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## Heavy Metal and Subcultural Theory: A Paradigmatic Case of Neglect?

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This chapter examines the subcultural status of heavy metal. Heavy metal is perhaps unique in that its thirty-year history - as the object of tribal loyalty and youth cultural activity - unravels on both sides of the subculture that was seen to be the last word in cultural theorising: punk. David Muggleton (2000: 2) has remarked that on reading Dick Hebdige's account of punk, in *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979), he could find no reflection there of his own experiences as a punk. As a fan of heavy metal, (before I embraced 'prog rock', jazz-fusion and then punk)<sup>1</sup> I do not even have the satisfaction of claiming this, since the account of heavy metal in subcultural theory is, at best, marginal; at worst, simply 'invisible'. What follows is an attempt to investigate this 'invisibility' but also to explain it.<sup>2</sup>

My argument is that heavy metal, although it ought to have qualified for subcultural status, did not. Firstly, because it did not show up on subcultural radar and, secondly, when it did, it was rejected as 'inauthentic' on political grounds. This is because I view subcultural theory as a theoretical-political framework for categorizing 'radical' cultural activity. The problem with this framework is that it depends upon a rather fabricated idea of *commodity stylization* as a necessarily restrictive class *practice*. Thus, while all working-class youth suffer structural oppression, only a minority are able to articulate 'resistance' through a creative and class-affirming 'subversion' of leisure consumption. This assumes, among other things, that youth have an oppressive relationship to the cultural commodity 'market', just as they do to the other institutions of 'social control'. At the same time we are asked to believe that the 'youth culture industry' is parasitic on subcultural stylization, in wanting to exploit it, once the process of 'moral panic' has passed to an 'incorporation' phase. This exploitation

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<sup>1</sup> This transition from one subcultural style to another was not just signified by a change of clothing but by changes in my record collection. This involved a reordering and categorising of what was 'cool' or just 'acceptable' and what wasn't. In this respect, the impact of punk was to severely limit my collection: it was a 'ground zero' operation. My 'prog' and metal records were now an embarrassment and I sold them to one of my mates who was still into metal and therefore a bit of a 'dinosaur'. Now, of course, all these records sit happily together.

<sup>2</sup> This ought to involve uncovering 'the subjective meanings, values and motives of those involved' (Muggleton 2000: 5). But given the thirty-year gap, nothing short of a time machine would be effective in achieving this!

involves selling radical stylization as 'novel' style to the rest of working-class youth, but emptied of its class-articulated meanings. Thus the model posits a 'heroic', because unequal, struggle between radical 'appropriation' as style, against a recuperative act of 'dislocation' of class-made meanings that become the source of attraction to non-radical youths. The reason this division inheres is because in order to distinguish radical consumer stylization from just any stylization, the class colouring must be 'pure' and uncontaminated by the media, the market or the (non-radical) majority of the working-class itself.

Sarah Thornton (1995: 119) importantly has argued that this model rests on a radical fantasy of a 'media-free space', prior to exposure, prior to incorporation. But it equally involves a fantasy of a 'market-free' space, won through subcultural struggle against incorporation into the 'mainstream'. It is my argument that youth commodity stylization is much more widespread than subcultural theory makes it out to be, and that there are as many subcultural styles as there are markets to distinguish them. What matters are the criteria we bring to the definition of subcultural markets themselves, since membership is not necessarily defined by class but through subcultural identification with the practice of stylization. It follows that the class character of such stylization is much messier and less pure than subcultural theory would like. It also has more to do with the existence and demise of subcultural markets than with subcultures understood as the autonomous practices of minority radical stylists within an otherwise undifferentiated mass of the working-class.

Subcultural markets are not, as Angela McRobbie (1994: 136-7) argues, a post-punk phenomenon, but a condition of the popular expansion of postwar style-culture itself. One subcultural example that makes this clear is heavy metal, although I am sure there are plenty of others. The commodity stylization of heavy metal culture revolves around a collective investment in a 'fantastic' masculinity, made possible by the existence of a dedicated market of records, concerts and other activities. The development of this market allows this culture to develop and to complexify, to become subject to internal modification and to external change. Like accounts of class subcultures, the style of heavy metal culture is rooted in contradictions of class, gender and ethnicity, which are mediated through its style of expression and which are the source of its attraction. While heavy metal music cannot resolve these contradictions, it can stage an imaginative encounter with them that is both pleasurable and meaningful (cf. Walser 1993).

