best exemplifies the changes undergone by many working class districts in the last twenty years. These changes have affected all the crucial areas of working class life, the occupational structure; housing and neighbourhood structure; the family and leisure patterns. All this is perhaps not to say more than that English society has undergone dramatic changes in the post war period, but it is within such traditional working class areas that these changes have had their severest and most visible consequences.²

(a) Occupational structure:

The fundamental changes in the post-war occupational structure affecting such areas as the East End were those stemming from technological changes and the increasing use of mass production techniques. The fundamental consequence was a polarization of the job structure into two categories, those highly skilled, specialized and well paid, jobs associated with the new technology and the demand for labour to fill routine unskilled and low paid tasks, both in production and service industries, captured in the phrase 'dead-end jobs'. A simultaneous change was the collapse of small scale specialized craft trades which were central to the neighbourhood occupational structure of the East End. The brunt of these changes was born by those who had previously filled skilled and semi-skilled jobs - the 'respectable' working class.

These changes have continued to bear heavily on the children of these families, as traditional patterns of employment closed down, new alternatives did not open. For the majority who did not gain sufficient educational qualifications for the technical posts,

² The areas of Birmingham which produced their own distinctive skilled groupings show similar sets of changes to those of the East End. See White (1971).

resignation to one or a succession of dead end jobs, or to periods of unemployment was the only realistic avenue. The experiences of those problems are compounded by the other half of the education-employment nexus, the schools. School is still felt to be a situation where one is subject to the whims of figures of external authority: in John Holt's words (1964:p.24):

"It is a place where they make you go and where they tell you to do things, and where they try to make your life unpleasant if you don't do them or don't do them right."

School is also where one is forced to learn and reproduce irrelevant information:

"You don't use everything that you're taught at school. Say you're a van driver, you don't use 'istory, science, technical drawing, woodwork or metal work." (Paint House,p.46)

More importantly, school tells you what society thinks of you; one learns, in effect, ones supposed place in the social order, and the value which society gives to that status. Leading, perhaps for many, to the frustrated plea of

'I ain't no good, they told me at school I ain't no good'.
(Paint House:p.38)

This lack of positive self identity which many experience in the schools is given added power by one of the crucial changes in the schools system. Following the 1944 Education Act, its ideological self representation as an open, achievement oriented system where each individual supposedly receives the education he deserves, serves to underminé the previously held negotiation of education failure, where schools uphdd the fundamental class divisions between 'them' and 'us' (not least in economic terms). To the extent that parents subscribe to this ideology of achievement, the expectations for the boys, and their consequent experience of failure, are

heightened.

This experience of school is carried over into employment through the mediation of agencies such as the Youth Employment Service, where, as the boys realise, they cannot escape their school history:

"If you're thick they don't wanna know you but if you got a bit of education and you go in, they can't do enough for you. If you want a trade or something, you go up to the upper blokes, the ones upstairs, but if you just want anything, they'll keep you downstairs. I went up there and they just seemed to pawn me off, they didn't wanna know." (Paint House:p.61)

Both the Youth Employment Service and schools careers programmes have to negotiate the contradictions between ideologies of equal opportunities and the possibilities of selecting jobs to satisfy one's own needs and the reality facing most of these youths of both lack of choice and absence of intrinsic satisfactions. The negotiation is attempted, albeit unsuccessfully and with an inarticulate awareness of the contradictions, through the inculcation of "realistic aspirations".

Housing and neighbourhood:

The redevelopment of working class neighbourhoods has brought with it its own set of special problems. Those areas which have developed strong skinhead groupings have shown a similar complex of related changes. Firstly the population structure of the neighbourhood has been altered, in one way, by a 'downgrading' of housing with an influx of coloured immigrants seeking sizeable and inexpensive properties and congregating (both for reasons of mutual assistance and as a consequence of the housing market) in particular districts.³ In a second way, by the "upgrading of housing through an influx of young middle class families seeking their own homes in districts possessing a certain "character"; and thirdly by the rehousing of long resident working class families on new housing estates, such

3. See Rex and Moore (1967).

as Dagenham or Quinton and Ladywood in Birmingham. Whatever the combination of these changes, the net result was to remove the social and cultural homogeneity of the area.

The physical redevelopment of these areas also had severe effects on the neighbourhood culture, and acted in two main directions. One was the destruction of what Phil Cohen⁴ terms 'communal space', by removing and altering those major foci of it, the street, the local pub, and the corner shop. "Instead there was only the privatized space of the family unit, stacked one on top of each other, in total isolation, juxtaposed with the totally public space which surrounded it". (p.16).

