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New York in February, 1979 while on bail awaiting trial for the murder of his former girlfriend Nancy Spungen (see Savage 1992).

4. For a similar account of the fashion sensibilities of older women associated with alternative music scenes see Holland (2004).

### 3 Recent concepts in youth cultural studies

#### Critical reflections from the sociology of music

*David Hesmondhalgh*

The concept of subculture has been criticized a great deal in recent research on youth. Some writers, such as Muggleton and Weinzierl (2003), seem willing to hold on to the notion of subculture in a revised form, but one thing is nearly always made clear: the conception of subculture associated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) is off limits. The critiques of Birmingham subculturalism go back many years and, as is occasionally pointed out, some of the most trenchant and significant came from other researchers who worked in the Centre or who contributed to its publications (this includes writers such as Simon Frith, Angela McRobbie and Graham Murdock). But the backlash really came in the 1990s, when a critical deluge came pouring out of youth cultural studies. In reading academic work published over the last few years in this field, it sometimes feels as though there is some kind of collective obsession with this thing called Birmingham. Amusingly, many of these accounts speak of Birmingham subculturalism as an 'orthodoxy', as a dominant approach to youth culture. Never can an orthodox approach have been so unanimously condemned in the field it purportedly dominates.

As this book and others make clear, a number of terms have emerged as offering new ways of conceiving of collectivities of young people in the wake of these repeated criticisms. The most prominent seem to be *scenes* and *neo-tribes*, but there are reasons to think that these do not offer useful ways forward. In this chapter, I present criticisms of advocates of these terms. But I also argue against returning to the now largely discredited notion of subculture. Scenes, tribes and subcultures have all been associated with the analysis of popular music as well as with youth, and my focus in this piece is mainly, though not exclusively, on the areas of overlap between these two domains.<sup>1</sup> This is because I write as someone whose primary academic interest is in music rather than youth. Nevertheless, I think some of the comments below are relevant to the study of youth generally, because they highlight some of the problematic political assumptions and conceptual haziness surrounding the terms.

## TRIBES AND NEO-TRIBALISM, AND LIFE-STYLES TOO

Andy Bennett has argued that 'neo-tribalism', a concept he derives from the French social theorist Michel Maffesoli, via some comments of the British sociologist Kevin Hetherington, provides a much more adequate framework for the study of the cultural relationship between youth, music and style than does the concept of subculture (Bennett 1999: 614). Bennett identifies two main problems in uses of subculture as a framework for studying youth, music and style. One is that the term is used in increasingly contradictory ways. The second is that the 'grounding belief' of the subculturalists, that 'subcultures are subsets of society, or cultures within cultures', overestimates the coherence and fixity of youth groups (1999: 605). The main way in which Bennett wants to move beyond these perceived limitations is to find a term which will capture the 'unstable and shifting cultural affiliations which characterize late modern consumer-based identities' (605). He finds the basis of such a term in Michel Maffesoli's concept of the tribe in his book *The Time of the Tribes* (1996). For Maffesoli, the tribe is 'without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar, it refers more to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form' (Maffesoli, quoted by Bennett 1999: 605).

For Bennett, fixity and rigidity are associated with the old language of structural Marxism, and its concern with class, whereas the concept of tribes or 'neo-tribalism' offers a recognition of instability and the temporary nature of group affiliation. In my view, this is too polarized a presentation of the alternatives. The CCCS subculturalists may at times have overestimated the boundedness and permanence of the group identities they were studying, but simply to offer instability and temporariness as alternatives doesn't get us very far. We need to know how boundaries are constituted, and how group identity is maintained over time, not simply that such boundaries are fuzzier than various writers have assumed. And confusingly, 'tribes' carries very strong connotations of precisely the kind of fixity and rigidity that Bennett is troubled by in the work of the subculturalists. Indeed, it would be hard to find a concept more imbued with such connotations than 'tribe', which has been generally used to denote a social division of a people, especially a preliterate or ancient people, defined in terms of a common descent and territory. The term has been widely used in dance music culture, but as with a great deal of dance music discourse, it represents a projection of pre-modern symbols onto putatively new phenomena. It would be a great mistake for sociologists to take such projections at face value.

