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"Hardcore Makes Me Sick"

Truth, Youth and Unity in Australian Hardcore Punk Subculture

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

We are in a quiet industrial area in Sydney's inner west. The street is unlit and only the silhouettes of loitering kids, male and female, mingling on the concrete pavement, spilling onto the street. Sleeve-tattooed arms clutch at longneck beers, others at tatty guitar cases or cymbals. The backs of some hands bear a prominent, black-tattooed cross. These are *straightedgers*, hard core kids committed to a lifestyle of discipline and abstinence. Amongst the shadowy outlines, too, one can just make out a group of *hessian* punks, in their characteristic ripped jeans, studded jackets and back band patches: these are *heshes*, or as they are sometimes known, *herbs* or *hippy* punks, advocates of "autonomous living" such as DIY,[1] squatting, dumpster-diving and veganism. Standing next to them are some clean-cut *jocks* in new sneakers and band hoodies. Some hair flows free and unkempt, in dreads or in ponytails; others sport undercuts, crew-cuts or are shaved to the scalp. All are hardcore *kids* — "kids" the term used throughout the scene to denote a hardcore devotee, whatever their particular identification within the scene: hesh, straightedger, jock or otherwise.

My close mates in tow, with a few nods of acknowledgement, we pass by them, and on to the warehouse entrance. A single dark light bulb is the only illumination in the

narrow staircase. We enter the warehouse, paying our few bucks, our hands marked with a marker pen.

The concrete floor is sticky and unforgiving. The room is wide and high. Various adornments punctuate the dark room: a doll's head on a spike; hanging nooses; a large painted x-ray of a human ribcage, all shabbily set. At one end, a stage, behind which is a huge poster of a dreadlocked protester holding a gun to the head of a policeman. We mingle, making small talk: awesome new bands, upcoming tours. As usual, the conversation quickly falls to scene gossip, grumbling about overpriced shows, recently exposed *sell-outs* or annoying scenesters who do not really care about the music.

The background music rattles like a motorbike, reverberating with my heartbeat. Despite the calming influence of mundane chatter, I realise that I am in something of a heightened state of expectation. Anticipation for the forthcoming show grabs at my chest, shaking me, raising my level of anxiety to an almost unbearable pitch.

The band gathers to the tattered stage, raised only a foot above the floor. They tune their instruments nonchalantly whilst conversing with friends over their shoulders. The atmosphere is deceptively laid-back: relaxed and non-performative until . . .

The band starts to play, abruptly cutting short any remnants of chitchat. A wave of sound—a concrete wall of solid noise—hits the assembled crowd, smashing like a rock in the face. My breathing syncopates with the noise of the pulsating blast beats

from the drums. The vocalist's screaming tears at my brain. The fuzzy guitars resonate in my chest and constrict the muscles my neck. It is intolerable. It is terrible. It is beautiful.

So fast. Fast and so loud. The passion. The pure desperation. The adrenaline. I am consumed, monstered by the sound. My hands shake. My knees vibrate. I can't breathe. Bile rises in my throat. I run to the bathroom.

This is my hardcore. It makes me fucking sick.

Introduction: "Hardcore Makes Me Sick"[2]

This dissertation is at once an ethnography of some Australian hardcore punk scenes, and an assessment of the relevance and value of dominant theoretical models with reference to this subculture at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As an ethnography it will understand hardcore as contested and fragmentary; a subculture that is embraced by its followers as being "full of contradictions. It's contradictory by nature" (LM 2005).[3]

In the spirit of Clifford Geertz, this ethnographic work makes no claims to generalisability, but rather aspires to contribute to better conversations about the ways in which cultures understand themselves, and the worlds in which they are formed and maintained (Geertz 1973). My ethnography will proceed from my own participant-observation, through performance analysis, readings of various texts

and, of course, my exchanges with hardcore insiders, whose voices will pervade my writing. At the same time, this work is framed by the call to reflexivity made by Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). By means of a systematic attention to my own cultural situation—in particular my own involvement and investment in the scene about which I am writing, my intellectual background, and the over-arching bias of the scholarly gaze—I will tease out and explicate my own interests in both the scene and my academic project (Swartz 1997, 273-283).

Hardcore Music

Hardcore music is a derivative of punk music, albeit louder, faster and more aggressive than its cultural predecessor. It has a "hostile, aggressive meatiness" that is "full of Grrrr" (AB 2005). Its attraction lies in "the energy, the rawness and the aggression" (LM 2005). It is often, (though not always) *Short. Fast. Loud*.[4]

It is also abrasive. Neil from the Brisbane band *Draft Dodger* explained that:

> I've always been of the opinion that punk rock [or hardcore] was meant to be an ugly thing. It's not something that you sit around and clap your hands to. (Daniel, Interview with Neil from Draft Dodger 2004).

From yelled vocals to thrashing guitars, blast-beating drums and offensive or confronting lyrics, hardcore is anything but beautiful or easy listening. This ugliness, Neil argues, is central to the aesthetic of hardcore music. It often looks, and occasionally is, performatively violent. And yet a precise definition of hardcore remains elusive, as Christian from the band Blood of Others explains: "[a]s for explaining exactly what it is, I think it isn't possible. It's just something I know when I

see, hear or otherwise experience it" (Daniel, Interview with Christian from Blood of Others C 2003).

A brief Hardcore History

It feels good to say what I want.
It feels good to knock things down.
It feels good to see the disgust in their eyes.
It feels good and I'm gonna go wild.
                    "Spray Paint the Walls" *(Black Flag 1981)*

Before setting out the contents of this thesis, a short historical contextualisation is required: when and where hardcore originated, and a sense of how it was taken up in Australia. There is, however, no singular, unified or definitive history of hardcore. Much of its history is oral, and that which is written is dispersed, diffuse, contradictory and embedded in subjective experience and perspectives. However, it is generally accepted that the first published usage of the word "hardcore" in reference to punk culture was as the title of the Vancouver band DOA's album *Hardcore 81* (DOA 1981), a reasonable indication as to the year hardcore consolidated into a subculture and a related musical genre.

The term "hardcore" was originally an adjective to describe those who were the most extreme punks in the late 1970s Los Angeles punk scene (Spitz and Mullen 2001, 192-193). Hardcore punk became a breakaway scene in Los Angeles with bands like the Germs, Black Flag, Dead Kennedys and Fear in the late 1970s.[5] Early hardcore kids have described it as an attempt to push the limits of punk; "Hardcore", wrote Blush, "expressed an extreme: the absolute most punk" (Blush 2001, 16).

James Ward quotes Jeff Goldthorpe in defining it as a "fundamentalist interpretation of punk," deliberately intended "to ensure a threatening unsellable style" (Goldthorpe, 1992, cited in Ward 1996, 163)

The origin stories vary slightly, but there is a common theme, paralleling the heritage of many new punk scenes and movements: some of the younger Los Angeles punks, becoming disillusioned with the Hollywood punk scene, distanced themselves from this scene, creating a new socio-musical hub in Orange County, in the suburban, middle class outskirts of the city (Spitz and Mullen 2001, 194; Macleod 2010, 94-95).

Many were frustrated by what they perceived as the staleness of the excessively-stylised British punk that the Hollywood scene had appropriated. The life experiences of these kids—these suburban "jocks" (Blush 2001, 20)—was markedly different from the high-living, fashion conscious, and sexually promiscuous senior school of Hollywood punks. "The newer bands and their audiences were thus trying to carve out a space for themselves in a scene where they felt somewhat marginal" (Waksman 2004, 682). They were the punk scene fringe dwellers; outsiders to a subculture that was already on the outside, but they felt they were all the more punk for that. In fact, they were *hardcore punk*.

This stock narrative is played out again and again in the biography of hardcore:[6] familiar tales of resistance by authentic underdogs, targeted at those perceived as being cultural charlatans. According to Traber:

LA punks react[ed] against the image-conscious mentality of Los Angeles by

presenting a contrary image: celebrating ugliness in contrast to beauty, depression instead of joy, the sordid over the morally approved; in short opting for the city's gritty underbelly over its glamorous face (Traber 2001, 34).

The new kids were drawn to and concerned with the aggression of punk, rather than to its "style". According to Mike Patton from the proto-hardcore band Middle Class:

We weren't fashion punks, we didn't dress the part, and we were openly from Orange County . . . we were not putting on any sort of image. We were just who we were, and to us that was what punk rock was all about - something honest and pure (Spitz and Mullen 2001, 174).

The music they created and the identity they embodied was even more raw, more intense, and stripped-back than punk. This minimalist aesthetic was reflected in their choice of fashion: dressed down in old t-shirts jeans and crew cuts, a response to the spectacular style for which punk had come to be known.

Though younger and more suburban, this first wave of Californian hardcore kids were "physically tougher, angrier and more immediately REAL about their intention" (Belsito and Davis 1983, 38). Hardcore was a "more down-to-earth part of the punk scene. It was less of a costume show" (Lahickey 1997, X).[7]

Origins of Australian Hardcore

Australia Lucky country sing a song
Meet your doom from an enemy bomb.
"Copper Chopper" (Depression 1985)

Australian hardcore developed from the early 1980s, both as an emulation of American hardcore, and as a reaction against the extreme excesses and superficiality of punk. The new sound of proto-hardcore bands, in particular those from Los

Angeles, but also from the USA more generally as well as from the UK, provided the sonic basis from which to reject "fake" punk, upon which was built a set of local sounds. While punk had flourished in Australia from the mid-1970s—indeed, bands such as The Saints and Radio Birdman arguably preceded and anticipated the explosion of British punk in 1976—it was the 1983 tour of seminal LA hardcore band The Dead Kennedys which "opened a lot of peoples eyes and ears to the new LA punk sound coming out of the USA" (Anonymous 2013).

The impact of the Dead Kennedys' tour was severalfold, visible in the mainstream as well as the underground. It validated the already existing local hardcore scene; with its attendant media controversies and moral panics, it ticked all the boxes of a paradigmatic punk tour and it delivered to audiences loud, passionate anthems.[8] In fact, the tour acted as a sort of baptism of Australian hardcore: the first international punk band (apart from The Clash) to tour Australia, according to the Dead Kennedy's vocalist (Biafra 1983). If Australian punks were seeking external (read American or British) recognition of the already existing Australian hardcore scene, they found it at this time.

The tour exposed a greater number of people to a sound and an attitude which was already on our shores, and which continued to grow. Early Australian hardcore converged around major cities, and in particular Sydney and Melbourne (S&C 1988). Bands such as Depression, Mass Appeal, Civil Dissident, Death Sentence, Vicious Circle and Gash defined the Australian hardcore sound, and marked a shift away from the UK street punk, especially in its more spectacular guises. The "'skatecore"

bands of America (e.g. JFA, the Faction) and the more melodic American hardcore bands like Seven Seconds etc. (Davis n.d.) combined with 80s heavy metal influences and UK anarchist punk such as Discharge to forge this new style.

The sound offered the platform that was to become an alternative to the punk "uniform", which the new school kids found odious. One informant, PL, a member of a seminal Sydney hardcore band, explains the circumstances surrounding the dawn of Australian hardcore:

> My personal view is that punk was one of the first cultural and musical movements that I could relate to that was completely against oligarchy, totalitarian thoughts, against elitism. One of the great things about punk is that anyone can fucking form a band and it doesn't require millions of dollars or training to do it. And they're fucking seductive notions (PL 2006).

Thus, for PL, punk offered a set of attractive ideals which encouraged the DIY ethic and promoted freedom of expression. However:

> . . . once everyone became Sid Vicious and started spiking their hair, buying the same shoes and the same haircut, and every band started sounding the same and every album cover looked the same. Then, I thought that hardcore was a heavy punk-music-based-movement that rejected all those bad elements of punk. And as far as music is concerned, they brought heavy metal influences in to make it twice as heavy. And that along with the advent of self publishing fanzines and Do It Yourself swapping culture, all of a sudden right across the world you had people turning up to shows wearing sandshoes and shorts with any kind of hair they wanted to, trading records and tapes! This is fucking fantastic! And from there the only rule that you follow was that you don't fuck your friends over and you say no to all forms of authority. So that's why people are rejecting record companies, news agencies. You're gonna distribute handbills, you can do an all ages show in a hall rather than a pub, all that kind of stuff you know (PL 2006).

PL understands Australian hardcore as a realignment of a punk that had forgotten its essence, a shift away from its spectacular façade to its core. Within the context of the new, heavy, fast sound, was a renewed focus of "DIY"—Do It Yourself—

practices, and a fresh way of rejecting authority as a means of consolidating social unity within one's peer group. Hardcore promoted scene co-operation and interaction. It created spaces for sharing music outside of the pub scene, the "all ages" shows where "you don't tend to get as many morons" (S&C 1988). It established avenues for expression outside of established publishing sources, and created opportunities for interaction with punk communities internationally through grassroots networks of trading and touring (initially USA, UK and Continental Europe, but later throughout South America, Russia and particularly Asia). It gave permission to dress down at shows. Most importantly, it offered the freedom to shed the punk fashion and return to what was understood as the authentic core of punk.

The championing of "openness" starkly contrasted with the stale and conformist profile of punk in the early 80s in Sydney.

> It's hard to explain to someone who wasn't around in the early 80s how elitist and oppressive the punk scene was. From my personal point of view, I couldn't tick any of the boxes [based on his appearance, his ethnicity and his musical tastes outside of punk]. And basically to be a punk back then you had to listen to one type of music and wear a uniform, which is a real turn off. It's very creepy you know (PL 2006).

The early Australian hardcore scenes were, then, formed in a spirit of anti-authoritarianism and anti-conformism, as a reaction to the perceived narrowness and exclusivity of existing punk scenes.

Structure of the thesis

The ethnography of this dissertation is itself contextualised by decades of work in the field of "subcultural studies", a contested and dynamic academic discipline—or

inter-disciplinary complex—that aims to provide theoretical and analytical resources and tools with which to understand the data collected through ethnography. Before proceeding to my ethnography, then, I will review the history of subcultural studies, with a view to assembling a collection of resources appropriate to the task of understanding hardcore in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

My thesis is, then, broadly divided into two segments. The first is concerned with the way in which subcultures have traditionally been studied. The second shifts the focus towards the lived experiences of the hardcore punks themselves.

The first chapter is an introduction to the subject matter. The second is concerned with the understanding of hardcore as a traditionally-conceived subculture, and the ways in which, and the extent to which, academic constructions of post-war cultural formations have eddied and flowed, drawn by various theoretical trends, which will be outlined here. The second chapter narrates brief histories of, respectively, the Chicago school, including (Cohen 1955) and the Birmingham school including (Clarke, et al. 1976; Hebdige 1979), examining some contemporary criticisms of each. The latter part of this chapter is focused upon the alternatives to the mechanism of subculture which are in use in post-subculturalist discourses (Maffesoli 1996; Thornton 1996; Miles 2000; Straw 2002). Although some of these will prove to be useful in describing some aspects of hardcore punk, I will show that the terms that these theorists employ to replace "subculture" are not useful as a primary categorical designation, and advocate for the continued usefulness of subculture as a social category (Hodkinson 2002; Williams 2011).

I address methodological concerns in Chapter Three. Here I will explain the process of my research, which centred upon insider accounts as the primary source of information and privileged hardcore kids' own construction of their culture. In doing so, I recognise the constructed nature of hardcore subculture. Through a process that draws from Bourdieu's version of critical reflexivity, I come to acknowledge my own role—and investment—in the construction of hardcore both as a social practice, and as a critical concept.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters constitute the ethnographic component of my dissertation. Chapter Four examines the way in which hardcore kids in Australian scenes negotiate the key insider concept of "unity". Scene unity has a contested status in hardcore, representing on one hand, an ideal of communal empowerment and strength, particularly evident in practices like straightedge, and in the performative conventions of live music shows, and on the other, the danger of social conformity, homogenisation and complacency.

Chapter Five is concerned with the way in which hardcore is understood to be, in a fundamental way, about "youth". However, this is not to say that hardcore is a youth culture. Youth cultures, traditionally conceived, invoke implications of irresponsibility, consumption and teenagehood, from which, I will argue, hardcore kids wish to distinguish themselves.

Chapter Six turns to how hardcore kids formulate their own reality. Whilst simultaneously upholding and contesting values of honesty, fidelity, simplicity and

sincerity, they re-concretise these values in the face of post-modern complexities. They re-imbue the discourse with a subcultural truth, stubbornly refusing to have their social identities stripped of meaning. Thus I will be examining *unity*, *youth* and *truth* in Australian hardcore punk subculture. The thesis will conclude with some remarks on the manner in which hardcore affords its adherents with both specific and general senses of empowerment, and furnishes them with an ethical compass with which to navigate their lives.

A final note before proceeding

This thesis is based upon my own experience as a participant in Sydney Hardcore. Through a process of reframing these experiences through ethnographic study, I was able to interrogate and understand the dynamics of hardcore. This was demanding. Hardcore requires full-time commitment, passion and (at least) claims to authenticity. Academic rigour requires some space and some distancing from one's own insider status. The difficulties in balancing these aspects will be examined in Chapter Three, as part of my discussion of research methodology.

Endnotes

[1] DIY or Do It Yourself will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

[2] "Pap Music" (Straightjacket (StraightJacket nation) 2004).

[3] My informants will be kept anonymous. I will use the convention of identifying informants by using initials.

[4] The name of, amongst other things, a weekly punk and hardcore radio programme hosted by Stu Harvey, and broadcast nationally on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "youth" network, 2-JJJ. See http://www/abc.net.au/triplej/shortfastloud accessed on 24.10.2013.

[5] See — or hear too – for example, Circle Jerks, Adolescents, Agent Orange, Angry Samoans, Wasted Youth, Ill Repute, Youth Brigade, TSOL, Social Distortion and Minutemen.

[6] See, for example (Traber 2001).

[7] There are numerous documented accounts of this era. For example see; *The Decline of Western Civilization*, (Spheeris 1981), *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, (Spitz and Mullen Brendan, We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk 2001), *American Hardcore*, (Blush 2001), *Get in the Van*, (Rollins 1994), *Please Kill Me*, (McNeil and McCain 1997), *Going Underground* (Hurchalla 2005) *Punk Attitude* (Letts 2005). See in particular, *Hardcore California: A History of Punk and New Wave* (Belsito and Davis 1983). For this reason, I will not provide a detailed historical account of the inception of hardcore here.

[8] There were "riots" in Brisbane, police who responded disproportionately, and arrests (even of the band members). No doubt the fact that the tour played neatly into the rhetoric of what a real and intense punk show should be worked to consolidate it as a defining moment in Australian hardcore history. See (Anonymous 2013). However, whilst this may be what marked it as historically significant, it was the music and experience that marked it as a "good show" from the point of view of the participants.

CHAPTER TWO

A History of Subcultural Studies

1. Subcultural Studies as an Emergent Discipline

> **. . .** [S]ocial theory relating to youth and popular music over the last century has not developed in a particularly planned or systematic fashion. While textbooks have a tendency to compartmentalize ideas into some sort of order—usually chronological—social theory has in the main evolved in an irregular and much more arbitrary fashion than some of the secondary literature would suggest (Huq 2006, 41).

Notwithstanding Huq's critique of chronological reductionism, the following overview of subcultural theory is at once chronological, reductionist and non-exhaustive. For analytical purposes, it condenses, somewhat artificially, the ad hoc, cross-disciplinary and often conflicting schools of subcultural theory of the last century into a misleadingly coherent and linear framework. As a first step, I will divide my account into three distinct phases: the Chicago School, the Birmingham School and the post-subculturalists; again, acknowledging the symbolic violence enacted in any such partitioning: a symbolic violence paralleling, as I will argue below, the oversimplification of hardcore identities in later chapters. Whilst this last "school" of thought, the post-subculturalists, tend to catch something important about subcultures that the other accounts miss—a complexity and flexibility which accounts for the dynamism of the subculture and the lived experiences of its members—they do so at the risk of undermining the social category itself.

This second chapter, ostensibly a review of subcultural history, will offer a historical contextualisation for its own telos, post-subcultural theory, and will proceed by focussing upon the elements of subcultural theory most salient to my own fieldwork on contemporary hardcore punk, both in circumstances where the theory does, but also where it fails, to satisfactorily describe and account for the observations of my own research.

As my interest in the perspectives I have assembled under the title of "subculture theory" is primarily in reference to their applicability to hardcore punk kids on the east coast of Australia, I will conclude each section by drawing attention to how the theory may play out; that is, in the first instance, what it may reveal and explain about the hardcore punk world the hardcore kids inhabit. Additionally to this obvious first "test" of the value of subculture theory, its -etic applicability, I will consider how the theoretical discourse itself has informed, both positively and negatively, the ways in which hardcore insiders form their own understandings and practices of being hardcore; that is, the emic perspective.

2. American Sociology and the Chicago School

The Chicago School of Sociology was established in 1892 at the University of Chicago and was considered the first sociology department of its kind. Initially using ideas drawn from theorists such as Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Roderick McKenzie, the Chicago School is credited with the introduction, in the middle of the twentieth century of the idea of "subculture" as a lens through which to analyse the changing nature of modern urban society (Gordon 1947).

The Chicago School theorists were prolific, producing a significant body of ethnographic accounts: micro-social investigations of city groups, usually ethnic cultures or urban underground cultures in the divided urban landscape of American populations such as Chicago. Their interest was drawn to fringe dwellers, clinging tenuously to the social and economic margins of American life: groups of hobos (Anderson 1923), gang members (Thrasher 1927), (A. Cohen 1955), taxi dancers (Cressy 1932) and marijuana users (H. S. Becker 1963). Often cast as delinquents or deviants, with all the connotations of criminality that such a label implies, these groups were characteristically, in this literature, described as part of a putative underclass of society, set against a normative developmental narrative, which took as its grounding metaphor the idea of a healthy organism competing in a complex ecology: deviant subcultures were, to an extent, interpreted as symptoms of a disruption to the normative structure of the city environment.

"Moral Milieu," "Functioning Unity," "Subcultural Solution" or Syymbolic Interaction"?

The earliest conceptions of what subsequently were identified as "subcultures" were formulated in cartographic terms as a "moral milieu". This was a "mosaic of little worlds that touch but do not interpenetrate", embedded within the context of the Chicago landscape (Park, Burgress and McKenzie 1925, 40). This is a two-dimensional trope, but one which makes sense if we conceptualise the cultural world as the corollary to the physical city; that is, as a map of various (moral) "zones" (Park, Burgress and McKenzie 1925, 40). It is not surprising that this interpretation of

subcultures (as they would later be called) would mobilise a topological metaphor: Park's work is a revision of the traditional model of culture defined by spatio-temporal locality. Micro cultures of the industrialised urban environment were still conceived of as being tied to particular locations within the city.

Park et al. use the term "moral zones" to characterise these "little worlds", effectively drawing a strict homology between "moral" and "cultural". From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, there is clearly more shared by the residents of these zones than their morality, narrowly understood. Park et al., however, assume that one can leave one's moral—or cultural—baggage at the border between these "little worlds", as one migrates between them. In other words, the effect of an individual passing easily between worlds does not seem to effect, for Park, the separateness of the cultural worlds.

One of the earliest appearances of the term "subculture" is in Milton M. Gordon's 1947 paper "The Concept of the Sub-Culture and its Application", although he himself acknowledges "[n]o claim is made here for the origination of the term." (Gordon 1947, cited in Gelder and Thornton 1997, 41). For Gordon:

> [s]ubculture is a concept used here to refer to a subdivision of a national culture, composed of factorable social situations such as class status, ethnic background, and religious affiliation, but *forming in their combination a functioning unity which has an integrated impact on the participating individual* (Gordon 1947, cited in Gelder and Thornton 1997, 41).

There are several deficiencies here that are immediately evident. First, Gordon reduces the complexity of a modern (macro) culture by making it synonymous with a national culture. Second, he proposes only a limited set of examples of identities

along which lines subcultures may exist; religion, class and ethnicity—though no doubt his list was not intended to be comprehensive. Nonetheless Gordon's description seems to be a workable, albeit preliminary, definition of subculture. The real value of Gordon's work here is his predication of the necessity for some "functioning unity" in the identification of a subculture. This is a phrase to which I shall return throughout this thesis. It opens up to interpretations of subcultures in terms of their own organising logics; as affirming, aspirational grounds of interest upon which they are founded, rather than allowing them to be understood as responses to, or as symptoms of, external or prior contexts. Subsequent work in the Chicago School however—most notably that of Albert K Cohen—was committed to understanding subcultures as reactions to specific social circumstances, or, as he conceived them, "problems".

In his work on delinquent boys, for example, Cohen suggested that:

> [t]he crucial condition for the emergence of new cultural forms [the subculture] is the existence of effective interaction with one another, of a number of actors with similar *problems* of adjustment (A. Cohen 1955, 59).[1]

Thus, the formation of a social group such as a subculture is depicted as a response to a common problem of its members-to-be. According to Gelder:

> Cohen's view of the "subcultural solution", then, is a bit like Park's notion of the "moral milieu." The nonconformist interacts with others who, perhaps paradoxically, share and sympathise with the norms of his or her nonconformity (Gelder, 2007, p. 42).

So, even early on in the formation of subcultural theory, a subculture was depicted as being constituted in and by a reaction to the norms and values of the society within which it existed. The members of a subculture lived by a different set of

norms or moral code: being subcultural was their solution to the problem of having to live a difficult social experience. It is only to be expected, then, given the subcultural members' moral perspectives were often radically different to the contextual culture, that they tended to be cast as being deviant. As such, subcultural studies in early formulations were often married to studies in deviance and criminology.

A key flaw in Cohen's conceptualisation of subcultures is that it only explains why the subculture was created by its original members, and not their reasons for remaining in the subculture, nor why subsequent generations join. It explains only the "crucial condition for the emergence of new cultural forms," missing something of the fluidity and continuity of subcultures. One solution to this problem, perhaps, is to extend the problem/solution analysis diachronically, interpreting the endurance of subcultures as a succession of responses to an assortment of related social problems. These responses, collectively, constitute the subculture as on-going solution-finding to a sustained set of external pressures, construed as an enduring state; a "problem." The dynamics of such a sustained system yielded Howard Becker's reframing of the relationship between dominant cultures and subcultures as what we might now identify as "performative" interactions.

Becker's key innovation was to advocate a reframing of the idea of "deviance" itself through a symbolic interactionist approach. On his account, deviance is not a simple state, but the creation of an *interactive* process, taking place "between some social group and one who is viewed by that group as a rule breaker" (Becker H., 2004:

1968, p. 10). It was *symbolic* because the process generated the meanings of social categories. The creation of the social identity of a deviant therefore involves "both deviants and non-deviants." The focus of Becker's work was thus not only upon the "outsiders" (what we might today call subculturalists) but those who label them, that is to say the "moral entrepreneurs." Designations of certain groups as "deviant" arise out of the discursive exchange between the labellers and those labelled. Thus for Becker "*social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance*" (H. Becker 2004: 1968, 10; emphasis in original).

The effect of this reframing for the social categorisation of the deviant was fundamental:

> [s]ince deviance is, among other things, a consequence of the response of others to a person's acts, students of deviance cannot assume that they are dealing with a homologous category when they study people who have been labelled deviant (H. Becker 2004: 1968, 10).

Thus symbolic interactionism, as deployed by Becker, worked to reinvent the meaning of subcultures, understanding them not as associations of deviants but as performative negotiations. The benefit of such is that it accounts for the fluidity of the subculture, "seeing social performance as a much more contingent thing, a question of increasingly fluid, open social relations" (Gelder 2007, 44).

3. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) was founded at Birmingham University in 1964 under Richard Hoggart, and continued until university restructuring in 2002. The most influential years of the Birmingham CCCS, under

Stuart Hall, produced seminal, if often-criticised, interpretations of post-war culture and, importantly for my purposes, of subculture.