The second major dimension of these effects was the breakdown of the extended kinship patterns of the neighbourhood. This occurred both through the geographical redistribution of families to new areas, thus separating families by marriage from their families of origin, and through the architectural design of the new flats and houses which were built to fit the needs of the typical middle class nuclear family, not the needs of an extended kinship network. Thus the family unit could no longer draw upon its traditional supports of extended family and neighbourhood, especially during the early phases of redevelopment, until new patterns of adaptation could be established.

These effects were recognized in the subjective experience of the youths themselves, especially where traditional neighbourhood ties were strong, as this quotation indicates.

"The particular block of flats that I lived in in Stepney, Ring House, were a complete transfusion of people from a street called Twain Court. So what you had was the same quality of life in Ring House as you had in Twain Court, except that new people live side by side and over and under each other.

⁴ P. Cohen, "Subcultural conflict and working class community".

Everyone knew everyone else intimately. Flats are not like that now. Flats are not what I remember Ring House being, 'cause they draw people from all over. They don't take a street full of people, who have sort of seen each other and 'elped each other and fought each other, and sort of lived together. They don't take that lot and say bang you lot are gonna live in 'ere. That particular good thing is missed in blocks of flats, because they 'ave taken a person from 'Ackney and another from Woolwich, and so on." (Paint House: p.19).

Leisure and Consumption:

The development of the so-called 'classless' society has been most visible in the field of leisure, where once clearly marked class boundaries have become quite blurred. Partly this stems from the wide availability of new forms of leisure options (e.g. television and cars), and partly from changes in older leisure institutions.

One major dimension of this has been the decline of the neighbourhood as the focus of leisure, and a concentration of the major leisure facilities in city centres. The closing of local cinemas has been followed by the redevelopment of multi-cinema centre town sites, while city centre pubs have set the red-sign standards and patterns for many one time 'locals'. Many of the stylistic changes owe much to the image of youth as affluent and potential consumers, a trend which is even more visible in the most recent form of centre town leisure facilities, the discos.

These clusters of central facilities have meant that local provisions have been forced into competing for trade on the terms set by those facilities, the development of stylized interiors for pubs, the provision of evening discos and pop concerts, and the restructuring of some surviving local cinemas. These changes embody a belief in the changing nature of the users of those facilities, seeing him as possessing the once-clearly middle class characteristics of affluence, nobility and the ability to make

'rational' selections among the leisure alternatives offered to him. This change is reflected in the emphasis of 'competition' in the 'leisure industry'⁵, and is captured in the description of the role of the user as moving from that of member to that of consumer.

Most importantly for the discussion of the skinheads, these changes are also visible within professional football.⁶

The main post-war changes in football may be summarized as those of professionalization, internationalization, and commercialization. I will briefly expand on each of these changes and then attempt to account for them and finally set out their consequences for the game.

Firstly, professionalization refers to an increasingly calculatory awareness in the game of the technical requirements for success. This attitude is manifested in concerns for tactics, scientific methods of training and high demands of physical fitness. Similarly, rapidly rising transfer fees indicate the readiness of clubs to add to their assets in order to assure success or avoid failure.

Secondly internationalization describes the increasing introduction into the game of foreign competition as a supplement to the domestic game. This has taken the form of both cup competitions and friendly fixtures. There have also been a number of attempts to introduce more theatrical additions to the game, such as American style cheerleaders, and the pre-match release of balloons.

Finally the commercialization of football is to be found both in the increasing financial concerns of the game, rising transfer fees, entrance prices and gate receipts. These concerns are also

5. Also of note is the diversification of those companies once involved in only one sector of leisure provision.

6. This section draws heavily on the work of Ian Taylor (1971).

to be found in the widespread group improvements made by football clubs. The improvements to facilities include the creation of more seated accommodation, improved provision of toilet and bar facilities, better refreshment facilities, including restaurants at some grounds, and the creation of social clubs for supporters. Football clubs, anticipating the disappearance in the new social order of the traditional cloth-capped football fan, felt they would have to compete for audiences with the providers of alternative types of entertainment, television especially. If the traditional fan no longer existed, then nor would traditional loyalties, and they would be competing for the favours of the new classless, rationally selective consumer.

Consequently, the game had to be made as exciting and dramatic as possible to appeal to the uncommitted, the spectator had to be made comfortable, and his every whim catered for. Further, the uncommitted were unlikely to come each Saturday to watch an unsuccessful team, therefore greater attention had to be paid to avoiding failure.