### **Heavy Metal: a Subculture Without any 'Style'**

Despite emerging in the period 1969-1970, as a distinctive musical style that was able to recruit a substantial working-class and lower-middle-class following, heavy metal was ignored, dismissed or marginalized by Birmingham CCCS subcultural theorists and in the newly emergent youth and popular music studies. Receiving not a single reference in the pioneering CCCS work (Hall and Jefferson 1976) or those that sought to revise it (Mungham and Pearson 1976; Brake 1980; 1985: 72-80), heavy metal's working-class and student popularity was belatedly acknowledged in a bemused footnote to Hebdige's celebrated (1979) work. Here, 'heavy metal rockers' (ibid.: 84) are identified as one of a range of 'youth cultural options' open to ordinary youth, who are *not* subcultural stylists. The appended note is presumably to explain this option to the uninformed reader. Thus,

Heavy metal is, as the name suggests, a heavily amplified, basic form of rock which relies on the constant repetition of standard guitar riffs. Aficionados can be distinguished by their long hair, denim and 'idiot' dancing (again, the name says it all). Heavy metal has fans amongst the student population, but it also has a large working class following. It seems to represent a curious blend of hippy aesthetics and football terrace machismo (1979: 155, n.12).

This 'reading' from Hebdige, the self-styled semiotician *par excellence*, is curiously flat and one-dimensional. This is presumably because heavy metal can simply be read 'on its surface'. It does not represent a 'crime against the natural order', like punk's coded and oblique 'white noise', but a rather dull elaboration of past elements, of rock and hippidom. Hebdige clearly views the behaviour of the followers of heavy metal as 'comical' ('idiot dancing') and yet this public behaviour, which he incorrectly identifies (actually *headbanging*), could quite plausibly qualify as an element in, and evidence of, a subcultural homology. What the phenomenon lacks, of course, is a tightly-knit sense of stylistic innovators who are coded 'working-class'. The surprising alliance between 'scruffy students' and the working-class is attributed to a reactionary *alliance* of the counter-culture and 'machismo', rather than a *cross-class* bricolage. In the Hall and Jefferson (1976) classic CCCS text, football terrace machismo is romanticised, even admired, as a 'defence of space' (for example, Clarke 1976b); yet in this context it is simply 'machismo'. The confused class composition of the heavy metal audience, its obvious lack of style and its self-evident consumer origins mean that it does not express a 'ritual of resistance' but rather of conformity to 'traditional' values of working-class masculinity, which the consumer style of heavy metal exploits.

Here, in capsule form, we have the 'problem' of the subcultural status of heavy metal and it is, I shall argue, a problem *not* of heavy metal but of subcultural theory. Heavy metal is simply invisible to the radar of subcultural theory, despite the fact that it was, throughout the

period of formation of the CCCS approach, a popular cultural form that attracted the spending and leisure focus of a large quantity of male (and some female) working-class and lower-middle-class adolescents. Indeed, it could be argued, in terms of the CCCS model, that the emergent stylistic ensemble of heavy metal youth culture announced a similarly striking unity of group cohesion and identity to those groups – the teds, mods, skins and punks - that formed the empirical focus of Birmingham subcultural theory. Such a subcultural recognition might have allowed a clearer understanding of the stylistic transition that led from the mid-1960s ‘rockers’ or motorbike gangs, via the ‘hippie’ counterculture (two styles distinctly *contrasted* within Willis’ (1978) study), to the post-rocker, *sans*-motorbike ‘greasers’ or ‘grebos’. For these ‘greasers’ began to exhibit the stylistic elements that Deena Weinstein (2000: 100) identifies as ‘hippie-biker’ or ‘outlaw-biker-gang’, from which heavy metal style is derived.

### **‘Headbanging’: the Panic that Wasn’t**

It is Cashmore (1984) who is the first to extend Hebdige’s dismissal. Cashmore’s approach is notable because it makes explicit the features which ought to have qualified heavy metal as a subcultural ‘style of resistance’, yet perversely fails such criteria. Like Hebdige, Cashmore identifies its emergence amidst ‘punk vs. Ted skirmishes’ in the late 1970s - ‘a mass following of youth, their denim clothes covered in studs and appliqué, their hair long and wild so as to swing freely when they shook their heads in time with the music – what they called ‘head-banging’ (1984: 37).