The Orthodoxy

There are numerous theorists who cite the CCCS as "orthodoxy" in subcultural studies and consistently do so as a prelude to their criticisms of various aspects of the CCCS's work (G. Clarke 1990, 68; Jenks 2005, 4; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 5). Similarly, the body of work produced by the CCCS has been described as a "primary yardstick" (Hodkinson and Deicke 2007, 6) and a "milestone in youth culture" (Huq 2006, 22). Hesmondhalgh notes that "[n]ever can an orthodox approach have been so unanimously condemned in the field it purportedly dominates" (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 37). According to Huq, "criticisms of subcultural theory began from within almost as soon as the ink was dry on some of the original subcultural works" (Huq 2006, 10). It is clear then that whilst the body of work is valuable, it is far from uncontroversial.

In what follows I will briefly highlight some concerns *of* and concerns *with* the CCCS's work. I will deal in turn with three characteristics of the school: their pervasive use of Marxism, structuralism and semiotics to explain subcultures. As described by Cohen, in his evocative imagery, the big three are the apparatus of the CCCS's theorist-gods:

> [t]he Conceptual tools Marxism, structuralism and semiotics, a Left-Bank pantheon of Genet, Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Althusser have all been wheeled in to aid this hunt for the hidden code (S. Cohen 1997, 161).

I will discuss each of these in turn, flagging, as I do so, some of the more manifest criticisms of the CCCS's approach to cultural studies. Again, this study will focus on

the aspects that are particularly pertinent to my own project; that is to say the explanatory effectiveness of the CCCS's approach. I will conclude that what has come to be understood as the global CCCS "orthodox" vision does not *fit* with contemporary subcultures, even in a *prima facie* way, and that it is therefore not particularly useful in helping us to understand subculture such as hardcore punk. I will suggest, however, that CCCS never actually claimed to be offering a totalising explanatory mechanism, and is better understood as a dynamic, in many ways an unresolved experiment in theorising culture.

The Double Articulation

Under the initial influence of the work of Raymond Williams, the Birmingham project was, from the outset, explicitly Marxist. They used the emerging idea of subculture to explain the class relations of post-war Britain, and, importantly to investigate a site of possible resistance to the dominant class.

Stuart Hall explains the emergence of the CCCS as a direct response to a new form of capitalism, a "settlement", which was:

> defined by the revival of capitalist production, the founding of the welfare state and the "cold war"—[which] appeared to bring economic, political and cultural forces into new kinds of relations, into a new equilibrium" (Hall 1980, 17).

However, these new kinds of relations were, despite their rupture from industrial capitalism, still to be understood as class relations, but more complex ones than were hitherto understood. In effect, this change was merely that the dominant class shifted their mode of rule from "coercion" to "consent" (Clarke and Jefferson 1976,

139). This *new capitalism* required a new working class response, a response that was to be articulated subculturally.

The primacy of class as a structuring force in modern cultural formation is pronounced in the CCCS's work. Classes are the "major cultural configurations" (Hall and Jefferson 1976, 13). Hall and Jefferson set out, in *Resistance through Rituals*, from the premise of Marxism; subcultures become merely a tool for, or demonstration of, its application. This is the position implied by Hodkinson when he writes that:

> [s]ome have suggested [i.e. (Redhead 1990)] that the CCCS's interpretation of subcultural styles had more to do with their own neo-Marxist theoretical agenda than with the empirical reality of subcultural participants (Hodkinson 2007, 6).

Indeed, much energy was invested by CCCS scholars to make subcultural activity fit this framework. As suggested in my introduction to this chapter, this approach, though not necessarily wrong, creates some potential hazards.

One problem with the move from Marxist (class) theory to subcultural practice is that it tends to colour the theorist's subsequent interpretations of the subculture. Starting with a big theory may affect the choice of subcultures studied, the discerning of who is regarded as an expert or an insider, and where the subcultural boundaries are to be drawn. So while it might be impossible to avoid a theory-infused ethnography altogether, one should at least be aware that to set out from the beginning with a particular academic or political agenda may lead to a certain rigidity in methodology, hindering reflexivity, thus limiting of one's ethnographic

findings as well as their construal. In particular, in the case of the Birmingham theorists, with the centring of class, there was the risk of overlooking the diversity of social factors that lead to the formation of subcultures. A rigidly class-based assessment of subcultures is restrictive, and does not fit well with the experiences of subcultural members of hardcore punk, as I have experienced them.

Relatedly, the CCCS'c investment in structuralist Marxist polemics shifted focus away from the important ethnographic component of research. In the heady appropriation of big theories, the *lived experience* of subcultural members was sacrificed or at least it worked to "relegate the young to the sidelines" (Bennett 2007, 30). The lack of subcultural members' voices is recognised as a concern also by (Huq 2006, 11) and (Muggleton 2000, 3).[2] Such concerns prompted what Bennett called the "ethnographic turn" of the 1990s, which subsequently informed the character of much post-subcultural studies (Bennett 2003, 186).

This neo-Marxist focus on class as the most important determining factor in culture formation, in combination with the rise the category of "youth" in post-war Britain, nurtured the CCCS's understanding of what a group had to be in order to constitute a subculture. Working class youth shared similar problems as their parents, rooted in systemic oppression, but reacted in a new way. Resistance to the dominant culture came not from the "parent culture" of working class adults, but from their children, the "youth subcultures." The consequent layering of youth identity upon class identity is what Clarke called a "double articulation" (Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976, 6). Moreover, this double articulation was a "necessary way of staging the analysis"

(Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976).

However, members of contemporary subcultures, like Canadian straightedgers for example, do not necessarily, or even predominantly, derive from the working class, (Atkinson 2003, 215) and even members of more traditional subcultural scenes such as the punks in Los Angeles (Traber 2001, 44-45) or Australian skinheads (Moore 1994, 10), do not conform neatly into this category, problematizing the necessity of the double articulation. Subcultural members today and in the past come from (and came from) a diverse range of backgrounds, differ in age and draw upon a vast range of identity factors to account for their subcultural allegiances. They are in fact involved in multiple articulations. Thus we would do well to broaden the spectrum and recognise the multiple articulations of subcultural members, which would permit a certain methodological flexibility and account for cultural fluidity and diversity within subcultures.

For the Birmingham theorists, drawing the boundaries so narrowly meant that those who did not fit their criteria of working class and youth were excluded from the discourse of subculture. If, as is the case with many aspects of hardcore punk, a subcultural practice cannot be read as a direct (or symbolic) challenge to the problems of either a putative working class or a "youth" condition, then it cannot then be called a subculture in the sense in which Clark et. al. understood the term.

The paradigmatic CCCS subcultural member was a white, male, heterosexual, working class youth. The subcultures of alternative identities were secondary, if they

were present at all in the literature. For example, female "subculture" was relegated to the periphery of subcultural studies by virtue of the fact that "girls' culture" was not subculture proper. This was because it constituted a "different, necessarily subordinate set or range of activities" that revolved around family and private life (McRobbie and Garber 1976, 211). Other social identities remained invisible in terms of their subcultural participation. Even when such alternative identities were represented in the subculture, their roles were minimal and secondary; limited and limiting. For example, the use of blackness in reference to white subcultures was the dominant depiction, though with some exceptions (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982). For the most part however, racially-articulated subcultures— for example rastas and rudeboys—were considered to be important insofar as they influenced the true subcultures, which consolidated solely around issues of age and class (Chambers 1976; Hebdige 1979; Jones 1988).

Since the early days of the CCCS there has been significant work done on the role of divergent social identities within traditionally conceived subcultures, focussing, in particular, on how these subjectivities are negotiated within, for example, punk subcultural scenes, which are traditionally assumed by theorists to be white, (Ensminger 2010) male (Blanc 1999), and heterosexual (Dawson 1999). Particularly in light of recent empirical analysis, Clark et al.'s oversimplified view of subcultures cannot be maintained, and the tracks along which subcultures were said to run have been largely torn up. Certainly there are articulations of youth, of working class, of masculinity within subcultures such as punk. However, these articulations are no more "necessary" to the analysis of subculture (as Clarke et al. has suggested), than

other identity formations.

Kicking the Machine

The Birmingham approach in one sense can be understood as a rejection of the culturalist and interactionist approach of the Chicago School—and American Sociology in general—in favour of a form of (non-reductionist) structuralism.[3] The Birmingham School took the behaviour of such individuals as largely a response to factors of a systemic problematic. Crucially, the CCCS was concerned with the overall class structure of Britain, to which the youth subculture was merely a particular response.

> To use a common metaphor: the theories [of the Chicago School] explained how and why kids would kick a machine that did not pay; no one asked how the machine was rigged in the first place. The new theories [not so new Birmingham theories now] are very much concerned with how the machine got there (S. Cohen 1997, 151).

This privileging of the role of the machine led to the problem that Huq articulates as "structuralist overdetermination", or the "emphasising the role of social structure(s) in predetermining individual trajectories" (Huq 2006, 13). This is a theme that has been taken up in a number of studies (Tait 1993, 2-3; Sabin 1999, 5; Muggleton 2000, 3; and G. Clarke 1990, 82).

However, the version of structuralism employed by Clarke, Hall, Roberts, Jefferson and Hebdige, combined with the general enthusiasm with which most of the CCCS embraced the revolutionary potential of subcultures, reveals that the grasp of (capitalist) society is not absolute. It can, at least potentially, be stirred. Resistance, conceived of as a break from an instance of absolute control of the dominant class'

structuring of society, can be enacted. In line with this, Clarke and Jefferson tell us that:

> though man [and woman] is born into a social formation—a structural-cultural-biographical nexus which is highly constraining, men [and women] do, within limits, respond in ways which affect the social formation, they do in this sense "make their own history" (Clarke and Jefferson 1976, 146).

Many of the CCCS theorists have used Gramsci's concept of "hegemony" to develop this reasoning (Hebdige 1979, 12-16; Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976, 40; Clarke and Jefferson 1976, 139-140). Whilst hegemony is recognised to be a "total social authority", this is somewhat of a misnomer (Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976, 101; Hebdige 1979, 15). Once stated as such, both Clarke et al. and Hebdige, respectively, proceed to undermine the "total" of the social authority. Whilst the domination of hegemony is restrictive, it is not absolute on this account. It is negotiable. It is resistible. It can be broken. It leaves room for the generative potential of the subcultural member because it involves the power to limit one's choices but not determine them (Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976, 39; Hebdige 1979, 16).

In short, the Birmingham theorists used hegemony to create space for resistance. As Jenks writes:

> the development of a neo-Gramscian perspective . . . meant that a softer mediation between agency and all-encompassing structure was provided through the concept of *hegemony* (Jenks 2005, 110-111).

This was part of the Birmingham project to "avoid reductionist explanations of culture and popular culture in particular, and to see culture (that is, creative as opposed to receptive) as being itself a powerful force" (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 48). And this powerful force was symbolic resistance.

Semiotic Guerrilla Warfare

In order to understand the nature of that symbolic resistance, the CCCS used the semiotics of Roland Barthes, Levi-Strauss' understanding of style as bricolage, that is, a re-assemblage of existing cultural material to new ends, and Jean Genet's examples of imbuing old signs with new meanings.

For the CCCS, subcultural allegiance and activity can be understood as a response to particular problems.[4] For example, Young explains subcultural drug taking as a solution, and moreover that such "groups select drugs which have psychotropic properties seemingly suitable for their problems" (Young 1971, 41). J. Clarke explains skinheads' mob mentality and immigrant directed violence as attempts to restore threatened ideals of working-class community (J. Clarke 1976, 99). In terminology echoed by Hebdige, P. Cohen suggests that subcultures function to offer "magical" (stylistic) resolution to the double articulation problems or contradictions within the working class parent culture (P. Cohen 1972, 23). Whilst there are multifarious subcultural solutions, all of them are enacted symbolically. Thus, much was invested in decoding the resistant acts—understood primarily as the fashion—of punks, skins, rude boys, mods and rockers etc., to secure the potency of such signs.

This was clearly a *style-based* revolution:

> however, the challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is not issued directly by them. Rather it is expressed obliquely, in style. The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed (and, as we shall see, "magically resolved") at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs (Hebdige 1979, 17).

Such were the acts of the punks who, on Hebdige's account, "wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed—with calculated effect" (Hebdige 1979, 114). They dressed in conscious, conspicuous and deliberate ways to express particular meanings. It was an active, intentional and "calculated" process of identity formation through the act of deciding what to wear.

Through the practice of bricolage then, subcultural members were able to build up a (collective) stylistic identity with which they expressed themselves and their subculture, because the "'bits' which had been borrowed or revived were brought together in a new and distinctive style ensemble,"

> but also because symbolic objects—dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music—were made to form a unity with the groups relations, situation, experiences: the crystallisation in an expressive form, which then defines the group's public identity (Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976, 110).

It was through the creation of these new stylistic assemblages that subcultural members were able to invert the traditional meanings of certain signifiers, by changing the social use of the object. This was only possible because objects may have multiple potential meanings: "[t]hey 'mean' only because they have already been arranged, according to social use, into cultural codes of meaning, which assign meanings to them" (Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976). This afforded subcultural participants, according to the Birmingham theorists, a certain agency in their appropriation of everyday artefacts, which they transformed into the spectacular. Herein lies the power of "semiotic guerrilla warfare" (Hebdige 1979, 101), the energy of semiotic transformation. Subcultural members were thought to be empowered to make their

own subversive meanings in novel and often playful ways.

However, there were some problems with the stylistic resistance account of subcultures. I will outline four. The first is that Birmingham theorists, such as Paul Willis (Willis 1978, 191), used semiotic theory to uncover homologies between the appearance of subcultural members and their subcultural identities. Muggleton has since argued that by emphasising these homologies, the "heterologies" and "antilogies" of the member's acts were neglected (Muggleton 2000, 126). The risk in embracing the CCCS methodology is that we become blind to all the instances where the style of the members contradicts the meanings they make, and to thus define conflicting elements outside a particular subculture. It is easy to become too sure that punk is about such-and-such and hence ignore readings that contradict our theory. But it is these contradictions that make subcultural living, and subcultural study, so exciting.

Second, a semiotic interpretation should be accepted with caution. This is because signs and their meaning are notoriously slippery. If meanings are not inherent to signifiers and are "made to mean" new things by subculturalists, as proposed by Hebdige, Clarke et al. etc., then the fluidity, multiplicity and interpretational nature of meaning must be recognised, and substantial evidence presented for privileging one reading over another. Despite potentially multiple meanings, the CCCS suggested it is possible and necessary to read these cultural signs in order to gain a single, authoritative understanding of the "text," which is the subculture. According to Muggleton, "style is read as text, and only the semiotician is entrusted to crack

the code" (Muggleton 2000, 13). However, the careful ethnographer would be wary

to ask: Whose interpretation has been prioritised in such accounts?

Third, The focus of Hebdige's work was limited to the working class youths who were

members of "spectacular" subcultures; those who were visible on street corners and

in the media, as Huq observes.

> Past limitations often stem from skewing studies towards more marginal
> youth sensationalising the deviant deeds of the few while the essential
> conformity of the silent majority, those who do not want to semiotically
> resist through rituals, is overlooked (Huq 2006, 22).

Similar arguments refer to the CCCS's neglect of unspectacular youth (Hodkinson

and Deicke 2007, 7; G. Clarke 1990, 1981, 90-1). By ignoring the daily lives of normal

working class kids, the CCCS narrowed the potential sites of working class resistance

to the spectacular struggles. Presumably the non-spectacular working class hold up

the hegemony by this account.

Finally, the focus was upon the use of style as resistance, which meant that

subcultural resistance was conceived as being, ultimately, futile. This is a recurring

claim in the CCCS literature (Hebdige 1979, 96; Willis 1978, 176; S. Cohen 1997, 150;

Clarke, Hall, et al. 1976, 47): the "powerful force" subculture creators were able to

generate, was in the end, a resistance that was "fated to fail", *because* it was

"pitched largely at the symbolic level" (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson & Roberts, 1976, p. 47).

Subculturalists were thus prohibited from enacting "real" change, and from

instigated any enduring effect.

> If their cultures were basically a matter of style, then no matter what they
> expressed or implied they could be taken as just that: style which could be
> generalised, torn from its precise contextual meaning and used to generate

further demand for the culture and consciousness consumer industries. (Willis 1978, 176).

The problem with style-based subversion of the dominant culture, then, is its propensity to be incorporated back into the mainstream. Symbols can be robbed of their subcultural meaning by the dominant culture. Just as they are reappropriated by the subculture, they can be re-reappropriated; taken back from those who stole them, imbued with non-threatening, watered-down meanings and finally sold back to youth as sterilised versions according to the dominant culture's own agenda. Therefore, the same process of bricolage as used by the subcultural members themselves, can be used by the dominant culture, to invert meanings and to promote and reinstate dominant ideologies.

The threat of subcultures then, is no more than "the temporary power to disfigure" (G. Clarke 1990; 1981, 84). Thus, if we are looking for effective subcultural resistance, we should be looking for something more substantive. There is, indeed, a growing tend in later literature to focus on more substantial and concrete sites of subcultural resistance than the purely symbolic, which is largely in response to the negative fated-to-fail CCCS approach, to which I will turn, below.

The limiting of subcultural resistance to the realm of the symbolic—and more often than not, to "fashion" symbols—stripped the subcultural members of a power to create real change to their situation. This being the case, it would seem to render the CCCS's endeavour useless. After so much work by the subcultural theorists to justify subcultures as neo-Marxist and oppositional to the dominant culture; after

the trouble with refining notions of ideology and introducing hegemony in order to leave room for resistance, one cannot help but feel a little disappointed with the conclusion: that the project is doomed from the outset.[5]

After such an effort to imbue subcultural members with the potential for resistance, to freedom of action and oppositional force on the part of Clarke et al. and Hebdige, it is a shame that the restrictions imposed by the hegemony left only the option of stylistic resistance open to them, with its empty promise of real force. In fact, we seem to end up where we began: with a deterministic, fatalistic and pessimistic analysis of subcultural resistance. After all, is resistance that carries with it the seed of its own impotence, which is doomed from the start, really any resistance at all?

The Universe of Discourse

So for the Birmingham theorists, subcultures are class-based, structural phenomena that can be understood through a semiotic reading. As mentioned above, from the outset, there was criticism of the CCCS's project from many sources. One of the problems with all the criticism of the Birmingham School stems from a misunderstanding of the project itself: a misunderstanding of the Centre's work as a conceptual and methodological framework. Stuart Hall wrote:

> [t]here has never been a rigidly imposed unitary theoretical position in the Centre: though there has always been a general project—the elaboration of a non-reductionist theory of cultures and social formations—and a defined "universe of discourse" within whose framework different positions and emphases are exposed to mutual critique (Hall 1980, 40).

Hall frames all the various publications of the Centre as work in progress, and their practices of ethnography as experiments in how to conduct research methodology.

Thus the title of the first collection of works was appropriately "Working Papers in Cultural Studies". This, Hall wrote, "underlined the tentative character of this enterprise, as we saw it" (Hall 1980, 16).

Thus, while many of the criticisms levelled toward the CCCS are valid, perhaps some of them can be defused reconceptualising the purposes of the Birmingham project. The project itself was progressive, experimental and fluid, and, like the Chicago School before them, the Birmingham CCCS is best understood as a loose alignment of theorists who were concerned with similar empirical foci (popular culture, television studies, youth subcultures), and similar methodology.[6]

4. Post-Subcultural Studies

It is somewhat misleading to categorise the post-subculturalists as a school, as they represent a diversity of approaches and methodologies.[7] Minimally, they agree upon the inadequacy, to a greater or lesser extent, of the CCCS's project which were considered "empirically unworkable" (Thornton 1996, 8). The post-subculturalists are writing largely in response to CCCS theorists—who in turn were responding to the Chicago School. As such, much of their work constitutes critiques of the CCCS's methodology. The birth of this school can be traced back to the moment when these criticisms became creative by the imposition of new tools and approaches to understand subcultures sometime in the 1990s. The origin of post-subculturalism therefore marks the moment when the theorists finally broke from the apron strings of the Birmingham CCCS.

Whilst the contemporary approach to subculture allows a more particularist approach and a freedom of interpretation in studying subculture, this can be somewhat of a double-edged sword, undermining the communal dimension of subcultural activity. It is my intention to use a particularist approach to subcultural analysis, as advocated by numerous post-subculturalists, whilst retaining the term subculture in the case of hardcore punk in order to stay true to this spirit. I acknowledge that many post-subculturalist interpretations are useful for understanding various aspects of contemporary popular culture and sociality. However, their use in reference to hardcore punk is most pronounced as a demonstration of the ways in which hardcore kids dismiss or react against any extrinsically-imposed conceptualisation of themselves, (for example as fashions, as teen cultures or as style cultures). Thus, my project falls into the realm of post-subculturalist study, but not into the anti-subcultural branch of this loosely defined field.

5. Still Subculture?

In this section, I shall examine post-subcultural thinking through the question of whether or not the term "subculture" is worth retaining, in light of the various alternative terms that now litter the theoretical landscape. In particular, I will examine the various meanings and inflections of *tribus*, *neo tribe*, *clubculture*, *scene*, *substream* and *lifestyle.* I will show that despite the plethora of new words to describe different types of social formations and phenomena, *subculture*, for my purposes, is still the most appropriate. This is not to say that the new words are not useful; they work to readjust some of the weaknesses of the subcultural approach by

way of a terminological overhaul. In doing so they provide new and interesting ways of dividing the social landscape and are valuable in analysis of certain social phenomena; *certain* social phenomena—but not hardcore punk. My contention is that despite the flaws of "subculture," it fits hardcore punk better than the alternate terms.

In order to show this I will, first, briefly review the traditional (read CCCS) formulation of a subculture, highlighting its pertinent characteristics, in particular the characteristics of subculture that the post-subculturalists rejected. I will then examine these new terms and how they changed the traditional "subculture". It is worth pointing out here that these theories discussed below are all broadly classed as post-subculturalist. They employ terms that are embedded in particular, and often competing, cultural theories. The post-subculturalist approach can be described as a reconceptualisation in light of the fluidity and multiformity of cultural formations in post—or very late—modernity. At the same time post-subcultural approaches often focus on consumer style as the creator of subcultural identities.

> If the study of youth cultures prior to the 1980s was dominated by socio-economic marginalisation and spontaneous subcultural defiance, then in more recent years the field has been awash with themes of fragmentation, fluidity and consumerism (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 8).

These are some themes to which I return in Chapter Six.

Traditional Account of Subculture

To understand the new terms we must first understand that to which they were reacting, what flaws of "subculture" they were intended to resolve. The key

problem, then, was an account of subculture as "essentialist and non-contradictory" (G. Clarke 1990; 1981,82). In other words, the lines drawn by the CCCS theorists were clean, implying consistent and static categories.

Part of the problem was that

> the subcultures are treated as static and rigid anthropological entities when in fact such reified and pure subcultures exist only at the Centre's level of abstraction which seeks to explain subcultures in terms of their genesis (G. Clarke 1990, 82).

This genesis-centricity means that theorists fall into a cultural snapshot approach, whereby the study is of individual "'moments,' when, temporarily, the social formation and the position of the specific group within it, becomes crystallised." (Clarke and Jefferson 1976, 152). This failure to take into account the changing meanings of cultural phenomena over time and cultural development informs the characteristics of the CCCS's conception of subculture.

The result was an account of subcultures "as externally differentiated, yet internally homogeneous groups," (Muggleton 2000, 42). On one hand this means that the distinctions between groups is over emphasised (Muggleton 2000, 127). On the other, it means that the similarities within groups are also overstated. In fact, "[c]ontrary to this mythical picture, modern, plural societies are instead characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity (Huq 2006, 41).

Finally, this simplified account of the social world succumbed to the modernist tendency of reductive dichotomies. In particular, the familiar subculture/mainstream

configuration as critiqued in Sarah Thornton's reconceptualisation of subcultures in

Club Cultures:

> [t]hey [subcultural theorists] have relied on binary oppositions typically generated by us-versus-them social maps and combined a loaded colloquialism like the "mainstream" with academic arguments, ultimately depicting "mainstream" youth culture as an outpost of either "mass" or "dominant" culture (Thornton 1996, 92).

It is such formulations of subculture against which post-subcultural projects have defined themselves. And thus, conceptualisations of the modern subculture, as discussed above, will help us gain an insight into the post-modern subculture (or post-subculture subculture), to which I will now turn.

New Terms for Old Culture: The Fracturing of Subculture

The term "subculture", despite its unfortunate connotations, is still the most useful framework to apply to a study of hardcore punks. The recent influx of alternate terms to describe youth cultural formations notwithstanding, subculture will be the primary term I use throughout my thesis. In doing so, I do not mean to discount the importance of new terms in the analysis of social formations. Subcultural members are also, to greater or lesser extent involved in tribes, scenes and lifestyles etc.

Maffesoli's *Tribus:* A Diffuse Union

For Maffesoli, a *tribus* is a community which lies somewhere between the mass and the individual within urbanised and globalised social frameworks (Shields 1996).[8] It is in this context that "one runs across, bumps into and brushes against others; interaction is established, crystallisation and groups form" (Maffesoli 1996, 73). Thus

group formation is constructed by the accumulation of moments of social interaction in everyday life, as the individual encounters ("bumps into" and "brushes against") others. For Maffesoli it is "these tactile relationships, through successive sedimentations, [which] create[s] a special ambience—what I have called a *diffuse union*" (Maffesoli 1996, 73). This description resonates with Gordon's account of a functioning unity and Park's spatial metaphor as discussed above.

A *tribus*, in contrast to the rigid conception of a tribe in a traditional anthropological sense, is fluid, albeit to a greater or lesser degree, depending on their extent of internalised crystallisation. These groups are created and defined by the participants—though not necessarily consciously so. They are orientated either towards the attainment of a particular goal or for the purposes of nurturing of a sense of belonging, (Maffesoli 1996, 96), for example, sporting or religious groups.

As Shields points out:

> Typical examples of *tribus* are not only fashion victims, or youth subcultures. This term can be extended to interest based collectives: hobbyists; sports enthusiasts; and more important—environmental movements, user-groups of state services and consumer lobbies (Shields 1996, xi).

Thus the term is very broad and the amount of internal crystallisation and duration of the *tribus* is a consequence of the particular level of investment of the group members, "all of them having varied lifespans according to the degree of investment of the protagonists" (Maffesoli 1996, 140).

The main problem with *tribus* is, as Huq points out, its vagueness:

> [I]t can be stated that the postmodern tribe [the *tribus*] is in many ways an unsatisfactory classificatory system. Like postmodernism at large, its vagueness makes it difficult to "get a handle on" and can mean all things to everyone (Huq 2006, 29).

A *tribus* cannot be pinned down to much more than the fluid social formation of a diffuse union. So it can be, a subculture, a religious cult, a political rally or a book club. In contrast to Huq, I suggest that this is the strength of the concept, which is to say, it accounts for a diverse range of social formations.

Bennett's Neo-Tribe: Fluid Boundaries and Floating Memberships

Neo-tribe is an interpretation of Maffesoli's *tribus* that emphasises cultural fluidity by focusing on the "flitting about" of its subjects. (Maffesoli 1996, 144). The theorists who utilise this concept often attribute this cultural infidelity to particular conditions of post-modern consumer culture. More will be said about this characterisation of contemporary subculture in the next section.

The concept of neo-tribe is used by Gore (1997), Malbon (1999) and Sweetman (2004) to describe contemporary cultures, but this section will focus on Bennett's articulation. Bennett uses neo-tribe to understand the groupings:

> which have traditionally been theorised as coherent subcultures [but] are better understood as a series of temporal gatherings characterised by fluid boundaries and floating memberships (Bennett 1999, 599-600).