Ian Taylor describes the combined effect of these changes as "Bourgeoisification", which is the process

"which legitimizes previously working class activities for the middle class or more accurately, activities which were previously seen as legitimate only for the working class, such as watching doubtful films or congregating on the kop".
(1971:p.364)

Taylor symbolizes this audience change by commenting that:

"Clearly to attend the Saturday game is no longer simply an activity of the Andy Capps: the Brian Glanvilles and the Professor Ayers of this world are unashamedly interested."
(1971:p.364)

This process has brought with it a changed conception of the football supporter. The "genuine" supporter is no longer the traditional cloth-capped figure, living for the Saturday game, his own fortunes inextricably linked with those of his team and actively participating

in the game, but has moved towards the passive, selective consumer of entertainment, of the game as a 'spectacle', and who objectively assesses the game. I would characterize this as a transition from the "fan" to the "spectator". These changes are by no means total, either in the character of the football crowd, or in the club's attitude to their supporters, but the changes which have taken place certainly have had the 'spectator' in mind.⁷

The difference between the new bourgeois involvement in football and the traditional experience of football is well illustrated by Hunter Davies' recent reporting of the 'Skinhead Special'. Davies travelled to Coventry with a trainload of Spurs' skinheads and stood with them on the terraces. He says that because of all the singing, shouting and scarf waving they couldn't have time to observe the nicities and technicalities.

"It would be too easy to say that they weren't interested in the game only in the result. But by the very nature of standing physically and precipitously so close together and by making so much noise and raising their scarves and pushing each other, it is hard to believe that they can ever follow the details of the game. Coventry did win, by one goal to nil. Unlike Bill Nicholson, the fans didn't criticize the Spurs players. They didn't even admit that Cyril Knowles had had a bad game, which he had. Cyril was bloody unlucky they all said." (1972)

What Davies has missed, with his passive, rational analysis of the game, is the physical and emotional experience of being part of a football crowd united in your support for your team.

This example also illustrates a dimension which is missing from the analysis of similarities in leisure patterns, which is, that involvement in similar activities may hold alternative meanings for different groups. To put it more theoretically, cultural artefacts

7. This and later sections draw on arguments from J. Clarke "Football and Hooliganism and the Skinheads". (1973)

and activities do not totally determine the meanings attached to them, but are susceptible to being appropriated by different groups for their own uses and be invested with their own meanings.⁸ An irrelevant but clear example of this is in what I once thought to be a gentle and imaginative children's folk song which turns out to be (from another cultural viewpoint) a communist inspired incitement to young people to use dangerous drugs.⁸ The song in question, as I'm sure all reds under the bed spotters will realise is "Puff the Magic Dragon".

Parent Culture:

In turning to the relation of youth cultures to their parent cultures which I have chosen to do is to take what I feel to be the most fruitful formulation of this relationship, that by Phil Cohen in his article 'Subcultural conflict and working class community' and try to select those points at which I feel our analysis differs significantly.

To summarize his argument, Cohen sees subcultures as a way of working out the internal conflicts of the parent culture by decenting the "tensions which appear face to face in the family and replacing them by a generational specific symbolic system". Thus for Cohen, working class youth subcultures have the "latent function of expressing and resolving "albeit magically", the contradictions which remain hidden or unresolved in the parent culture". And the fundamental contradiction is that, at an ideological level, between traditional working class puritanism and the new hedonism of consumption, the subcultures come to symbolize one or other of the options open to the parent culture.

⁸. G. Allen 'more subversion than meets the ear' in Denisoff and Peterson 'sounds of social change'.

The point at which we diverge from Cohen is on the extent of continuity between parent and youth cultures: that is, we do not see the youth culture as merely resolving the contradictions of the parent culture. There are two dimensions to this. Firstly, there are significant discontinuities as well as continuities between the parent and youth culture in both structural and cultural situations. Most notably these lie in the areas of education and employment, where the young are faced with structural positions and cultural experiences of them which are not identical with those of their parents. Indeed, as we saw with the educational ideology of equal opportunity, this lack of identity may be the source of extra problems for the young to resolve. Also the fact of being in different structural and cultural positions (although these are in large part derived from their parents' structural and cultural positions) means that different cultural responses are open to the young.

This opens up our second difference from Cohen, for his view of the parent culture is an implicitly static one - it is for the youth culture to resolve the problems for the parent culture, whereas we would argue that the members of the parent culture are themselves, simultaneous with the development of youth cultures, evolving new negotiations with, and adaptations to, their changed positions, for example the development of more family centred leisure patterns, and involvement in institutionalized nostalgia such as 'Coronation Street'.