This head-banging was the source of the only genuine moment of panic about heavy metal when a youth died after inflicting on himself brain damage through continually jerking his head at a concert in the Midlands town of Wolverhampton. But heavy metal generally failed to arouse the kind of hysteria or panic associated with most youth subcultures. This said, the heavy metal kids didn’t actually do much of note: they went to concerts, very big outdoor concerts, and they gave the appearance of being threatening without actually being threatening. That’s all. It would be unfair to call heavy metal conservative: inert would be more accurate (Cashmore 1984: 37).

What Cashmore is actually describing is the ‘New Wave of British Heavy Metal’, a term coined by *Sounds* music journalist, Geoff Barton, to capture the aggressive resurgence of heavy metal bands in the wake of punk (Barton 1979, 1990; Brown 2001). Taking the ‘grass roots’, DIY aesthetic, speed and aggression of punk, a whole new wave of heavy metal influenced bands began to emerge in the 1979-1980 period. Cashmore views this revival, like Hebdige’s account of the teds, as a form of youthful, working-class conservatism. Yet his account is unable to ‘explain’ the coherence of the style or its practices. For clearly this group

has a definite identity, argot and ritual. They are also clearly working-class 'white kids' but Cashmore is unable to 'locate' them within a class 'contradiction'. The one familiar element, the moral panic potential of 'headbanging', fails to provoke sustained media coverage. For Cashmore, this is symptomatic of the political 'inertness' of the movement, which is vaguely threatening, but ultimately socially introverted, because it is based around consumption.

### **The 'Problem' of Heavy Metal**

It is my argument that the case of heavy metal can reveal how it was possible for subcultural theory to get it wrong. In other words, the 'problem' of heavy metal is actually a problem of the compatibility of the emergent features of the youth culture with the conceptual framework the CCCS developed to explain the striking synchrony or 'homology' of elements of style to the class 'messages' that subcultures carried. This ought to be a methodological issue, of how empirical features are gathered and ordered in the construction of a theoretically adequate explanation (cf. Muggleton 2000: 20). But, in fact, the problem with Birmingham subcultural theory is an over-bearing *political* 'theoreticism', which is compelled to identify subcultures as 'authentic' expressions of working-class 'resistance'. As Steve Redhead (1990: 25) puts it, "'Authentic" subcultures were produced by subcultural theories, not the other way around'. What I want to add to this is that particular elements in the theoretical mix of subcultural theory have particular outcomes in terms of the account of subculture. Drawing on aspects of the growing critiques of the CCCS (Gelder and Thornton 1997), I want to illustrate how the case of heavy metal offers a paradigmatic critique of the theoretical procedure of subcultural theory in recognising and categorising subcultures.

Firstly, the CCCS take their subcultural categories from media coverage and then trace them back to an original 'moment' of authentic stylistic creation. Although such an approach wishes to separate 'authentic' subcultures from their sensationalized exposure in macro media, it is only after the fact of this exposure that subcultures can be recognized as distinct (Thornton 1995: 119). Significantly, there is no account of the role of the media or cultural industries until after 'pure' subcultures become subject to moral panic coverage and commercial diffusion/defusion as 'consumer style'. The 'problem' with heavy metal is that it is not subject to specific moral panic until 1980-1, ten years after its first emergence. This means it is 'invisible' to subcultural recognition. It also means that it literally doesn't exist in the 'tightly-knit' form that subcultural theory would recognise as 'authentic'.

Second, subcultural theory presents an account of postwar subcultures as entirely working-class in origin, in terms of their locations of emergence (almost exclusively London) and their membership. They do recognise the 'counterculture' as a middle-class

phenomenon, which articulates the 'focal concerns' of this class. But the 'hippies' are not 'subcultural' in the way that working-class groups are. Rather the 'counterculture' is composed of students, ex-students and 'drop outs' from the class system, it is therefore a quite diffuse 'milieu' (Clarke *et al.* 1976). The problem of heavy metal here is that, although it is possible to trace its working-class emergence in the UK midlands and the north in terms of early bands and followers,<sup>3</sup> it also has middle-class fans that, as we have seen, are identified as 'scruffy students'.