In contemporary subculture, he argues, neo-tribe affects a group which is "rather more fleeting, and in many cases arbitrary than the concept of subculture, with its connotations of coherency and solidarity, allows for" (Bennett 1999, 603). Thus, he posits that youth formations are always unstable and fluid, and that their members

are able to easily pass between genres and social formations like a clubber passes between levels at a multi-story dance club.

Certainly, there is value in his ethnography of dance club culture in its mash of styles, diversity and transitory engendering of identities. Bennett's mistake, however, is his claim that:

> [I]t seems to me that such fluid and eclectic forms of music consumption, while they may assume particular forms of significance for clubbers, are not in fact restricted to urban dance-music clubs but are also central to other aspects of youth and youth culture (Bennett 1999, 612).

This leap from the particular to the general is unsustainable in reference to hardcore kids. Bennett's theory accounts for the diversity of youth social formations; but it is precisely this eclecticism that prohibits a reduction of all subcultures to "neo-tribes" with all the fluidity and post-modern infidelity to group identity, which that entails.

According to this formulation, Hardcore Punk is a *tribus*, but of a particular type. Subculture is a version of *tribus* which is not a neo-tribe, but something more internally socially coherent, tight and enduring; that is, a phenomenon towards the more unified, less diffuse end of the diffuse union spectrum.

Thornton's *Clubcultures*: Media Right There From the Start

No doubt, the excess emphasis on fluidity can be explained by Bennett's choice of social phenomena. Club-based cultures, particularly those that focus on club going as a weekend recreational pursuit certainly lend themselves to such an analysis. Likewise Redhead and Thornton focus on this fluidity, in their own work on clubbers

and ravers, describing communities "with fluid boundaries which may come together

and dissolve in a single summer or endure for a few years" (Thornton 1996, 3).

A clubculture, in Thornton's conception, also has the quality of being mediated *ab

initio*. Thornton argues that media is essential in the formation of subcultures. This

contrasts from Hebdige's conception of subculture as pure prior to media corruption

of it, thereby challenging the idea that an authentic subculture is necessarily an

unmediated one.

> Contrary to youth subcultural ideologies, "subcultures" [clubcultures] do not
> germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into
> mysterious "movements" only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather,
> media and other culture industries are there and effective right form the
> start" (Thornton 1996, 117).[9]

Thus, for Thornton, three levels of mediation—micro, niche and mass—are

ubiquitous within and formative of clubcultures.

The clubculture, as well as the neo-tribe, however, is a particular kind of social

formation, which is not analogous to what I mean by subculture—though it is

sometimes co-extensive with it. So, while Bennett's conception of the neo-tribe is

one that is deemed necessarily to be unstable, consumer orientated and snap-

shotish, the term he has appropriated—Maffesoli's *tribus*—encompasses a broader

range of social formations, some tighter and more coherent than others. At one end

of the spectrum we have the culture hoppers: Bennett's clubbers and Bhangra

youth; Thornton and Redhead's clubculturalists. Occupying the other end of the

tribus spectrum we have more stable subcultures, such as hardcore punk and

Hodkinson's goths (Hodkinson 2002).

Scene: A Socio-Spatial Inflection

The term "scene" gained prominence in the 1990s as an alternative to subculture, but its usage, according to Hesmondhalgh has "been very ambiguous, or perhaps more accurately, downright confusing" (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 42). Scene manages, to an extent which subculture does not, to capture the public performative nature of a particular cultural milieu. For example, Irwin refers to the:

> [t]heatrical metaphor of the word "scene" [which] reflects an emergent urban psychological orientation – that of a person as "actor", self-consciously presenting him—or herself in front of audiences (Irwin 1977, 23).

This spectacular sense of scene is obviously place specific. It "invokes a socio-spatial dimension" (Huq 2006, 165). However, there are two further cases where we might apply the term scene, reflective of new social conditions, which problematise this location-grounded notion.

Sometimes "scene" is used to describe the local phenomena (Shank 1994), but sometimes to describe the global or trans-local association of subcultural members (Straw 1991). Straw recognises a scene as something which refers to the "effervescence of our favourite bar" but also, in its elasticity, stretches to "the sum total of all global phenomena surrounding a subgenre of [for example] Heavy Metal music" (Straw 2002, 247). According to Straw:

> "[S]cene" will describe unities of highly variable scale and levels of abstraction. "Scene" is used to circumscribe highly local clusters of activity and give unity to practices dispersed throughout the world (Straw 2002, 248).

However, it seems that when we use scene to refer to something like the international punk scene, we are in fact drawing upon the 'socio-spatial dimension"

in order to nuance the communality of such groups: to explain that they are reproductions of that which is traditionally locally bounded.

A further challenge to the local scene is the introduction of virtual scenes. In addition to the local and the trans-local meanings, Bennett and Peterson posit a third sense, that of the virtual. (Bennett and Peterson 2004). For Bennett:

> [s]uch commitment is no longer regarded as necessarily involving regular face-to-face contact, or the display of spectacular visual attire. Indeed, individuals separated by vast distances, who may never physically meet, can form music scenes purely through the medium of the Internet [sic] (Bennett 2006, 223).

Again, these virtual scenes imply virtual communities, centred within a virtual space, but a space nonetheless. The face-to-face is replaced by the user-to-user, in a way analogous to interactions constitutive of the local scene. Trans-local scenes and virtual scenes are merely "scenes" as analogy. For my purposes I shall be using scene to refer to the particularly located groups, including those "located" in cyberspace, but more often to refer to regional associations of hardcore punks (the D.C. scene, the Memphis crust scene etc.). This usage of scene is endogenous to hardcore punks (and other music cultures).[10]

Like scene, substream also denotes a specific locality, set, as it is, in contrast to "global mainstreams". Proponents, such as Valdivia in his work on Latino culture in middle America (Valdivia 2003), frame the social world as a place where global mainstreams and local substreams "rearticulate and restructure in complex and uneven ways to produce new, hybrid cultural constellations" (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 3). Whilst capturing the fluidity of subcultures, permitting for their

development over time and their complex interaction with macro-cultural elements, the *local substream* is inappropriate for the same reason as *scene*; its attribution of specific location—whereas hardcore is very much a trans-local social phenomena.

Miles' *Lifestyle*: Material Expression of Individual Identity

"Lifestyle" is a concept used by several theorists, including, Miles, Jenkins, Chaney, Reimer 1995. Here I will be examining Miles' articulation of this idea, that it is the "material expression of an individual's identity" (Miles 2000, 28). For Miles, this pertains to an individual who is a youth.

He specifically advocates replacing "subculture" with "lifestyle" because:

> [u]nlike "subculture, the word "lifestyle" does not imply the domination of youth by dominant orders. It is precisely for this reason that the notion of lifestyle should be prioritised, as it expresses the interplay between structure and agency that operates in young people's daily lives (Miles 2000, 32).

What the term manages to capture, according to Miles, is the individuality of the subcultural member and her agency. A lifestyle is self-created—and self-owned—and as such liberates her creativity to make and remake one's own identity and:

> allows [young people] to discover new possibilities for the creative continuum that exists between notions of what is "passive" and what is "active" (Miles 2000, 31).

Thus lifestyle, like neo-tribe and clubculture demands choice, but this is choice of what to buy as determinative of what to be. Indeed, consumer goods "might well represent the vehicle upon which the identity is constructed" (Miles 2000, 28). I suggest, however, that by abstracting "lifestyle" from the consumer context, its

value in subcultural studies (rather than in, for example, marketing) is limited. In fact, that a subcultural member "buys" her identity is probably not necessary and it is certainly not the whole story. There are many methods of constructing an identity, some of which will be examined throughout this thesis.

The theory points to the uniqueness of the individual; of their tastes and attractions, beliefs and material circumstances. A lifestyle may be particularly subculturally-orientated, but need not be. In the case of hardcore however, there is an important collective element. Surely they live a hardcore lifestyle but they also live within hardcore subculture, and do so self-consciously through communal identification. For my purposes then, lifestyle will be employed (minus the connotations of necessary consumerism), to express the individual identity creation of hardcore punks and how they live as individuals.

Return to *Subculture*: An Umbrella term.

In his work on goth subculture, Hodkinson explicitly rejects the use of alternate terms for subculture in relation to goth culture, with its association with stability, commitment, distinctiveness of identity and autonomy.

> But in spite of overlaps and complexities, the initial temptation to describe goths using a term such as *neo-tribe* or *lifestyle* was gradually tempered by the realisation that such a move would have over-inflated the diversity and instability of their grouping. Crucially, fluidity and substance are not matters of binary opposition, but of degree. In this particular case, the observation that the goth scene involved elements of movement, overlap and change does not somehow obfuscate the remarkable levels of commitment, identity, distinctiveness and autonomy which were evident (Hodkinson 2002, 29).[11]

Thus, for Hodkinson, the term "subculture" works "to capture the relative

substantive, clearly bounded form taken by certain elective cultural groupings" (Hodkinson 2002, 9).

The multiformity of social formations means that some cultures will be more tightly bound than others. As suggested by Hodkinson, this is not to ignore the liquidity of subcultures, but to accept that different approaches may be more or less appropriate for different social groups. It is, after all possible at times, as Muggleton points out to "(over)state the postmodern case" (Muggleton 2005, 217). Muggleton himself allows the plurality of approaches, placing the liminoid cultures at the fluid, fragmented and hybridised end of the spectrum, against the liminal subcultures which retained, at least a minimal amount of internal social cohesion (Muggleton 2000, 73; and 2005, 216).

The value of alternate terminology is threefold:

(a)   It may be more appropriate in their application to new types of social relations that have developed post CCCS;

(b)   It adds a different inflection that focuses our attention toward certain characteristics of the groups traditionally called subcultures; and

(c)   If taken together, multiple terms make us realise that there is not one single type of social relationship but that these associations are as diverse as the individuals with which they are comprised.

A feature of post-subculturalism is the willingness to embrace multiple approaches, rather than to posit a single, unified or holistic theory employing instead "mixed

models to describe contemporary youth cultural formations" (Huq 2006, 21-22). Different cultural phenomena may require different theoretical frameworks. But more than this, the same cultural phenomena can be cast in different dye and carved up in different ways to increase the range of possible perspectives, which may be useful.

However, these new models should not overshadow subculture. For Patrick Williams, "[o]ne of its most important usages is as an umbrella term that represents a collection of perspectives and studies" (Williams 2011, 3). But more than its flexibility for Williams, is the value of subculture in expressing the "negativistic perspective," a Hegelian approach which counters the Comtean project of positivist sociology, as well as a constructivist approach. Thus, they "function as the antithesis to mainstream/dominant culture" and they capture the collective creative agency of subculturalists in making themselves in relation to this mainstream (Williams 2011, 4). Although not all social formations are pitted against the "mainstream culture," hardcore is, and self-consciously so, (as we shall she in subsequent chapters). These dichotomies persist in framing the ways that many subcultural members understand their own projects and I suggest it is to this extent that "[s]ubcultures function as the antithesis to mainstream/dominant culture" (Williams 2011, 3).

If understood as a convenient "umbrella" term, subculture and post-subculture, as characterised by a plurality of approaches, are not, as pointed out by Muggleton and Weinzierl, "necessarily incompatible" (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003, p. 6). Thus, whilst the new concepts are not, in my view, useful as a wholesale substitution for

"subculture", they are as ancillary concepts. Taken together they provide a rich language for distinguishing the different types of cultural formations, which operate differently and require different levels of commitment. It is for this reason that we are justified in a divergence into some of the alternate labels for subculture, which have been posited since the CCCS.

According to Hodkinson:

> [i]t would seem to make sense to replace attempts to apply single concepts across the board with the use of a limited number of clearly defined terms which are narrower in scope. In particular this would enable us to differentiate those groupings which are predominantly ephemeral from those which entail far greater levels of commitment, continuity, distinctiveness or, to put it in general terms, substance (Hodkinson 2002, 24).

For Hodkinson, the goth scene falls into this latter category. In the forthcoming chapters I will demonstrate that hardcore punk does also.

Hardcore as a Subculture

The terms *tribus*, neo-tribe, clubculture, lifestyle and scene are often employed in an attempt to break from CCCS cultural studies and as such are often vague (Hodkinson 2007, 15). They generally understand identity formation as activated by processes of consumerism, emphasising mediated consumer culture, and minimising the sense in which they are reactions against (a real or imagined) mainstream or dominant culture. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, (note in particular the discussion in Chapter Five and Six,) such emphasis is less appropriate to punk than to other cultural formations. Although the terms are often misused, they do have the benefit of adding particular ambiance of different social formations and of new ways of

seeing the same social formation. Thus, they have different meanings, even when they refer to the same thing.

My primary analytical term will, therefore, be subculture. While subculture describes many of the current cultural formations, they are not apt to apply to all. The social formations discussed in the literature are unique and disparate: see, for example, the distinction between Rave and straightedge (Wilson and Atkinson 2005). Given these differences, it is unreasonable to use a one size fits all approach subcultural terminology. It is for this reason that a wholesale supplanting of subculture for one of the alternative terms discussed above is unwarranted.

What is a subculture then? Something more than the basic *tribus* or friendship networks, they involve a certain degree of emotional investment, they rely on community and identity but are not reducible to either of these, and they are relatively stable. It has identifiable members who can leave but who understand being an insider as involving some level of personal commitment. It may not have strict parameters but it does have a flavour. It has some shared cultural practices, discourses, and behaviours. Its scenes are unique but for all that, they share some family resemblances. It is dynamic but not so much so that it makes the linguistic term meaningless. It is fluid and changing but not so fast as might be imagined. It is contested at the edges, and what constitutes the edges is contested by the subculturalists themselves.

I understand *tribus* as a fluid and restless group expanding and contracting within

each of our everyday interactions: interactions which occasionally evolve into the more static subculture. Likewise Neo-tribe and clubculture seems to be a particularly youth orientated manifestation of a *tribus*, the kind of *tribus* we find at a nightclub or rave or dance party, based around consumer tastes. Such cultures do not capture the relative stability that subculture implies. Henceforth I will be using lifestyles to refer to an individual's way of living out their personal identity, subcultural or otherwise. Scene, I will be using to describe location based intra-subcultural phenomena, remembering that such scenes are merely one part of a larger subcultural network in the case of hardcore.

So, while I reject these terms as articulating the cultural formations I am investigating, I do posit a degree of usefulness in such terms. Neo-tribe, with its elasticity; lifestyle, with its implications of individualised lived identity; scene with its specifications of spatio-temporal locality; and clubculture, with its mediation and fluidity all draw attentions to unique perspectives and configurations of social formations. Such is the contingent categorisation of people, in respect to their thematic intentions. Each suggests a revision of the CCCS's conception implicit in the term and attempts a distancing from the negative associations of the traditionally conceived "subculture".

While I agree somewhat with Hodkinson, that too much debate over the appropriate term may constitute an "unhelpful distraction" (Hodkinson 2007, 15), it has been worth outlining such linguistic debates not only because of their centrality to the concerns of the subcultural theorists, but because each term does indeed prove

useful for me in bringing to the fore certain features of hardcore, or contrasting it with a generalised "mainstream" (*tribus*/lifestyle) or clubbing culture (neo-tribe/clubculture). Everyone who is socially engaged is involved in a *tribus* and has a particular lifestyle; some people are involved in a neo-tribe or a clubculture; and some—including those in my study—are involved with a scene and subculture. As such I will be utilising such notions in order to expound upon my primary focus, that is the specific *subculture* of hardcore punk.

7. Conclusion

Hardcore subculture is, in some sense, a functioning unity; a complex matrix of shared affiliations, traditions, language and experiences. It is fluid, animate and internally diverse, but has sufficient cohesion to warrant the term subculture. It is more than mere style, or a mere musical genre. It transcends friendship groups. It may be used as a solution to members' problems but the problems are not uniform, and the solutions are not merely symbolic. It is not about class but it is in some sense (as we shall see in Chapter Five) about youth. It is not simply a *tribus*, a neo-tribe, a clubculture, a scene, a substream or a lifestyle. It is created by the participants through processes of negotiation, through contestation of the boundaries and through struggles as to what constitutes its meaning. Its meaning is generated by adherents, at least in part, as against the distasteful strains of the "mainstream." For these subcultural members the stakes are high. Their subculture is often their whole world: artistically and morally, as well as socially. Hardcore punks are bound together in the webs of identity that they construct for themselves.

Endnotes

[1] My emphasis.

[2] Although Muggleton here cites the ethnography of Paul Willis as an exception (Willis 1978).

[3] The Chicago School adherents generally took a symbolic interactionist approach, foregrounding the "self" as social actor. In the words of Jenks it was "more person-centred, more individualistic, micro, or what has come to be formulated as social-psychological" (Jenks 2005, 52).

[4] Note A. K. Cohen above.

[5] Perhaps, under such circumstances, we would do well to see the semiotic readings of subcultures more as exercises in descriptive analysis rather than as a theoretical end in themselves.

[6] Moreover, Hodkinson points out, much of the more recent criticism may be due to the evolution of the subject matter since the CCCC's work (Hodkinson 2002, 12). We would thus do well to understand the CCCC's work as applicable within a particular historical-social context (Huq 2006, 23).

[7] Muggleton and Weinzierl cite Chambers (1987, 9) as the first use of the term (Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, 4).

[8] Shields, in his foreword to the English translation of *The Time of The Tribes*, states categorically that Maffesoli's *tribus* are not neo-tribes but "that they are better understood as 'post-modern tribes', or even pseudo-tribes" (Maffesoli 1996, x). This distinction is well to be maintained because Bennett and others uses the term to describe a particular type of *tribus*, one that is particularly fluid and transitory.

[9] Mediation in hardcore will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

[10] However, it should be noted that hardcore kids also use "scene" to refer to the wider hardcore scene. This usage is at least as prevalent, and is used interchangeably with hardcore subculture. However, I feel it is important to make the distinction between small micro-communities which are location based and the wider subcultures who may never meet and yet understand themselves as sharing some ideological and musical cultures. For this reason, I draw the scene/subculture distinction.

[11] Neo-tribe, for Hodkinson will be used "to describe more superficial forms of affiliation" (Hodkinson 2002, 29-30).

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This thesis is an ethnography of hardcore punk, proceeding, methodologically, along three axes: "engaged listening" (Forsey 2010), participant observation, and the collection and analysis of cultural artefacts. It does so, whilst recognising the constructed nature of what counts as legitimate data collection practices, defined disciplinarily (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 226). After a brief description of these three practices, I will turn to the importance of recognising hardcore as a constructed object. Finally, I want to take some time to consider the implications of my own investment as researcher. In particular, I wish to explicate the influence of my position *as* insider, drawing out some of the advantages and risks inherent to this position.

Hardcore Kids' Voices: Engaged Listening

My intention has been, by foregrounding insider accounts and hardcore kids' voices, to tap into the experience of kids living hardcore punk in Australia. In doing so, it became evident that 'traditional' scholarly accounts of "subculture" in fact inform the subcultural members' understanding and construction of their identity and the meanings of their practices. The kids are inclined to rail against the sorts of views which they understand as challenging their authenticity, robbing them of coherent identities, or merging the boundaries they themselves draw and which are important

for demarcating their lifestyles from the popular and the mainstream. They tend to shun views that interpret the contestation of the concept of unity in hardcore subculture as an index of dis-unity, or worse, of meaninglessness. They are hostile to accounts of youth culture which claim that hardcore passion is reducible to mere patterns of consumption.[1] It would be easy to paint such reactions of hardcore kids to theoretical trends as part of the punk "I'm against it" rebel-without-a-cause stance,[2] or the reactive anti-elitist sensibilities informing the world of hardcore. To do so, however, would risk missing some subtlety in the way in which hardcore kids construct their own truth. In other words, to prioritise purely theoretical accounts of subculture does not reveal the whole picture, and to dismiss all intra-hardcore criticisms of these renderings is to overlook the sophistication of (some) insider's accounts.

For this reason, in this ethnography, I have been committed to taking seriously insiders' accounts, even when to dismiss them would have been easier, and would have led, perhaps, to a more coherent body of analysis. As I explained in Chapter Two, the "ethnographic turn" in the 1990s places renewed focus on insider accounts. If we are truly committed to respecting insiders' views, then they must be included, even if (especially if) they conflict with the popular theoretical climate. The results may be difficult, messy and sometimes indigestible (mirroring hardcore "style" itself) but this project seeks to celebrate the complexities of hardcore rather than sanding down its jagged edges and thus overlooking something important about the unruly and ugly spirit of hardcore.

In practical terms, taking seriously subcultural members' voices meant that a great deal of my time was dedicated to simply listening to informants and other insiders in various hardcore scenes; it meant a *prima facie* assumption of the cultural authority of these kids; it required a generosity of interpretation, at least in the spirit of what was said, if not in the precise wording. It did not mean, however, that these accounts and opinions were accepted wholesale as truth about hardcore; indeed due to a large amount of disagreement between informants' reports, it could not have been so.

Participant Observation

The participant observation aspect of my study required my complete immersion in hardcore culture. This generally amounted to my simply being involved in many of the activities I would have been involved in anyway: going to shows, working in hardcore punk record stores, hanging out, and playing in bands. The difference was that the critically reflective attitude that I brought to these activities was structured by the framework of my research.

This was a demanding process, whereby every spare moment of my life became dedicated to either living or analysing hardcore. I was always "on": mentally noting interesting conversations, scanning rooms in a state of heightened awareness, looking out for pertinent moments at shows, sitting in a dark corner scribbling experiences like an obsessive hypergraphite. There was no way of stemming the tide of information, or of just hanging out with friends at a show.[3] I was living, breathing and thinking hardcore until it made me sick.

Collection of Data

The ethnographic dimension of my thesis was drawn from a number of sources including recorded interviews, musical lyrics, fanzine articles, photocopied posters or fliers and observations of live performances.

I conducted and transcribed interviews with twenty-five informants.[4] These took place as informal conversational meetings, recorded at various locations around Sydney, Newcastle, Brisbane and Melbourne, as suited the interviewees' convenience. Most interviews lasted about an hour, with some participants showing an encouraging enthusiasm to continue for longer. The purpose of my thesis was explained clearly as a research project on hardcore punk subculture in Australia, and each of them readily agreed to participate. If more information was requested, I explained that my thesis was less argument-driven, and more about what it is like to be into hardcore, and what is important in hardcore. I felt it was necessary to keep the initial stages of the interview very open and to be directed by interviewees, following subject matter that they judged to be important topics in hardcore. Towards the end of the interview process overall, I was less guarded about sharing my own opinions and was willing to describe in more detail the shape that I intended my thesis to take, and to engage more with the interviewee. The key remained, however, flexibility.

An original call for volunteer participants, which was printed in zines, and posted at record stores and on websites, proved ineffectual. Therefore I approached a few

potential participants directly at shows or by emails. It was suggested to me that although many people had seen the call for volunteers, it was not until they had understood the researcher herself to be a member of a hardcore scene that they showed an interest in participation. The process then, functioned by snowballing: word of mouth soon meant that hardcore kids who were keen to have their own sentiments aired contacted me to be interviewed. They often recommended other suitable interviewees who I then contacted by email or approached at shows to request an interview. I always told the potential interviewee that it need only take ten minutes of their time, but once we began, the interviewee usually wanted to talk for longer.

The interviews were conversational. The interviewees often forgot the presence of the tape recorder and the "interviews", by their nature structured events, bounded and contrived, often approached a simulacrum of an everyday social interaction. This encouraged the free flow of opinions and the subjects often chatted well beyond the scope of the interview, both in terms of time and of subject matter. I was hesitant to redirect them, not wanting to limit at the stage of initial data collection, the direction of my thesis. There were several occasion where participants opened up so much as to volunteer information of a very personal nature, a testament to the confidence I had earned and which, not wanting to abuse that trust, I have discretely omitted from my written notes.

Pseudonyms have been used to protect interviewee's identities. However, due to the fame and sometime infamy of some of the interviewees, and because it was

often necessary to include distinguishing features in order to fully capture the vibrant character of hardcore participants, some may no doubt be recognised or at least guessed at by other members of their scene. Some may be identified by their particular feature or by the peculiarity of their opinions (which will be familiar because they have been aired previously in zines and from on stage). When the statements touched on particularly sensitive material, or I judged that there might be negative repercussion for the interviewee, I have used my discretion and omitted the names of any bands or people which might indicate who they are. The authorship of information and opinions collected from zine writers and zine interviews on the other hand, have been referenced by the subject's first name (or their scene name), or the zine or band with which they are associated. Such information is readily available and thus it was not considered necessary to protect their anonymity.

Overall, the interviews proved to be much less taxing than the process of collecting and notating of cultural artefacts. I trawled through old zines, characteristically small-fonted, typewritten, heavily pixelated, cut-and-paste in black and white, and printed on old, browning, paper which fell apart in my hand. They were often written in an esoteric manner, with the author assuming that the reader had awareness of hardcore history, specific scene knowledge, and musical familiarity with particular and often obscure bands. They contained many spelling, grammatical and factual errors.

I also listened to a large volume of records, making notes on the music, the bands and the lyrics. This part of the research was primarily conducted during my time working at two small, independent record stores in inner-city Newtown, Sydney, that specialised in punk and hardcore. This gave me access to a huge amount of these valuable resources, and the time to listen to them.

Although these resources proved most important, they were cross-referenced against DVDs of band interviews and live shows, photodocumentaries and historical accounts of various scenes, lyrics and lyrical explanations, online websites and forum posts. Additionally, private discussions with hardcore kids, including those from overseas provided invaluable information. Cumulatively, this constituted the background information about hardcore, against which the official interviews were juxtaposed.

Recognition of the Constructed Nature of the Object

This thesis is about hardcore, and hardcore, as I will claim, is 'about' truth, youth and unity. Although the selection of these themes was guided by their prevalence in the context of what I came to determine to be hardcore punk discourses, I do not wish to make the claim that they are definitive of hardcore. They are not the only issues I could have chosen to explore. However, the strands that I have chosen to draw out are, I believe, sufficient to give the reader a taste of hardcore culture and I have chosen only three to ensure a substantial development of each may be achieved.

In a wider sense though, I recognise that it is through my choice of presentation and omission of certain facts, inclusion and exclusion of bands, zines, people, acts, opinions, etc., that the nature of hardcore in this thesis is developed. My own object of study—my account of hardcore—was not given *a priori* but developed, built up slowly and piecemeal with every proposition painstakingly subject to the scrutiny of critical reflexivity.

According to Pierre Bourdieu,

> the construction of an object . . . is not something that is effected once and for all, with one stroke, through a sort of inaugural theoretical act. The program of observation and analysis through which it is effected is not a blueprint that you draw up in advance, in the manner of the engineer. It is, rather, a protracted and exacting task that is accomplished little by little, through a whole serious of small rectifications and amendments inspired by what is called *le metier*, the "know-how," that is, by the set of practical principles that orients choices at once minute and decisive (Bourdieu 1992, 227-28).

Hardcore, as the object of this thesis, is likewise a built-up entity, perpetually made and remade, moulded and refined. Bourdieu emphasises the need to recognise the constructed object *as* constructed, rather than existent transcendentally. In fact, such a process is not so different from that which hardcore kids enact themselves in their own subcultural identity construction, through self-reflexivity and persistent questioning the categories of hardcore.

In what sense then, is this elusive subculture (or even subculture itself) a real phenomenon? Often, I felt like I was chasing chimeras—and at times I came to radically doubt the bounds and existence of hardcore. Then I would hear some kid talk passionately about their experience of hardcore, or attend a "hardcore show"

and recognise the feel of the music, the atmosphere, the style. These moments, more than any record label's marketing category, guided my own construction of hardcore.