Underlying Bennett's criticisms of subcultural theory is a particular interpretation of the historical development of youth culture and a particular view of personal identity. Bennett offers what he describes as a related concept, life-style, in order to provide a basis for 'a revised understanding

of how individual identities are constructed and lived out' (1999: 607). Drawing upon the work of David Chaney, Bennett explains how the concept differs from what he describes as 'structuralist interpretations of social life' (though, in fact, his objection seems more specifically to be to the Marxian elements of subcultural theory). The concept of life-style, according to Bennett,

regards individuals as active consumers whose choice reflects a self-constructed notion of identity while the latter ['structuralist interpretations of social life'] supposes individuals to be locked into particular "ways of being" which are determined by the conditions of class (1999: 607).

Once again, we have a polarity: the term *life-styles* emphasizes activity and agency, whereas structuralism emphasizes determination and that old devil called class.<sup>2</sup> This is an odd characterisation of some subcultural theory, such as the work of Paul Willis, which was at pains to draw attention to the creative ways in which individuals made use of commodities drawn from consumer society. It is true to say that class underpinned Birmingham CCCS theory as an explanatory factor, and it might be fair to argue that the CCCS subculturalists paid too much attention to class as a factor in understanding individual and collective identity, at the expense of other factors. But it isn't clear that Bennett's emphasis on active consumers 'whose choice reflects a self-constructed notion of identity' (607) is a more satisfactory view of the relationships between consumption and modern personhood. Bennett offers what is in effect a celebration of consumerism. For example, he glosses a passage from Maffesoli as implying 'that a fully developed mass society liberates rather than oppresses individuals by offering avenues for individual expression through a range of commodities and resources which can be worked into particular lifestyle sites and strategies' (1999: 608), and it is very clear that Bennett is endorsing this view. He anticipates the objection that the concept of lifestyle does not pay adequate attention to 'structural issues' (it is not altogether clear what this might mean beyond class) and makes the counter-claim that 'consumerism offers the individual new ways of negotiating such issues' (1999: 607). Tied to this celebration of consumerism is a voluntaristic conception of identity, whereby life-style is defined as a 'freely chosen game' and identity is 'self-constructed' (607). The references to choice help to reveal Bennett's uncritical view of consumerism. But what of the factors that might limit or constrain such choice: poverty, addiction, mental illness, social suffering, marginalisation, disempowerment, unequal access to education, childcare and healthcare, and so on? All such states and processes seem to be consigned by Bennett to the category of 'structural issues', negotiable by self-creating subjects. Bennett's conception of 'the cultural relationship between youth, music and style', which he is trying to theorize, appears to be that youth can do whatever they want with music and style.<sup>3</sup>

How does music fit into Bennett's theory of neo-tribes? Bennett draws on his own fieldwork on urban dance music to elucidate the framework. His claim is that 'musical taste, in keeping with other lifestyle orientations and preferences, is a rather more loosely defined sensibility than has previously been supposed.... Music generates a range of moods and experiences which individuals are able to move freely between' (Bennett 1999: 611). The basis for this claim is that DJs mix different styles into their sets, including pop songs; that clubs offer different musical genres in different rooms; and that young Asians have a variety of tastes, including a liking for western pop as well as the 'Asian' genre of bhangra. Now Bennett might be right to say that some Birmingham subculturalists overly simplified young people's musical affiliations, but the uncontroversial idea that people like different musical genres does not sustain a theory of neo-tribalism, which in Bennett's version, implies that all relations between taste and identity are pretty much contingent, or at least dependent on the whims of individuals. Later, I will draw on recent work on music and identity to argue for a theoretical framework that makes it possible to examine different kinds of relations between taste and musical genre, without losing the idea that collective identity or community can be expressed through music.

