CULTURES OF POPULAR MUSIC

Andy Bennett
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Popular music' is one of those phrases that somehow manages to be both precise and elusive in its meaning at the same time. Everyone knows just what they mean when they say it, yet seldom find themselves in complete agreement with anyone else's preferred definition. Closer scrutiny reveals that the words 'popular' and 'music' both carry the burden of a troubled history, each of them having been made the subject of intense cultural conflict over time, space and place. Echoes of these conflicts continue to resonate throughout current debates in important ways, especially when questions are raised about who has the power to define 'what counts' as popular music today.

Andy Bennett's Cultures of Popular Music explores a diverse array of popular music styles in relation to their audiences, from 1950s rock 'n' roll to contemporary dance music. Beginning with an overview of the socio-economic circumstances which gave rise to the development of the post-war youth market, the discussion promptly proceeds to identify several key technological innovations which revolutionized the music industry in countries like Britain and the USA. At the same time, youth 'counter-culture' movements, especially in the 1960s, are similarly shown to have had a lasting influence on the formation of certain styles of popular music. In the chapters which follow, individual genres of popular music are analysed with the aim of discerning how they have been appropriated, re-worked and stylistically 'localized' in different cultural contexts around the globe. Heavy metal music is the first such genre to be examined, with Bennett then turning his attention to the punk phenomenon, reggae, rap and hip hop, bhangra, and dance music (especially house and techno) within club
cultures. The latter portion of the book is then devoted to exploring the meaning and significance of music-making activities for young people, before concluding with an account of different media representations of contemporary youth (very much a contested category) and the importance of music in their daily lives. This is an exciting book, not only due to the sheer breadth and depth of its treatment, but also for the perceptiveness of its insights.

The Issues in Cultural and Media Studies series aims to facilitate a diverse range of critical investigations into pressing questions considered to be central to current thinking and research. In light of the remarkable speed at which the conceptual agendas of cultural and media studies are changing, the authors are committed to contributing to what is an ongoing process of re-evaluation and critique. Each of the books is intended to provide a lively, innovative and comprehensive introduction to a specific topical issue from a fresh perspective. The reader is offered a thorough grounding in the most salient debates indicative of the book’s subject, as well as important insights into how new modes of enquiry may be established for future explorations. Taken as a whole, then, the series is designed to cover the core components of cultural and media studies courses in an imaginatively distinctive and engaging manner.

Stuart Allan
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The inspiration for this book has come primarily from teaching undergraduate courses in popular music, youth culture and related areas and from attending various popular music related conferences since 1994. I would, therefore, like to express my thanks to those students at the universities of Durham, Glasgow, Kent and Surrey who have participated in lectures and seminars and to my colleagues in the field of popular music studies for their support.
INTRODUCTION

Without a doubt, popular music is a primary, if not the primary, leisure resource in late modern society. The sound of pop permeates people’s lives in a variety of different ways. From nightclubs and live gigs, through cinemas and TV commercials, to what Japanese music theorist Hosokawa (1984) refers to as the ‘autonomous and mobile’ form of listening facilitated through the invention of the personal stereo; for a great many people, popular music is an omnipresent aspect of their day-to-day existence (Hosokawa 1984: 166). As Frith (1987: 139) observes: ‘We absorb songs into our own lives and rhythms into our own bodies; they have a looseness of reference that makes them immediately accessible’.

Equally significant about popular music is the way in which it functions at a collective level. Every week in cities around the world people gather in clubs and venues to listen and dance to their favourite musics. The summer months bring festivals where music consumption is mixed with relaxation and socializing as people forge new friendships and associations based around common tastes in music, fashion and lifestyle. Popular music has also been linked with political issues and social change. In 1969 500,000 people gathered at a rural site near the town of Woodstock in upstate New York for the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, an event which, among other things, protested about the US’s continuing involvement in the Vietnam war. During the 1980s, popular music became the focus for a series of globally broadcast mega-events (Garofalo 1992a), beginning with Bob Geldof’s Live
Aid concerts in Britain and the US in aid of the famine in Ethiopia. Geldof later described the Live Aid event as a ‘global joke box’ to raise awareness about the famine. Although the political naiveté of Live Aid has been justifiably criticized (see, for example, Garofalo 1992b) the event’s principal success was that it was able to focus, however briefly, people’s attention on a world problem by utilizing a key element of their leisure and lifestyle.

Since the late 1960s, popular music has become a key focus in the related disciplines of cultural and media studies and sociology. Every era of post-Second World War popular music, and the cultural scenes this music has inspired, has been the subject of study in one or each of these disciplines at some level. The purpose of this book is to examine and evaluate, for the first time in a single volume, key studies of popular music styles and their audiences from 1950s rock ‘n’ roll to contemporary dance music. In addition, the book broadens the conventional Anglo-American scope of studies on popular music and style. Seven of the chapters included here illustrate how Anglo-American popular musics and their attendant, primarily youth cultural, styles have been appropriated, reworked and effectively ‘localized’ in non-Anglo-American contexts.

The ten chapters in this book are developed from courses I have taught to undergraduate students in several UK universities. Each chapter is intended to give students a grounding in the subject matter presented while at the same time highlighting, via textual references, key studies for further reading. Through their investigation of different eras of post-war popular music and style, the chapters also provide contextual illustrations of the significance of current theoretical concepts such as globalization, ‘localization’, ‘risk’ (Beck 1992), cultural reterritorialization (Lull 1995) and ‘new ethnicities’ (Back 1996).