Third, unlike heavy metal, none of the postwar subcultures are identified with the emergence of particular music scenes. The mod music scene, for example, is seen to emerge after the mods and to involve a commercialization of their 'original' style (Clarke 1976a: 187). The exception here should have been punk, but Hebdige (1979) overemphasises its style politics at the expense of its existence as a music phenomenon (Laing 1985), while failing to locate its origins in the middle-class/ art school/ student 'milieu' (Frith and Horne 1989). The other 'possible contender' for a subculture with a music origin is 'glamrock', which Ian Taylor and Dave Wall (1976) argue is instrumental in the demise of the skinheads. However, if this thesis is accepted 'it breaks the pattern of post-war youth culture in Britain' (Mungham and Pearson 1976: 7). This is because Glamrock is a commercialization of the counter culture in a 'hardrock' style, calculated to appeal to the working-class (Taylor and Wall 1976: 106). It is therefore a 'prefabricated' subculture which has no 'authentic' roots in working-class experience. What is striking about this debate is that the 'hardrock' style of Glam music is not contextualized within a musical genealogy (see Cagle 1995: Ch.6), which would have to include heavy metal, as well as garage-punk. Also, that the problem of the emergence of heavy metal is a dry rehearsal of these kinds of arguments, five years earlier.

This inadequate periodization of musical styles also disables Hebdige's account of postwar rock, as part of his wider claim that all subcultural styles rehearse a 'phantom history' of black/white relations in terms of a reaction/accomodation to the 'black immigrant presence' (1979: 44-5). As Gary Clark argues, because Hebdige 'examines only selected areas of

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<sup>3</sup> Emerging in the period 1969-70, bands such as Black Sabbath, Judas Priest (Birmingham, West Midlands) and Budgie (Cardiff, South Wales), to note only the most well known, were clearly working class in origin, as were their followers. This pattern of emergence from formerly heavily industrialised conurbations also holds good for heavy metal's second wave, the so called New Wave of British Heavy Metal, composed of bands such as Def Leppard (Sheffield), Saxon (Barnsley) and Venom (Newcastle). There is also a clear north/south pattern to the development of the genre, although some bands formed in and around London, notably Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Iron Maiden, the strong hold of support for metal lay in the Midlands and the North (indeed, Plant and Bonham were West Bromwich born and played in the Birmingham based, Band of Joy, prior to co-founding Zeppelin).

articulation as opposed to the mass appropriation of black music [he wrongly] suggests that black and white links were absent during the early seventies' (1990: 88-9). The most significant 'black-white' articulation occurring in this period is, of course, that of heavy metal, in the riff style and lyrics of black urban blues, meeting the psychedelia of the late 1960s (Walser 1993: 9). The contradictions involved in this cultural syncretism are just as significant, in terms of racism and 'white' ethnicity, as Hebdige's account of the music of the teds and skins.

### **Radical Consumer Stylization: the Importance of Records**

This point takes us to the heart of the problem: the inadequate treatment of popular music within subcultural analysis. There are broadly two reasons for this. Firstly, the 'ideology' of classless youth, contested by subcultural theory, identified the notion of a 'youth generation' as 'rooted in the new consciousness carried by progressive rock music' (Murdock and McCron 1976: 22). Subcultural theory was therefore keen to show that the 'counterculture' had an almost exclusively middle-class membership and that the musical tastes of the middle- and working-classes were separate and divergent. As Murdock and McCron put it, 'far from dissolving class differences and creating a homogeneous generational culture, the bifurcating cultures of pop and rock became one of the main means through which these divisions were extended into the sphere of leisure' (1976: 23).