Maffesoli's concept of tribes has been taken up elsewhere in the study of youth. A more fleeting and qualified use than Bennett's is to be found in Ben Malbon's research on clubbing. Malbon used Maffesoli's contrast of the fluidity (that word again) of 'contemporary tribal formations' (1998: 280) with that of 'classic tribes' such as the Californian counter-culture. The emphasis is supposedly on the 'flitting between groups' of young people, rather than 'membership per se of a group or community' (208). Echoing these comments in his interesting book, Malbon seemed much more dubious than before about the novelty of such groupings, but he added remarks on how Maffesoli's theory usefully drew attention to 'the here and now, the affectual [sic—this word only seems to exist in translations of, or references to, Maffesoli] and the tactile' (1999: 57). Quite why such a mystifying theoretical apparatus was necessary to get at these admittedly important elements of the clubbing experience Malbon never made clear.

More recently, Paul Sweetman (2004) has approached questions of youth identity by juxtaposing neo-tribalism with 1990s debates about reflexive modernisation, most famously associated with the work of Ulrich Beck and Antony Giddens. Sweetman recognizes important critiques of the notion of the subject used by reflexive modernisation theory, made by writers such as Lois McNay, and to be aware of the limits on our capacity to refashion ourselves, but such critiques are brushed aside. Instead, fieldwork interviewees' claims to individuality are offered as evidence of reflexive modernization. What neo-tribalism adds to this, according to Sweetman, is a complementary engagement 'with the more affectual [sic] or experiential aspects of what an involvement with "subcultural" formations can entail' (Sweetman 2004: 85). Again, the problem here is: why use this particular theoretical

formulation to get at these important aspects of the 'formations' under analysis? This is an engagement with affect at such a level of abstraction that the emotions of human subjects are hardly registered at all.

### SCENES: A FRUITFULLY MUDDLED CONCEPT?

Does the concept of scene offer more as a new key term for understanding the relations between youth and popular music? In comments on the 1993 conference of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, Simon Frith observed that '[t]he long domination of IASPM (sociology division) by subcultural theory is over. The central concept now (a fruitfully muddled one) is scene' (Frith 1995: iii).

There are two main sources for the widespread use of the concept of scene in popular music studies. One is an influential article by Will Straw (1991), the other is Barry Shank's book on the 'rock and roll scene' in Austin, Texas (Shank 1994). Straw examined the difference between two ways of accounting for the musical practices within a geographical space (a country, a region, a city, a neighbourhood). He set the notion, prevalent in rock culture, of a stable *community* which engages with a heritage of geographically rooted forms against the idea of a *scene*, which for Straw has the advantage of taking account of 'processes of historical change occurring within a larger international music culture' (Straw 1991: 373). Echoing the emphasis on complexities of the local and the global among cultural geographers such as Doreen Massey, Straw draws attention to the way that local processes are dependent on 'a vast complexity of interconnections' (Massey 1998: 124).

Straw in fact developed his use of the term *scene* from an earlier paper by Barry Shank, and in 1994 Shank produced a substantial study of 'the rock 'n' roll scene in Austin, Texas'. Shank's book treats scene in an equally interesting but very different way, closely linked to a type of cultural studies associated with the journal *Screen* in the 1970s. Shank develops a theory of the positively transformative aspects of rock scenes such as those of Austin, a theory which is based on French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's account of how individual subjects attempt to achieve wholeness, mastery and plenitude, but constantly fail to do so. In the context of a scene, this results, in a series of temporary identifications, which create 'a productive anxiety' (Shank 1994: 131), which in turn provides the impetus to participate in a live, face-to-face scene. In Shank's words, 'spectators become fans, fans become musicians, musicians are always already fans' (131). In effect, Shank is celebrating this productive achievement, but unlike other studies of local music-making, is grounding it in a (Lacanian) theory of human subjectivity. For Shank, drawing on the work of feminist theorists Julia Kristeva and Jacqueline Rose (who are themselves indebted to Lacan).

a signifying community is produced 'based upon new enunciative possibilities within and among individual subjects' (1994: 133).

