

Youth, Popular Culture and Everyday Life, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, February 8-9 2002. : <http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/ics/ycc/>
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Popular Culture Studies thrives in the United States. A busy cycle of regional and national conferences occur under the auspices of the Popular Culture Association and American Culture Association (PCA ACA) that also runs a lively and active electronic discussion list (<http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~pcaaca/>). The Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), Bowling Green, Ohio is one of the leading departments in the field. The Staff includes Joe Austin, editor with Michael Nevin Willard of *Generations of Youth* (NYU Press, 1998) and organiser of the conference.

Papers included studies of boys with long hair in the 1960s, *Law and Order*, the Spice Girls, the musical *Hair*, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, youth in contemporary Turkey, *Star Trek* and advice literature in the post-war period and Riot Grrls, with a highlight being Janice Radway, Frances Fox Professor of Literature at Duke University and author of *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature* and *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle Class Desire* (University of North Carolina Press, 1984, 1997 respectively) on girls zines. Because the conference was wholly concerned with youth and because the organisers had made intelligent groupings, papers in the strands chimed together to offer collective in-depth studies of their subjects - a rare pleasure associated with focused conferences.

Music offered a unifying theme. It was introduced in the first strand 'Global Rap: the Politics of Hip Hop Culture' and continued by plenary speaker Carol Siegal, Associate Professor of English at Washington State University in her paper 'Perils for the Pure: Abstinence Rhetoric and Goth Youth Cultures' in which a cover version of Rod Stewart's 'Do You Think I'm Sexy' by the Revolting Cocks was used as a symbol of all that is healthy about punk and Goth adherents in an ultimately unconvincing comparison with the less fortunate followers of contemporary teenage abstinence programmes. The musical journey concluded with the final strand 'Situating Subcultures: Record Shops, Heavy Metal and War'.

Of the several British delegates, three were gathered in a strand entitled 'British Subcultural Theory Revisited: Issues of Youth, Style and Subculture' opened by the author of *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Blackwell, 1998), Bill Osgerby, of the University of North London. His paper 'Towards a Pre-History of Post-Subcultural Style: A Case Study of British Youth Culture During the 1950s' compared mass culture theories which present youth as the dupes of commerce and ignore the self-fashioning efforts of the young with other accounts, such as those by Hebdige, which privilege cultural production by youth at the expense of adequate acknowledgement of commercial mediators. Osgerby positioned himself in the middle ground arguing for recognition of a constant exchange between young people and the media and markets. He rejected Steven Connor's association of such an exchange with the postmodern condition suggesting instead that such interplay is long standing. He went on to exemplify this with a case study of some band members from Brighton. The second speaker in this strand was David Muggleton, of University College Chichester and author of *Inside Subculture: the Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Berg, 2000), whose paper 'Subcultural Authenticity: Insider and Outsider Perspectives' compared and contrasted ideas about youth culture and subculture put forward by members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham based upon authenticity, collective resistance, adaption and revolt, with those views of subculture promulgated by theorists of the post-modern focused on the inauthentic, fad-following and adoption. Muggleton argued that each of these approaches is inadequate for discussions of authenticity which individuals understand subjectively. He used oral history examples to show that subcultural participants, such as the Brighton-based punks interviewed by Muggleton, imagine that their own engagement with subculture is authentic and unlike the fashion-led engagement experienced by others. While the first two speakers had successfully cemented in the minds of the almost wholly North American audience the importance of Brighton as the epicentre of British subculture, Rehan Hyder of the University of the West of England, offered an alternative geography in his paper 'Asia Rising: Ethnicity and Subculture in

Contemporary Britain'. Drawing on examples of Anglo-Asian music such as Fun[^]da[^]mental, Black Star Liner, the Voodoo Queens and Cornershop Hyder sought to demonstrate that notions of authenticity in this music and in its makers were highly complex and not aided by mediation determinedly concerned with the political import of the use of instruments such as the sitar and tabla. Such mediation, Hyder contended, was not helpful to bands for whom music was not a political matter, and he offered published interview material with the lead singer of Cornershop as proof. Of the three, Hyder's paper most clearly demonstrated the problematic nature of oral history as a route to explorations of authenticity. If a band uses sitar and dholki and sings the Beatles's Norwegian Wood in Punjabi and is called Cornershop how can claims by the lead singer that what they do is not political go unquestioned in an academic study?

The title of the conference indicated a concern with everyday life that was perhaps not wholly met by the proportion of papers concerned with media and entertainment. Readers of the Design History Society Newsletter may assume, as I did, that design would have a central place at such a conference. In fact, fashion and clothing were exceptional as areas of material culture subjected to scrutiny in departments of Popular Culture as indicated by the conference line-up. Other forms of material culture remain as yet unexplored terrain.

Bowling Green is a town of 28,000 inhabitants, many of whom are involved with the University as students or staff. It is 25 minutes south of Toledo, near Lake Erie. Picture your reviewer at the wrong end of Fraternity Row eating burritos Mexicanos in the snow-burned landscape. At the centre of the campus is a lawn with a plaque explaining that it was the original University football field - hallowed ground indeed, but I never did find the eponymous Bowling Green.