Insider Research

The distinction between insider and outsider is a fuzzy one. Following Hodkinson (Hodkinson 2005, 132), I contend that this does not mean that the terminology should be abandoned. Investment in, or connection to a subculture, framed spatially (i.e. as proximity to the subculture) can affect both the access one has to information and the way in which this information is interpreted. However, whether one is an "insider" or "outsider" is a matter of degree and negotiation. These terms are useful, even allowing for the fluidity, unpredictability and multifacetedness of complex social identities. Thus, whilst recognising the boundaries of hardcore are beautifully evasive and malleable, I nonetheless regard my own role in terms of insider/outsider positioning in reference to hardcore punk.

At the time of research I was certainly an insider. Many of my informants, even those who I had not met directly knew me (though often only by a "scene name").[5] Many were in bands with which I had played or we had frequented the same shows. With some, I had bought, sold or exchanged records. With some, I had friends in common. Others I had seen play or I knew by reputation alone. I had been, since about 2001, involved in the hardcore scene in Sydney and, though no longer a part of any hardcore scene, I am to this day a fan of hardcore.

It is not unusual nowadays for theorists of music subcultures to also be cultural insiders, to have one foot in each camp or at least have some previous subcultural affiliation with the object of their study. See, for example, Malbon in his ethnographic work on clubbing (Malbon 1999); Weinstein and Kahn-Harris respectively in their work on heavy metal (Weinstein 2000; Kahn-Harris 2004); Muggleton on punk, (Muggleton 2000); Hodkinson on goth (Hodkinson 2002); Haenfler on straightedge, (Haenfler 2006); and Driver on hardcore (Driver 2011). However, it is generally acknowledged that although the role of researcher-as-insider has advantages, it also has some pitfalls around which one must navigate.

One practical advantage of the insider researcher concerns the quality of data collated. The insider may have a good idea from the outset as to where and how to access accurate and appropriate information. They may also have a head start in terms of their ability to discern the quality of information gathered and thus weed out the more blatant inaccuracies and misconceptions (McRae 2007, 58; Hodkinson 2005, 140). There is of course, no objective standard by which to judge such *quality*, but the process of research involves a series of judgments about what is more or less important, what is more or less noteworthy, what is more or less true of the culture.

A capacity to pick up on subtleties and to apprehend mistakes early on may indeed be an advantage in being an insider researcher. In the course of my research I encountered many accounts of punk and hardcore that either missed their mark, or were describing a different social phenomena from that with which I was concerned (Willis 1993; Hopkins 1997; Ambrose 2001). Whilst presenting interesting or novel

views, I could not recognise in them the "meaning" of hardcore punk (of any kind with which I was familiar) that resonated with my own experience. Were I an outsider, I would not have been able to easily distinguish these "punk" cultures as a different beast from the version of hardcore punk that was my object of study. However, in the process of doing thick ethnography, such misunderstandings will likely become evident irrespective of the starting point of the researcher, as through experience and the research project the object comes into sharper focus. I recognise that my own project cannot cover all the intricacies of the hardcore lifestyle, (for some, it will be too moshcore-centric, for others, the focus will seem too heavily in favour of hessian DIY hardcore etc.). However I do hope that other insiders will recognise within this thesis some of the flavour of hardcore. Indeed, I certainly recognise the object of my study (hardcore) as constructed, as already noted.

The presence of an insider-researcher may work to cultivate a more relaxed atmosphere and encourage an initial rapport with interviewees. This may aid the course of an interview, fostering an initial relationship of trust and respect between the researcher and the informant. From my own experience, informants seemed to be very open, and their responses were candid. Hardcore kids have no lack of opinions, and usually adopt an extreme attitude of free expression that supports giving voice to their ideas and judgements (sometimes irrespective of the prudence of doing so). Bearing in mind this hardcore stereotype, it is not possible to know how much of my informants' enthusiastic willingness to speak their mind on matters that were clearly close to their hearts, was enhanced or aided by my own insider status.

What I do know is that the kids were more willing to agree to be interviewed when they knew that I was an insider.

The assumption seemed to be that, as someone with her identity invested in hardcore, I would be less likely to misrepresent the culture. There was certainly a fear of being misunderstood, and a concern that their subculture was unfairly treated or abused by outsiders (embodied as the usual suspects; major record labels, mainstream media, police, parents and so on). On the one hand, they wanted to protect the culture from outside interference; on the other, criticism from within is actively encouraged. Although my position as a hardcore fan did not mean that I would be less likely to criticise the culture, it did mean that any criticisms I had would be regarded as more legitimate and acceptable. I thus feel the weight of the responsibility to represent hardcore culture accurately. At the same time, I am fully aware that the predisposition of hardcore kids to "shit talk", that same attitude which fosters vigilance against complacency and spurs constant questioning of one's own hardcore beliefs, also makes it unlikely that this thesis will escape criticism from within hardcore circles. And so be it. Such is the ongoing struggle over the meaning of hardcore (as will be further developed in Chapter Six).

However, being an insider-researcher also bears some risks. There is a danger that knowing I was "into hardcore" may have influenced interviewee's responses. Hodkinson explains that

> [i]nsider researchers should also be aware that, although their status may often improve rapport in a general sense, it may in some situations cause respondents to feel threatened, or pressured into giving particular kinds of

responses (Hodkinson 2005, 140).

One informant, PL, concluded his interview by saying "I hope I haven't been too negative about the scene [subculture] that you love" (PL 2006). This implies that knowing I was an insider had not stifled his engagement with me, but also that he was conscious that he was talking to someone who was not neutral or objective on the matter. However, of more concern than that my interviewees knew I was a hardcore kid, because we shared social and creative spaces, and many of them were aware of my views on a range of specific subjects relating to hardcore. In zines and at shows I had previously been very vocal in expressing my opinions on (macro and scene) politics. In some cases, I was apprehensive as to the extent to which this influenced their responses.

For example, on the subject of "girls in hardcore" the responses to my questions were uniformly positive and critical of the "boys' club" attitude and exclusivity of hardcore scenes.

> For me it's a damn shame. I wish these jocks hadn't scared all the girls off
> years ago. It's terrible. The girls who are into hardcore that I've known over
> the years are fucking unreal. Brilliant girls! 'Cos they've got to put up with all
> this shit, that's just how it goes (ST 2005).

Given that many of my informants where aware of my personal views regarding feminism, and given that I was myself a "girl into hardcore", I could not be sure to what extent this influenced their answers on this issue. Whilst not wishing to doubt the sincerity of ST's response (he showed genuine distaste for the "boys' club"), and whilst not presuming that he counted me as one of the "brilliant girls" of which he spoke so highly, the overwhelmingly positive enthusiasm for women in hardcore I

received from my informants may not be reflective of the general attitude of all hardcore kids. A few other informants, like ST, were insistent on the fact that "there are girls who are passionate about hardcore. Girls who get into it as much as guys" (GH 2005). One informant prefaced his discussion of women in hardcore with "as you know . . .", and others made specific reference to me as a women in hardcore. From this I conclude that my social identity as a hardcore woman (who is outspoken on gender and scene politics), did probably influence responses. However, the Corollary of this is that it is because I was an insider that I was sensitive to this potential discrepancy.

Critical Reflexivity

However, by far the greatest danger to an insider researcher is that she may fail to see, and to render explicit, her own social bias (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). These are the "'biases' that blur the analysts' gaze" (Maxwell 2001, 48).

As Maxwell explains:

> [f]or Bourdieu, reflexivity is not achieved through engaging in reflection on fieldwork, not through the use of the first person, but by "subjecting the *position* of the observer to the same critical analysis as that of the constructed object at hand" and thereby avoiding the "narcissistic or uncritical . . . *cul de sac* that ethnographers and theorists of ethnography have created for themselves" (Maxwell 2001, 47).

And while it is not at all clear to me that this is a task which can ever be satisfactorily or completely perfected, it must be attempted, and attempted through a Bourdieuvian dance of critical reflexivity. In my own case, this involved calling to attention some of my own prejudices, consequent upon my social positioning, both

as a hardcore kid and as a theorist.

Let me offer one example. An informant wanted to know before our interview began whether I was interviewing him *as an academic* or *as a punk*. He questioned my motivation (half jokingly): "so tell me honestly, are you using hardcore to get a good mark at uni[versity] or are you using uni to legitimise your involvement in punk?" (ND 2014). In other words, what was my primary identity affiliation? Where did my true loyalties lie? I reluctantly admitted that I was probably doing both.

In the process of writing, too, I was conscious of the problem of my motivation. Was my research motivated by my (very "un-punk") desire to improve my standing in the community? Or was my aim to promote my friends' bands? Was there some unconscious or conscious desire to justify my involvement in the community or convince outsiders of hardcore's relevance? And how did all this affect my mode of analysis? I am indebted to the vigilance of associates within the hardcore community who asked me such questions.

Moreover, did I ever succumb to the insider researcher's temptation to reduce the complexity of the subcultural experience to that of my own? My hardcore is not *the* hardcore; my experience does not represent the *true* hardcore experience, the measure of authenticity against which my informants' experiences are measured. There is no quintessential hardcore kid but only a conglomerate of overlapping lifestyles. As Bennett warns,

> [c]learly, however, if such "native" conventions are to be used in this way in

the pursuit of research, then it is important that they are effectively managed, that the researcher does not simply become so caught up in his/her experience that he/she assumes the role of "subcultural" spokesperson (Bennett 2003, 193).

As it is, the hyper-critical forces within the hardcore punk communities worked as a beneficial guard against falling prey to the arrogance of thinking myself a spokesperson; or of thinking that I really know anything about hardcore.

Another less visible, but equally important thread of critical reflexivity, is the call to awareness of the theorist's own location *as* theorist (Bourdieu 1992). In other words, it was necessary to question how much of my construction of hardcore was attributable to my own motivations as researcher.[6] In particular, did my desire to make a contribution to the field of subcultural studies, to find something new or novel about hardcore, colour (or perhaps warp) my understanding of hardcore? Most surely the answer is yes. Just as I have "used" this thesis as an excuse to prolong and intensify my engagement in in hardcore punk communities (if one was indeed needed), so to I have "used" hardcore with the intention of improving my academic credentials.

Dynamism and Flexibility

The solution to the above problems are, at least in part, resolved by redressing and assumption of the researcher's own staticity. It is necessary for her to be aware, and to prepare herself with a fundamental malleability; a self-awareness and flexibility in regards to viewpoint and approach.

71

This dynamism of tacking back and forth can be at times disorientating, but it is nonetheless the best—indeed the only—way to ensure a rich account, a thick description of a cultural phenomenon (Ryle 1968; Geertz 1973).[7] Such analysis warns against a purely external, "objective" account of the phenomena. It draws our attention, in regards to subcultural studies, to the necessity of understanding the phenomena from within the cultural formation. The more we know about the actors, their motivations and the meanings they make, the more accurately we can understand even the seemingly simplest of acts.

But, while this is an argument for cultural immersion, it is by no means necessary that the researcher *begins* this process from within. What is important is that they *finish* the process with some depth of understanding. Conversely, just as being an outsider is not necessarily detrimental to the research process, neither is being an insider (to either hardcore or academia), so long as one is able to engage in a critical reflexivity (McRae, 2007, p. 60).

Likewise, as Bennett observes:

> [m]ore crucial here [than that the researcher begins as an outsider] is the way in which the researcher manages his/her personal attachment to or ideological interest in the research matter (Bennett 2003, 193).

This means that wherever one's investment lies, whether one begins in or out, recognising this investment and undergoing a process of self-distancing is important.

> This will involve an "unlearning", or at least the objectification, of those "taken for granted" attitudes and values which underpin the life of a committed youth stylist and music fan. Issues of musical and stylistic

> "authenticity", which once seemed perfectly *natural,* will have been reappraised as "constructs" based upon subjective reworkings of musical and stylistic resources in particular ways that suit the aesthetic values of particular youth cultural groups (Bennett 2003, 190).

Whilst using the terminology of participant-observation, Clifford also emphasises the need to both read "the sense of specific occurrences and gestures empathetically" but also to "step … back to situate these meanings in wider contexts." This is achieved by the researcher through the "continuous tacking between the 'inside' and the 'outside' of an event" (Clifford 1983, 127).

Thus, in the case of insider researchers, it is important to make explicit the punk gaze as well as the researcher's gaze. This is to render visible the researcher's own perspective and to lay plain the duality of my investment in multiple discursive modes. In other words, to move with a dynamic grace between insider and outsider perspectives, between researcher and participant, insofar as these multiple, artificial, binary delineations retain a degree of conceptual usefulness is the most necessary and difficult challenge of my methodology. This is the project which is attempted here.

Endnotes

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[1] This is an oversimplification of the hardcore attitude towards contemporary cultural theory. This will be explained later in this thesis.

[2] See, for example (Ramones 1978).

[3] I probably was not much fun to be around.

[4] Two of my informants have been omitted from the project due to the unfortunate breaking of the cassette tape before I had the chance to fully transcribe the interview.

[5] This is usually a contraction of one's first name with one's band name, distro name, zine name or character feature.

[6] In fact, the social position of the researcher in relation to the object of study is only one of these biases. The second is the bias as to theoretical positioning and the third is the "intellectual bias" (Bourdieu 1992). See also (Swartz 1997; Maxwell 2001, 47-49).

[7] Gilbert Ryles discusses a "Chinese box" or a "multi-layered sandwich" whereby with a single act of eyelid contraction one may be, (a), signalling an accomplice; (b), parodying the signalling of an accomplice; or (c), rehearsing the parody of the signalling of an accomplice (Ryle 1968).
Geertz uses this framework to illustrate the distinction between a thin description (for example a physiological account of the contraction of an eyelid) and a thick(er) one: a description which explores the social meaning of that wink (Geertz 1973).

CHAPTER FOUR

Unity

1. The Unity Ideal

Wolfpack! It's a Unity Ideal.
Wolfpack! Better believe that it's real.

"Wolfpack" *(DYS 1983)*

> I've read some interviews with hardcore bands. I wont say who they are. I don't really know what these hardcore bands are about. In their interviews they got asked "you seem to sing a lot about unity" and they said "yeah its really important," and the guy said, "what else do you sing about?" "Oh not much else" (CH 2005).

This reference to scene unity, so frequently invoked in the Australian hardcore scene, was inherited from American bands, in particular the youth crew movement, posi-core ('positive hardcore'), and straightedge bands. In the mid 1980s in the U.S., the stylistically tough and mid-tempo genre of youth crew developed, complete with yelled vocals, gang-backups (back-up vocals shouted by the audience) and crowd sing-alongs.[1] Although there was undoubtedly a strong sense of hardcore community in earlier hardcore scenes, this particular movement of youth crew all but codified the idea of unity through song lyrics and the promotion and propagation of attitudes of clan or tribal (crew) mentality, taking the discourse of unity to a new level, and setting one's crew in opposition to other hardcore kids (sometimes within the same

scene). For the band DYS (Department of Youth Services), the crew was a "brotherhood" or a "wolfpack"; notions of local collectivity. Some crews, such as the Friends Stand United crew of the Boston scene in the late 1980s, subsequently gained global notoriety for taking an anti-racist stance and their extreme actions.[2] The narratives of crew unity are often mythologised and still resonated strongly with many of my own informants, some of whom actively aligned themselves with a crew.[3]

The cultivation of a "unity ideal", however, was not only about crew unity. Kids were also "united against a world that's wrong" (DYS 1983), an empowering, symbolic call to arms, in union, against a common adversary. Just who or what this enemy is, however, is slippery, manifesting for hardcore punks differently at different times. The enemy may be other crews, scenes, or subcultures such as *Nazi Punks Fuck Off* (The Dead Kennedys 1981); authorities such as the police such as *Police Story* (Black Flag 1981), Resist Control (Born Against 2003); or cultural dropouts and sellouts such as *New Direction* (Gorilla Biscuits 1989) and the more unforgiving *Sellout* (Throwdown 1999).

As indistinct as these enemies at times are, they are more defined than the general object of hardcore subcultural resistance, "the mainstream". Williams identifies the mainstream for many subcultures as a strawman which is "amorphous and remains largely hidden from view" (P. J. Williams 2011) This elusive mainstream is particularly

often evoked in Youth Crew, (and Youth Crew influenced) music, for example *As One*, (Warzone 1994); *Unity*, (Madball 1996); and *Wasted Youth Crew* (My Kind Belong Nowhere), (Blood for Blood 1998). An undefined "society" remains the target against which the kids are called to be united.[4] This generality gives the songs a versatility and lends to them an anthemic quality.

No matter the enemy, the effect is the same: a binding together of the insiders against the outsiders, and a strengthening of the "us" in opposition to the "them". Within hardcore, this unity ideal is replayed, reasserted, and reconstructed through, for example, the performance of youth crew cover songs by local bands, the appropriation of youth crew attitudes, and the performance—and narration of—(mosh) pit conventions which embody a collective spirit.

However, this notion of unity does not translate, directly and simply, into practice. A closer examination quickly demonstrates that, underneath the surface, hardcore is teeming with restlessness and diversity. Hardcore is after all, one way of living out a punk lifestyle, a lifestyle renowned for the ethic of individuality. This confronts members with a certain paradox analogous to that explained by Tsitos (writing in regards to the American alternative scene): that members must face "the paradox of being part of a scene (and therefore a community) which endorses individuality" (Tsitos 1999, 399). However, mere endorsement would be putting it rather mildly in the case of hardcore kids, for whom the demand of individuality is understood

necessarily as a reaction against scene homogeneity. In characteristically extreme hardcore style, this manifests as a call to "fuck unity!" (CT 2005).

It is hardly surprising then, that the concept of unity in hardcore is contested and subject to negotiation. Of subcultures in general, Wood recognises that:

> at any given point in its trajectory of existence, [a subculture] is both externally culturally stable and internally highly variable in terms of the identities of individual members (Wood 2003, 37).

Given the nature of the rebellious spirit embodied by hardcore punks, such variability is even less surprising.

In this chapter I wish to examine the complex and often sophisticated ways in which hardcore kids in Australia understand unity. I will discuss several methods of formulating and enacting the unity ideal within Australian hardcore: as unity in the pit, scene unity, and straightedge unity. These are manifestations of a recurring trope that characteristically rests uneasily with hardcore kids. On one hand, unity is an ideal to be sought by those for whom social cohesion is essential, and communal investment in internal stability is high. On the other hand, unity is seen as synonymous with crippling conformity and is exactly what hardcore kids mean to reject by embracing a hardcore lifestyle. This chapter will draw out how this paradox plays out in several different spheres of hardcore.

I will first turn to unity in the hardcore pit: the conventions, behaviour and dance styles which represent and engender a collective attitude at a particular hardcore show. How hardcore dancing is interpreted (and misinterpreted) is influential in shaping group attitudes. I will then turn my attention to the way in which scene unity is negotiated, focusing primarily on scenes as spatially determined subsets of general hardcore subculture. Scene unity, as we shall see, is kindled by both an ideal and by practical inducements. Moreover, it is provoked precisely through the sites of contestation and is developed and maintained by kids through complex processes of reflexivity and critical self-awareness. Finally, I will present an account of straightedge unity. Within the hardcore community, favour is given to straightedge as a personal choice over a way of fitting in with the crowd. However the reifying of straightedge as a an act of an individual is largely in response to the existence of what kids see as the ultra-conformist manifestations of the straightedge sub-culture; those take straightedge unity to an extreme and "to a platform" (AG 2006).

2. Unity at a Show

My friends!
The Pit!
Is all that I'm living for.
                    "My Friends The Pit" *(Impact Unit 1989)*

MK is in his thirties. His long dark blond dreadlocks flop down the back of his otherwise shaved head. Despite his punk appearance, he is exceedingly gentle and softly spoken. I asked him what it feels like to go to a show.

Oh wow! Wow doesn't even come close to it. It's . . . it's like your heart skips a beat, you know you're surrounded by people who for the most part think like you, that if something went down there, they'd be there for you. I'm getting emotional . . . [he laughs]. And just the, well the crassness of the music. You can't beat that. And just all the sharing of attitudes and ideas, the love in the room to sound all hippified (MK 2004).

Here, MK is describing the experience of his perfect show, a moment of awareness, mutual respect (or even love) and above all *unity* amongst the kids and performers alike. In such a crowd, MK may or may not be friends with the other audience members. Irrespective of whether they comprise his immediate social circle, he regards them with a form of connectedness.

However, a show is both a shared experience and an individual experience. It would not be accurate to emphasise the relation between audience members at the risk of neglecting the importance of the relation between the individual spectator and the music itself. Another hardcore kid, known as ST, explains his favourite part of hardcore to be "watching a band":

for me it's that private little moment where they play that part of the song that I love, and its probably so obscure, I mean, there are probably forty other people that love it but they are more worried about the big picture that that one bit. Watching a band is that for me. It gets worse and worse as I get older, I don't want to watch bands *with* other people anymore . . . 400 people could be in there are that's cool, but I just want to block out everyone else in the room (ST 2005).

Clearly ST is with other people, but I understand him to mean that he no longer wants to engage in watching a band as a shared experience. It is "his private little moment", irrespective of the number of people that surround him. Thus, by contrasting the perspectives of MK and ST, we can see watching a hardcore band can

be both an inclusively communal *and* a uniquely personal event. For my purposes, however, my focus is on the show as a communal event, which is not to devalue the view of many, who like ST, derive great enjoyment from a "private little moment" with the music.

In this section I will examine some of the ways of being in the pit as ways of sharing experiences. First, I will look at some pit conventions to draw out how they signify unity. Next, I will examine the ways that hardcore dancing is means of fostering a collective identity, primarily through the idea of having fun with one's 'mates'. Finally I will look at how, when the codes of what constitutes acceptable dancing aggression are misread, this reinforces the unity of those who have some knowledge about the meaning of hardcore dancing (i.e. that it is "just fun") in opposition to those who do not.[5] We shall see that, whilst the internal coherence of a hardcore show can be easily disrupted, altercations at shows—actual and potential outbreaks of violence—actually work to reinforce a sense of unity amongst hardcore kids.

Pit Unity

No I don't care if you're into different bands.
No cause for such hatred, I'm just a different man . . .
If we can walk together why can't we rock together?
                    "Walk Together Rock Together" *(7 Seconds 1985)*

The room is small but full. In one corner stands the band, their beaten drumkit and amps the victim of previous shows. They swing their guitars to and fro, mostly missing the heads of the dancing kids. The vocalist is swallowed whole into the crowd

of smiling faces and thrashing arms. He is with the dancers; he is one of them. Someone trips over a cable, unplugging the base. The vocals also cut out as the mic hits the floor. Nobody seems to notice and the show goes on. The kids kick and punch at the air, at the floor, or at each other. They windmill their arms in frenzied circular motions. Further back some kids stand with arms folded, self-conscious observers, marking the boundary between the inside and outside of the pit. These dimensions are in flux, following the ebb and flow of the pit dancers as they claim and reclaim their space. They do so both individually, defining themselves against other dancers, but also as a group through their dance style. Here, the performance of kickboxing and kung-fuing marks these (mostly teenage boys) out as "tough guy hardcore" kids, as much as the style of music.

The hardcore show, and in particular the pit as its crucible, is an important location in which to witness the cultivation and demonstration of hardcore unity. Atkinson and Wood explain this in reference to the Canadian straightedge show; their observations can be extrapolated to hardcore shows generally:

> [i]n most Canadian cities, shows form the interactional hub of Straightedge figuration; they are a focal meeting place for practitioners, showcase central figures of the lifestyle (i.e., musicians), and function as a tool for attracting potential newcomers or neophytes (Wilson and Atkinson 2005, 297).

As we shall see, performative conventions at hardcore shows both reflect and reinforce notions of community, equality and camaraderie. The ethic of oneness, which operates both between audience and performer on one hand, and within the audience on the other, is realised at an ideal hardcore show. For example, MK

explains:

> [p]eople look after each other. If someone falls down, three people pick him up. If someone gets agro at someone else, people step in and say, you know, "Chill out, punk rock—this is part and parcel of what we do" (MK 2004).

Here MK is suggesting that there are certain conventions surrounding looking after each other in the pit (Haenfler 2006, 19; Tsitos 1999, 406; Simon 1997, 149, 162). According to Tsitos, these acts "create and reinforce unity in the pit" (Tsitos 1999, 407). This is because the audience is not merely comprised of music fans, but of members of a social community, and they thus share a certain sensibility. For this reason, they may feel some responsibility to see that others have a good time and do not get hurt. They wish to "watch each others' backs", and to ensure that the show runs smoothly, both because of their investment in hardcore as an ideal, but also to make sure that in future, such shows can continue to occur.

In the pit one may engage in "mic sharing". This is where an audience member will grab the microphone out of the vocalist's hands, or wait to be presented with it by the vocalist (a "mic point"). Singing, screaming, or shouting is not just the role of the vocalist. Anyone can do it. It is a powerful moment witnessing a "hardcore dude" surrounded by two or three or more impassioned kids, the crowns of their heads locked together, faces red, yelling fervently the by-heart learnt lyrics inches away from each other, hands cradling each others' necks. Sometimes this escalates to a full scale "pile on", a spontaneous human mountain: more kids will scale each others' backs, yelling bodies appearing as one giant many limbed creature, before dispersing

in the next moment. Often, the audience will also sing along (or yell) in "gang backups", punctuating the rhythm of the music emphasising key phrases which, in as much as they tie the lyrical themes together also tie together those who sing them.

BC is a young "posi" straightedge informant. At his first hardcore show, headlined by Most Precious Blood, he recalls:

> I think it was Taking Sides and Shot Point Blank, which just sort of opened my eyes to Australian music. The guy's voice, when he'd talk between songs I just had to listen to him. Nothing else mattered. I just had chills and everything and they never really left. He was just saying, "It doesn't really matter if you don't know the words if you want to yell, just yell. This is my mic and your mic and its anyone's stage," and have fun sort of thing. And I had my Minor Threat shirt on and Taking Sides covered Minor Threat and that was the happiest day of my life up until then (BC 2005).

Thus for BC, the fun of hardcore is uniquely tied to the way that it encourages equality and unity of hardcore kids.

At many hardcore shows, the bands will play on a low stage, or on no stage, or even from within the audience. This facilitates close interaction with the audience and encourages audience participation and spontaneity of behaviour. For BC the absence of a stage is a symbolic equalising of band and audience.

> So you go to a lot of hardcore shows and there's a gap between the bands and the audience. I hate that gap. Cos hardcore is [in hardcore it's] s'posed to be [that] everyone is on the same level really.

> I s'pose there's a stage at [many] hardcore shows but it's a rad thing to have hardcore shows [without a stage]. Even just that thing matters, like *a stage*. When they play on the same level, there used to be heaps of shows like that . . . I don't know but its rad like you don't feel that they're a bit [superior] to you (BC 2005).

For PL, the closeness of the audience to the band is more than merely symbolic; it also creates a better atmosphere and leads to more enjoyment of the music.

> But as far as hardcore is concerned I found it liberating that people would be so ah there was so little difference between the audience and the people that were playing the music . . . (PL 2006)
>
> I think the great thing about hardcore and punk shows is that it tends to be played in an environment where the line between the audience and the bands kind of blur. I can't stand venues when there's a crowd barriers and stuff like that. And the last time I saw a band that absolutely had me in raptures and I couldn't stop moving up and down was a band from Melbourne called Straight Jacket Nation, I just could not stop moving. And it was because I was standing like a metre away from the bass player. I just could not stop moving (PL 2006).

Thus, the way in which hardcore kids occupy space at a show is indicative of the embodiment of hardcore unity in the pit. As BC points out, something as tangible as to whether or not there is a stage and closeness to the band can make a large difference in the sense of unity at a show.

Cutting Sick: Moshing, Slamming and Pit-Dancing.