Shank's approach is in marked contrast to Straw's in a number of ways. Whereas Straw shows a Bourdieuian concern with processes of legitimation and the competition for cultural prestige, Shank is working within a framework that draws a contrast between these transformative practices and the dominant or mainstream culture. More fundamentally still, Straw seems to be advocating scene as a word which questions the notion of local community which Shank celebrates, and which Straw associates specifically with the rock genre. In a brilliant comparison of the spatial and temporal dynamics of alternative rock and electronic dance music, Straw (1991: 381) argues that the constantly evolving nature of electronic dance music (at the time he was writing) ensured the 'simultaneous existence of large numbers of local or regional styles', such as Detroit techno, Miami bass, etc. This resulted in an interest in a cosmopolitan transcending of place which allowed electronic dance music to bring together the dispossessed and the marginalized across many places. Rock, according to Straw, had become static, lacking in innovation, and oriented mainly towards the white male musical connoisseur. Shank, by contrast, is a rock advocate. He sees the Austin rock 'n' roll community as a refuge for the alienated and the dispossessed.

My point here is not to adjudicate between these two approaches to the concept of scene, but to point out their pronounced discrepancies, not only in how they read the politics of local music-making, but also—and more importantly—in how they theorize this music-making. Both Shank and Straw borrow this vernacular musical and cultural term and put it to stimulating use, but they do so in widely disparate ways. These differences could of course be read as two sides of a productive dialogue. The problem is that, as noted above, the concept of scene has become very widely used in popular music studies as a result of these two crucial contributions and in many cases, the term has been presented as a superior alternative to 'subculture' (e.g., Harris 2001). But its use has been very ambiguous, or perhaps more accurately, downright confusing. This confusion has been compounded by its further use in popular music studies: sometimes to denote the musical practices in any genre within a particular town or city, as in Shank, sometimes to denote a cultural space that transcends locality, as in Straw's approach. The most important example of this approach is Keith Kahn-Harris's lucid and compelling study of the global extreme metal music scene (2006).

So is this a fruitful ambiguity, or simply a confusion produced out of the over-use of a fashionable term? Will Straw has returned to the notion of scene, and has responded to some criticisms. 'How useful', he asks, 'is a term which designates both the effervescence of our favourite bar and the sum total of all global phenomena surrounding a subgenre of Heavy Metal music?' (Straw 2001: 248). Straw proceeds to defend the term by observing

that the concept persists within cultural analysis for a number of reasons. The first is 'the term's efficiency as a default label for cultural unities whose precise boundaries are invisible and elastic' (248). My concern is that this might be evasive. Even if boundaries are invisible or hazy, processes of distinction and definition need to be captured in analysis. Perhaps a perceived elasticity is a result of the very imprecision of the concept itself? The second defence of the term *scene* that Straw offers is that it is 'usefully flexible and anti-essentializing', disengaging phenomena from 'the more fixed and theoretically troubled unities of class or sub-culture (even when it holds out the promise of their eventual rearticulation)' (Straw 2001: 248). The pairing with class is revealing here. For studies of 'scenes' seem to have been mainly confined to the bohemian metropolis. This is true even of Shank, who is rarely clear about the social class of his interviewees (see also Stahl 2001). The rearticulation of scenes to social class seems to be deferred endlessly. Finally, Straw observes that "scene" seems able to evoke both the cozy intimacy of community and the fluid cosmopolitanism of urban life. To the former, it adds a sense of dynamism; to the latter, a recognition of the inner circles and weighty histories which give each seemingly fluid surface a secret order' (Straw, 2001: 248). But how does the term achieve this metaphorical work? Of course, analytical concepts work via metaphor and association (think of Bourdieu's field, or Habermas's public sphere) but in my view scene has gone beyond the point where such metaphorical associations can aid in the analysis of the spatial dimensions of popular music. The term has been used for too long in too many different and imprecise ways for those involved in popular music studies to be sure that it can register the ambivalences that Straw hopes it will.

## BACK TO SUBCULTURES?

The two fashionable concepts, tribes and scenes, posited as replacements for the notion of youth subcultures, are both plagued by difficulties. So should we return to youth subcultures? In his book, *Goth: Identity, Style and Subculture* (2002), Paul Hodkinson, responding to the point made by Bennett and others that the concept of subculture overstates the degree to which young people remain fixed in particular groups, argues that we need to 'differentiate those groupings which are predominantly ephemeral from those which entail far greater levels of commitment, continuity, distinctiveness, or, to put it in general terms, substance' (Hodkinson 2002: 24). And Hodkinson proceeds to offer criteria for understanding such 'substance', including consistent distinctiveness of a group over time, commitment, autonomy from wider social and economic relations, and a sense of like-mindedness with others of the same group (28–33). Subculture, he argues, is still a relevant term for certain groups, such as the goths he studies, who display all these features to a high degree. A number of questions arise.