But the cost of this position is that the issue of music is consistently downplayed within subcultural theory. This produces a contradictory account of the relationship of subcultural style to musical preferences, in term of group 'homologies' and expressive style. In the main theoretical exposition of the concept of homology in *Resistance Through Rituals*, John Clarke claims that the 'neatest description' of the relation between object and group is George Melly's characterization of rock 'n' roll as "'screw and smash" music for the Teds' (1976a: 179). In fact, all the examples Clarke gives are musical ones. Yet, as Cagle puts it, although CCCS theorists 'view music as integral to the homology of the subculture, very little is said about how and why the music plays a significant role in the identity making process of the subculture' (1995: 39). This is because records are conceived of by the CCCS as 'objects' and materials, ripe for appropriation by the group in the 'genesis of style' (Clarke 1976a: 183). As such they pre-exist their subcultural adoption as one of many circulating commodities, whose 'meanings' are inscribed by the dominant culture in ways which reflect the 'preferred' meanings of the economically-dominant class. Here the absence of a theorization of media and the culture industries leads to a confusion between these institutions and those of 'formal' social control.



This is because subcultural theorists conceive the relationship between working-class subcultures and the leisure industry as a structurally oppressive one. Thus, subcultural stylization is an act of resistance which involves collective action, part of which is action against the tyranny of the commodity: 'neither money nor the market could fully dictate what groups used these things to *say* or *signify* about themselves' (Clarke *et al.* 1976: 55). The notion of 'resistance' turns on a notion of a passive/active relationship to the youth leisure market. Subcultural groups 'use' and 'appropriate' materials and commodities rather than 'consume' them. The idea of consumption here is that of passivity, inaction and conformity to social role and position. Thus, 'far from being the ideal passive consumer of capitalist society, consuming the commodity in the form in which it is presented, the mods raised the possibility of an active relation to the commodity' (Clarke and Jefferson 1976: 153). The claim for the radical and subversive nature of subcultures involves a conception of active 'appropriation', 'transformation and rearrangement' of particular objects (the act of bricolage) which are, or can be made to be, 'homologous' with the group's 'focal concerns'. That is, a 'fit' is accomplished between the structural context of the class sub-group and the objects 'in which they can see their central values held and reflected' (Clarke *et al.* 1976: 56).

Hebdige (1979: Ch.8) notably departs from the idea of homology in punk style, and thereby from the 'tightly-organized' relationship between objects and class meanings but, as Paul Willis maintains, both 'homology' and 'signifying practice', 'imply a subversion of the received and commercially fixed meanings of cultural items in favour of a subculturally specific meaning' (Willis 1982: 91). The problem, as Hebdige recognises, is the polysemic nature of commodities, their instability of meaning, which he argues punk takes to its terminus, by signifying chaos 'at every level' (1979: 113). Despite the fact that Hebdige carries this analogy over to his account of the music of punk, what he misses is that punk records were not commodities inscribed with commercially fixed meanings. Here, subcultural theory cannot allow for the idea that commodities can already have meanings that are 'expressive' and 'homologous' with stylists. Yet this idea is nonetheless suggested throughout the *Resistance Through Rituals* text. Clarke, for example argues that, 'It is the objective potential of the cultural form (i.e. in this case, music) and its fit with the subjective orientation of the group which facilitates the appropriation of the form by the latter, leading (sometimes) to a sort of stylistic fusion between object and group' (1976a: 179). It is surely significant here that it is music that is often given as a 'good' example.

These inconsistencies lead me to question the *relative* potential for meaning of the 'found' items employed within a subcultural practice of *stylization*. The meanings, latent or otherwise, in a record are much greater than those residing in a safety-pin or a pair of work boots.

Records are not simply commodities in this way but already ‘art-culture’ objects which circulate within genre markets. What is therefore being suppressed in CCCS accounts of working-class subcultural stylization is the development of subcultural markets that are dependent upon and reactive to subcultural stylists themselves. In other words, we are asked to believe that cultural commodities have no meaningful connection to youth groups until their meaningfulness is recognized as integral to a particular class identity. The discussion of diffusion/defusion is also significant here. As Clarke argues, the eventual commercialization of a style means that it is ‘dislocated from the context and group which generated it’ (1976a: 188). But there is absolutely no reason why the moment of creativity must come before the style becomes more widespread; surely it is the very breakthrough of the style that marks it as significant? By working back from this ‘moment’ subcultural theory avoids the most important issue: why it was that this style ‘took off’, was widely meaningful, etc.