Chapter 1 begins by providing an overview of the socio-economic circumstances which gave rise to the development of the post-war youth market, a centrally defining feature of the western consumer boom during the 1950s and early 1960s. The chapter also examines the technological innovations which revolutionized the music industry during this period and set the scene for the rapid worldwide appeal of rock ‘n’ roll, the first distinctive ‘youth music’. The remainder of the chapter examines the cultural significance of rock ‘n’ roll music for young people around the world and critically evaluates sociological readings of the early style-based youth cultures to which rock ‘n’ roll and subsequent derivatives gave rise.

Chapter 2 focuses on the more political relationship between the youth counter-culture and popular music during the mid to late 1960s. The chapter begins by examining the shifting nature of popular music in the mid-1960s from three-minute commercial pop songs to longer pieces of music
often relying on the improvisational skill of musicians and newly developed electronic sound effects. Such shifts in popular music aesthetics, it is illustrated, corresponded with a desire on the part of counter-cultural youth to experiment with alternative lifestyles based around the use of hallucinogenic drugs, eastern religion and the rejection of the western technocracy (Roszak 1969). The chapter then goes on to examine critically sociological and cultural studies readings of the term ‘counter-culture’ before looking at several of the individual movements which coalesced under the broader heading ‘counter-culture’, notably the anti-Vietnam war protest and the Black Power Movement.

Chapter 3 examines the significance of heavy metal music, a genre which, if until recently ignored by academic researchers, is unrivalled in terms of its longstanding popularity. Having looked at the development of heavy metal during the late 1960s, the chapter considers the periodic shifts in the heavy metal style, from the soft and glam metal of the 1980s to contemporary extreme metal styles. The chapter then focuses on the relationship between heavy metal music and its audience. This begins with an examination of how early heavy metal songs promoted traditional notions of patriarchy and male power to a male-dominated, white, working class, adolescent following. It then illustrates how metal’s broadening appeal during the 1980s involved a shift towards a more ballad-based lyrical and musical style, typified by the ‘soft metal’ of bands such as Bon Jovi, which attracted a greater female metal audience than previous heavy metal styles. The chapter next examines how contemporary extreme metal forms shun many of the conventions established by earlier heavy metal styles, returning to a heavy guitar based sound and introducing a new range of song themes focusing on the risk and uncertainty (Beck 1992) that impacts on the lives of young people in postindustrial urban settings. The chapter concludes by examining official reactions to heavy metal, notably by parental interest groups and the courts, which stress the harmful effects of heavy metal on young audiences by linking it with teenage suicide, satanic rituals and other forms of antisocial behaviour.

Chapter 4 looks at the punk phenomenon. Beginning with an overview of the origins of punk in the US garage band and New York underground scenes, the chapter goes on to consider how the punk style was appropriated and developed in Britain during the mid-1970s by groups such as the Sex Pistols. This analysis of British punk is then developed through an examination of punk’s relationship with the mass media and the way in which punk rock was used in the construction of a moral panic (Cohen 1987) by the British tabloid press and TV news programmes. The chapter then goes on to evaluate readings of the punk style, with particular reference to the work of
Hebdige (1979). Finally, the chapter looks at how aspects of British punk have been appropriated in other national and regional contexts where local circumstances have resulted in distinctive localized reworkings of the punk style and aesthetic.

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters which examine the relationship between youth, style, music and ethnic identity beginning with a look at reggae. Having outlined the development of reggae music in Jamaica where, through the work of artists such as Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, it became associated with the Rastafarian movement, the chapter examines the cultural significance of reggae for African Caribbean youth in Britain. Consideration is then made of how, as a result of reggae artists’ involvement in the British Rock Against Racism movement and the cross-cultural alliances formed between black and white youth in multi-ethnic areas of British cities, reggae music attracted a white youth audience in Britain. Finally the chapter looks at how reggae music has been rearticulated by Aboriginal youth in Australia as a means of protesting against racial exclusion and the exploitation of the Aboriginal people by the dominant white Australian population.

Chapter 6 focuses on rap music and hip hop culture. Beginning with a look at the origins of rap and hip hop in the South Bronx district of New York as a means of attempting to stem the tide of interracial violence, the chapter then considers the significance which rap assumed as a means for African American and Hispanic youth to address related social problems, such as poverty, racism and low self-esteem, which resulted from the urban ghettoization of these and other ethnic minorities. This is followed by a consideration of how rap and hip hop, despite their US origins and initial focus on a specific range of problems associated with urban life in inner-city ghettos, have become global forms characterized by localized reworkings in a range of urban settings across western Europe, Asia and Oceania.

Chapter 7 looks at the significance of bhangra and other forms of Asian dance music for Asian youth in contemporary Britain. Since the mid-1980s emergence of ‘bhangra beat’, Asian dance music has provided Asian youth in Britain with an important resource for exploring notions of identity and place in Britain. This chapter examines the development of bhangra beat from a traditional Punjabi folk music before going on to consider its significance for Asian youth in Britain during the 1980s. The chapter then illustrates how the appeal of bhangra subsequently declined during the 1990s as new Asian dance music styles emerged that drew upon developing club musics such as house and techno. Finally the chapter examines how these new Asian dance music styles have in their turn inspired new expressions of Asian youth identity, enabling young Asians to challenge popular stereotypes of Asians in Britain.
Chapter 8 focuses on contemporary dance music and club cultures. Having traced the stylistic development of two formative dance music styles, house and techno, the chapter goes on to examine how the arrival of contemporary dance music styles in British clubs during the late 1980s coincided with the increasing use of a new amphetamine-based stimulant Ecstasy, which, in conjunction with the rave, an illegally organized dance music event usually held in disused inner-city warehouses or remote rural areas, ensured that the dance music phenomenon became the centre of a new moral panic in Britain. The chapter then looks at recent research on dance music fans or ‘club cultures’ (Thornton 1995). Beginning with a consideration of how club cultures are held to challenge conventional subcultural theory, examination is made of the interactions between club culture and new social movements in Britain. Finally the chapter examines the relationship between club cultures, music and gender.