How typical are these substantive groupings? To what extent have we seen a shift in their numbers and typicality? Are they now mainly nostalgic and highly self-conscious re-creations of a lost era of collectivity? How should we conceive of the more fluid groupings which do not fall into the now more narrowly defined category of subculture? Hodkinson's book is very useful in provoking such questions for the study of youth culture, and in clarifying the notion of stability through the study of one notable remaining spectacular youth style. However, it isn't clear that Hodkinson's book has a great deal to contribute to the sociology of popular music. This is not a fault in Hodkinson's work, insofar as this may well not have been his aim. But it means that his book does not provide any reason for thinking that subculture should be retained as a key concept in thinking about music and youth. Music is just one of a large number of cultural practices which bind together goths, and there are only scattered references to goth music. Hodkinson lays greater (and useful) stress on friendships, goth events, DIY media, clothing and the Internet. There is no real sense of why the goths liked the particular types of music that they liked, other than their 'darkness' (2002: 47). What musical elements and processes constituted that darkness, and how did they come to be understood in that way? How did musical darkness evoke emotions and identities in the private and collective lives of goths? For all its strengths, Hodkinson's book is a reminder that subcultural analysis, including that of the CCCS, was never really about music, it was about youth collectivities that used music, amongst other means, to construct their identities. Only in very rare cases (e.g. Chambers 1976) did the subcultural theorists deal with popular music in any depth at all. By far the most developed account is that of Paul Willis in his analysis of bikers and their preferred music in *Profane Culture* (1978), and it is worth returning briefly to this account to examine its conception of the relationship between music and the social and how this bears on youth/music relations.

Willis's main analytical thrust is to emphasize the creativity and activity of the biker boys in forging connections between pop music and their own lives—and this sits uneasily with criticisms of subculturalism for its over-emphasis on structure, and its downplaying of agency. Willis's account very much fits with the CCCS's attempt to construct a theory of popular culture which would not pathologize that culture or its users. The main way in which Willis does this is to emphasize that the relationship between bikers and their preferred music was much more than 'an arbitrary or random juxtaposition' (Willis 1978: 62). For Willis, the bike boys' musical preferences were based on their identification of 'objective features' of the music which 'could parallel, hold, and develop the security, authenticity and masculinity of the bike culture' (Willis 1978: 63). Willis outlines a framework for analysis of the musical characteristics of the bikers' preferred genre, rock and roll, and he discusses 'its specific ability to hold and retain particular social meanings' (76). Willis concludes by suggesting that the 'dialectic of

experience' involved in the biker culture brought about 'very clear basic homologies' between the social group and its music.

The term *homology* is significant here. It derives from the Greek for 'same relation', and was developed in the natural sciences to denote a correspondence in origin and development, but it was adapted in the Marxist sociology of art (see Williams 1977: 103–7). Whereas Marxian sociology used the term to refer to relationships between art and society, Willis uses the term differently, to refer to relationships between collectivities of people, on the one hand, and cultural forms, such as music, on the other. The term has been heavily criticized, and certainly, as the musicologist Richard Middleton has shown, there are problems with the socio-musical analysis that Willis carries out in relation to the term. As Middleton (1990: 159–62) argues, the connection between rock 'n' roll and the rockers is much looser than Willis seems to believe. The music was more diverse than Willis implies; and many other groups were finding pleasure in this music. For Middleton, the quest for homology leads the socio-musical analysis astray.

Middleton's analysis supports the view that subculture should not be revived as a key concept in the analysis of popular music (though it may have its residual uses in the sociology of youth) because it was never a concept of much use to socio-musical analysis anyway. But if the proponents of the various terms under discussion in this article fail to offer adequate theorization of the relationship between musical practice and social process, especially in terms of the collective experience of music, what more promising avenues of investigation might there be?