To illustrate these points, I want to return to the earlier discussion of the changes in football. In the period of these post war changes, with football clubs coming to identify themselves as part of the 'leisure business' and carrying a changed image of the spectator the pre-war working class involvement in professional

football (in which football gave expression to some of the central values of working class culture) was undermined.⁹ It was altered both from inside the game itself by the changing image of the supporter and from outside by the changing structural position of the working class and their self image of their place in that new social order. As the parent culture was moving towards a more spectatorial position in football, so members of the younger generation were experiencing the bourgeoisification of football from a different standpoint. The 'subcultural rump' as Ian Taylor describes them, attempted to reassert in particularly distinctive ways, the relation of the 'fan' to football - becoming what might be called the 'superfan', and acting out of football's position in working class culture: most notably those of territorial loyalty, violence, and excitement. The transitional nature of the parent culture's relation to the spectator image of the supporter goes some way to explaining the ambivalent attitude of many older supporters to the activities of those "hooligans" at matches.

Thus the parent culture and the youth culture evolve their own sets of negotiations to the same structural 'crisis', while the youth culture can be seen to be reproducing (although in a distinctive form) and resolving some of the tensions of the parent culture's own changing situation, and it can be seen that these differing responses between the parent and youth culture create their own tensions and ambivalences.

This example also serves to illustrate one further important difference between the cultural responses of the parent culture and the youth culture, which is that the parent culture's negotiations typically involve legitimate and institutionalized outlets, whereas the youth culture's responses are often non-institutionalized (e.g. street

9. See Critcher "Football as popular culture: an outline".

delinquency) or "illegitimate use of institutionalized facilities, is partly dependent on their exploitation of two types of social space. Firstly, the traditional leeway afforded to youth to 'have its fling' before assuming adult responsibilities (though this leeway is often double edged, simultaneously celebrating the freedom of youth and condemning its irresponsibility); and secondly, the space provided by those leisure facilities which have developed specifically around the 'teenage consumer' market. Through such 'space' the young are more able (temporarily at least) to impose their own definition and meaning on the situation.

Relation to other Youth Cultures:

Their relation to other youth cultures is the last of the historical dimensions along which the Skinheads must be placed. The previous few years of English youth culture (from 1964 onwards) were dominated by two groups, the Mods and the Underground. The Mods, as Phil Cohen observes, were an attempt to realize, in stylized form, the socially mobile, affluent worker style. Their dress, music and use of drugs reflected, though in forms never envisaged by the expounders of the affluent society thesis, the hedonistic and conspicuous consumption involved in that image. But by 1968, the 'mod' style had become almost totally institutionalized and commercialized, its oppositional and threatening elements worn away by its incorporation as a style of consumption (as opposed to a life style.) Its dress had been incorporated into the glossy image of Carnaby Street and nationwide chains of boutiques (not to mention that still-existent phenomenon the trendy executive). Its pop heroes, once integral elements of the subculture itself, had become institutionalized as superstars, the untouchable properties of the music world, involving themselves increasingly in production and musical complexities.¹⁰

¹⁰ On this point, see P. Fowler (1972)

Roger Daltrey of the Who gave his view of this process in an interview with Sounds last December, referring to how the group had lost that "working class feeling" in their recent music (especially the LP "The Who's next") by becoming overconcerned with more "polished production".

As Cohen notes, the Skinheads represented a 'systematic inversion of the Mods - whereas the mods explored the upwardly mobile option, the Skinheads explored the lumpen".

If the Skins represented an inversion of the Mods, their view of the underground and hippiedom was one of almost total opposition. The hippies were basically middle class, individualist and intellectualist (especially in terms of their music, indulging in the complexities of jazz-classical-rock, or the 'significant' lyrics of contemporary folk music). Pete Fowler comments that "nothing was more loathsome (to the Skinheads) than the junk of progressive rock" (1972).

The hippies were also highly visible in terms of their clothes and hair styles, which, as this quote shows, were not seen as the skinheads' approved style.

'The older people started wearing hippie styles, I don't like 'ippie style. Couldn't stand the way they dressed, too scruffy for me, it looked dirty and scruffy.' (Paint House:p.34)

For those "about to be skinheads" attempting to create and support a meaningful identity in the face of the situation they were condemned to, existing youth cultural options were virtually bankrupt. The mods had been dissipated into a commercial corruption of the original distinctiveness, and the Hippies were essentially alien and meaningless.