Chapter 9 examines the theme of youth and music-making. For many years, academic studies of the relationship between youth and popular music tended to focus on youth as consumers rather than makers of music. During the 1990s, however, an increasing number of studies have appeared that consider the significance of music-making for young people. This chapter examines the various claims which have been made for the meaning and significance of music-making activities in young people’s lives. Beginning with a look at the processes of music-making itself, and the way in which the learning of songs, rehearsal and live performance give rise to micro-organizational practices which bond members of a group together, the chapter goes on to consider how the fact of being part of a pop or rock group provides young people with shared ‘pathways’ (Finnegan 1989) through which they are able to construct identities as musicians and/or artists, thus creating distance between themselves and more mundane everyday life institutions such as the family, school and work. Finally, consideration is made of the relationship between young people, music-making education and personal development.

Chapter 10 concludes the book by examining the ways in which the retro-marketing of popular music styles and associated memorabilia, particularly from the 1960s, has led to nostalgic representations of youth music and youth culture. As such, it is argued, youth has become a ‘contested’ category, the babyboomer generation continually reliving their memories of being young during the 1960s and comparing such memories of their own youth with the attitudes and sensibilities of contemporary youth. Drawing on studies which address this issue, it is illustrated how these comparisons have resulted in terms such as Generation X by babyboomer writers and journalists who claim that contemporary youth is apathetic and apolitical. The
chapter then considers some of the problems inherent in such representations of contemporary youth and illustrates how current youth cultures and youth musics must be viewed in their relevant socio-economic contexts if they are to be fully understood and objectively evaluated.

As this brief introduction illustrates, a primary aim of this book is to provide the reader with a knowledge of and insight into the key popular musics and associated youth cultural styles that have characterized the post-Second World War and subsequent eras. To a very large extent, the origins of post-war popular music and youth style are rooted in socio-economic and technological changes that took place in the years directly following the end of the Second World War. These changes and the shifts in youth leisure and entertainment to which they gave rise provide the focus for Chapter 1.
This chapter explores the socio-economic factors and attendant technological developments and innovations which gave rise to the transformation of the term ‘youth’. Between 1945 and 1955, youth changed from a taken-for-granted and largely unacknowledged transitional stage between childhood and adulthood to a cultural category marked by particular stylistic trends, tastes in music and accompanying patterns of consumption. Instrumental in this redefinition of youth was the development of the post-Second World War youth market. Thus, as Shumway explains:

the youth culture of the 1950s and later could not have happened without teenagers having become a significant market – that is, without their having significant disposable funds. Having that money and an increased independence from family, teenagers began to identify themselves as a group.

(Shumway 1992: 119–20)

As I will presently consider, the desire among post-war youth for distinctive forms of collective identity resulted in a number of visually striking images and styles which a number of theorists (see for example, Hall and Jefferson 1976; Brake 1985) suggest were symbolic of structurally grounded ‘subcultural’ sensibilities. The post-Second World War period then is crucial to our understanding of youth culture, both as an aspect of everyday life and an object of academic study. However, this is not to suggest

Rock music has involved young people as no other pop or elite art has ever done. In fact, it has involved young people as nothing else at all, aside from sex, has done in generations. It has made poetry real to them . . . It has firmly allied youth, bound them together with an invisible chain of sounds and a network of verbal images in defense against the Elders.

(Gleason 1972: 143)
that consumption had played no part in the everyday lives of young people prior to the Second World War. Although direct comparisons between the consumption patterns of post-war and pre-war youth are difficult to make, largely due to the lack of published research on youth consumption prior to 1945, there is clear evidence of musically and/or stylistically distinct youth cultures and gangs in the years leading up to and during the Second World War. Thus, for example, Willett’s study of the Swing Jugend (‘Swing Kids’) documents the widespread interest among young people in central Europe in the music of American jazz artists such as Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller and Artie Shaw during the late 1930s and early 1940s. When war broke out, the Swing Kid movement became a salient form of resistance to Nazi ideology both in occupied European countries and in Germany itself. Thus, as Willett explains:

The orientation of the Swing Jugend was patently pro-American as some of their brash nicknames (Texas Jack, Alaska Bill) and the names of their clubs (the Harlem Klub, the OK gang Klub and the Cotton Klub) attested. Clubs existed in most German cities, including Stuttgart in the south and Dresden in the east.

(Willett 1989: 160)

In a further study of pre-Second World War youth culture, Fowler (1992) identifies a series of locally situated and stylistically distinct youth gangs in the cities of inter-war Britain. Describing one particular gang, the Manchester-based Napoo, Fowler writes:

The Napoo gang . . . which regularly met at a dancehall in Belle Vue immediately after World War One, wore a highly distinctive uniform borrowed from American gangster films. Each gang member wore a navy blue suit, a trilby and a pink neckerchief. The fear the gang aroused among the population of Ancoats, where its members lived and worked, suggests that the Napoo should be viewed as an essentially pre-Teddy boy youth cult.

(Fowler 1992: 144)

Despite such evidence of a cultural relationship between youth, music and attendant forms of visual style prior to the Second World War, however, the appearance of music and style-driven youth cultures at a more widespread, and increasingly global, level began to occur only when youth became a distinct consumer group.
The development of the post-war youth market

The post-war youth market was the direct result of a series of socio-economic shifts which occurred after the Second World War. During the post-war period the west experienced an economic boom which in turn led to a growth in consumerism (see Leys 1983). Prior to the Second World War, consumerism had been an essentially middle class activity. Following the Second World War, however, increasing affluence and technological breakthroughs in mass production resulted in consumption becoming an accepted part of life for the working classes too (Chaney 1996). The new demand for consumer products was met by a rapid expansion in the types of commodities available. A whole range of items from cars to electrical household appliances, such as washing machines, food mixers, electric irons, televisions and record players, became much more widely available than they had been before the Second World War. New techniques of mass production also meant that such items were more cheaply available than they had been before the war.