## GENRE AND ARTICULATION

One conclusion to be drawn from my discussion of 'tribe' and 'scene' as alternatives to subculture as key concepts in the sociological analysis of music and youth is that the search for any single overarching master-term is likely to be unsatisfactory. Instead, we need an eclectic array of theoretical tools to investigate the difficult questions towards which the terms *subcultures*, *scenes* and *tribes* direct our attention. Nevertheless, some terms are more useful than others and need to be prioritized. In this section, I want very briefly to examine two concepts, genre and articulation, which encourage us to think about the relationship between symbols and other social entities or processes (see Hesmondhalgh 2005: 32–35 for a fuller discussion).

Genre is a much more satisfactory starting point for a theorization of the relationship between particular social groups and musical styles than are subculture, scene or tribe.<sup>4</sup> However, I am *not* offering genre as an alternative master-concept; I am suggesting that it is a necessary, but by no means sufficient, way in which to think about the relationships between music and the social. It is a term which has been used extensively in media and cultural studies to understand the relationship between production and

consumption—an understanding which is a necessary stage in the analysis of music or of youth. The key contribution in this respect has been that of Steve Neale, who broke through the formalism of many literary approaches to genre, to see genres as ‘systems of orientations, expectations and conventions’, which link text, industry and audience (Neale 1980: 19), rather than as taxonomic lists of texts. In music studies, the term *genre* has been taken up by a number of sociologists of popular music, to understand the importance of categories in making value judgements about music (Frith 1996), for example, or to analyse how genres inform the organization of music companies and the perceptions of audiences (Negus 1999). But most significant of all in the context of this chapter is the potential of the term to provide the basis for a theorized understanding of the relationships between music and the social. Jason Toynbee (2000) has offered a particularly promising account of genre, which challenges some of the tendencies in theoretical discussions of these relationships in the accounts discussed above. In particular, Toynbee draws attention to the *political* importance of the relationship between music and the social, often effaced or submerged in recent work.

Toynbee points out that in popular music, unlike in other media, the link between, in his formulation, groups of texts and social formations, has often been conceived in quasi-political terms as a form of representation: ‘Genre is seen to express the collective interest or point of view of a community’ (Toynbee 2000: 110). He argues that ‘to talk about style as the expression of community does not *necessarily* lead to the abstraction of music’s social function’ (2000: 111, emphasis added), as long as we recall that communities and genres are complex, and in particular that they are porous to outside influence. Another objection or set of objections, to text-social formation expressivism concerns the way that such communities have been assumed to be subordinate and resistant. Many analysts have pointed to changes in class structure and to the complexities of collective identification involved in modern societies. But for Toynbee, it remains the case that ‘class and ethnicity continue to generate communities’ (2000: 112)—and we might add that gender and age do too. Toynbee also deals, somewhat later in his discussion of genre, with what is effectively a further criticism of text-social formation expressivism, that modern media technology means that music is distributed far beyond its point of origin, both in time and space, and that this effectively breaks the link between community and style. Toynbee asserts in response that ‘musical communities none the less continue to provide the basis for genre markets’ (2000: 113), all the more so with the advent of globalization.

However, the concept of genre is not sufficient in itself in the present context. We need a concept that gets at the flexible and varying relationship between the social experience of community, on the one hand, and musical form or style, on the other. The most heavily-criticized aspect of subculturalism’s understanding of this relationship is the notion of homology.