Reading cultural style:

I now want to suggest that the "meaning of the internal elements of a style such as the skinheads can only be understood by locating it against this sort of historical background. The culture itself is an expression of the subjective experience of that historical conjuncture and a response to it. The elements of the style represent the most formal objectifications of that response, being both an integral part of the culture and a stylized representation of it. What I am going to do now, using Phil Cohen's fundamental insight that the skinheads offer a stylized reassertion of the traditional concerns of working class culture, is to examine the elements of the style as articulating those concerns.

The return to football (an element absent from previous working class youth culture developments) articulated a number of those concerns. Most importantly the support of a particular team provided a focus for the assertion of territorial loyalties, involving both a unified collective identity (We are the Holte enders, the shed etc.), and an assertion of territorial rights, not those of property ownerships, but of community identity. As Cohen notes:

"Territoriality is simply the process through which environmental boundaries (and foci) are used to signify group boundaries (and foci) and become invested with a subcultural value". (p.27).

This assertion takes place both physically, through the defending or taking of the home "end" and symbolically such as through the slogans such as "Smethwick Mob rules here". The Skinhead mobs placed great emphasis on this territorial basis, and the 'mob' may be viewed as an attempt to retrieve the disappearing sense of community, with its emphasis on mutual assistance in moments of need. Thus, one fundamental rule was not to 'cut and run' from fights, as one

ex-Smethwick skinhead said:

"The only real thing that they put pressure on about was if you were the first to run and leave a fight. They'd get you for that, no matter what happened in the fight."

The general point is reinforced by this comment:

"It's a community, a gang, isn't it, it's only another word for community, kids, thugs or whatever....."
(Paint House: p.31)

This defence of community may also be seen in the less frequent involvement in "paki-bashing", an inarticulate response to the threat to the cultural and racial unity. Coloured immigrants are also obvious scapegoats for the problems of the working class, being doubly visible. Firstly in a racial sense, and secondly by visibly competing with the working class for limited resources (notably housing and employment) within a particular district. The real nature of the structural inequalities are by comparison obscured by geographical and ideological barriers. Further, at the time of the skinhead's crystallization, such racial scapegoating was given public and official support and incentive by the statements and actions of both Labour and Conservative parties, and by sectors of the media (at a theoretical level, this reinforces the point that subordinate cultures are not self-contained but are infused with elements of the dominant culture). However, "paki-bashing" was not a simple expression of racial scapegoating, for it was overlaid with a significant cultural component which distinguished between Asians and West Indians. West Indians were not seen as so extensive a threat because many of the patterns of their culture were much closer to those of working class youths than were those of the Asians, whose introspective, family centred and achievement oriented way of life was much closer to a middle class outlook.

The Asian culture was especially visible in terms of the patterns of local shop ownership which developed in the areas in which they settled. At a simpler level West Indian youths were respected because they were tough, and willing to defend themselves.

To return to football, it also provides and allows the expression of excitement. That expression is supposed to take place within certain legitimate and institutionalized boundaries (e.g. those of chanting and cheering, but excluding the use of 'vulgar' and 'crude' language). The source of that excitement is institutionally supposed to be the match itself, but the skinheads extended both the source and expression of excitement (illegitimately, of course) through their own violence. Fighting both expressed their involvement in the game, and was a source of excitement both directly in the physical activity of the fight and indirectly as a topic of conversation to dispel the continual threat of boredom in the periods between fights and other group exploits.

The violence (both actual and talked about) acted as an expression of toughness, of the masculine self image. Of particular symbolic importance here is the group activity of "queer bashing", for the definition of queer extended to those males who looked 'odd' (i.e. who were not overtly masculine looking) as this statement shows:

"Usually it'd be just a little bunch who'd find someone they thought looked odd - like this one night we were up by Warley Woods and we saw this bloke who looked odd - he'd got long hair and frills on his trousers."

It is significant that both the Mods and the Hippies had gone some way towards undermining long standing cultural images of masculinity and femininity. The Skinheads attempt to assert a clearly defined masculinity can also be seen in their clothing and hair styles, which gave a stylized 'hardness' to those who wore them.

The clothes also had a strongly functional appearance, looking like an extension of working clothes (and indeed parts of it were functional - especially the boots!). By way of a general conclusion about the style, it is a necessary precondition for working class youth cultures to provide both a feeling of control and a strongly validated identity to their members, as those are denied to them by their structural situation. As those two statements show, the skinhead style offered both:

"You got a terrific feeling of power, when a group of 200 of you were running down the street, nobody would dare touch you, even the police kept out of the way."