The post-war period, then, saw consumerism become a way of life for many sections of society, including the young. The increased spending power of young people gave them new levels of independence from their families. As Bocock observes:

The young had emerged as a new, major market in the 1950s in Britain and Western Europe, following the United States which had experienced less disruption in the 1940s than war-torn Europe. Young people were employed in relatively well-paid jobs in new industries.

(Bocock 1993: 28)

Such independence was significantly enhanced by the burgeoning youth market. The consumer industries quickly realized that young people presented a highly viable and lucrative market and, consequently, a whole range of commodities designed specifically for them began to appear. These commodities included fashion clothes, cosmetics such as lipstick and mascara, as well as relatively new goods such as plastic 45 rpm (revolutions per minute) records, record players and transistor radios. Thus, in addition to financial independence, young people of the post-war generation had much greater control over their leisure time than previous generations of youth. Commodities and forms of leisure designated exclusively as aspects of a ‘youth lifestyle’ meant that young people became far less dependent on the family home and the leisure preferences of their parents. As Chambers (1985) points out in his study Urban Rhythms:
Leisure was no longer simply a moment of rest and recuperation from work, the particular zone of family concerns and private edification. It was widened into a potential life-style made possible by consumerism. To buy a particular record, to choose a jacket or skirt cut to a particular fashion, to mediate carefully on the colour of your shoes is to open a door onto an actively constructed style of living.

(Chambers 1985: 16)

Central to the new marketed youth identities, then, were items such as fashion clothing, magazines and music. While all of these commodities played their part in articulating the collective identity of youth, the most significant aspect of post-war youth culture was the music which effectively became its signature tune, rock ‘n’ roll (post-war technology also facilitated mass production of the electric guitar, the key rock ‘n’ roll instrument, see Chapter 9). As with other youth-orientated commodities, rock ‘n’ roll music was facilitated by the technological advances made during the immediate post-war years. Such advances in technology enabled new forms of production and distribution which were crucial to the impact that rock ‘n’ roll had on young people. Although, as Frith (1983) points out, the commercialization of music did not begin with rock ‘n’ roll, the cultural resonance that rock ‘n’ roll assumed was uniquely marked by the technological factors which gave rise to its emergence.

During the nineteenth century, commercial music had taken the form of sheet music, most households across Europe and the US possessing a piano (Frith 1983: 32). Thomas Edison’s invention of the phonograph during the 1880s in the US marked a fundamental change in the way in which music was marketed and heard by people. The cylindrical shaped phonograph was the forerunner of the vinyl record and allowed for acoustic sounds to be recorded and reproduced electronically. In 1888 another US inventor, Emile Berliner, took this idea further with the development of the gramophone. The gramophone worked on the same principle as the phonograph but used discs instead of cylinders (Frith 1988a: 14). As with the phonograph, however, the gramophone was very expensive to produce. Moreover, during the actual recording process, the music had to be recorded straight onto disc and the results were not always satisfactory, with much of the sound quality being lost.

It was not until the late 1940s that a cheap but highly efficient alternative to disc recording was found. This alternative was audio tape, originally invented by German scientists during the Second World War for use in broadcasting. Its first commercial use was not by the music industry, but by radio stations as a low-cost method of prerecording interviews and
advertising jingles. Tape recording was also used by film studios as a way of producing film soundtracks. However, the music industry soon began to realize the benefits of using tape in the recording process and by 1950 tape had completely replaced the disc. A major advantage of the switch from disc to tape was that recording costs dramatically decreased. Equally important was the new level of control which tape allowed over the recording process. As Frith points out:

Tape was an intermediary in the recording process: the performance was recorded on tape; the tape was used to make the master disc. And it was what could be done during this intermediary stage, to the tape itself, that transformed pop music-making. Producers no longer had to take performances in their entirety. They could cut and splice, edit the best bits of performances together, cut out the mistakes, make records of ideal not real events.

(Frith 1988a: 21–2)

At the same time, new techniques of mass production and the invention of the new, plastic 45 rpm record, meant that a far greater number of records could be produced. Thus, as Peterson explains:

The 45 was important to the advent of rock primarily because it was (virtually) unbreakable. One of the great expenses of 78s was the extreme care that had to be taken in handling and shipping them, and each of the major record companies developed a national distribution system that was geared to handling its own delicate 78s. . . . The smaller, lighter, virtually indestructible 45s made it much cheaper to ship records in bulk, making feasible the development of independent national distribution companies.

(Peterson 1990: 101)

If technological innovations such as those described above were crucial to the development of rock 'n' roll music, equally important was its relatively instant popularity among teenagers. It is to the significance of rock 'n' roll as a distinctive 'youth music' that I now turn.

The cultural impact of rock 'n' roll

Half a century after it first appeared, it is easy to overlook the cultural impact of rock 'n' roll on its audience. Yet, this musical style changed forever the way in which popular music was produced and marketed and also the way in which it was socially received. As Middleton (1990) observes,
prior to the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll, popular music had comprised ‘a relatively
narrow stylistic spread, bounded by theatre song on the one side, novelty
items deriving from music hall and vaudeville on the other, with Tin Pan
Alley song, Hollywood hits and crooners in between’ (Middleton 1990: 14).
When the first rock ‘n’ roll records appeared popular music became an al-
together different type of cultural form. Thus, as Billig explains:

[rock ‘n’ roll] sounded different from anything previous generations
had listened to. The whine of the electric guitar, the crisp drumming, the
echo effects, and, later, more complex mixtures of electric and acoustic
instruments, all made rock ‘n’ roll a new sound . . . The generation that
had lived through the hard times of the depression and the Second
World War, preferred its music soft and romantic. Their children, grow-
ing up in safer, more affluent times, wanted to hear more dangerous
music. They responded to simple chords, a jumping beat and loud elec-
tric guitars.