we saw earlier, this was an important component of Paul Willis’s attempt to understand the role of music in the biker subculture, and this has real problems. Homology is often equated by critics with Birmingham cultural studies, but in fact its use is relatively sparse in the essays collected in the much-maligned *Resistance Through Rituals* collection (Hall and Jefferson 1976) and was in fact criticized by another Birmingham subculturalist, Dick Hebdige (1979), writing from a much more post-structuralist perspective, for its supposed inflexibility and fixity.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the debate, this suggests the problems of analyses which downplay the internal differences of ‘Birmingham’ approaches. But my main point here is that in the long run, a much more important element than homology in subculturalism’s efforts to theorize the relationship between symbolic practice and social process, formation or experience has been *articulation*—and yet this term is hardly mentioned in the many attacks on CCCS work. Articulation was defined succinctly by Stuart Hall (1996b: 141) as ‘the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time’. In other words it is used precisely to invoke the difficulty and uncertainty surrounding attempts to link two elements (often, the symbolic realm on the one hand and other social processes on the other). This is a very different ‘Birmingham’ from the straw figure constantly and tediously invoked in recent youth cultural studies. And the concept is hard to miss. The fullest theoretical CCCS treatment of the link between youth styles and social formation, John Clarke et al.’s introductory essay to *Resistance Through Rituals* (Clarke et al. 1976) discusses the ‘double articulation’ of working-class youth cultures, firstly, to the culture of their parents, and secondly, to the ‘dominant culture’ of a changing post-war British society. The concept of articulation has been taken up very widely in cultural studies. In the sociocultural analysis of music, it has most notably been adopted in Richard Middleton’s important and influential book, *Studying Popular Music*, where Middleton uses the concept to discuss the complex, mediated relationships between musical forms and practices, on the one hand, and social structure on the other (Middleton 1990: 9). Jason Toynbee builds on this basis and, echoing Middleton, ‘dethrones’ homology, by making it ‘just one kind of link between community and social practice’ (2000: 114) alongside a number of other potential articulations: rap, for example, draws on many sources, experiences and mediations besides that of African-American communal life, but nearly always with implicit reference back to the homological relation between music and social group that is central to its meaning.<sup>5</sup>

This goes beyond some important limitations in the work on tribes and scenes. Bennett’s account effectively denies the continued relevance of communities based around class, and he seems sceptical about making any link between ethnic groups and musical styles (see his discussion of bhangra, 1999: 412). Meanwhile, as we have seen, the two most influential uses of the

term *scene* seem to have opposing views of the politics of community in contemporary popular music. Just as significantly, through his uses of the concepts of genre, articulation and homology, Toynbee offers a *differentiated* approach to the relationship between symbols and other social processes. This is relevant to the study of youth culture as a whole, not just music.

So the term *articulation* is a useful adjunct to genre, for it registers some of the ambivalence and complexity needed to understand the relationship between music and the social. This is worth reflecting upon in the light of criticisms that Birmingham subculturalism theorized the relationship between symbolic forms, such as music and clothing, and other social processes, such as class or generation, too simplistically and deterministically. While some Birmingham studies are more adequately theorized than others, the most lasting theoretical legacy of Birmingham subculturalism for cultural studies has been precisely a stress on complexity and multiple determination. However, this is not to say that the concept of articulation is without its problems, and, as with genre, I am not advocating it as an answer in itself to the formidably difficult question of how to understand the relationships between symbols and society. It too has been used in many different ways and is not theoretically precise. It is a general metaphor for complexity of determination. Nor does the usefulness of articulation mean that we can redeem the term *subculture* for the analysis of music and youth, because that term never really advanced understanding of the relations between the two. But combined with the key concept of genre, the concept of articulation, as a metaphor which holds onto notions of determination while recognising complexity, provides the means to discuss youth-based collectivities in a way that, in my view, is still more promising than the theorizations of scenes and tribes discussed above.

## CLOSING REMARKS

This chapter is *not* a defence of Birmingham subculturalism. My aim has been to question the cogency and usefulness of the terms *neo-tribes*, *scenes* and *subcultures*. In fact, there are broader issues underlying these debates, which there is no space to address adequately here but which I would like to signal in closing. One concerns the tensions between different theoretical orientations underlying Birmingham subculturalism and recent critiques of it. This was a Marxist approach, but a particular kind of Marxist approach which sought to break with perceived lacks in traditional Marxian analysis: in particular it sought to avoid reductionist explanations of culture and of popular culture in particular, and to see culture as being itself a powerful force. But what theoretical basis underlies the critiques from within youth cultural studies? These critiques spend little time on their own theoretical foundations, which, ironically, seem often to be a combination of interactionist assumptions with a certain kind of cultural studies approach

which developed out of the Birmingham School, one that holds the view that audiences have been 'pathologized', but are creative in their relations with popular culture, and so on. This hotch-potch of neo-Weberian sociology and cultural studies often invokes notions of everyday life and of experience that need quite a bit more theoretical questioning than they are granted. It is rare to find anyone taking the time and trouble to lay out a coherent and rigorous theoretical understanding of the terrain.<sup>6</sup>