Now you're on the bottom of a killer dogpile.
Now you'll feel the wrath of my rockin mosh styles!
<div align="right">"Intro" (Hard Luck 2005)</div>

The language of hardcore dance permits a degree of fluidity, and *moshing*, when used as a general term, can refer to any dancing that occurs in a (mosh) pit. However I will reserve the term *pit-dancing* for this general practice, and use *moshing* (at least within the context of hardcore) to refer to the subset of particular dancing which is more stylised and formulated, and which tends towards certain set moves (i.e., kung-

fu dancing, spin-kicking, picking-up-the-change, floor-punching, two-stepping, crab dancing and so on). This is the style of dancing typically seen at mosh-core/jock-core shows. Conversely I use *slam-dancing* (or slamming) to refer to the free form dancing wherein the kids run into each other and knock each other about. Slamming is more closely related to its punk origins as its derivative, circle-pitting (wherein the dancers slam in a circle).

According to Haenfler, the moshing style of dance involves a particular self-consciousness or self-awareness that more freeform hardcore dance, such as slam-dancing, lacks.

> Hardcore includes an exhibitionist element that slamming . . . do[es] not. The centre of the dance floor remains relatively open, allowing a few individuals at a time take the floor, demonstrate their skills, and exit, permitting the next group to participate (Haenfler 2006, 20).

Certainly, while slam-dancing and moshing are closely related and sometimes used interchangeably, they do have a different flavour (Lahickey 1997, X; Tsitos 1999, 397-8; Driver 2011, 980). Whilst not wishing to make light of these distinctions, for my purposes it will serve to conflate the two dance forms for several reasons. Moshing and slamming share the common feature of looking (and sometimes being) dangerous, and are thus sometimes violent. Both moshing and slamming, within the context of a particular show, foster pit unity by providing a shared language of bodily interaction. Above all, they are both considered by those who dance them to be "just fun."

Misinterpreting Pit Dancing

King of the pit. King of the Pit. King of the Pit. You Piece of Shit.
                              "King of the Pit" (Bones Brigade 2003)

Energetic moshing, circle pitting, slam dancing, kung fu-ing and the like do indeed,

look violent. However, my informants repeatedly described even the most aggressive

of pit-dancing as "fun." BR explains his behaviour in the pit as an interaction between

mates, which strengthens, rather than threatens, interpersonal relationships, and

which should not be taken too seriously. He says "I'd run over and punch my mate

over the head and he'd punch me. With no pressure it was just really fun."

BC similarly described pit-dancing. In doing so, he recounted a common experience:

encountering outsiders or the culturally illiterate who misunderstand the dance

conventions.

> I was just dancing and some guy came over, he had a Pantera[6] shirt on; he
> obviously listened to a lot of metal and he was like "are you trying to hurt
> me?" like he come up and whispered in my ear. "Uh no" [he laughs]; "that's
> why I'm dancing not near anyone and just having fun."

> "I'm watching you." And then a couple of bands later in Stronger than Hate I
> was dancing again and he came over to me and grabbed onto me, and then
> I'm like "dude, dude let go of me!" and by that time someone just smashed a
> glass on his head and stuff like that (BC 2005).

BC goes on to describe how his fellow hardcore kids defended him in the altercation.

> 'Cos the whole hardcore thing is like a gang kind of thing like they've got
> backup and I don't really believe in that kind of thing I hate violence
> [although] I might look violent dancing and that. I can't remember who it was
> but there were so many people trying to fight and then all of his friends, and
> the band stopped and stuff. And it's happened before, I was dancing and I've
> seen some of my friends try and grab some dude and I've been like "just

> fucking leave him alone, like he doesn't know what's going on." You realise after a while when you see people dancing and stuff (BC 2005).

Here, BC's response echoes MK's in the passage above. They both advocate patience towards someone who "gets aggro" by virtue of their cultural ignorance.[7] Such misinterpretations are cited as being common. Hardcore kids attribute the mistake to those who are not familiar with hardcore, or who lack the knowledge to correctly interpret hardcore behaviour. In this sense, such altercations reinforce the boundaries of insider and outsider status and consolidate the unity of those within hardcore.

SA is a mother, in her late thirties at the time of interviewing, but possessed of an extraordinary youthful exuberance. She recalls one incident where another of my informants was kicked out of a venue for violent dancing. She admits that "I guess if you look at it from an outsider's [perspective] he does look pretty angry when he's doing it" (SA 2005). However, for SA as for others, this violent dancing was a means of celebrating a shared experience with the band, as well as with the other audience members, and not an act calculated to inflict harm. The fact that SA knows this reaffirms her insider status, binding her closer to others who are "in the know."

BR, BC and SA's accounts demonstrate that those who are truly hardcore know the level of roughhousing hardcore dancing involves, know the physical risks and take them for the sake of shared fun. According to one respected vocalist and zine writer Brett:

[n]ow, I'm a supporter of dancing at shows, I've copped my fair share of lumps and bumps and I've given my fair share, not once has it been a malicious act. Fair enough I'm a bigger guy, but still, getting hit is getting hit. I can shrug it off and figure if you can get blasted in the face with a wild fist and shake it off then it will prepare you for being hit in the outside world. But of course, not everybody thinks the way I so in my own fucked up head. What gets me is how all these kids that are opposed to dancing hard are all, "no respect for others personal space, you might hit a girl, there's smaller people than you, you are messing up our emo love circle." No one is asking you to stand up the front and its just common sense at a hardcore show to look out for yourself when people are busting shit up. Is it that hard to move to the back? As far as I'm concerned, everyone is equal at shows. A swinging fist or a spin kick thrown by anyone is just that. If you do rattle someone hard, just stop and ask if they're ok. 9 times out of 10 they will give you a big grin and keep dancing. It's a big, mean world out there. Remember there's a difference to violent moshing and actual violence with motive and intent to injure. See you in the pit (Eberhard C 2004).

The flying punch is an act that is the same in the pit and in the outside world (as Brett drily observes, "getting hit is getting hit"). However, its social meaning is quite different. Outside, a punch is a means of exerting physical power with malicious intent over another and thus stratifying power relations. Inside, it is, for Brett, it is a mechanism for equalising audience and band members. Emo kids, girls, bigger guys: they are all the same. Those who are in the pit are all unified by risk of getting a fist in the face as much as by the fun of being there. In these terms, Brett has provided a wonderfully thick description of the meaning of pit aggression.

Despite the appearance of anarchic, directionless energy, hardcore dancing is an exhibition, treading the delicate balance between improvisation and stylisation. It is often very formalised and the rules as to what is permissible and what is encouraged levels of aggression, and codes of behaviour, are often quite specific, albeit unspoken. It is not just meaningless madness, as it is often made out to be. Even at the most seemingly uncontrolled, violent shows, like those of the Sydney band Smash

and Grab, there are unspoken rules of what type and how much aggression should be tolerated. At such shows, the lead singer would tape a ten dollar note to his forehead and invite the audience members to punch him, and to rip the money from his head during the song. The kids in the pit usually complied, on occasion making the singer bleed, but it was always done with respect. However, at one show at a Punks' Picnic in Sydney, things went wrong.

> Oh yeah. It was the first time I'd ever done that Smash and Grab thing. And so for people, the microphone probably would have sounded like "gocachuec". He was an older guy but he'd been on the piss all day so he just didn't know what was happening. 'Cos M punched me and this older guy didn't know what was happening so he started punching M and M punched back. I saw that older guy the next day he had no recollection whatever about that. . . . That sort of shit happens at punks picnic; people get there at midday and just drink. That's the scariest environment to do it, I'm always the scaredest 'cos there's always drunk, big dudes. There's all sorts of old dodgy people come out of the woodwork for it. The last one way even more full on when that trolley was on fire (Smash and Grab, 2005).

The boundaries of what constitutes acceptable behaviour are thus illuminated at the times that the code is transgressed. The drunk at the Punks Picnic broke the pit conventions because he misunderstood, thereby turning the "game" into "real violence". The behaviour of the boy in the Pantera shirt in BC's story was also intentionally aggressive, because he likewise misunderstood the show's dynamic. In both cases, the breaching of the boundaries, were considered a disturbance to the internal cohesion of the show, and not within the realm of "just fun".

The demo of the Canberra band Hard Luck opens with the lines "Side to side. Front to back. Get out of my way it's a mosh attack!" (Hard Luck 2005). Although moshing is

important, it is not to be taken too seriously, and in spite of these lyrics, moshing is generally not. In a zine interview with the band Hard Luck, the respect for letting loose and expending excess aggression is clear. Again, we notice that the language frames the activity in terms of having fun.

> There's nothing better than a show where everyone's having fun and going nutz [sic] and so are the bands. Kids should stop trying to copy or imitate everyone else and just have fun and be themselves. I think that what sucks is that hardcore and shows these days to some people revolve around moshing the hardest and whatever and that's all they take from it. But that doesn't mean that when we play we want to see a bunch of herbs standing in a line nodding their heads or whatever and I'd just like to see more people cutting sick, loosing their minds running around and shit than seeing whose the best two-stepper in the crowd or whose been practicing their Karate and can do the biggest/highest spin kicks (Stars C 2006).

Here, the more formal patterns of bodily movement are rejected in favour of untamed fervour. To be either inactive, or too rigidly active is valued as inferior to the more authentic displays of "people cutting sick, losing their minds and running around and shit".

The mood is thus of a community; or rather, that of what Victor Turner called *communitas*, that raw intercorporeal grounds for the possibility of community, forged in crevices of the social structure.[8] At those points in time when everyone is "cutting sick," there is no hierarchy, no status. It is "a moment in and out of time," rendered precious for its temporality and wildness. However, unlike Turner's *communitas*, with its ritual connotations of the "passivity" and "humility" of subjects who "submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (Turner 1969, 360), the mosher is unashamedly active, aggressive and even defiant. The band is no

ritual master to placate the moshers; but they are subject to the uncontrolled whims of the crazed pit monster, to flying spin kicks or renegade fists. They are, in this sense, made equal to the audience.

Hardcore music itself elicits a certain physicality. It is a music that begs action. It is typically played fast, thrashed aggressively and thus danced to with equal enthusiasm. The songs are fast and loud, and the embodied corollary of this is, as one informant described to me, the feeling of "insanity and energy. That sums it up" (SA 2005). The intense physicality of the music is evident even to those new to a hardcore scene. This wild throng of moshers and slam dancers was described to me by several informants as the most attractive, and certainly the most spectacular aspect of hardcore for them initially. While this is an aspect of the culture that is most prone to be misunderstood by those outsiders, it is also what makes hardcore fun.

Haenfler describes this as a discriminating feature of hardcore.

> Moshers [pit dancers] describe the experience as a safe, relatively harmless "release" of emotion, aggression, and frustration. Though outsiders may view moshing as violent, dangerous, or antisocial, for insiders it is a fun, communal, and essential element of what sets hardcore apart from other musical genres (Haenfler 2006, 20).

This "release" is no catharsis in the Aristotelian sense, with the connotations of emotional purgation (Shields 2013). Their passions expended, the kids will not be thrown again onto the city streets as placid and rational citizens. Neither is it, as

Adorno understands, the sort of catharsis which is likened to the crying child in his mother's arms: the "catharsis for the masses, but the catharsis which keeps them all the more firmly in line" (Adorno 2002, 463). This child will return to the world emboldened and with a renewed sense of obedience to the (capitalist) social structure. In the view of many hardcore kids (as one may well expect), the opposite is affected in the pit. Dancing, by consolidating one's hardcore status, by reifying one's subcultural allegiance, is felt to weaken the control society has over the subject. Whether or not this is truly the case will depend on the particular show and the participants. There is, after all, a very broad range of political (and apolitical) agendas within and between various hardcore scenes. If the kids remember (and they are often reminded) that hardcore is about more than *just* moshing, then it may be—but is by no means guaranteed—that the unity in the pit will enhance their disposition for social resistance. In an interview with the band, In Name and Blood, we are told that

> [w]e need more bands like the Faux Hawks and Hard Luck, to make kids realise that punk and hardcore music is a threat, not just a soundtrack to dance to. (Billy C 2005).

Unity in the Pit: Conclusion

Together united but still open to you.
We're best friends, a united crew.
                    "United We Stand" *(Crippled Youth (Bold) 1986)*

There is a sense of camaraderie and equality in the pit, evident from the pit conventions, social codes and performative practices as discussed above. These

homologies are supported by the way that participants describe the general atmosphere at a show and the feelings they have towards other hardcore kids in the pit who share their passion for the music, their ideals or simply their desire to have a good time. This communality is constructed amongst insider audience and performers who understand the seemingly violent moshing and slamming as fun (and to the exclusion of the subculturally ignorant who do not and who thus threaten the delicate balance of the pit). For hardcore kids, pit dancing is at once a personal expression of individual autonomy and a means of relating to other kids, of communicating in a common language, thus consolidating the ties of equality ,unity and harmony with their fellows.

3. Scene Unity

NOW – is the time for unity
WHY – because it means a lot to me.

"Unity" *(Madball 1996)*

Unity occupies a unique position in hardcore punk subculture. The term pervades hardcore punk discourses both formally and informally, and (as discussed in the previous section), is enacted through certain performative practices at hardcore shows. In this section, I turn my attention to perceptions of scene unity; that is, in its widest sense, subcultural unity. However more often, scene unity is understood on a narrower level, and is the site of negotiating the interactions between hardcore kids who come into contact with each other at shows and in shared virtual spaces. In this

sense the scene is a subcultural subset, which has a "a socio-spatial dimension" (Huq 2006, 165), and it is this sense of scene to which my informants primarily referred when speaking of "supporting their scene."

In this section I will further examine the value hardcore kids place on *scene unity* and proffer some reasons why the expression is given such importance; illuminating both practical and ideological rationales for advancing scene unity. I will then turn my attention to the concept of hardcore as "unity in diversity", and the unique role criticism (including self-criticism) plays in binding hardcore kids to each other.

Functionality of Unity

Don't hate each other, we're family.
There is a strength through diversity.

"Embrace" *(Ignite 1996)*

Brisbane band Just Say Go, like their American predecessors, draw upon themes of unity. They have a particularly reflective understanding of the term. One song explodes, bouncing into vocally driven chorus music as the yelled words and gang vocals puncture the song: "we can all stand as one". Crowd participation is usually high as kids appropriate the microphone or accept a "mic point." The small-statured singer is energetic and eyes the audience with a singularly of focus.

> Another year, another day.
> Still screaming those words but its all just the same.

> Strength through diversity, another catch phrase
> "Unity!" Hatred can be erased.
> We can all stand as one!
> You and me
>
> <div align="right">"Stand as One" (*Just Say Go 2004*)</div>

Here the singer, Al, seems to acknowledge the overuse or misuse of claims to hardcore unity. Nonetheless he posits, with refreshing sincerity, that behind such espousals there is something real and concrete that is shared by hardcore kids. In this sense, the concept of unity is used as a social glue of hardcore punk, a tool to promote ideas of strength through community and communal empowerment. For Al, it is a cliché, but one which still holds true.

According to Al:

> [w]hen I wrote this song I was writing about the term unity and how loosely it is used in the hardcore scene, especially amongst more business minded bands who are in competition with each other. To me unity is based on a community mindset where everybody helps each other, and keeps a positive connection between the people that surround us. I guess it is important within hardcore because it isn't (not all the time anyways) a richly funded business venture to start a band and a lot of the time hardcore kids need to use and return favours just to keep doing what they are doing, and with that in mind, conflict and difference need to be reduced to keep the community tight (AG 2006).

So, for Al, the importance of unity lies in its functionality: it has the purely practical utility of helping to foster cultural networks, enabling kids to get stuff done. These networks form the foundation of hardcore because they allow hardcore culture to be continuously produced. They allow the writing and performing of music, the making and distribution of zines, the organisation of shows and the like. As CJ explains, "it is

really necessary for bands and people with similar ideas to work together to get anything done" (CJ 2005).

In an interview, MS offers a similar view on the value of scene unity by describing his changing attitude:

> I was also very anti-scene as well. I sort of associate it with mob mentality. I mean seeing the same people day in day out some people try and maintain just the social side of it. Maybe its just comfortable, maybe its just recreation. It's tiresome for me personally. Because I don't really do friends very well . . . The scene has only started to make sort of a little bit of sense to me over recent times because just seeing that pretty much everyone involved in it does contribute to it somehow and that's good to develop a good culture of music and artwork, and it encourages other people to do it. [It's useful] for creating a community of people that can put on shows, play in bands, put out zines, get records in for people. I think that's wonderful. That's really good. I think its more practical, it makes the system easier to work with (MS 2005).

The value of scene unity, then, is that it establishes the foundation for subcultural, social and artistic creation. It is not so much an end to be valued in itself. Rather, it is a means for establishing the conditions of co-operation, which are necessary for such creation. For MS, the relevance of the scene became apparent when he began to view it this way. Whilst the sociality of hardcore scenes cannot be seen purely in terms of their cultural productive value, one reason for cultivating scene unity is undoubtedly in reference to its function in facilitating musical and cultural output. This is not, however, to undermine the many true friendships which may develop within hardcore punk communities.

The Ideal of Unity

Bringing it back through unity.
Bringing it back.
The spirit remains.

"Loyal to da Grave" *(25 Ta Life 1997)*

Hardcore unity is not merely pragmatic. Kids still, as in the time of the original youth

crew movement, understand their collectivity as a symbolic gesture of the subcultural

"us" against the dominant "them." It is social unity as a (magical?) solution to "a

world that's wrong" (DYS 1983). This is a traditional embracing of dialectics, which, if

not explicitly appropriated from the CCCS, are nonetheless reminiscent of their

version of subculture.

This persistent idealism of oppositional politics within hardcore culture is largely the

inheritance of the early 80s hardcore and proto hardcore (punk) bands.[9] In this social

context, the fight against authorities was understood as actual response (often

physical and direct) to an immediate threat (Rollins 1994, 19,46). Nevertheless,

irrespective of the "realness" of the resistance at this time, today it certainly has a

symbolic dimension which plays out as allegory, as a means of paying homage to

cultural heroes and pioneers; and it is this process of myth creation and sharing

which unites contemporary kids of respective scenes under particular identity

umbrellas.[10] In general, hardcore kids, even today, are brought together by the

rhetoric of fighting a system, which is articulated in terms of the usual suspects:

variously, the mindless drones of suburban normality, the forces of state oppression, and capitalist consumer culture.

Whilst hardcore kids do engage with the language of resistance (as a means of formulating a socio-politically understood scene unity), it is difficult to say how seriously they understand the potential of their putatively resistant practices. Most likely there is no single approach, as there are various divisions within hardcore with different agendas. Whilst some scenes might formulate their unity as the predicate of an effectual socio-politically motivated resistance (often nowadays through projects of personal liberation, creative acts and DIY methodologies), others are clearly happy to echo previous discourses of resistance and unity, as a nostalgic nod to their subcultural heritage. In either case, however, this talk of resistance against an enemy has the function of unification through the reification of a common (real or imagined) foe. This can be both a communal and a distinctly personal enterprise. Dan, a prominent musician, straightedger and zinester explains:

> [t]his zine is about hardcore punk. One, it is about punk music, about the small gestures of refusal it makes, about the way it connects us as a tribe of people struggling, everywhere, against our own legacies of horror, and against the horror of the world. Two, it is about punk culture, making our lives sustainable, about making the context for this music to uplift us: to create more daring music, to create more daring lives (D.X. 2004).

For Dan, it is the "small gestures" that, despite their symbolic nature, are powerful in their potential to bring together the social community.

Diversity or Conformity:

Life on your knees
Born to be led
Restrained and controller
Submit and comply
Sheep

"Sheep" (*Dropdead 1993*)

When Con first became a hardcore punk he remembers the scene:

> [t]here were liars, junkies, racists, sexists, yobbos, blow ins, violent fuckwits, violent and destructive fuckwits, dickheads, people of low morals, scruples, ethics, principles (hey all of those things are roughly the same!), girls just interested in boys not punk, losers that couldn't be accepted in any other social group, hardcore drunks, pretentious crusties[11] that wiped dirt over each other before entering a pub, new recruits that looked down upon others, narrow minded old schoolers, people so stagnant that change was anathema, gossipers, perverts, hangers-on, jerk offs, criminals, weirdos and other related characters and their human traits. Even the punkest and the coolest of people will have some things in common with you but they will differ because they are individuals and to think for one second everyone in the punk scene will meet your expectations is naivety full stop (Con 1999).

My point in citing Con (from his zine) is not to reduce the complexities of subjectivities of hardcore punks to mere caricatures and single dimensional stereotypes. It is, rather, to illustrate that difference, if not explicitly welcomed (or even tolerated), is at least *acknowledged* by hardcore kids within their community. For Con, there is an idealistic and naïve expectation amongst hardcore kids, married uneasily to an acceptance of difference. Other (hardcore) punks will live out their existence in different and often offensive ways. Nonetheless, for Con, it was this difference that formed the early need for, and possibility of, unity in Australian hardcore punk.

So, while celebrating community, the nature of that community is that it is varied and vibrant. To reduce the scene to a single type, or a single linear history, would be to misunderstand hardcore. Moreover, the acknowledgement of the complex narrative of hardcore, means including distasteful elements into the scene.

> There are always going to be bands and the people with somewhat questionable politics and attitudes, but to claim they don't exist or are not punk is to oversimplify our history, to make it relevant only to a particular, puritanical world view (D.X. 2004).

In this way, scene unity is about acceptance of diversity.

Christian from Blood of Others notes his views on Unity.

> Any notion of "scene unity" is always going to be untenable I think. The reason being "unity" as most people want it is draconian and leads to crippling conservatism in some form. Everyone thinks the same, everyone looks the same, acts the same, everyone knows each other and so forth. No room for the individual, creativity or outsider, within reason. This soon leads to a very safe and boring environment, devoid of life . . . The majority of those seeking it have no idea what it would take or mean (Daniel C 2003).

One of my informants, PL, who played in an Australian hardcore punk band and witnessed its evolution in the 1980s and 1990s, explains:

> [t]his is a really good quote. You know [X] from Mass Appeal said: "you know when hardcore became shit? Two words: "New York". He's convinced and to a certain degree he's justified that a lot of New York Hardcore introduced a lot of fucking jock element into the hardcore scene (PL 2006).

So for PL, as for Christian above, the unity ideal represents an oppressive conservatism which is an undesirable element in hardcore. He explains this element

as the jock element, and jockcore, originally a derivative term for a particular style of hardcore, a genre against which the more sensitive, emotional hardcore, is measured.[12]

Criticism and "Shit-Talking"

Sick of your attitude, sick of you, your social clubs, your flavour of the month
I don't care who you know, you don't know shit
                                        "Left for Dead" (*Left For Dead 2006*)

Extreme diversity, though in one sense celebrated, doesn't mean that hardcore kids are silent about critiquing what they see as the negative aspects of their music, their scene and their culture. On the contrary, hardcore kids are particularly vocal about individuals or groups that they do not like. They are often quite ruthless in their verbal abuse of divergent personalities, bands, politics, behaviours and styles.

It is widely acknowledged that hardcore in Australia is as much about "shit-talking" and "in-fighting" as it is about unity (and which is why calls for unity are considered necessary). For example, SA recognises the lack of unity in the Sydney Scene:

> [a]lso in Sydney there seems to be a lot of negativity between bands. Well, not so much bands but groups of people, different genres of bands in that hardcore scene. Like hardcore bands going "oh they're smelly bands" and crust kids going "oh they're all those tough guy wankers" or whatever (SA 2005).

SA concludes that, hardcore, "seems to be very segregated."

In person and on Internet boards, hardcore kids can be extremely "bitchy", and there is a strong culture of "taking other people down", "to their face" as often as "behind their back". Hardcore kids are not usually shy about criticising people directly, harshly and without mincing words. For CT, as for many of my informants, this overt and unashamed judgemental temper is attributed to the punk influence of "being critical of society and saying 'piss off' to most people" (CT 2005). GL is an older punk who has witnessed many fights, breakups, betrayals and altercations within his scene. He explains how intra-scene squabbles do not detract from the connectedness that he feels towards his hardcore scene.

> There is a lot of fucking bullshit that goes on no doubt. But once again it's that connection, like you see through the bullshit I guess in a way . . . if you spend enough time around something you kind of take things as they are to a degree but you know where you're at (GL 2005).

"Hardcore Makes Me Fucking Sick"[13]

The paradox is, of course, that the heterogeneity of identity and ideology referred to above, is the very glue that unifies the Australian hardcore scene[s]. It is the predisposition to voice opposition to "Pride, Honour, Loyalty (and everything I hate about hardcore)" (Far Left Limit 2001) that consolidates insider status.

So, in a subculture that encourages self-criticism and is overtly antagonistic towards any establishment, there is a widespread desire on the part of many hardcore kids to challenge prescribed aspects of hardcore culture itself. This means that a band like

Melbourne's Straightjacket (later Straightjacket Nation) can coherently renounce

hardcore punk, whilst maintaining their status as a hardcore punk band:

> When we play, we play to kill a beat
> My face in it for the thrill
> Rock and Roll makes me sick,
> This is your clothes your image, your fashion, your style
> Got nothing on us, we're fucking wild
> Punk rock makes me sick.
> This is it.
> Spineless bands spout rhetoric.
> Hardcore makes me sick,
> Makes me fucking sick.
>
> "Pap Music" (*Straightjacket 2004*)

At one show in Sydney I witnessed Dan, the singer of Straight Jacket, fervently

sweating these lines to an eager and willingly participating crowd. The audience slam-

danced and cheered as Dan plunged himself, wild-eyed, into their midst. Somehow

Dan and Straightjacket shared a powerful, communal, aggression-fuelled moment

with the very throng of kids that he criticises; with the very scene that "makes him

fucking sick."

In a similar vein, Sydney Band Black Fucken Eye's song "mob mentality" begins with

the slow heavy lilting vocals of "Everyone here is so fucked up. Everyone here makes

me wanna throw up." Again, the negativity towards the audience of hardcore kids is

described by the metaphorical physical reaction it provokes in the singer. The song

continues:

> The tough guys the poseurs the fucken fashion jerks.
> What does this shit mean to you? Tell me what its worth?
> . . .

When and where did things go wrong?
How much longer will it fucken go on?
Fuck the crews, fuck the cliques.
Safety in numbers? Nah you're just too weak.
Heard it from the heard, bunch of fucken sheep.
What's the point of ridicule this fucken week?

"Mob Mentality" *(Black Fucking Eye 2006)*

In contrast to the association of hardcore kids being a strong aggressive wolfpack (as in DYS's formulation) they are, for Brett, a flock of weak sheep. But the frustration is not only turned outwards towards others in the scene but also aimed at himself as a participant and contributing factor in its downfall (or uprising).

And it's sort of a shame that the undergrounds now up.
And we're the ones who fucked it all up.

4. sXe Unity and Personal Choice

You said it shouldn't be taken too seriously.
You said it was just your personal ideas and opinions.
You said it was only meant to relate directly to your life.
What About my life?
Has the Edge gone dull?

"True Till Death" *(Chain of Strength 1989)*

Straightedge—sXe—is best understood as a practice, whose adherents refrain from drug taking, including cigarettes and alcohol. Often associated with sXe is the prohibition of sexual promiscuity, or the adherence to complete sexual abstinence. In many cases, sXe kids also understand veganism or vegetarianism to be part of their sXe identity. Haenfler describes the tenets of sXe as "positivity/clean living, reserving

sex for caring relationships, self-realisation, spreading the message, and involvement in progressive causes" (Haenfler 2004a, 415).

In recent years there has been a considerable amount of work conducted on sXe, looking at particular scenes in the USA (Irwin 1999; Helton and Staudenmeier 2002; Wood 2003; Haenfler 2006; Mullaney 2007); Canada (Atkinson 2003); Sweden (Larsson, et al. 2003);[14] Australia (Nilan 2006); and on the online presence of straightedge (Wilson and Atkinson 2005; Williams and Copes 2005; Williams 2006). These theorists have had different focuses, but all take seriously insider accounts, privileging sXe kids' voices. Much of the interesting work examines the paradoxical nature of sXe subculture which is both oppositional to "youth culture" and the wider culture in general (Wood 2003; Irwin 1999) , yet in many ways socially conservative and hyper-masculine (Haenfler 2004a; Haenfler 2006; Atkinson 2003; Nilan 2006),,. For example, Atkinson notes that "sXers exploit and reframe long-standing cultural stereotypes about the tattooed body in order to "civilise" the face of contemporary social resistance in Canada" (Atkinson 2003, 197).