(Billig 2000: 5, 19)
The roots of rock ‘n’ roll music lay in the rhythm and blues developed by
African American musicians who, having migrated from the South of the US
to northern cities such as Chicago, began to electrify the music of the orig-
inal African American bluesmen (Chambers 1976). The term rock ‘n’ roll
was first coined by Alan Freed, a radio disc jockey (DJ) from Cleveland,
Ohio, following a visit to a local record store. As Gillett (1983) writes in his
book The Sound of the City:

Alan Freed . . . was invited, sometime in 1952, to visit a downtown
record store by the owner, Leo Mintz. Mintz was intrigued by the musi-
cal taste of some of the white adolescents who bought records at his
store, and Freed was amazed by it. He watched the excited reaction of
the youths who danced energetically to music that Freed had previously
considered alien to their culture – rhythm and blues.

(Gillett 1983: 13)
While Freed championed the black roots of rock ‘n’ roll, regularly featuring
the music of black artists such as Fats Domino and the Drifters in his shows,
other DJs tended to play cover versions of rock ‘n’ roll songs by white artists.
By the mid-1950s, if rock ‘n’ roll was starting to gain favour among young
white audiences then it was a music which had been cleaned up for white
consumption. As Gillett points out, the record industry attempted to ‘knock
the rough edges off rock ‘n’ roll [arguing] that people didn’t want their music
to be as brash, blatantly sexual, and spontaneous as the pure rock ‘n’ roll
records were’ (Gillett 1983: 41). The result was all-white groups such as Bill
Haley and his Comets, whose song ‘Rock Around the Clock’ was used as the title track of the first feature length film devoted to the new rock ‘n’ roll sound (see Denisoff and Romanowski 1991; Lewis 1992).

When Rock Around the Clock was first screened in Britain, shortly after its release in 1956, it resulted in a string of minor disturbances. Cinema seats were torn out and in several major cities youths were arrested and later fined for aggressive or insulting behaviour as they left cinemas (Street 1992: 304). Across Europe, reactions to Rock Around the Clock were even more extreme than in Britain. In the West German city of Hamburg cars were overturned and shop fronts and street signs vandalized by young people as police used water cannons in an attempt to quell the unrest (Krüger 1983). Similarly, in the Netherlands, where Rock Around the Clock was banned in several major cities, ‘young people took to the streets to demonstrate for their right to see the film’ (Mutsaers 1990: 307). Disturbances were also reported in Toronto, Sydney and in Auckland, New Zealand although, according to Shuker, apart from several minor incidents, the responses of young New Zealanders to Rock Around the Clock were ‘generally restrained’ (Shuker 1994: 257).

**Rock 'n' roll in search of an idol**

If the music of Bill Haley clearly generated a great deal of excitement among teenagers, the image of Haley and his group, the Comets, was decidedly out of step with the young audiences for which they performed. As Bradley (1992) explains, Haley’s ‘plump, energetic, affable, ageing’ appearance could never hope to ‘inspire much identification among boys or romantic adulation among girls’ (Bradley 1992: 59). The rock ‘n’ roll phenomenon was still in need of an artist who could appeal to white audiences on a musical level while at the same time retaining the rawness, sexuality and excitement associated with black rock ‘n’ roll artists such as Little Richard. This role was to be assumed by Elvis Presley. Presley, who Beadle (1993) describes as ‘the first pop star in the modern sense’, was working as a truck driver when he was discovered by Sam Phillips, head of a small independent record label, Sun Records, based in Memphis, Tennessee (Beadle 1993: 5). Presley first visited Sun Records to record a song as a present for his mother’s birthday. However, Sam Phillips was so impressed with Presley’s voice that he invited him back to record some more material. In recalling these early sessions, Sam Phillips said of Elvis: ‘I noticed a certain quality in Elvis’ voice, and I guessed he had a feeling for black music. I thought his voice was unique, but I didn’t know whether it was commercial’ (Palmer 1976: 205).
When Elvis Presley began to record rock 'n' roll songs for Sun Records, he restored the rawness and emotion missing in the work of other white rock 'n' roll artists. Indeed, Spencer (1997) suggests that Presley was instrumental in what he terms the 'sexual seduction of whites into blackness' which ultimately gave rise to 'new and acceptable attitudes about sexuality' in white society (Spencer 1997: 114). Such seduction was further enhanced by Presley's image, which was quickly emulated by many white male teenagers, and his stage performances, which injected a source of spectacle into rock 'n' roll that was, up until this time, unknown to white audiences. According to O'Sullivan (1974) Elvis signalled the arrival of the new teenage pop idol, thus marking the end of the pop star of indeterminate age.