A second broad issue underlying recent youth cultural studies work 'after subculture' is its failure to address questions of policy, inequality and power. Not every individual piece of research can or should do this. But when it comes to assessing youth cultural studies as a whole, its lack of engagement, say, with how educational, crime and welfare policy interact with the expressive cultures of young people is extraordinary. In the British context, some of this can perhaps be blamed on the bizarre and longstanding division between sociology and social policy. But some of it seems to derive from the depoliticization of this area of research.<sup>7</sup> It may well be that those sections of youth policy and 'youth transitions' studies (MacDonald and Marsh 2005) that are able to engage adequately with expressive culture might offer a much more promising site for the reinvigoration of youth cultural studies than any further tedious rehashing of how Birmingham subculturalism got it wrong.

## NOTES

1. This chapter is a substantially reworked version of an article published as Hesmondhalgh (2005). That piece also included a detailed discussion of the relationship between the study of popular music and the study of youth, and a polemical call for an amicable divorce between the two areas. The emphasis here is more on youth cultural studies in general. My thanks to Johan Fornäs, Keith Kahn-Harris and Brian Longhurst for their comments on that earlier paper.
2. The notion of 'life-styles' has also been taken up by Steven Miles (2000). Once again, the CCCS are the villains, and the concept of life-styles seems to be the basis of Miles's claims that we need to pay (more) attention to youth experience. This is presumably a call that few could disagree with, including many CCCS scholars; everything depends on what is meant by experience.
3. There is no need to take an orthodox Marxist or neo-Marxist position to find such notions troubling; see, for example, Fornäs (1995), summarized in Hesmondhalgh (2005).
4. In fact, some of the most useful aspects of Straw and Shank's work concern the operations and temporalities of particular musical genres.
5. See also Born's (2000: 32) claim that 'there is a need to acknowledge that music can variably both construct new identities and reflect existing ones' (32) and her important attempt to categorize various forms music/identity relation.



6. One refreshing exception is a chapter by Peter J. Martin (2004). While I do not share Martin's interactionist perspective (amongst other reasons, because it pays too little attention to the way that human relations are historically formed) his chapter constitutes a serious attempt to think through how best to conceive of collectivities of young people, and this allows a potentially much richer engagement between alternative positions.
7. Muggleton and Weinzierl's collection (2003) rightly attempts to understand the broader political and economic contexts of young people's lives, but in my view its attempt to repoliticize youth cultural studies overstates the actual of young people.

## 4 'Insider' and 'outsider' issues in youth research

*Rhoda MacRae*

This chapter examines an increasingly important methodological question within youth research, that of the initial position of researchers vis-à-vis the groups of young people they study. The discussion draws upon well-known sociological work and upon recent youth and music research. It also includes some reflections on the author's own study of dance culture. In contrast to some recent 'insider research' within youth cultural studies, this study involved the ethnographic process of moving from being a 'stranger' among young clubbers to becoming a familiar, well-informed citizen (Schütz 1976). Ultimately, the chapter suggests that the initial subjective positioning of researchers with respect to those they study can be of great significance, but that whatever the extent of their initial proximity or distance, critical reflexivity is vital for understanding and making explicit the full implications of one's position.

So-called insider-outsider distinctions and the methodological issues they raise are important to contemporary youth research, not least because ethnographic studies—including some where the researcher has initial proximity to the respondent group—are an ever more popular method in attempting to understand how young people construct their identities as members of youth cultures. Given this, it is important that youth and music research draws on the existing body of sociological knowledge as well as accounting for the peculiarities of conducting research in this field in attempting to discuss the implications of either an insider or an outsider position for the research process and its outcomes (Bennett 2003). Arguably, the proximity of the researcher to the researched affects all aspects of the research process from gaining access to analysing and writing up data. Yet recently the position of the researcher in relation to the researched has been further complicated by how sociology has reconfigured the meaning of identities, something which suggests that the relationship between researchers and researched is liable to be complex and subject to variation rather than straightforwardly identifiable as an insider or outsider situation.

With the multiplicities of identity being widely recognized within sociology, youth researchers, amongst others, have also begun to reconsider