### **Willis and the Emergent Stylization of Heavy Metal Culture**

As we have seen, it is crucial to subcultural theory that music consumption has a class pattern that corresponds to the contrasting structural location of working-class and middle-class groups. We have also noted that, although music is readily invoked as expressive of group homologies, the radical stylization of subcultural groups is authenticated by the novel meanings their active use makes possible and this is diffused when such meanings become identified with the style as commercially ‘novel’. It is therefore very significant in Willis’s (1978) study that he abandons the absolute separation of commodity consumption and stylistic use in his account of the subcultural relation of the hippies to ‘their’ music consumption. The reason he does so is because the music of the hippies escapes the logic of commodification by the music corporations. This is because ‘rock’ artists had artistic control of their product, did not produce music simply for profit, and were themselves derived from the community their music addressed.

The hippy case contrasts with that of the motor-bike boys who could only select from what was provided, the hippies, or people very much like them, *could* exert a powerful influence on their music [...] the crucial characteristic of ‘progressive’ pop during the [...] late 1960s was that the performers, not the controllers, were able to decide on the artistic content of the music. Now these performers very often came from some version of the hippy culture. The music, therefore, came to reflect and develop more and more closely the concerns of this cultural group (Willis 1978: 164-5).

Willis’ argument, then, is that despite the status of ‘progressive’ records as commodities, the condition of the market’s expansion was that creative control remained with the artists rather

then those who financed it. Thus, the particular stylization of consumption of the hippies exerts a demand for a particular kind of cultural product which is determinant of the success of the market. This is therefore an art-culture market, despite the fact that the records 'make a lot of money'. But this relationship to consumption is not possible for the working-class bike boys because they do not have this kind of control over what they consume.

The significance of this for identifying heavy metal as an unacknowledged subcultural stylization that 'produced' its own distinctive market should now be clear. But there is further 'hidden' significance to Willis's study, in that the musical characteristics identified by the hippies as epitomising the 'progressive' culture that was integral to their class identity - such as the development of distortion techniques, a disregard for the temporal confines of the song form, and so on - are identified as those of formative heavy metal bands, such as Led Zeppelin. And, in terms of the 'messy' class location and consumption of heavy metal, as I have argued it, there is a further irony. As Muggleton comments, 'Reading *Profane Culture*, it seems beyond the bounds of possibility that some bikers may have become suedeheads, or that certain hippies could have transformed themselves into glam rockers or punks, so imprisoned are individuals by group homologies' (Muggleton 2000: 26). It is my argument that the emergence of heavy metal, as a distinctive market 'expression' of subcultural stylization, depends upon exactly this sort of thing occurring. That is, some members of both these opposed and contrasting groups went on to become, after 1969, heavy metal or progressive rock fans or more likely both, and that this tendency is clearly evident in the Willis study. For example, Willis's claim that the rockers' music constitutes a 'physical' homology between the motorbike and musical timbre, points to a moment in the formation of heavy metal culture (1976: 63).<sup>4</sup> Or as Andy Bennett puts it,

The fan base for heavy metal and progressive rock was essentially the same audience, largely comprising hippies and bikers. Indeed, by [the late] sixties [the] 'rocker' version of motorbike culture, with its attachment to fifties rock 'n' roll, had all but disappeared and been replaced by a new type of biker whose endorsement of the hippie lifestyle was unmistakable (Bennett 2000: 184).

This is also confirmed by Deena Weinstein's account of the emergence of the heavy metal subculture as a 'hippie-biker' hybrid youth culture which began to appear in late 1960s as

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<sup>4</sup> The biker anthem, 'Born to be Wild' by Steppenwolf (1968), contains many of the formative elements of heavy metal cultural stylization, not least the line 'heavy metal thunder'. The motorbike has remained a dominant 'iconic' signifier of heavy metal, despite the fact that most fans do not own bikes.

psychedelic music was getting harder. Weinstein's argument is that, with the collapse of the 1960s youth culture,

both the blue collar and longhairs and the psychedelic bands were left stranded. Eventually they found each other with the help of the music industry and the result was the heavy metal subculture [...] The important thing to note here is that the subculture was not a fabrication of the popular-culture industry, but existed, in germ, before heavy metal music as a distinctive genre erupted (Weinstein 2000: 101).