In keeping with the rise and appeal of rock 'n' roll generally, the importance of new technologies cannot be overlooked in attempting to chart the cultural impact of Elvis Presley on young audiences. Presley first reached a nationwide audience in the US through the medium of television. Indeed, in the case of young people outside the US, Presley remained an essentially 'mediated' star, television appearances and subsequent films rather than live performances being the way in which Presley was experienced on a global level (apart from several impromptu performances in Germany during his tour of duty there as a soldier in the US Army, Elvis never performed anywhere outside the US). Moreover, the spectacle of Elvis on TV created a moral panic among the parent culture which further endeared him to his young fans. The following account by Shumway (1992) provides a graphic illustration of the controversy surrounding Elvis's early television performances:

What was most remarkable about Elvis on television was the dancing or gyrating that he did while he performed. His first TV appearances, on the Dorsey Brothers' Show, included some of his dancing, but, perhaps because the shows were seen by relatively small audiences or because Elvis's dancing was photographed from above, these appearances produced no significant reaction. In his first appearance on the Milton Bearle Show, however, Elvis's dancing was both more extreme and went on not only during the instrumental break but during the entire last half of the performance of 'Hound Dog'. The reaction of both professional critics and the self-appointed guardians of morality was swift and harsh. The public outcry nearly caused NBC to cancel Elvis's next scheduled TV appearance, on the Steve Allen Show. Rather than cancel the show, the network devised a plan to contain Elvis. Allen dressed him up in tails and had him sing 'Hound Dog' to a live basset hound. Later in the same year, Elvis was restrained by court order from
making any offensive gyrations on stage in Jacksonville, Florida. Early in 1957, in what was Elvis’s third appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show, Sullivan insisted that Elvis be photographed from the waist up. (Shumway 1992: 125–6)

However, it was not simply the visual representation of Elvis himself that endeared him to the fans. Elvis’s early television appearances also included shots of the audience which, in turn, served as a frame of reference for other fans watching the show at home on television. These fans learned from the televised audience how to respond to Elvis. A further passage from Shumway’s (1992) study illustrates this point:

When Elvis is featured on national TV programmes, the audience becomes part of the show. In the Berle performance, the film cuts between shots of Elvis and shots of the audience, not as a large mass of indistinguishable faces, but of particular faces whose response tells us of the excitement the performer is generating... These pictures showed other fans how to respond appropriately... while at the same time... creat[ing] a new representation of male sexuality. (Shumway 1992: 127)

Ehrenreich et al. (1992) make a similar series of observations in relation to early Beatles’ performances in the US during 1964. Thus, according to Ehrenreich et al. (1992), fans already knew how to respond to the Beatles having watched TV footage of the group performing in Britain, such footage being similarly intercut with scenes from the audience:

When the Beatles arrived in the United States, which was still ostensibly sobered by the assassination of President Kennedy two months before, the fans knew what to do. Television had spread the word from England: The approach of the Beatles is a licence to riot. At least 4,000 girls (some estimates run as high as 10,000) greeted them at Kennedy Airport, and hundreds laid siege to the Plaza Hotel, keeping the stars virtual prisoners. (Ehrenreich et al. 1992: 86)

If mediated images of Elvis and the Beatles were instrumental in securing loyal and enthusiastic audiences for these artists, they were also ensured the popularity of Elvis and the Beatles on a global scale. If rock ‘n’ roll was the first musical form to exploit the potential of the global media, this in turn ensured it gained an audience which went far beyond the US and Britain. Similarly, the demand for rock ‘n’ roll music resulted in the appearance of ‘home-grown’ rock ‘n’ roll artists in many different countries throughout the world.
Rock 'n' roll as a 'global' music

As noted above, the first indications of the extent of rock 'n' roll's global appeal came as newspapers around the world reported on the response of local youth to screenings of the film Rock Around the Clock. However, it was not simply the consumption of rock 'n' roll sounds and images from the US and Britain which transformed rock 'n' roll into a youth music on a global scale. Equally important, if often overlooked, were local arrangements for the production and consumption of rock 'n' roll music.

In the Netherlands, for example, the local rock 'n' roll scene was dominated by Indobands. These were groups comprising Indonesian immigrants whose 'apparently natural musical abilities' and affinity with the guitar (which was used in traditional Indonesian music) gave them a distinct advantage over indigenous white musicians in emulating the sound of US and British rock 'n' roll artists (Mutsaers 1990: 308). Indeed, according to Mutsaers (1990: 310): 'White musicians are reported to have painted their hair black and darkened their faces in order to gain musical credibility'. The dominance of Indobands in the Dutch rock 'n' roll scene created special concerns for the Dutch authorities regarding the effects of rock 'n' roll on young people. In particular, there were concerns over reactions of audiences to the live shows of Indobands. At dance halls where the groups played there were often violent clashes between white Dutch boys and 'Indo' boys who, it was alleged, were 'stealing' the girlfriends of the white boys (Mutsaers 1990: 310). Indobands were also very popular with German audiences, one particular group, the Tielman Brothers, moving to Germany where they became 'the best-paid live act in the history of Indorock and at that time of Eurorock altogether' (Mutsaers 1990: 312).

The extent to which rock 'n' roll became a global phenomenon is further illustrated by Shuker (1994) in his account of the music's impact on youth in New Zealand:

As with their overseas counterparts, by the mid-1950s New Zealand youth were more visible and more affluent. Contemporary press advertising reflected increased awareness of youth as a distinctive market, particularly for clothes and records. Dances and concerts catering for youth increased, with 10,000 people attending the Ballroom Astoria - 'New Zealand's Biggest Dance Attraction' - in a regional centre, Palmerston North. Youth clubs conducted rock 'n' roll dances, and the nationally broadcast Lever Hit Parade began in November 1955.

(Shuker 1994: 256)

The iconic status of Elvis Presley also informed a rather less likely rock ‘n’ roll success story in the former Soviet Union. When rock ‘n’ roll records first began to filter into the USSR, initially in the form of gifts brought by western visitors, and subsequently as illegal imports intended for the black market (see Easton 1989), the Soviet authorities adopted an overtly negative attitude, claiming that rock ‘n’ roll ‘was dirty bourgeois propaganda aimed at westernising the Soviet Union’ (Bright 1986: 361). Despite such official opposition to rock ‘n’ roll, however, the USSR had its own rock ‘n’ roll scene. One of the biggest stars of this scene was Dean Reed, a US born singer-songwriter who Nadelson describes as the Elvis Presley of the Soviet Union, ‘so famous his icon was for sale in shops alongside those of Yuri Gagarin and Joseph Stalin’ (Nadelson 1991: 3).