Much of this work characterises sXe as an identifiable subculture in itself, or at least as a relatively distinct "informal social movement" (Haenfler 2004b, 785), albeit one that is "nearly inseparable from the hardcore music scene" (Haenfler 2006, 9). I will be examining sXe here as a subsubculture of hardcore punk, consistent with the way

that hardcore kids in the Australian context understood it. Nilan, in her work on the Newcastle (NSW) scene, says that '[i]n Newcastle, local straightedge subculture is identified as a subset of the local "hardcore punk" music scene rather than an entirely separate scene in its own right.' (Nilan 2006, 4). This is an important formulation of sXe for my purposes because I wish to examine the way that unity between sXe and non-sXe kids plays out in Australian hardcore scenes.

My particular concern with sXe is to examine the way in which it is constructed and presented as an individuated, *personal choice*, rather than as being informed predominantly by a sense of community. Straightedge unity notwithstanding, all of my informants said that the most important thing about sXe, is the personal liberation that it engendered. Approximately half of my informants were sXe at the time of interviewing, or had in the past identified as sXe. All of my informants who were sXe understood their decision to be a personal choice, rather than as a mode of enacting social conformity. "It's something for me, it's not for anyone else really," one sXe kid, BC, informed me.

In this section I will briefly examine the American Straightedge traditions that inspire and inform Australian hardcore kids attitudes to sXe. I suggest that hardcore kids operate with a heightened historical consciousness, and the US movements in the 1980s and 1990s constitute an essential backdrop to how contemporary hardcore kids (both "edge" or not "edge") understand their own, contemporary hardcore

identity. I will then turn to exploring straightedge as my informants see it, that is, as a personal choice. I will examine some of the various reasons why hardcore kids become sXe and look at how kids tend to distinguish good and bad sXe practices and motivations along the dichotomy of personal choice/uniformity. We will see that for sXers, ex-edgers and non-edgers, the rhetoric follows a certain pattern. Straightedge, if embraced for personal reasons—for health, for self-empowerment, or as a manifestation of personal politics—is a positive and is a lifestyle which is respectable and respected in hardcore. On the other hand, when a straightedge identity is appropriated for the purpose of conforming to a particular set of rules, for the purposes of crowd-following or from a will to homogeneity, it contradicts what is considered to be the "true" hardcore attitude, and is thus shunned. However, the valorisation of personal choice over unity is, as with all aspects of hardcore, not ubiquitous. We would do well to keep in mind that it is on one hand, a response to the staunchness of the ultra unity-minded bands, whilst on the other, it is the basis against which new bands will define their own sense of blossoming straightedge unity. The hardcore pendulum is fuelled by disagreement and is never static.

History of sXe

Don't smoke, don't drink, don't fuck.
At least I can fucking think.
I can't keep up, can't keep up, can't keep up.
Out of Step with the world

"Out of Step" *(Minor Threat 1983)*

"Straightedge" as a term was coined by Ian Mackaye in his song of the same name

from the Minor Threat EP:

> I'm a person Just like you
> I've got better things to do
> Than sit around and fuck my head
> Hang out with the living dead
> Snort white shit up my nose
> Pass out at the shows
> I don't even think about speed
> That's something I just don't need
> I've got straight edge.
>   (Minor Threat 1981)

For Mackaye, sXe was meant originally as an individual choice (Haenfler 2006, 9),

born out of a "reverence for individuality" (Lahickey 1997, xvii). Its early development

was spurred on by the irritation that it caused in the Washington DC hardcore scene

(the HarDCore scene) becoming a means of challenging the norms of this scene,

which was heavily fuelled by drugs and alcohol. The challenge Minor Threat posed

was intentionally provocative.

> The reaction we got for being straight was so contemptuous, we couldn't
> believe it. We thought being straight was just like being another type of
> deviant in this community, just like junkies. I didn't realize it was gonna upset
> the apple cart so much—the reaction we got made us up the ante. That's
> when I realised "Man, I'm saying shit, and people are getting angry. This is
> really effective" (Ian Mackaye in Blush 2001).

As sXe, at this time, played out this familiar punk narrative, it was at once a personal

choice and a form of resistance which pitted itself against the dominant social climate

and which also challenged the unity of the DC scene.[15]

The early proponents of sXe however, including MacKaye, quickly became weary of

sXe as it grew into a more doctrinal social phenomenon.[16] An account of the DC

scene, *Dance of Days*, notes that

> [a]t the time, no one could have guessed that "Straight Edge" would be the
> most influential of the EP's tracks. For Mackaye it was—and would remain—
> simply a song, not a philosophy or movement, but for others it would take on
> a broad and lasting significance (Anderson and Jenkins 2001, 91).

Straightedge took on the form a social movement when it spread throughout the US

with scenes rising up in Nevada (7 seconds); Los Angeles (Uniform Choice); and in

Boston with bands like Social System Decontrol (SSD), Department of Youth Services

(DYS) and Negative FX. The association of veganism, vegetarianism, animal rights,

with sXe developed in the late 80s particularly with New York Youth Crew.[17] For

example Youth of Today's "No More":

> Meat eating, flesh eating, think about it
> So callous this crime we commit (Youth of Today 1988).

Hardline

*The key to self-liberation is abstinence from the destructive escapism of
intoxication . . .*
Through my refusal to partake I saved myself.
Abstinence was the beginning.
What's important is what's done with the freedom.
                              "The discipline" *(Earth Crisis 1995)*

Inspired by the Minor Threat song, Al Barile, from Boston band SSD, appropriated sXe

as a life philosophy. In this tough environment of the Boston scene, sXers embraced a

pack mentality, and were renowned for beating up non-straightedgers at shows.[18]

sXe, as an extreme view became known as "hardline", from Vegan Reich's EP of the

same name, (Vegan Reich 1990), though it is also called militant sXe. Under the influence of proponents such as Sean Muttaqi from Vegan Reich—it became an even more aggressive and puritanical enactment of the sXe ideals and veganism. Lyrics such as "If you're not on my side, you're a target in my eyes" (Vegan Reich 1990), indicate the extreme radical intolerance of drug-takers, meat-eaters and in particular, edge-breakers.

My concern here is how these oral histories about the development of sXe in North America influenced contemporary Australian practices. Australian hardcore kids engage with such narratives and use them to define their own conception of what it means to be straightedge in a hardcore scene. In particular, my informants tended to reject the staunch straightedge practices and attitudes in favour of the earlier "original" (Washington DC) manifestation, considering this to be the more authentic. This first wave were straightedge for "the right reasons." For the (Washington D.C.) "HarDCore" kids, the right reasons were explicitly *not* the desire to unify but to challenge social conformity through actions that are very personal. Whilst the context has obviously changed, the rhetoric of shunning rule following and social compliance, in favour of a personal choice, endures. Of course, collective identity features as an important aspect of straightedge, but, if my informants are to be believed (many of whom considered sXe an essential part of their identity), sXe is more about an individual's control over one's *own* body, *own* identity and *own* integrity, than it is about unity. Straightedge is a lifestyle to be shared with others, but far more crucial

for sXers is that the choice is motived by the desire for personal empowerment that

clean living facilitates. This is, straightedge for the "right reasons". In the next section

I will examine some of these "right reasons" which arose during my research.

Personal Reasons for Becoming sXe

It's a positive decision nothing to do with ostracism
There's nothing contradictory about unity and diversity
You made your choice I made mine.
We can still stand together side by side.
To define not divide
A mere reflection of some beliefs that I hold inside
                                   "To define Not Divide" *(What Happens Next? 2000)*

As I have explained, all of my informants who were or had been sXe described it as,

primarily, a personal choice and, as SP explains " [i]t's obviously not for everyone"

(SD 2005). Because it is a matter of concern for the individual, they cited many

various motivations for becoming sXe. In this section I will look at four informants

who describe their choice to become straightedge using different but overlapping

reasoning.

Some felt that sXe was something that had always dwelt within and their awareness

of the practice through hardcore music and culture had reflected a "self truth" that

was inherent and unique to them, an intrinsic part of their internal personal identity.

I asked BC how it was that he became sXe.

> It's always been there. I didn't really notice it that much when I first started
> getting into hardcore and punk music but later on I just kind of found out
> what the deal is with it. Out of the bands that are straightedge, the

straightedge lyrics and stuff like that. I just always thought it was cool morals to go by . . . I suppose I wouldn't have gone straightedge if I didn't listen to hardcore punk—like I wouldn't have known about it. There's a big influence of hardcore punk in it (BC 2005).

BC understands the influence that hardcore, and in particular sXe music and culture, had on him, in terms of inspiring him to enact a lifestyle to which he already had a predilection. The meaning of sXe lyrics resonated with his apparently already held beliefs and sXe culture reflected, rather than created, his personal identity, his morality, his sense of self. If taken at face value, we should understand BC's claims of hardcore as a reflection of an internal, intrinsic truth. However, as shall be explore in chapter six, rather than be concerned to what extent BC (and many others who explain their identity in essentialist, expressivist terms,) are true, I wish to examine these claims as part of the performative method of *making* hardcore truth and as part of the hardcore project of performative self-making. In light of such a perspective, one is made straightedge by one's acting out of straightedge—one's not drinking, etc, and one's listening to hardcore. Importantly, part of that performance includes claims to authenticity such as BC's, that straightedge was in him from the start.

However, BC's is not the only method of explaining one's straightedge commitment. Other informants attributed becoming sXe simply to the sense of wellbeing it engendered. They understood their abstinence as a source of personal strength, self-empowerment and even liberation. For FR, a vibrant young Brisbane straightedge

girl, straightedge as a sensory experience, as creating the conditions for feeling good

by virtue of being drug-free, was the most important factor.

> Not drinking is cool, like really it made me feel awesome, and sort of from
> then on I was like "why am I smoking this is the most pointless thing ever", my
> mind was so much clearer, so much better without drinking. So cigarettes
> became the most stupid idea in the world. Within a week of quitting
> cigarettes I'm like "this is the most amazing thing that's ever happened to me
> I'm going straight edge!" (FR 2004).

For some, becoming sXe is a means of overcoming drug and alcohol abuse:

> I'm straightedge for almost 3 years. I used to be addicted to a lot of drugs like
> ice, cocaine, alcohol and cigarettes. It sort of ruined my life and I dropped out
> of the punk scene for it. So I sort of got it together . . . And I've been a vegan
> for like ten . . . I don't know I really like the idea of it. Always sorta have. It's
> obviously not for everyone (SD 2005).

Two other of my informants recognised that their family history of alcohol abuse

formed their decision to be sXe as do informants in other studies (Nilan 2006, 6;

Helton and Staufenmeier 2002, 464-465). The importance of sXe for them is that it is

a physically and mentally healthy solution to their particular circumstances.

Some also understood their sXe identity as politically motivated. For instance, the

feminist and animal rights activist JK:

> I identified for about 5 years. I identified with sXe because I didn't believe in
> alcohol or drug use or sex and I was vegetarian at the time and vegan for
> some of it. I saw it as some of the socially controlling factors that society tried
> to use to control us and to direct our desires and to numb us and I didn't want
> to be part of that. But I think (although this is generalising) the majority of
> people who are sXe are sXe to get scene points and because that's what you
> need to do (just like getting tattoos) to be part of the hardcore community (JK
> 2005).

Here, JK makes the distinction between those who are truly concerned with rejecting the mainstream values of drug and meat consumption, and those who are more concerned with being a part of a community, and in collecting cultural capital ("scene points"), to earn respect in that community.

My Choice

Silence the division, as a result of choice.
A powerful expression through one voice.

" A choice" *(Uniform Choice 1986)*

The authentic sXer is constructed as one who is acting out of personal choice, and not (or not solely) from a sense of community obligation, social conformity or even unity. Such is the case when Brisbane band, Against, call out: "My hate! My choice! No regrets! My Choice! Drug free! No regrets!" (Against 2003). Indeed they have due reason to posit their straightedge conviction as their own choice. It is a way of reclaiming autonomy in a context whereby so many (sXe and non-sXe) associate the practice with a unifying and uniform influence, see it as crowd following, as homogenising doctrine or as mindless obedience to a set of rules.

For instance, PL is very wary of sXe for this reason. He discusses his experience of sXe in Sydney in the 90s:

> [o]ne of the biggest blights in hardcore that I could see was the rise of that kind of straightedge oligarchy. It's creepy. I find straightedge on par with pro-life lobbies. I find it as creepy as the PMRC.[19] I find that any people who want to join a boy scout group and decide that you're only going to allow yourself

> to drink milk and not have sex until marriage and all these kind of, fundamentally, almost biblical notions of reality . . . Well fuck, when did people impinge on my right to self destruct? If I want to self-destruct using chemical means i.e. alcohol, I should be allowed to do that (PL 2006).

The social conformity that PL suggests sXe promotes is, for him, comparable to totalitarian regime. "If a subculture can't offer me those ideals of freedom and choice then I may as well go back [to my home country] when there is martial law!" So for PL, the lack of freedom of choice is the main flaw of sXe. It is this type of "straightedge oligarchy" which is subject to heavy criticism from both straightedgers and non-straightedgers alike, as being "anti-punk" (PL 2006).

Today some straightedgers also associate themselves with pro-life and anti-homosexual beliefs, or with religions such as Christianity and Hari Krishna (Cappo and Das 1993). However, in contrast, many sXers consider formalised belief structures, religious allegiances and socially conservative values as opposed to what sXe is, or should be. For example, as one informant frankly explained about those who refrain from drug taking and sexual promiscuity on the basis their religious ideals: "you're not fucking straightedge; you are just being a stupid fucking Christian (PL 2006)". For them, the unity engendered in such conservative doctrines and practices is at odds with the "real" meaning of straightedge and of hardcore more generally. SA confided in an interview:

> I just think it should be [about] choices. I think putting restrictions on groups of people is kind of like another religion. And I think hardcore isn't about religion. It's anti-religion, its anti-anything, its anti-all-confinements (SA 2005).

By explaining that sXe *should* be about choices and not about restraints, SA is distinguishing what she considers to be the true, authentic form of sXe from the sort of sXe described by PL.

Many of my informants sought to emphasise that, whilst sXe scenes may fall into such patterns of social conformity, such a claim needed to qualified by the normative claim that this is not what sXe should be. They saw straightedge unity as a double-edged sword, with both the potential for flourishing, and the potential for crushing identity through unity. In making this distinction, some of my informants were more adamant in their rejection of hardline than others. TP is a member of a number of punk bands, including one of the most prominent Australian (Straightedge) hardcore bands from the 90s. For him, Straightedge is a very positive phenomena for those for whom it is a private affair:

> but, if your one of these new hardcore, hardline sXe fuckwits, fuck off I don't care. You're as relevant to me as a Nazi skinhead. I don't give a fuck (TP 2005).

sXe does rouse a strong sense of community. However, most of my informants, even those who displayed high level of vocal commitment, of strict adherence and who celebrated straightedge unity, nonetheless played down the conformity apect of sXe identity. Instead they emphasised understanding it as a means of exercising their right *not to self-destruct*, (to use SP's terminology). Such protestations are usually framed in the language of rights and choice. They are at once a rejection of the more

most militant species of sXe as a schismatic and divisive force within hardcore, as well

as an attempt to pacify shared social spaces by engaging in liberalist discourses.

Additionally, many local hardcore kids assert that sXe is a personal choice, but do so

in reaction to what they see as a (mis)interpretation of sXe as being ultra-conformist.

FR explains how her understanding of sXe changed through exposure to a different

hardcore scene:

> I had enough friends in (Melbourne) who have been straightedge for several
> years and don't even talk about it don't even mention it and its more of a
> personal choice not so much displayed as much as it was in (Brisbane) for
> particular people that I was associated with. So I learnt from that, that
> straightedge should be a personal thing and that's how I approach
> straightedge, as a personal thing (FR 2004).

Likewise, LM, who was once a staunch advocate of the sXe lifestyle, explains:

> well I'm not straightedge any more . . . I still respect it a lot but I guess what
> its become I'm not into. I mean straightedge is a personal thing, you cant
> really say straightedge sux or straightedge is great. It's different for different
> people. Its basically one person's song that people have appropriated into
> their lives and gone to a whatever degree with it (LM 2005).

They both look down on the breed of sXe which involves dogmatic, crowd-following

and a lack of individuality. This is reflective of Haenfler's suggestion that sXe is "more

a personal quest for individuality, an expression of a "true self", rather than a

collective challenge" (Haenfler 2004a, 408).

So on the one hand, sXe is a liberating force, affording a platform for physical and

mental empowerment and strength; on the other, it is the black spot of punk culture,

in the uniformity of behaviour aggressively expressed by some sXers. As GL explains

"there's heartache and there's fucking sunshine in everything. There's no golden rule

. . . sXe has a positive fucking side and a downfall because of the ignorance that goes

along with that" (GL 2005).

Preachy Hardcore

ST, who is not sXe, values sXe practitioners who are discrete in their lifestyle choices,

who may be very firm in there beliefs but do not feel a need to display their identity

publically. He explains one of his sXe friends,

> anyway you wouldn't know [he's sXe] he doesn't walk around with giant x's
> on his hands jamming it down everyone's throats. It's just his belief he just
> doesn't feel the need to go out and drink heaps of rum anymore and be a
> fuckwit; therefore he's sXe (ST 2005).

This contrasts with BC's attitude, who, whilst engaging in the same stylistic dressing

as ST's negative stereotype of a sXer, dresses for his own self, not necessarily to

display his sXe identity to others. He choses to occationally mark his hand with an X

(to "X up"), an indication of straightedge status.

> I X up but not all the time. It's not a must for me, 'cos it is for myself. Like I
> don't really need to tell other people. If someone asks if I'm straightedge then
> yeah, then I will say. But I don't go out of my way to do it (BC 2005).

For both ST's friend and for BC, it is important for straightedgers to maintain a non-

judgemental attitude towards non-straightedgers and to engage in sXe practices for

one's own sake. For many of my non-sXe informants, the type of sXe identity, which

is non-confrontational and not "preachy," is a lifestyle that they respect. In particular

CH refers to those who "never have the need to tell everyone," in reference to a kid

who "even though he was a sXer, he never went on about it . . . not pushing it in your

face" (CH 2005).

AB describes her close friend:

> I grew up with someone who made that choice for himself, by himself, it made sense to him. And he made the choice for himself and lived it for himself and never made anyone else feel uncomfortable about that choice (AB 2005).

Thus, in particular for non-sXers, "jamming it down one's throat" or "pushing it in one's face" is not a necessary aspect of sXe. However, in saying as much, they are acknowledging that some people do try to force sXe beliefs on others.

SA explains:

> I mean there's people I know that are straightedge and they've been sXe for a really long time and I can't see them drinking or doing drugs or anything but they're kind of calm about it. It's just a choice that they've made. Like I've seen so many people through the years that have been militant about it and seriously, out of all of them there are probably only a handful that are still edge.

To talk too loudly about one's sXe identity is particularly dangerous because it draws attention to one's own transgression. CH notes that "I find the people that go on about it are the people that last a week." For SA, "I think some people are really passionate about it. But it seems to me that the ones who are the most passionate about it are the ones that don't last in it." AB and TP, in a joint interview, discuss those who "took it to a platform . . . and now they're drug dealers" (TP 2005).[20] The harder they preach, the harder they fall. The need to shout too loudly itself is sometimes perceived as a marker of inauthenticity in hardcore, signifying a lack of

endurance. There is, however, a fine line involved in distinguishing true and lasting

passion for the sXe ideals from those shamed as "culture abusers" who are motivated

only by the desire to be seen to be edge.

Thus straightedge is respected when it does not involve condemnation (or physical

aggression) towards non-straightedgers. Note the similar views of two of my

informants, TB and GL:

> [b]ut I do think there are people out there that do see alcohol as a numbing
> stupefying agent and they don't want to take part in that and that's fine. But I
> think to look down on other people if they consume alcohol or to make the
> assumption that everyone who does acid is a moron is completely illegitimate
> and I think a lot of straightedge people do that (TB 2005).

and:

> [y]ou know some of my favourite bands are sXe bands but these are guys
> we're talking about here that are gonna beat up on people for having a
> cigarette and stuff and I don't know that I am down with that mentality of it. I
> don't see the sense in that, when you're trying to just get on (GL, 2005).

Thus for GL, the need for scene cohesion make straightedge preaching a destructive

tendency, starkly in contrast to the positive tendency of sXe itself.

In one sense, those who criticise hardline sXe, sXe conformity, preachy sXe and sXe

posers and fakes, are, themselves, being divisive. They are challenging the claims to

unity of hardcore subculture by challenging the role of certain types of sXe. On the

other hand, however, my informants understood such criticism being limited to those

whose own actions worked to undermine the harmony hardcore, or a particular

hardcore scene.

GH talks about a song he wrote for his band, "I drink! I think! fuck you!", as a reaction against the sXe kids who threaten scene unity.

> When people take it to a level and start looking down on people for not having those beliefs even though they're in the hardcore scene, its not cool to divide people in such a small scene because then it becomes even smaller.

> The whole song is not against sXe it's not meant to create any ill will, in fact it singles out people that will put themselves above the rest . . . I've got a lot of good sXe friends and its not about them in particular, its about people who abuse any culture, and if someone listened to the lyrics they'd be able to understand that (GH 2005).

Thus it is, again, the process of isolating and criticising the elements of hardcore which contradicts the true punk ideals, which works to reinforce the unity of the true hardcore kids. By distinguishing the "us" from the other, they consolidate, rather than fracture, their community.

Breaking Edge

So you fucking sold me out and everything it meant. . .
Today is the day we start again.
All that was lost
Is the past, another lost friend.
<div align="right">"Sellout" (Throwdown 1999)</div>

The association of sXe with tattooing and body marking underscores the importance of permanence and commitment; more, it predicates an identity which is essentialist, fixed and immovable. BC describes sXe tattooing as indicative of one's commitment to their ideals:

there are people getting X's tattooed on their hands and stuff, some people might think that's taking it a bit to far but I don't. Like if you've got lots of tattoos and you don't mind it then go for it, like if you're that committed to something . . . (BC 2005).

sXe slogans like "true till death", "sXe for life," and "if you're not [sXe] now, you never were [sXe]" (Haenfler 2006, 70) appropriated by the title of the Our War album *If You're Not Now . . . You're Fucking Dead* (Our War 2002), exemplify the gravity of consistency of identity and fidelity to a sXe code. To some extent, this positing of the stable and true self is a reaction to the formulations of subcultural identity (and in particularly youth subcultures) as fluid, temporal and transient. I suggest that, although the kids may not be directly aware of post-subcultural theory, they are in some sense reacting in general to popular notions of youth culture as faddish and subcultural identity associations as transient.[21]

Breaking the rules of sXe, even if only once, is sufficient to break edge. "These sXe 'rules'", observes Haenfler, "are absolute; there are no exceptions, and a single lapse means an adherent loses any claim to the sXe identity. Members commit to a lifetime of clean living" (Haenfler 2004a, 409). But the commitment of sXe is not just a personal commitment. When one makes a vow to become edge, one creates an obligation towards one's scene, and thus, for those who have a large investment in being sXe, there are social repercussions to betraying their ideals. Breaking edge severs ties with the community as well as with one's own personal hardcore identity. Breaking edge is deemed a shameful betrayal, a matter not just for the edge breaker him or herself, but for the whole band, friendship circle, scene or sXe culture in

general. Edge-breakers are ostracised as "sellouts" (Pitboss 2000 1999), (Throwdown 1999).

BR describes how he broke edge:

> [i]t ended up the label annoyed me. Being straightedge and coming up to 18 I thought so what if I have a beer? If I do that someone's gonna look down their nose at me, "you're a sellout blah blah blah." So I went, "fuck it." I stopped claiming edge and it wasn't until 3 months later that I had a beer . . . I copped the usual sellout crap (BR 2005).

While his true friends accepted his lifestyle decision, BR was perturbed but not surprised by the scene's response and the level of investment that other sXers had in his personal lifestyle choice:

> A lot of people that I knew just from shows were like "err sell out." Whatever. I had someone say, "Oh well, more edge for me", once. That doesn't make sense at all. It was about me (BR 2005).

I asked one well-known straightedger about his experience of breaking edge and if he had ever been called a sellout. LM responded:

> Not to my face. I think when I stopped being straightedge . . . I mean the nature of straightedge anyway is that you sort of set yourself up for it. If you subscribe to straightedge and X up and parade around and say "Yeah I'm straightedge," you're setting yourself up and I think you've got to be prepared to take the flack if you decide to champion that ideal and wave the flag, so to speak. If you sell out, then expect to cop it. I thought, "Well this is going to happen." People are going to give me shit. That's fair enough. I waved the flag. I waved it hard. I got in peoples faces so I deserve to have the piss taken out of me. That's fine. But people never really do it to your face you just hear "Oh so and so said this," and nowadays with the Internet its a hundred times worse. But no-ne would ever come up and say "oh you fucking let me down man," which would be much better (LM 2005).

5. Conclusion

Visions of unity seem so nice
But when I see a fight I think twice
When I go to the shows and see stupidity
All I can say is "Where's the Unity?"

"Where's the Unity?" (*Infest 1988*)

According to one hardcore kid, a university student at the time of interviewing:

> I have never in my broad experience of social activity witnessed a scene that so heavily criticised and critiqued [itself] as hardcore punk. I think it is truly the heart of the scene (JS 2005).

JS, rather eloquently, goes on to explain the consequences of this unity paradox.

> On the one hand you have a free love mentality that opens the doors to all participants within the situation. On the other you have nothing shy of witch hunting that brutally conditions individuals into accepting certain social norms. To put it another way, hardcore punk sets out to distance itself from any established cultural norm, even the ones it established itself. Idiots (JS 2005).

This illustrates a paradox of unity, which, for JA, is what hardcore is about. So in a subculture that encourages self-criticism and is overtly antagonistic towards any establishment, the tendency for many hardcore kids to challenge the prescriptive doctrines of hardcore culture itself is rife. The tendency to criticise is a behaviour that JS, with self-consciousness and perhaps with some irony succumbs to in deeming hardcore kids who criticise their scene or subculture as "idiots." In acknowledging this internal tension, JS is not in fact distancing himself from hardcore, but proving his hardcore identity by enacting the very sacred hardcore precept that nothing is

sacred; nothing is beyond the reach of condemnation.

Hence, this illustrates why it is useful to think of this subculture as a constant "negotiation" between individuals within certain established but malleable and ever questioned conventions of hardcore. Rather than thinking of hardcore punk as a strict "set of rules" (Minor Threat 1983), it is better understood as a common discursive ground whereby such lifestyle choices and musical preferences are discussed, and commonly argued. It is a shared space to disagree as much as to encourage and create. Moreover, the disagreement itself constitutes the "heart of" hardcore. The notion of a unity ideal itself, is one such contested norm. In the next chapter, I will take this concept further to examine how notions of youth in hardcore are negotiated and how this problematic and variously idealised and contested behaviour can have a unifying, as well as a divisive effect upon hardcore scenes in Australia.

Endnotes

[1] For example in New York with bands such as Bold and Gorilla Biscuits; In Boston with bands such as Turning point, and in L.A. with bands such as Instead. For a concise history of this period see Haenfler 2006, 7-17.