## **Conclusion: From Woodstock to Cockrock: Popular Music Studies and Heavy Metal**

Given the elements of syncretism emergent within Willis's (1978) account of the hippies and the motor-bike boys, elements that later find their expression in the formation of heavy metal culture, we would expect approaches to youth, based on musical preference, to be more sympathetic to such developments. But this is not the case. In fact such approaches largely reproduce the negative characterization of heavy metal, but do so by contrasting its negative divergence from the radical stylization of the middle-class 'counterculture'. The key feature of this argument is the relative autonomy of middle-class 'hippie culture' to articulate a progressive social vision through 'rock' music. As Frith puts it, 'rock had become an art form which bound a community' (1983: 213). Rock ideology expressed the sentiments and spirit of what was, in effect, a new 'deviant' middle-class: but in a 'universal' language.

The significance of this, and its connection to subcultural theory, is that the 'hippies' were the one subcultural style, outside of the working-class, recognized as a potentially *radical* subcultural milieu. This was because the hippies were able to articulate their critique of capitalism, whereas for other subcultures such a critique was 'coded' and in need of deciphering. It is against this class framework that the negative impact of heavy metal is decisively codified. This is because the commercial success of heavy metal as a mass music, sold to adolescent, working-class or lower-middle-class males, is seen to signal the demise of the 1960s 'counter culture'. Its emergence, at the close of the 1960s, becomes critically identified with the commercial *reappropriation* of the 'authentic' rock community and the rock 'artist' by the music business. Frith argues,

as the decade developed it became increasingly difficult to make sense of heavy metal as student music. Bands like Black Sabbath, Uriah Heep, and Deep Purple had their own armies of scruffy working-class fans, and the dismissive response of *Rolling Stone* to hard rock as a genre (and to all its exponents except its original 1960s founders) was symptomatic. The huge popularity of Grand Funk Railroad, in 1970-71, symbolized the arrival of a rock culture of working-class fans who didn't even read *Rolling Stone*; and the rise of Kiss later in the decade was an even clearer indication of how rock could be integrated into the

traditional marketing modes of teenage *pop*. The result was a music which had no significance for 'the intelligent' rock fan at all (1983: 214-5).

Here, the 'problem' of heavy metal is that it devalues rock music - the voice of a wider, inclusive community, articulated (through critical journalism) and supported (through consumption and participation) by a 'new', radical middle-class - by transforming it into a 'loud populism', sold to working-class males. Such a view is based on the assumption that a popular cultural form must fail the criteria of artistry when tied to the logic of the market, and is also central to the account of subcultural stylization as minority radical practice. Therefore the cross-class *bricolage*, represented by the development of heavy metal, must represent a devaluation of rock culture, because its majority audience is working-class. The market standardization of heavy metal allows it to be 'sold', like earlier forms of pop, as an industrialized genre. As Taylor and Wall argue, the 'inequality of access to the middle-class culture of liberation has been resolved at the expense of that culture' (1976: 112). The elements of heavy metal, borrowed from rock, become 'empty' forms of stylization, such as 'guitar virtuosity'.

The result of this process is that working-class males, by adopting the music and trappings of the counterculture, reinvent it as a celebration of 'wild masculinity' and commodified 'machismo'. This is clearly brought out in an account offered by Chambers (1985: 123) where heavy metal is described as 'closely tied to the immediate emotions of loud music, beer and communal maleness'. This view, of how heavy metal culture allows a collective celebration of lower-class masculinity, is itself derived from the seminal account, by Frith and McRobbie (1978/1990), of heavy metal as 'cockrock'. McRobbie, along with Frith, was one of the earliest theorists to dismiss heavy metal because its public consumption, by male youths, rested on the passive consumption of sexist mass culture. Thus, the 'sexual liberation' promised by the counter culture is transformed into a sexist machismo that finds a ready audience of working-class males.

Despite the fact that heavy metal is denied subcultural status, the centrality of masculinity to the commodity stylization of heavy metal is the feature that significantly connects it to other post-war working-class styles. But the characterization of this masculine stylization as a traditional machismo or as a commodification of sexism is inadequate. Indeed, the point is not that it is a masculinized style, but that such masculinization is dependent upon consumption. Hence, the problem for subcultural theory is that the stylization of masculinity in heavy metal does not articulate a 'defence' of class, but rather seeks to 'escape' or transcend class through a sci-fi /gothic/ heroic/ tragic dramatization, made possible by

consumption stylization itself, and which the subcultural 'market' of heavy metal makes possible.

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