Nadelson’s biographical account of Dean Reed is significant not simply because of the alternative history of rock ‘n’ roll in the former USSR and wider Eastern Bloc which it portrays, but also because of its insights into the growing desire of Soviet youth for the products of the western popular culture industries during the Cold War years, even as such products were systematically barred by the authorities. Indeed, as Nadelson illustrates, Soviet youth’s interest in western popular culture began not with rock ‘n’ roll but with ‘the movies and the records which the Red Army captured in Berlin after the [Second World] war’ (Nadelson 1991: 76). These included Sun Valley Serenade, a film whose Glenn Miller soundtrack included ‘Chattanooga Choo Choo’ which the Stilyagi (the Style Hunters), a local Moscow youth culture (see Pilkington 1994), adopted as ‘their anthem’ (Nadelson 1991: 76). As Chapters 2 and 4 will illustrate, this interest among Russian youth and the youth of other Eastern Bloc countries in western popular music and style continued throughout the years of Soviet rule despite the various attempts of government bodies to deter such interest.

As the above examples illustrate, far from being simply an Anglo-American phenomenon, rock ‘n’ roll music became popular throughout the world during the 1950s and 1960s. Similarly, the recognition of rock ‘n’ roll as a distinctive youth music was also acknowledged by young people on a global scale. An integral aspect of rock ‘n’ roll and subsequent post-war popular music styles were the styles and fashions of young fans. This was particularly noticeable in Britain where a succession of stylistically spectacular and highly distinctive youth cultural groups emerged during the post-war years.
Post-war youth culture and the CCCS

The first sustained attempt to make a sociological study of the post-war youth style in Britain was from theorists based at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (see also Bennett 2000). Central to the work of the CCCS is the concept of subculture first developed by the American Chicago School of sociology during the 1920s and 1930s. The Chicago School theorists wanted to construct a sociological model of juvenile delinquency as an alternative to the individualist criminological accounts which argued that deviance was symptomatic of individual disorder (see Sapsford 1981). The Chicago School argued against this explanation of deviance, suggesting instead that deviance was a product of social problems such as unemployment and poverty. Furthermore, they argued, given that these problems were a common aspect of everyday life for many individuals, deviant behaviour, for example theft, violence and drug taking, could be seen as ‘normalized’ responses, particularly in relation to the young who would resort to deviance as means of empowering themselves.

The CCCS modified the original Chicago School model of subculture through the application of a structural Marxist perspective that focused on the collective style of post-war British youth ‘subcultures’ such as the Teddy boys, the mods and the skinheads. Hall and Jefferson's (1976) Resistance through Rituals, the centrepiece of the CCCS’s work on post-war youth cultures, produced a new theory of subcultural style in response to the then widely endorsed ‘embourgeoisement thesis’ which argued that, with the increasing affluence of the post-war period, British society was becoming classless (see, for example, Butler and Rose 1960). The class struggle which had characterized the previous 150 years, it was argued, had ended as working class people became more middle class in their outlook due to their increased wealth (Leys 1983: 61). Such arguments were very easily applied to young people, the emergent youth market being seen by many as the single most important influence on post-war youth and the catalyst for a new unified youth culture as young people abandoned the class-based identities of the pre-war years and bought into new consumer lifestyles (Reimer 1995). The CCCS theorists rejected the view that the increased affluence of post-war working class youth had resulted in their assimilation into a unified teenage consumer culture. Instead they argued that the emergent youth styles, if indeed indicative of the newly acquired spending habits of working class youth, also symbolized a series of ‘subcultural’ responses on the part of working class youth to the socio-economic conditions of their class position.

According to the CCCS theorist, Phil Cohen (1972), youth subcultures
were to be understood in terms of their facilitating a collective response to the break up of traditional working class communities. Cohen suggested that the urban redevelopment programmes in the East End of London during the 1950s, together with the relocation of families to ‘new towns’ and modern housing estates, culminated in an irreparable rupturing of traditional working class ways of life as these families struggled to come to terms with the loss of former working class communities and their various support structures, while at the same time attempting to integrate into a new environment and new patterns of existence. Subcultures, argues Cohen, were an attempt on the part of working class youth to bridge the gap between life on the new estates and the former patterns of traditional working class life:

It seems to me that the latent function of subculture is this – to express and resolve, albeit ‘magically’, the contradictions which remain hidden and unresolved in the parent culture . . . [each subculture attempts] to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in their parent culture.

(Cohen 1972: 23)

From this point of view, subcultures are seen to form part of an ongoing struggle on the part of working class youth to reassert a sense of community. This reading of subcultural style informs several other CCCS studies. In his work on the 1950s Teddy boy style, Jefferson argues that the group life and intense loyalty of the Teds can be seen as a reaffirmation of traditional slum working class values and the ‘strong sense of territory’ as an attempt to retain, if only imaginatively, a hold on the territory which was being expropriated from them.