[2] Original member Elgin James explains of FSU: "the thing about FSU that people misunderstand and misunderstood then is that it wasn't about being bullies, it was about hating bullies. It was about being united in destroying bullies, whether those are fucking a bunch of fucking dickhead bouncers beating up a punk rock kid at a show. You know what, well there's maybe ten of you and there's fucking 200 of us. Or maybe about these fucking white power kids showing up at a show and it's the same sort of thing really there's twenty of you well there's 100 of us and if you touch one of us you're going to have to fight 100 of us" (Elgin James 2004).

[3] For example, the 618 crew in Adelaide, the Sydney Hate Crew (SHC), North Coast Hardcore (NCHC) of Queensland and Northern N.S.W., the Newcastle Wolfpack (in deference to the Boston Wolfpack) otherwise known as the "original NCHC". Although each requires a different level of seriousness and investment, they are by and large, (at least within the contemporary Australian context), social circles and

demarcations of local identity rather than violent gangs. As one informant confided that "I have a WSHC tattoo which means Western Sydney Hardcore." He cited his reason for being in a crew as "it's just fun" (GH 2005).

[4] "I won't be fucked around no more. Got to show society we're right" (Warzone 1994); "This is all about you and me, and our fight against society" (Madball 1996); "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you and society too" (Blood for Blood 1998).

[5] For example, GH explains, "I think the most important thing is that everyone has fun and that everyone stops being so serious" (GH 2005). This is confirmed by LR, who told me that "I just think to many bands are too serious and they don't have that fun element" (LR 2004).

[6] A popular Texan metal band.

[7] Angry: Australian slang.

[8] Turner makes the distinction between communitas ("the modality of social relationship") and community ("an area of common living") (Turner 1969, 360).

[9] For example, note Black Flag's "Police Story" (Black Flag 1981).

[10] The process of constructing hardcore history and truth will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

[11] Crusty punk is an identity associated with anarchism and autonomous, self-sustaining lifestyle practices along with an unkempt style of dress. At the time of research, they were sometimes referred to as hessian punks or hippy punks. Crust punk is a related style of music which known for a metal-influenced, heavy, full sound; dirty guitars, strong baselines, growled vocals an blast beats or med tempo 'D-Beats' (in reference to the drumbeat popularised by the British anarchist band Discharge).

[12] Emotional hardcore is style of music originating from the mid-1980s D.C. Scene from a movement dubbed "Revolution Summer", with bands such as Rites of Spring, Beef Eater, Grey Matter and Dag Nasty (Anderson and Jenkins 2001, 171-199). It challenged the scene's tough-guy mentality, consciously introduced melodic riffs and personal/political themes and "demonstrated that intensity did not require speed" (Anderson and Jenkins 2001, 183). However the term "emo-core" was introduced by a Journalist from the skate magazine *Thrasher*, to describe the new sound, in particular reference to Embrace, and Ian Mackaye's response was that this was "the stupidest fucking thing I've ever heard of" (Anderson and Jenkins 2001, 202). Although emotional hardcore is the origin of "emo" music, it has little in common stylistically and thematically with the contemporary, more popular manifestation (which has more of a pop sensibility and focuses on romantic themes).

[13] "Pap Music" (Straightjacket 2004).

[14] In reference to Swedish vegan youths.

[15] Mackaye very much revelled in the challenge of stereotypical punk identities, playing out himself the identities of a polite skinhead, an emotional punk, and a tee-totalling rocker.

[16] Mackaye has since disassociated himself with the practice as a movement in a number of interviews. See for example his interview in the documentary film *Edge,* (Ian Mackaye 2009).

[17] In addition to veganism, some puritan sXers also refrain from consuming stimulants like caffeine or

prescription drugs, and others limit consumption to organic products.

[18] Elgin James of Wrecking Crew/Righteous James from Boston attributes the origination of hardline to Barile (Elgin James 2004).

[19] Parents Music Resource Center; An organization in the USA since 1985 that lobbies for increased control over youth's access to music.

[20] In Chapter Six, we shall see the way in which longevity of commitment is an important attribute of the authentic hardcore kid.

[21] See also Chapter Two, Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

CHAPTER FIVE

Youth

1. Introduction: Youth as a Grenade

Youth is a grenade completely fukkin dangerous.
My optimism and enthusiasm is totally contagious.
                    "Youth as a Grenade" *(Hostile Takeover 2004)*

In the introduction to his zine *Youth Grenade*, Dan Grenade asserts the radical

positivity of "youth".

> The manifesto is still the same: to provide a thought provoking zine that goes
> deeper than idol-worship and the who/what/where and helps people realise
> that hardcore can be more than just a place to hang out, more than just a
> travelling merch[andise] desk, more than just a perfect two-step and a hot
> scene girl. That it can take a confused and alienated kid and teach them to
> question every truth we're led to believe, that it can teach us lessons we can
> apply to the outside world that can help us to live meaningful lives outside
> the doldrums of normality, that it can be more than just a phase or a youthful
> indiscretion. And the new name [of the zine]? It comes from a song by
> energetic Californian posi-hardcore thrashers Hostile Takeover. I think the
> lyrics sum up perfectly what hardcore is about for me:
>
> > *Youth is a grenade completely fukkin dangerous.*
> > *My optimism and enthusiasm is totally contagious*
> > *you cant hold me down cause ill destroy you if you try.*
> > *I wont be a teenager forever but Ill be young till I die.*
> > *"Cause I use youth as a grenade!! Die a shrapnel death!!"*[1]
> >   (Grenade c. 2003)

Through the appropriation of Hostile Takeover's lyrics and the construction of an

idealistic "manifesto", Dan Grenade makes a claim for the potency of youth as a

weapon against a meek acceptance of what he styles as the normality of the adult

world. Instead, Grenade proposes an intentionally active engagement with hardcore,

which is effectively defined as youth resistance. Of course, his earnest, impassioned appeal to the disruptive potential of juvenescence, he is not stating anything new: a rallying call to the power of youth has long been a standard part of subcultural discourse both from within and without. A general theme of a "refusal of complicity" (Thornton 1996, 102) pervades a plethora of post-war (youth) subcultures, from mods to punks to clubbers. The distinguishing feature here, however, is that Grenade's fight against adulthood employs a new strategy that involves more than simply occupying the crude and clichéd role of rebellious teenager. In advocating for a more *thoughtful* lifestyle, and a more sophisticated mode of resistance, he seeks to inspire the abandonment of typical teen behaviour (e.g. hanging out, consumer purchasing and interaction with the opposite sex). This, I propose, marks the hardcore discourse of youth as distinct and innovative.

Indeed, traditional formulations of subcultures conceive them as "youth cultures". In this chapter, I suggest that while "youth" need not be necessary condition for subcultural belongingness, youth and youthfulness do, in the case of hardcore punk, occupy a special space. In Australian hardcore punk, we shall see that youth is appropriated as an identity, negotiated, engaged with, challenged and reinforced in various ways. By explicating how notions of this state of being young informs hardcore, I do not mean to reinstate traditional, essentialist formulations of "youth culture", but rather seek to understand the ways in which competing ideas contribute to the meaning and practice of this particular subculture, and to explore some of the ways in which tensions over age are played out.

In the first section, after examining the traditional formulations of "youth culture", "youth cultures" and the "teenager", I will consider the ways in which hardcore kids identify with such notions. Drawing out several of the homologies between hardcore kids and the traditional teen, we shall see how they posit this figure as an ideal type, and the very antithesis against which they define themselves.

In the second section I will turn to how hardcore kids extol the concept of youthfulness, and explain the unique status of the "kid" in hardcore. However, it must be remembered that in this sense, *youthful* is defined with reference to social, rather than literal, chronological, age. I will explore how, as 16 year old FR explained, "hardcore is about the kids . . . because that's what fuels the culture" (FR 2004), and suggest some possible reasons why hardcore kids look to the support of the adolescents and young adults to aid the flourishing of their scene. I will then examine the use of hardcore as a means of rejecting the standard set of practices and characteristics associated with the traditional teenager. Finally, I will explain the role that nostalgia for youthfulness plays in the idealisation of youth in hardcore.

We will see that hardcore kids, as part of what it means to be such, create and challenge identities that balance adolescence and maturity, both literally and symbolically. Youth and youthfulness are negotiated by revamping outdated notions (as teenagehood), redefining what it means to be young and what is means to be hardcore (punk) in the process. In this way hardcore culture embraces the old who are "young at heart", and the young who consciously embrace mature behaviour in a rejection of traditional teen narratives.

Subcultures as Youth Cultures

Brickwalls, rowhouses and alleyways.
Subculture life every night and day.
Urban youth breakin rules and breakin laws.
Hangin out and getting loud just because.

"New Generation" (86 Mentality 2007)

Not all subcultures are about youth. The assumption that this is the case is an unfortunate inheritance of Birmingham School terminology, in which the expression "subculture" tends to be used interchangeably with "youth culture" (see, for example, Redhead 1990, White 1993, Thornton 1996 and Hodkinson 2007). This approach of conceptualising subcultures, which casts youth in opposition to a parent culture, does not always, if ever, accurately capture the logics around and through which contemporary subcultures consolidate.

In fact, to equate all subcultures with youth cultures is faultily reductive and ignores their diversity. Many are evidently not 'about' youth;[2] connection to a certain class or age group, or a certain race or gender, is contingent upon the character of a particular subculture. There are subcultures for whom certain self-identifications are important, as they form the basis of what it means to be a member and thus identity politics takes centre stage. For example, a riot girl might claim that being female is inherent in the act of living as a riot girl. In the same way, being black could be posited as essential to what it means to be a rasta or being working class to what it means to be a skinhead.[3] However, regarding subcultures in general, no such generalisations can be made. This is all very obvious, but bears reiteration because it is too often forgotten by social theorists who wish to advance a single, simple notion

of subculture. I suggest that whilst hardcore is not a "youth culture" as traditionally conceived, it is in some sense *about* youth. The nature of this connection will be examined below.

2. Negotiating the role of the traditional teenager and youth culture

You take their shit. Stand up and fight.
Fuck those rules and show your might.
But you have no guts. You'd rather get high
Take the day off and smoke all you buy.

"Wasted Youth" (*S.S. Decontrol 1982*)

By the term *youth culture* (as opposed to *youth cultures* in the plural) I am referring to a *single* unified category, encompassing all young people. Whilst there may be some value in using the term in this way I would urge caution. What all youth (as an empirical category) share throughout the world, even the Western world, is very broad and very thin. So while, as Miles observes,

> [i]t is still possible to identify some key characteristics of young people's experiences which have a powerful and widespread influence on both the construction of their everyday lives and their identities (Miles 2000, 1) . . .

. . . it would not do to push these characteristics too far. For this reason, I have used *youth cultu*re (in the singular) to refer to the general state of teenage sociality, an ideal type that exists in popular imagination and against which hardcore kids tend to define themselves. Thus, this usage of "youth culture" is less serviceable as a way of carving up the social world, and more as a means of contrasting the traditional concept of "youth cultural members" (as they exist in the popular imagination) against hardcore kids' self perception.

Aside from, but related to, the thinness of the concept, another problem with the category of a singular youth culture is that it is fixed by an out-dated conception of youth, essentially centred around the teenager as an irresponsible, lazy and wild subject. Whilst teenagers (defined by age) need not share any of these characteristics, the association still lingers in the popular imagination, an unfortunate legacy of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons.

Although Andy Bennett suggests that the origins of youth culture itself can be traced back to Ancient Rome (Bennett 2000, 12), according to Birmingham theorists Murdock and McCron, it was the Parsons who coined the term "youth culture" in 1942 (Murdock and McCron 1976, 11). Moreover, Parsons employed the term "teenager" to refer to one in this social category (Parsons 1954, 92). Irrespective of its origin and author, by the time that Parsons is writing in the middle of the twentieth century, the idea of youth culture, and its association with the teen was familiar and relatively stable.

> Perhaps the single best point of reference for characterising the youth culture lies in its contrast with the dominant pattern of the male adult role. By contrast with the emphasis on the responsibility in this role, the orientation of the youth culture is more or less specifically irresponsible. One of its dominant feature themes is "having a good time" in relation to which there is a particularly strong emphasis on social activities in the company of the opposite sex (Parsons 1954, 92).

Murdock and McCron explain that:

> [i]n Parsons" formulation "youth culture" stands opposed to the male role which forms the hub of the adult culture. Instead of stressing productive work, conformity to the routine and the acceptance of responsibility, the "youth culture" emphasises the inverse values of consumption, hedonistic leisure and irresponsibility (Murdock and McCron 1976, 11-12).

The "traditional teenager", then, is the personal embodiment of this youth culture.

As suggested above, this teen is the standard against which hardcore kids tend to define themselves inversely.

To this day, Parsons' conception of the American teenager lingers in the popular conception of the adolescent who is necessarily rebellious, overtly hedonistic, floundering in (his) liminality between the adult world of responsibility and childhood dependence upon parents. However, to attribute such characteristics wholesale to the social realities of hardcore punk kids would be erroneous and offensive. In fact, much of the behaviour of hardcore kids is purposefully adopted in direct response to the limitations of such stereotypes of teenagehood, and the gender-specific manifestations of adolescence (that is, Parsons' "athlete" and the "glamour girl").

Having (Consumer) Fun

I will now examine some characteristics of the traditional teenager in order to demonstrate how *having fun*, *acting irresponsibly* and *having free time* are interpreted by hardcore kids. In one sense, *having fun* is the most significant feature of hardcore.

AB informed me that "at the end of the day it's entertainment." For her,

> [bands] can be as serious and as deep and as politically affected as [they] like but at the end of the day make it fun for me 'cos we're coming [to shows] because we need to blow off some steam and I'm coming to see you jump the fuck around and get crazy and help me release that (AB 2005).

In a joint interview, TP agrees that fun should take precedence over any "serious" motivation:

> Going to a full political punk band and listening to someone sprout and scream, "fuck the fucking Howard Government Rah! Rah! Rah!"… It's boring (TP 2005).

Others, however, explained that hardcore should be inspired by something more than only "having a good time". Whilst for MS, the fun aspect is not the most essential, he accepts that hardcore show has a plurality of meanings and motivations for different kids:

> I was angry before about people who come to shows just for a night out. I'm not as antsy anymore because I don't think everyone needs to experience something the exact same way I do (MS 2005).

In fact, it is less the idea of having fun that many hardcore kids are averse to than the type of fun they have. In a profile of the band xCautionx in the zine *On Fire*, the interviewer, Dan, explains that

> I'm not really critical about people who want to have fun and enjoy themselves, but my emphasis is that hardcore should be more than this *consumptive fun* [my emphasis] (D.X c. 2003).

In response, this opinion is confirmed and elaborated upon by Lex from xCautionx, as he draws a distinction between having fun and wanting to consume.

> There are always people who are going to be involved because they just want to have fun, and I don't have a problem with this. But I think that hardcore is about trying to have fun in more than safe, consumable, rock'n'roll clichés, and I'd like to think that our project, as hardcore kids and revolutionaries, is to create spaces where we can have fun after the show finishes. Where we can have fun for the rest of the week and the rest of our lives, and obviously this is pretty damn impossible because of the systems of capitalism and control, but I'm pretty certain, that we've inherited this revolutionary tendency from punk rock, and from before them, the situationists, and this is the idea that in presenting people the constraints of their everyday life—that is, specifically relating to hardcore, the kinds of things that are stopping us from doing what we want, when and how we want—then these constraints become apparent and not illusory, and we are able to confront, attack and do away with them. So, if you are into hardcore just to have fun, I have no problem with that, but I do have a problem with if your aspiration ends there, if you allow the fear and despair of capital to turn you into a passive consumer. It becomes apparent then that you aren't wanting fun, you want

to consume, and consumer hardcore kids can fuck off as far as I am concerned, because they contribute nothing but apathy, boredom and self-obsession (D.X c. 2003).

For both Dan and Lex, then, enjoying one's involvement in hardcore is not wrong, although it is not sufficient to account for the entirety of the hardcore experience. Moreover, fun, as a liberating form of cultural production, is in sharp counter-distinction to consumer fun, which can be understood as an aspect of the standard teenage experience. This connection is not new: "from the time the term first appeared in the early 1950s, the image of the "teenager" was intimately bound up with the idea of the consumer society" (Murdock and McCron 1976, 15).[4]

There is a serious reflectivity of many hardcore kids over the "youth rebellion".

Take, for example, the Brisbane band Bjelke-Peterson Youth's lyrics:

> Stand atop the pulpit in your pulled up concrete socks,
> Say you're aware in your sportswear made with care in the sweat shop,
> "Stick together! Join the fight! I wanna see the kids unite!"
> For the kids, by the kids (at a dollar an hour).
> What about the ones who died so you could wear cool shoes?
> Fools.
> <div align="right">"By the Kids For the Kids" (For the Kids (By the Kids), 2002)</div>

In the lyric explanation, this song is described as a parody of hardcore "youth rebellions," that depend on inequality and disadvantage in order to feed their adherents style. According to Neil, at this point "hardcore resembles a Nike commercial". Again, we see that when fun becomes based solely on consumerism, and, when it becomes comericalised, it is no longer representative of the true spirit of hardcore.

Being Irresponsible

"Live fast, die young"
Was just a fad for a bunch of losers who didn't take care.
I'm gonna live my life breath, every breath.
Look towards the future and move straight ahead.
                                    "Youth of Today" *(Youth of Today 1988)*

A slightly older informant, the proprietor of an established record store and label, LR,

explained that:

> a person-into-hardcore's attitude is a lot . . . different and [more] open
> minded than a person that's [not] . . . They're a bit more serious . . . I don't
> know. It's very different, mentality-wise. [The hardcore kid sees] more of a
> broad spectrum of what goes on (LR 2004).

He described hardcore kids as being *aware*, as *circumspect*, and as not being

motivated (solely or primarily) by the sensory experience of the music and the

immediate passion evoked. However, LR is the first to acknowledge that this

characterisation is not always applicable; instead he posits it as a normative

construction of what, in his "informed" opinion, a hardcore kid *should* be.

If worldly awareness and rational sensibleness are indicative of what is valued in

hardcore, their opposite: short-sightedness and hedonistic indulgence are construed

as the antithesis of a true hardcore identity. Moreover, hardcore kids, such as FR,

associate these second set of characteristics with a general idea about teenagehood,

against which hardcore kids react with self-control and constraint. FR, a high school

student and cheerful posi-hardcore kid from Brisbane sees her experience of

discovering hardcore as implicitly a rejection of the common teenage sensibility.

> High school.[5] That was interesting. I didn't go to parties anymore and people
> really made me alienated at high school. Cos I was also vegan at that stage as

well so I was like non-drinking non-meat eating. [They thought] "Wow this is crazy she must be on drugs." I was the only person in that school who knew who Minor Threat were (FR 2004).[6]

FR's experience of being different, in terms of her ethics, behaviour and subcultural knowledge, worked to reinforce her self-perception as (being) hardcore (and thus not being a traditional teenager). It is interesting here that FR describes her peers' response to her behaviour as having to be on drugs, as if this was her only alternative as a teenager to the "normal" teenage experience of going to parties and consuming intoxicants that her school friends could understand: "I don't know sometimes I think my mum would love me to be an alcohol drinking teenager, just 'cause I'm not normal, she thinks, you know to not drink" (FR 2004).

As we saw, above, this rejection of drinking and drugs is particularly characteristic of the sXe experience, an aspect of hardcore that, as the preceding discussion might suggest, lends itself to a politicised abandonment of youth culture and the teenage experience. For another informant, AB, straightedge is an "incredibly powerful and positive fight against that norm of being a pissed teenager" (AB 2005). However, the sensible hardcore is not confined to the abstinent.

Living in Leisure

We are the board [sic] *youth and we are here to stay.*
Hang out all night and sleep all day.
Running wild in the streets with no place to go.
Causing chaos and tearing up your shows
                              "Board Youth" *(Bones Brigade 2002)*

For PL, the fact that hardcore is a time and energy-consuming lifestyle which requires full emersion and utmost dedication explains the link to young people.

It might just be that young people are the ones with actual time. They're the ones with time and the daring to be able to be involved in a subculture. Maybe they're the only people with energy and time on their hands to be involved in something like that. Because it is time consuming (PL 2006).

LM explains how living subculturally came to dominate his life, comparing it to a drug addiction:

[j]ust waking up and putting on an Infest record. Thinking about when the next show is. Writing lyrics for a song. Writing to someone in England to get a rare fucking' demo. And I didn't work back then either, I was on the dole, so I just devoted all my time to it basically. It's like having too much of a good thing (LM 2005).

However, we would be well-advised not to interpret hardcore as an exclusively leisure-time activity. Within this context, the work/leisure distinction is not fixed. The hardcore show is more than a social space but a space for artistic expression and cultural creation. Making music is, for many hardcore kids, *work*.

Many find ways of financially supporting themselves within the scene, for example as musicians, managers or roadies. Most of my informants (who were over 18), were employed in jobs that allowed them to dedicate time and effort to hardcore. They often saw their job, not as a career but as a means of supporting themselves whilst they played music, wrote zines, collected records and hung out at shows on the weekend. Others were students and worked part time. A few were employed in creative roles, for example as tattoo artists or designers. Some were on the dole or consciously sought modes of sustenance outside of traditional capitalist work patterns. In other words, there was no archetypical of hardcore kids' employment. They are not all kids with nothing better to do and, for those with the commitment, there are different means of finding or making the time to invest in hardcore.

Interpreting the conflicting accounts of Hardcore as a Youth Culture

You don't believe what this really means. Fuck the Kids!
                                  "Fuck the Kids" *(RIght Brigade 2001)*

In some sense, hardcore is about being a teenager but not in the narrow, restrictive, Parsonian sense. This is a new teenager, carving out their own definitions of youth through their own subcultural lifestyles. They are creating, alternative ways of being adolescent; alternatives to nightclubbing and flirting; alternatives to drug-taking and the role of the typical "pissed teenager"; alternatives to purely consumerist methods of getting kicks, alternatives to "youth culture" with its association with mass produced, culture-industry popular culture. They are appealing to other young people to redefine, and to "elderlise the youth" (All in Deep Shit 2001).

They are young and energetic, but sensible, and diligent (when it comes to working towards their goals and passions). They are often knowledgeable about politics and social issues and are able to bring a sophisticated and reflexive, "grown-up" approach to analysing the world and their place in it. They are not beyond having fun, they revel in the play of the pit and the joy of aggressive music, but are prone to question what types of fun should be had.

The result is that whether or not one interprets hardcore as a youth culture depends precisely on which features of youth one is measuring. It is thus possible to unify seemingly contradictory accounts. For TB:

I don't know like anything things get trendy and I'm sure some people would

call it a youth culture. Me? I wouldn't. Firstly I'm hardly a youth. Ha ha. I'm thirty-seven now but in the real underground its more a feeling, not a fashion (TB 2005).

This is important because it contrasts youth culture, with its trends, fashionistas and inauthenticity as something fluid, and in contrast to the static-ness of hardcore.

This formulation, however, contrasts with LM's understanding of the term youth culture:

> I think older people can definitely still consider themselves a part of [youth culture]. I think in essence [hardcore is] a youth culture. It comes from youth. . . . by nature it is a lot of the time reactionary (LM 2005).

This is interesting because it posits two features of traditionally conceived youth subculture; (fashion and reactionary), confirming one but rejecting the other. If both TB and LM are to be believed, Hardcore is youth, in that it is a reactionary culture, but not youth, in that it demands a greater cultural commitment than a mere teen fad would demand.

3. Hardcore as a 'solution' to teenagehood

I got a feeling there's something wrong.
I got a feeling that I don't belong here.
I don't belong here. I know it's true.
I don't belong here and neither do you!
<div align="right">"I Don't Belong" (Jerry's Kids 1983)</div>

Most of my interviewees "got into" hardcore between the ages of 13-19, finding out about this form of music while they were still in high school. Their introduction to hardcore was often through a friend or relative (usually slightly older than them), through other types of music, such as heavy metal, pop-punk or grunge, or through

skateboarding culture. Their descriptions of getting into hardcore are predominantly

articulated as a challenging and active process wherein the subject had to seek out

shows, zines and records independently of their primary peer group.

Many of my informants spoke of feelings of social isolation before finding hardcore

and refer to hardcore as that which saved them. As such, hardcore is described as

the bridge over the "awkward years" of teenagehood.

CT spoke, for example, about discovering hardcore as a solution to social isolation.

> For me this probably sounds a bit cheesy but its true, for me going through
> high school I was a little bit different, people picked on me because of the
> way I looked and stuff and I just remember going to hardcore shows and I felt
> like I'd finally found a place to fit in and singing along with other people, I
> always found it really friendly and its as simple as that. I finally found a place
> (CT 2005).

CT is well aware that his story plays out the traditional narrative of the teen-oucast-

turned-subculturalist. He is also aware that in understanding his subcultural

community as a remedy to this feeling of social isolation, he is not breaking new

ground. And yet, despite its almost clichéd status, several informants drew upon

similar realisations. One was ST, who talks of hardcore with a spirited enthusiasm:

> This is great. This is it. This is all I ever had. I was a reject fucking nerd all
> though my life until I discovered this and now I'm still a reject nerd but I'm a
> reject nerd with somewhere to go and something to do, you know (ST 2005).

Whilst Albert Cohen discusses potential subcultural members as united by "similar

problems of adjustment" (Cohen 1955), the problems associated with growing up

are understood by hardcore kids on a much more personal level than that accounted

for by the structuralist Birmingham theorists. For Cohen and the other Birmingham

theorists, the "problem" in the problem/solution framework they employed was inevitably that of class, and the solution manifested as a symbolic class challenge (Cohen 1955, 5). However, not all teenagers are going to experience the same sense of social isolation, nor are they all to react to it by the same subcultural attachment. For hardcore kids, even the most "typical" of subcultural narrative is uniquely personal and individually experienced.

Nonetheless, what is generally consistent throughout my informants' accounts is that their connection to hardcore punk, once instigated, generally reinforced the distance from their (non-hardcore) peers whilst simultaneously consolidating their identity and developing relationships within the hardcore community.

4. Youth as a solution to Social aging

I don't wanna grow up.
I'm never getting old.
I'd rather work from 9 to 5 than drink to stay alive.
I'm gonna stay young till I die!
                                        "Young Till I Die" (*7 Seconds 1984*)

At the time of interviewing, my informants were between the ages of sixteen and forty-three. Many were not, in a literal, chronological sense, "young". However, to say that hardcore is therefore not a subculture about youth is to misunderstand the idea of youth as an inherent category defined by one's actual age, instead of as a socially-constructed notion. Youth, like class, can no longer be understood as a static category, an essentialist identity. Hardcore kids are aware of this distinction. CJ explains that

being young is not just about how old you are, I mean there's heaps of old dudes that everyone still considers kids. You don't really notice the difference between someone who is like 15 and who is 35 (CJ 2005).

CJ understands that "youth" is not solely a matter of age, but often is more to do with how people are perceived. He understands that "the kids", no matter what their real age is, are young. Recognition of the constructed nature of youth, rather than as something merely given at a certain point in life, permits hardcore kids to work at their youth, to foster it, to develop it as a active and robust identity. This is not a new technique of "youth" cultures. As Lawrence Grossberg recognised this in his work in 1988:

> There is an increasingly tenuous relationship between age and "youth" in this culture (i.e., where "youth" has become something to be worked for) (Grossberg 1988, 125)

Here, the Bourdieuvian concept of social age is a useful analytical framework with which to further our understanding of the phenomenon. Bourdieu argues for the category of "youth" as a defence against social ageing, as opposed to biological ageing (Bourdieu 1984). Association with "youth" cultures therefore can, as Thornton explains, "act[s] as a buffer against social ageing—not against the dread of getting older, but one of resigning oneself to one's position in a highly stratified society" (Thornton 1996, 102).