"Well, it got you a lot of attention didn't it - the press and things, everybody knew who the skinheads were...if we hadn't done those things nobody would have noticed us."

Some notes on "cultural diffusion":

The emphasis in our general approach has been on the grounds of specific youth cultural styles, and has involved no specific attempt to survey how the style spreads and is taken up by other groups. However I feel that some general comments on this topic can be made.

Firstly, I would suggest that the means by which such styles are diffused can be divided into two main areas: the mass media, and the personal-group contact with bearers of the style. Mass media stereotyping of specific groups, although intended to condemn and exclude such groups, may well have the opposite effect.¹⁴ It makes certain elements of the style available to a wider audience, among whom may be groups who find it homologous with their concerns, and appropriate it for their own use. Although that use is unlikely to be totally unrelated to the central elements of the style itself,

¹⁴ See, for example, Jock Young's analysis of deviancy amplification, 1971. Theoretically, although the message is encoded within the dominant meaning system it is open to different decoding by those within a subordinate or oppositional meaning system. (See S. Hall, 1973).

it is not totally determined by them either, so we would expect to find variations in the use and meaning of the original style occurring in accord with the particular situations and concerns of different groups. One major effect of such stereotyping is to focus attention on particular stylistic and behavioural elements, and less on the overall content of the subculture. We might characterise this representation as the presentation of a "life style" as a "consumption style".

The second means of diffusion - that of face-to-face contact (in the case of the Skinheads, typically at football matches) is also likely to produce a concentration on specific stylistic and behavioural elements. The taking of the "name end" by a group of visiting skinheads is not a situation which is conducive to obtaining a fully detailed and sympathetic understanding of the inner workings of the subculture, rather it is likely to create and reinforce association between the style and the situated behavioural elements (the violence, in this case). Both of these 'methods of diffusion' point to a conclusion which is also reachable from a different perspective. Simply that the creators of a style are likely to have greater commitment to a particular style (i.e. a greater concern with its authenticity) than those who take it up at a later stage. In Schutz's terms it is part of a primary zone of relevance, that area which one is, in part, able to dominate and control, rather than a secondary zone, one which provides materials to be appropriated for one's own project. (1970:112)

The Politics of Youth Culture

I want to conclude with some comments on what we have called the 'politics' of youth culture: this use of 'political' is a wide

one by which we mean that members of youth cultures are involved in a struggle for control - the attempt to exert some control over their own life situation. They attempt, through their negotiations to create meaning for their own existence and to symbolically express those, rather than simply acquiescing in the dominant cultural meanings. That these expressions should take place symbolically rather than in terms of verbal articulacy should not surprise us in a culture where such articulacy is viewed with suspicion and distrust, and whose members are systematically denied the articulacy necessary to express their real situation.

This struggle to control meaning is one which is fundamental to the social order (especially where the dominant class is attempting to extend its cultural hegemony). Here one can see the significance of the media's stereotyping (and thereby redefining) youth cultures as an attempt by the dominant class to reaffirm its own view of society as the only correct one. It is not coincidental that in a struggle to control meaning, that one of the most frequent adjectives used to describe disapproval of behaviour by the young, should be meaningless.

Bibliography

- J. CLARKE and T. JEFFERSON "The politics of popular culture: cultures and subcultures". Paper at Conference "Popular culture: Europe and America"; University of East Anglia, August, 1973.
- J. CLARKE "Football Hooliganism and the Skinheads", C.C.C.S., 1973.
- P. COHEN "Subcultural conflict and Working Class community". WPCS, 2.
- C. CRITCHER "Football as popular culture - an outline", C.C.C.S.
- H. DAVIES "The Glory Game", Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1972.
- S. HALL "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse", paper for the Council of Europe Colloquy on "Training in the critical reading of Televisual language". University of Leicester, September, 1973.
- "The Paint House: words from an East End Gang", Penguin, 1972.
- J. REX & R. MOORE "Race, Community and Conflict", Oxford U.P., 1971.
- A. SCHUTZ "On Phenomenology and social relations", University of Chicago Press, 1972.
- I. TAYLOR "Football Mad" in Dunning (ed.) 'A Sociology of sport', Cass, 1971.
- P. WILLIS "Popular music and youth cultural groups in Birmingham", Ph.D., C.C.C.S., 1972.
- D. WHITE "Brum's Mobs", New Society, 21 October 1971.