(Jefferson 1976: 81)

Similarly, Clarke (1976: 99) argues that the subcultural style of the skinhead ‘represents an attempt to re-create through the “mob” the traditional working class community as a substitution for the real decline of the latter’. The visual image of the skinhead, suggests Clarke (1976: 56), ‘resonated with and articulated skinhead conceptions of masculinity, “hardness” and “working-classness”’. A somewhat different interpretation of working class youth style is put forward by Hebdige (1976a) in his study of mods. Thus, according to Hebdige (1976a), the mods’ fetishization of expensive and highly desirable commodities, such as Italian sharp suits and designer sunglasses, symbolized an emphasis on leisure time, rather than physical territory, as a threatened space. Hebdige argues that the mods’ collective antidote to their workaday existence as office boys and unskilled labourers
was to take control of their night-time and weekend leisure through conspicuous consumption and a disregard for the structured time of the working week articulated through all-night clubbing and a steady stream of speed pills. Such collective sensibilities are clearly illustrated in Franc Roddam's 1979 film about mod culture _Quadrophenia_ (re-released in 1997). Thus, as Lewis observes:

> [by day] we see Jimmy, the film's hero, at work as a mail boy at a posh advertising firm. Surrounded by images of inaccessible women and wealth, Jimmy finds the whole work scene debasing. . . . [by night and at the weekend] Jimmy ably follows [the mod] fashion, embracing the hell-bent hedonism with a kind of desperate fervor.

(Lewis 1992: 86–7)

The work of the CCCS has been criticised on a number of grounds. One of the most salient criticisms of subcultural theory has been made by McRobbie and Garber (1976), who point out the CCCS's failure to include in their work any account of girls' involvement in subcultures. In their study 'Girls and subcultures', McRobbie and Garber (1976) identify a strong teeny bopper culture among young girls. They argue that while this teeny bopper culture is an equally significant form of youth culture as the more male dominated subcultures, it is less visible because of the stricter parental control to which girls are subjected, such control forcing them to construct their teeny bopper culture around the territory available, the home and the bedroom (McRobbie and Garber 1976: 219). In subsequent work, McRobbie (1980) attributes the failure of the CCCS to acknowledge this home-centred teeny bopper culture to the selective bias of the CCCS researchers themselves. Thus, she argues,

> while the sociologies of deviance and youth were blooming in the early seventies the sociology of the family was everybody's least favourite option . . . few writers seemed interested in what happened when a mod went home after a weekend on speed. Only what happened out there on the streets mattered.

(McRobbie 1980: 68–9)

A number of other writers have also criticised the sociological interpretation of post-war youth put forward by the CCCS. Frith (1983), for example, has argued that one of the central problems with the CCCS approach lies in the 'romantic' notions of resistance which it attaches to subcultures. Frith takes issue with notion of style as signifying 'the moment of symbolic refusal' in the 'act of symbolic creation', adding:
The problem is to reconcile adolescence and subculture. Most working-class teenagers pass through groups, change identities, play their leisure roles for fun; other differences between them – sex, occupation, family – are much more significant than distinctions of style. For every youth ‘stylist’ committed to a cult as a full-time creative task, there are hundreds of working-class kids who grow up in a loose membership of several groups and run with a variety of gangs. There’s a distinction here between a vanguard and a mass, between uses of leisure within subcultures.

(Frith 1983: 219–20)

Such an argument is clearly critical of the CCCS’s notion of tight coherent subcultures, suggesting alternatively that such groups may in fact be characterised by a series of floating memberships and fluid boundaries. A similar position is taken by Jenkins (1983) in his study Lads, Citizens and Ordinary Kids. Like Frith, Jenkins is critical of the fact that subcultural theory not only tends to overlook the essentially interconnected nature of so-called subcultures but also regards such groups as ideologically separated off from the wider society. Thus, he argues, ‘the concept of subculture tends to exclude from consideration the large area of commonality between subcultures, however defined, and implies a determinate and often deviant relationship to a national dominant culture’ (Jenkins 1983: 41).

In my own critique of the CCCS I take issue with the Centre’s idea of working class resistance as a centrally defining aspect of post-war youth style. The concept of ‘resistance’, I argue, revolves around the very tentative argument that, despite the possibilities for visual creativity and experimentation with identity opened up by post-war youth fashions and other commodities, ‘working-class youth were somehow driven back to the fact of class as a way of articulating their attachment to such commodities’ (Bennett 1999a: 602). I further suggest that, rather than accentuating issues of class divisions, ‘post-war consumerism offered young people the opportunity to break away from their traditional class-based identities [and adopt] new, self-constructed forms of identity’ (Bennett 1999a: 602).

Finally, Thornton (1995) makes the point that, in focusing entirely upon conditions of class as a basis for both the origins and stylistic response of subcultures, the CCCS overlook the other influences upon the collective self-image of youth, in particular the role played by media representation. Thus, argues Thornton:

When [the CCCS] come to define ‘subculture’, they position the media and its associated processes outside, in opposition to and after the fact of subculture. In doing so, they omit precisely that which clearly
delineates a 'subculture', for labelling is crucial to the insiders’ and outsiders’ views of themselves.

(Thornton 1995: 119)

According to Thornton then, rather than emerging as fully formed, grassroots expressions of youth solidarity, subcultures are the product of youth’s dynamic and highly reflexive relationship with the mass media. The mass media are responsible, argues Thornton, for providing youth with many of the visual and ideological resources which they incorporate into collective subcultural identities.

Conclusion

During the course of this chapter I examined the socio-economic factors which gave rise to the post-Second World War youth market and the influence of this market on the spending patterns, tastes and collective awareness of young people. I have shown how the ready availability of new youth commodities, notably fashion items, magazines, films and popular music, during the post-war period, was instrumental in youth’s realization of itself as a 'culture', that is to say as a separate social category marked off from the parent culture and from childhood by a series of distinctive visual images and accompanying sensibilities of style and taste. Central to youth’s stylistic revolution during the post-war period, I have illustrated, was rock ‘n’ roll, the first genre of popular music that youth could claim as ‘its own’. In the final section, I considered some of the explanations put forward by theorists from the Birmingham CCCS to interpret the significance of British post-war youth style. As subsequent chapters will illustrate, although the CCCS has been variously criticised, its work, particularly the concept of subculture, has been highly influential in studies of a number of contemporary youth music and styles from punk to rave.

Further reading