Some post-subculturalists, Thornton amongst them, engage with Bourdieu's notion, showing social age to a means by which subculturalists are able to play with formalised notions of youth. Amongst the post-subculturalist who appropriate Bourdieu's notion of social age is Huq. According to Huq, Bourdieu

> has argued that "youth" is no more than a word, as the divisions between

youth an old age are arbitrary and the frontiers between them in all societies are a matter of struggle (Huq 2006, 1)..

This site of struggle is particularly important to hardcore kids, who align themselves with a culture that on one hand idolises and idealises the teenager, and on the other, degrades and criticises it. Through a complex relation of embracing and rejecting the role of the young, they construct new ways of living out youthfulness.

Here I am concerned with the social youth of hardcore kids. To emphasise this I will refer to hardcore youth as "youthfulness". Youth as youthfulness is a tool that can be used to resist the implications of "growing up". The well-worn trope of the evils of adulthood are akin to death, as reflected in lyrics such as these by Nevada band 7 Seconds:

> You grew up fast, now you'll die soon.
> I'll never fucking be like you.
> You finish college, grab a wife
> You're dead before you're 35.
>> "Young Till I Die" (*7 Seconds 1984*)

Or these, from New York band Kill Your idols:

> You wake up every day
> To a life that you despise
> You're already dead
> I see it in your eyes.
>> "Young at Heart" (*Kill Your Idols 2001*)

Or in Charles Bronson's "Youth Attack!":

> When the scab of youth has been picked, the scar of maturity will set in, and then you're dead!
>> "Youth Attack!" (*Charles Bronson 1997*)

In the Australian context, the resistance of and by youthfulness is demonstrated by

Dan Grenade's attitude, and his use of youth as a weapon, as cited at the beginning of the chapter. Youthfulness is thus a means by which hardcore kids can arm themselves against being a grown up.

Hardcore kids sing and talk about youth and youthfulness, often with impassioned affection. Youthfulness is privileged, idealised in hardcore discourse. A certain idealisation of youth is demonstrated in the use of the subjective noun for hardcore adherents. They are "kids", irrespective of their age. This may just be that they have:

> a kid mentality. Like you might be older but you still act like a kid 'cos you're into punk. So when I say its about the kids its like that as well (FR 2004).

Again, this reinforces the idea that social youth or youthfulness is not determined by age.

All Ages Shows

Just because we're not 21,
That's not supposed to mean we can't have any fun,
So come on raise your fists high, stage dive,
Dance the night away.
                                                        "All Ages" (*Kid Dynamite 2000*)

Further exemplifying the status of youth and youthfulness is the deference paid to *all ages shows*. An all ages show, as the name implies, is a performance that is not restricted to those over the legal drinking age (18 years in Australia). In a zine interview, such shows are described by Chris from the band, *Sense of Purpose* as, "the life blood of the scene . . . without [which] the scene will die." Furthermore Chris suggests that the "foundations of any hc [hardcore] scene is only as strong as

its all ages scene" (Willcott c2005).

One of my informants, BC, explains:

> [t]hey're the best idea. Rad idea. If I had anything to do with it I'd make every show all ages even if you lost a bit of money on it . . . It shouldn't be just for people over the age of 18 (BC 2005).

This emphasis on minors and on the inclusion of minors into hardcore punk spaces is not indigenous to contemporary Australian hardcore. There is a strong tradition in punk and hardcore of negotiating the politics of exclusion from shows, in particular exclusion on the basis of age. For example, one of the most visible signifiers of straightedge is the X. Straightedgers often "X up" by penning (or tattooing) a black X on their hand. Originally, (in the context of the early 80's Washington DC scene), the X was a concession to bar managers, whereby underage kids (who were straightedge and thus had no intention to drink) would identify themselves to the venue staff. They would thus be permitted to enter the show and watch the bands (Anderson and Jenkins 2001, 92).

Influenced by the combination of youth adulation and recognition of hardcore autonomy (understood in this case as the importance of a band's self-determining their audience), the rhetoric in hardcore communities usually is strongly in favour of all ages shows. According to the band, Miles Away,

> [w]e 100% support all ages shows, and if it were possible would only ever play all ages shows. Hardcore was started by kids and should remain accessible to young kids at every opportunity. Also, the atmosphere at all ages shows are always better than at licenced shows (Stars c2005).

Some of the more DIY hardcore punks do in fact restrict themselves to only playing

all ages shows. For example, in an interview on the punk/hardcore website

Screamingbloodymess.com, Tom from the band St. Albans Kids explains,

> Before we started we were pretty adamant that we were, well still are, that we wouldn't be playing any show that were being put on by promoters or any over age shows or any shows in pubs altogether (Sarah c2002).[7]

This highlights another traditional punk response to restricted shows, one perhaps more drastic than the necessary compromise of the DC straightedgers. This involved the DIY creation of independent spaces, rather than relying on financially motivated venues who often were motivated by alcohol sales. Legitimate venues were (and are) generally more conservative in denying entry to minors because of legal constraints. Due to their purely profit-driven motives they are less likely to take risks. On the other hand, when hardcore kids create and control their own social and artistic space, they are, more willing to flout the licencing laws by merely being unlicensed and unregulated. The level of legitimacy of DIY spaces is variable.

It is possible to identify, then, four reasons given for why all ages shows are prized: they are important to sustain the scene (Chris); the "atmosphere is better" (Miles Away); they are inclusive of under 18s (BC 2005) and the bands have more control over all ages shows as opposed to licenced shows (St. Albans Kids)[8]. Thus, through confirmation of the value of all ages shows, hardcore kids may be both reinforcing the pragmatic concerns of scene sustenance, and signifying an idealism which focuses on keeping the external forces of the adult world at bay.

Having minors at shows is also symbolically important because it is reflective of the equality of hardcore kids and suggests an egalitarianism and inclusiveness of all

participants irrespective of their age. Moreover, the term *all ages* has come to imply more than merely the equal access of young kids but an almost veneration of their position as cultural creators. They are regarded as the "foundation" of the scene and we are reminded that hardcore was "started by" kids. They are essential for keeping a scene alive and vibrant, and all ages shows demarcate the spaces that bring the kids into contact with hardcore live music and culture.

There are several reasons that youth is considered important to hardcore which I shall discuss. The first is that, as suggested above, the energy of youth is depended upon to keep hardcore music and cultural practices alive, in part due to the extent of their leisure time and their enthusiasm. The second embraces a traditional formulation of subculture by viewing hardcore culture as a solution to the problematic circumstance of teenagehood. The third relates to hardcore adherents' nostalgia for their initiation into their scene, which often coincided with their teenage years.

Youth as generators of culture, and as the driving force of Hardcore

Leaving behind those adult schemes.
Living by our own rules, that's our scene.
You're only young once.
So do it right.
<div align="right">"You're Only Young Once" <i>(Side by Side 1988)</i></div>

On the importance of encouraging new kids into hardcore, one zinester wrote:

> [w]e have to encourage new people into the scene. Especially the younger kids. We need an influx of people coming into the scene so they too can get that kick ass feeling like I had (Damien n.d.).

This tells us one motivation for encouraging the youth to be involved in hardcore.

Damien here feels an obligation to rouse and cultivate a new generation of hardcore

kids so that they too can benefit from the hardcore feeling. But more than this, Damien indicates that kids are the source of energy for a hardcore scene; they are necessary to ward off the dangers of complacency, staleness and adulthood. The kids are active, and scene members should value their "fruitful little minds" (AB 2005).

> The kids. Which is what it's all about. Hardcore is about the kids…'cause that's what fuels this culture. Its not, you know, the jaded old dudes after years of being into it. [They say] "ahh, this is shit" or whatever. It's the kids who are enthusiastic and going, "Oh I'm going to start this band and it's going to sound like this and it's going to be awesome.[9] . . . that's what fuels it, I think (FR 2004).

Chris from *Sense of Purpose* further explains:

> [w]ithout kids coming through the future is very bleak. It will just be made up of jaded adults like myself who will one day be too old to go to shows or play in a band . . . There are some great committed kids who are coming out though, just not enough of them. Hopefully these kids will provide the impetus for others to get involved (Willcott c. 2005).

The presence of the next generation, then, secures the future of hardcore, against the "jaded old dudes".

From an article entitled "Canberra Kids, supporting their scene?" from *Can I Scream* zine, it is explained of "the kids":

> [t]he music scene belongs to them just as much as it belongs to us…in fact some of these kids are doing more for their scene than any of you do, yet you feel privileged enough to rag on them for being a nu-jack (Scream 2006).

It should be noted here that such affirmations of the importance of fresh blood in hardcore is often a response to a certain elitism, an attitude of superiority that the more seasoned kids have towards the greener newcomers. The older kids are deeply emotionally invested in hardcore. Thus, it is unsurprising that they are wary of each new crop who are yet to prove their commitment and proffer exemplification of the

dedication that being authentically hardcore demands. This caution is, in fact, justified as the fresher kids are often prone to misread cultural signifiers and misinterpret hardcore. The perceived threat is that over time, such misunderstandings come to constitute the truth of hardcore, as its fabric is subtly reshaped. For the older kids, this is both an exciting and also challenging process, as the risk is the metamorphosis of their culture into something unrecognisable and worse, something representative of the popular culture of traditional teens, against which hardcore should be pitted.

> Yeah, young kids are essential to hardcore, but there is always the risk that they are going to fuck it up. But then, I'm not going to tell them that they can't do this or that (CJ 2005).

This demonstrates the ambivalent relationship that the older kids have towards the new kids, in the context of a culture which prides itself on being anti-hierarchical, in having "no gods, no managers" (Choking Victim 1999) and "no set of rules" (Minor Threat 1983).

Nostalgia for the Time when we got Into Hardcore

Well youth is a lovely thing but it quickly went by.
Now I'm stuck with this piece of shit life.
Maturity is a curse.
Every day is the fucking worst.
Man I wanna be a kid again.
. . . And one day I'll be just like them

"Youthful Senility" (*Worse Off C 2001*)

One way in which hardcore is tied to youth is that many hardcore kids were young when they first got into the music and the scene. The association of hardcore with

the experience of playing an active role in creating new identities creates a sense of nostalgia for this lost time. Most informants spoke about this period in their lives with great warmth, as a life changing experience. One informant explained affectionately regarding his introduction to hardcore, "it was just something that kind of hit me. Like a fucking rock in the face" (GL 2005). Some said that it "saved their lives". Thus the association of hardcore with a difficult transition period from childhood to adulthood means that this life stage of being young is given especial importance for hardcore kids. Though many of my informants had attitudes about hardcore that were not always positive and had complex relationships with it, they all looked upon their initial exposure to hardcore with a fond affection. This was true, even for those well into their forties, even for those who declared that they hated hardcore or for those who no longer consider themselves to be hardcore.

For AB,

> [i]t's amazing to be part of something and to have grown up being part of something and I had some spectacular people around me that had introduced me to a lot of different things and have since gone on to be record collectors and have record labels and I had a fantastic experience growing up (AB 2005).

However, in spite of youth and youthfulness being a revered aspect of the hardcore experience, such themes are still a matter of contention and subject to fervent negotiation. Notions of youth do indeed inform notions of hardcore punk. Social age or being young at heart takes precedence over actual age in constructing the authentic hardcore kid (often well into their thirties). The young are at once revered and endured as cultural generators. Those hardcore kids who are not young remember with fondness the time that they were, a time bound up in their memory

with their hardcore experience. Punk's disregard for authority, lively energy and willingness to provoke change are all signals of hardcore authenticity.

Nonetheless, and somewhat paradoxically, being responsible and cautious, the performance of adult behaviour and demonstration of maturity are also indicators of authenticity in hardcore. In this last sense, a conscious (or unconscious) rejection of teenagehood occurs. For hardcore kids, this rejection is the dismissal of the traditional "youth culture" experience, which is interpreted as having been corrupted and mutated into hyper-consumeristic hedonism. As such, it is evident that the value of youth and youthfulness in hardcore is both unique and contested.

5. Conclusion

Positive youth (its not just for kids anymore!) . . .
Together young and old.
Rejecting what we've been told.
Respect the elders.
Respect the Youth.
Together we may find new truth.

> "Positive Youth (It's not Just For Kids Anymore)" *(What Happens Next? 2001)*

In this chapter, I have demonstrated some of the ways in which the concept of youth informs that of hardcore. Youth is no longer understood as a static category, nor one that is essential to subcultures generally. In the particular case of hardcore however, notions of youth and youthfulness play an important role. The lack of consensus amongst hardcore kids about the role of youth notwithstanding, its presence on the

subcultural discursive agenda is sufficient evidence to claim that hardcore is "about youth".

Above all, many hardcore kids understand youthfulness as a central characteristic of hardcore. Nonetheless, they also see aspects of the hardcore lifestyle as a rejection of certain traditionally teenage characteristics.

The role that youth plays is complex and contested. Attitudes towards adolescence in hardcore may be adopted partly in relation to, or in reaction to, popular constructions of youth as irresponsible and defined by consumer culture. Alternatively, they may be reflective of the hardcore idealisation of, on the one hand characteristics such as energy, vibrancy and explosive passion, and, on the other, caution, consistency and responsibility. In either case, it is by virtue of the flexibility of hardcore and a testament to its dynamism that it is able to simultaneously embrace and reject the practices of youth and youthfulness.

Endnotes

[1] These lyrics are from the song "Youth as a Grenade" (Hostile Takeover, 2004).

[2] Obvious examples are diasporic ethnic cultures or politically orientated cultures which are both constituted by people of all ages and orientated around identities that are not age specific.

[3] These are examples of the ways that subculturalists might link their subculture to their personal and political identity. I do not mean to offer conjecture as to the "real" nature of these subcultures. Neither do I mean to suggest that these identities are static, clearly delimited or otherwise unproblematic constructions.

[4] Murdoch and McCron go on to reject the notion that youth culture is a homologous category, but unsurprisingly take the view that working class youth culture is.

[5] At the time of interviewing, FR was still at high school. Thus I suggest that here she is discussing her initial exposure to the social world of a typical high school experience.

[6] A highly influential 1980s Hardcore band from Washington DC. Known for political stance, their catchy and passionate lyrics and for originating the Straightedge movement. The assumption for FR is that one who doesn't know Minor Threat doesn't know the first thing about hardcore.

[7] Alternate venues include parks, car parks, warehouses, living rooms, basements, back yards and record stores make this possible, providing the opportunity for performances that are not restricted by age. But such venues are notoriously problematic and transitory as they are often illegitimate or semi-legitimate and participants struggle to avoid authorities (landlords, local councils and police).

[8] This is certainly true of DIY venues (described above), but may not be the case for certain underage venues such as PCYC"s, underage discos or large commercial festivals.

[9] "Like when I say kids I'm talking like shit, people up to the age of 30, 'cos that to me is still a kid" (FR 2004).

CHAPTER SIX

Truth

1. Introduction

Whose voice is the loudest? What do they say?
What earns them positions of Authority?
No one's got the answers. Nobody Rules!
No one's more than human. Nobody Rules!

<div align="right">"Nobody Rules" (Sick of it All 2010)</div>

When asked about the meaning of hardcore, Christian from the band Blood of Others

explained:

> the answer is very hard to pin down in its entirety. As a lifestyle I think there
> are a million things that could be stated to characterise it. One being the do it
> yourself principles for example. Probably the best way to describe it is when
> your life becomes largely influenced by the music, the message, the ethics
> and so on that are a part of what characterises Punk/HC.[1] I think the people it
> changes to a degree are the people who are part of it as a lifestyle, those who
> got into it and then got something out of it and continue to do so in some way
> . . . This is something that's internalised after a period of time and therefore
> becomes a part of who you are, what you do, the way you do it and so on.
> Things as everyday as participating and contributing toward the "scene" (mail
> ordering records, putting on shows, putting people up, putting out records
> etc.) and branching out and acting on your beliefs (Food not Bombs, direct
> actions, diet, ABC, squatting etc.) are all part of this and more (Dan, Interview
> with Christian from Blood of Others, c2003).

Thus, whilst admitting that "authentic" hardcore is "very hard to pin down," it is

something which is certainly recognisable (*I-know-it-when-I-see-it*) for Christian.

Although his explanation falls short of a definition, we are able to glean certain

characteristics of hardcore from his zine interview. For Christian, hardcore is about

practicing DIY ('Do It Yourself'), about recognising and internalising the messages of

hardcore, about being moved by the music and about actively supporting one's own hardcore scene. For him, as for others, hardcore is a *seriously* meaningful set of practices and beliefs; if playful, it is seriously so (Huizinga 1955).

This view however, is at odds with that taken by post-subculture theorists (as discussed in Chapter Two), for whom "taste cultures" or "club cultures" (Thornton 1996) are practices in the hyper-real (Redhead 1990). A post-subculture, thus conceived, carries with it the lustre of superficiality and the conflation of the style with the meaning. Muggleton has pointed out "[s]tyle is now worn for its look, not for any underlying message; or rather, the look is now the message" (Muggleton 2000, 44). Such an understanding of subcultures renders them, at best, playful and at worst, trivia, and significantly underestimates the level of significant engagement in, and commitment to, a given culture has for insiders: for those who are willing to invest their time and energy in belongingness.

Whilst hardcore kids rarely, if ever, engage directly with post-subcultural theory, they are aware and weary in a general sense of similar projects of painting all subcultures as style-without-substance. The trivialisation of subcultures, in its "uptown" manifestation is the high theory of post-subculturalism, whilst in "downtown" lingo it is treating hardcore "like a little, like a fucking little passing phase or fashion or something" (GL 2005). It is at this point, that the post-subculturalist and the (constructed enemy of the) "parent culture", which is the voice of the adult world, converge. If it were true that hardcore was only a fad, it would strip that hardcore— which participants not only hold dear, but which to a large extent, use to make sense

of their lives—of its potency and appeal. In other words, to concede that hardcore is mere style would be to concede that there is a fundamental hollowness to their very being. In fact, hardcore kids usually react vehemently against formulations that reduce subcultures to mere aesthetic choices. For the kids, hardcore always was, and is still, something *within* them, an essential part of who they are. It is the music that they love, the scene within which they are solidly rooted and the identity with which they are heavily invested. Hardcore kids claim authenticity. They utilise discourses of truth and reality. What that reality is may be up for grabs, but its nature is concrete and meaningful.

In particular, they (re)define the meaning of style and they engage with a DIY ethic. They seek to demarcate the boundary of the authentic/inauthentic by identifying practices and performances as presenting evidence of *real hardcore passion*, *sincerity* and *commitment*. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how "real" commitment is distinguished from the intentions and motivations of those who merely appropriate the empty shell of hardcore: transient scene-hoppers, inauthentic fashioncore kids and style-mongers who from the perspective of the "true" insiders, remain ignorant of the true meaning of the message. The precise nature of the true hardcore kid is, of course, negotiable, but the fact of his (or less commonly her) existence, is reaffirmed frequently, through the process of identifying and labelling specific practices.

For Patrick Williams,

> [a]s subcultural participants interact with one another over time and in many different situations . . . they come to some agreement as to what the

subculture ideally stands for and who does a better or worse job of embodying those ideals (Williams 2011, 133).

For hardcore kids, perhaps more than is the case in other subcultures, this is a process which is particularly charged, and the "agreement" is one which is born out of conflict. The struggle for the right to decide what and who is real is ongoing, but the fact of there being a "real" is attested to through the emotional conviction of hardcore kids that there is something worthwhile about the culture, something that draws them back "in spite of the bullshit" (CJ 2005). Thus, through the maintenance of such distinctions of real and fake, hardcore kids are claiming their own truths and asserting that which is valuable to them.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each explicating a technique used by hardcore kids to negotiate authenticity. In the first section, I will examine the shifting role of style; from the way the notion was employed by the CCCS theorists, to the way it is used by the post-subculturalists. I will then explain how hardcore kids in Australia understand style in a third way. In the second section I will briefly examine, in turn, the way that passion, commitment, sincerity, honesty and subcultural knowledge are regarded by hardcore kids as part of what it means to be hardcore, and how these concepts are used to distinguish their own experience and identity from that of the inauthentic hardcore kids. Finally, I will examine the role of the DIY element of hardcore as a means of countering what is perceived as the passivity of consumer culture. Hardcore kids embrace DIY both as a practical means to reclaim command of their cultural, artistic and daily environment, and as an ideologically motivated, symbolic rejection of consumer capitalism.

2. Rejecting Style: Hardcore responses to Style Fetishism

So was that all just a pose?
Your beliefs no deeper than your clothes?
Come on then, prove me wrong
I Should've never had to write this song.

<div align="right">"Sell-Out" (Oi Polloi 1999)</div>

For the Birmingham CCCS, style was a method employed by subcultural members to make meanings. Subculturalists crafted stylistic statements which had a particular energy and force, legible to those in the know. Punks, for example, "wore clothes which were the sartorial equivalent of swear words, and they swore as they dressed—with calculated effect" (Hebdige 1979, 114). This concept of "style fetishism" (a version of Marx's commodity fetishism) endures in many post-subculturalist accounts, having "outlasted many other aspects of the CCCS's work" (Stahl 2003, 27).

However, whilst the concept remains, it has been radically revamped in line with the shifting role of style in post-modern discourses. "Style fetishism" no longer constitutes a Hebdigian "semiotic guerrilla warfare" as it once may have (Hebdige 1979, 105). It has been disarmed, as post-subculturalists no longer look for what a style means but find value in the meaninglessness itself. Revelling in the absence of meaning challenges traditional methods of semiotic analysis whilst reinforcing subcultural stylistic reductionism.

For Redhead, "[p]revious theorists of post-war pop and deviance had tended to look

beneath, or behind, the surfaces of the shimmering mediascape in order to discover the 'real' subculture" (Redhead 1990, 1). However, for many of the post-subculturalists, rather than see style as representative of a particular subcultural truth whereby a meaning can be read by the subculturally literate, like a text, style is all there is, layers and layers of it; symbols floating without referents, giving one no way of distinguishing the real from the fake, the authentic from the inauthentic. This is hyper-reality, a concept that originates with Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1988), and is taken up by contemporary theorists such as Frederick Jameson (1993; see Muggleton 2000).

According to Bloustien's account of hyper-reality,

> [t]he speed and intensity of the production and distribution of "images" in the form of objects and media content . . . is such that none of them is any longer attached to any real or concrete meaning. Rather, the depthless, infinitely adaptable commodities begin to interact, mix with and refer to one another (Bloustien 2003, 17).

In such a state of affairs, signs refer only to other signs, and cannot be related to anything in the world. Meanings cannot be pinned down. For Redhead (as for Baudrillard) this hyper-reality culminates in an "end of the century party", whereby from the 1990s onwards, he predicted, "new" culture was no longer possible; instead, all that is available are reformations of pre-existing culture: rehashes of historical styles, mashed together in a grotesque and hedonistic spectacle of dizzy, spinning emptiness. Understanding post-war popular cultural history as circular, not linear, the speed of this process accelerates into the present state of hyper-consumerism and in hyper-reality, fashions return and re-return until they spiral giddily into style frenzies.[2]

> Cut adrift in a free-floating, inauthentic and valueless ether, post-subculturalists [subcultural members] are interpreted [by theorists such as Muggleton above] as mindlessly genuflecting in awe at the post-modern (Stahl 2003, 30).

However, as we shall see, "hardcore style" is neither the spectacular style of the CCCS's theory, nor the meaningless layers of style of the post-subculturalists.

Hardcore as Anti-Fashion

Where did you get those hundred dollar threads?
You know that I'd like to rip them up to shreds.
> "Anti Fashion" *(Social Distortion 1983)*

> It used to be about (whether it was social issues or world issues), it was something to talk about, now, and I feel pretty strongly about this, it's about selling a record. For being in a fucking magazine with your makeup and your fucking trust fund arms[3] and your piercings and your [perfect] teeth (TP 2005).

For hardcore kids *there is* meaning in playing music, making zines, socialising, putting on shows and holding strong opinions. In one sense, this is style; it is "lifestyle", and sharply contrasted to "style" understood purely as fashion, a spectacular style, or a consumable/consumer style.

Hardcore punks understand that there is a true identity reflected in their "style". This style is more that mowhawks and cultural objects, it is more even than their practices and what they do, it is, also as Williams describes, a "subcultural swagger". This is how a subcultural members "presents themselves in everyday life" which is "an expression of their subcultural essence" (Williams 2011, 67). Likewise, many hardcore kids see their hardcore lifestyle as an expression of an anterior, pre-existing truth. They reify a reality behind the fashion, behind the anti-fashion, behind the music,

behind the presentation of self and the manner of doing what they do.

For hardcore kids, at least in the original manifestations, their "challenge" was not through the "spectacular", not through pastiche and appropriating signifiers but through the far more "being what they are," which they thus considered far more radical and confronting. As one simply dressed hardcore informant explained, "I don't see the need for huge mohawks and 100 piercings and stuff for me personally. I mean, I guess that what I wear is also a style but it's just [a reflection of] me." This project of being onself is far more complex and far less natural than it may sound. It is active, creative and communal. Hardcore was, and still is, a conscious attempt to subvert the spectacular style of the punks (and perhaps other "style" subcultures) and thus to redefine punk, but it is, for all that, no less stylistic and no less self-consciously so.

Bloustien describes traditional punk culture as focusing on the "[t]he accoutrements of Punk: torn clothing, torn skin, fetish gear, leaking bodies, sharp hair, social aggression and an aesthetic of sensory indiscrimination", over the ordinary lived experiences of the punk (Bloustien 2003, 61).[4] In contrast, for hardcore kids the essence of punk *was* the social aggression and the other "accoutrements" are merely stylistic manifestations of an internal truth.

According to the historical accounts of early American Hardcore, hardcore punks in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and early 1980s valued the ethic of authoritarian resistance that punk inspired, but were disillusioned with the emphasis on fashion

163

propagated by the Hollywood punk scene (Belsito and Davis 1983, Blush 2001, Spitz and Mullen 2001, Traber 2001). The music they created, therefore, was quite self-consciously even more raw, more intense and stripped back than punk. This aesthetic of minimalist excess was reflected in the conscious choice of fashion: they dressed down in old t-shirts jeans and crew cuts as a response to the spectacular style for which punk was known, shunning it as superficial.[5]

Even the hardcore dress, which was originally a purposeful dressing down of punk, a stripping away of stylistic signifiers—the "accoutrements" to which Bloustien referred—itself signifies the intention of punk to re-assert a "reality" in place of the "mere" style; to affirm the importance of the subject's "core", their inside over the outside, the constant over the fluid. It illustrated an attempt not to buy into the meaning making game of style that Hebdige and others suggested was the crux of punk subcultural resistance (Hebdige 1979, 17).

As in LA, so to in Sydney; in the mid to late 80s, the genesis of Australian Hardcore was strikingly "anti-fashion". According to one informant, PL:

> [e]arly hardcore kids in Sydney would] go out of their way to underdress for punk gigs and that and I found that really fascinating. You could go to a gig and wear a pair of shorts and a pair of running shoes and not feel alienated at a punk gig! (PL 2006).

So this hardcore "style" of dressing down, intended to affect a stripping back of stylistic signifiers, is an act which itself signified a re-positing of the real, the "core", the substantial and the constant.

Of course, this hardcore (un)style is itself often criticised, as it is by PL, for becoming a "uniform". For example, sportswear, crew cuts and black band t-shirts may be considered as much a standardised dress code as elaborate "trust fund arms," facial piercings or dreadlocks (which are a re-dressing up of the dressed-down look). As several informants warned me, such fashions are no less the indicators by which to read subcultural status, nor are they less restrictive than the "punk uniform" that they purportedly set out to replace. It is unsurprising that hardcore falls into such a paradigm, but is interesting that hardcore kids acknowledge and criticise the elitism inherent in this process of reading *either* "dressed down" or "dressed up" style as a status indicator.

This often results in a general weariness about fashion consciousness in and about making any judgements based on another's style (fashion or even musical) when evaluating their hardcore authenticity. Such caution is reflected in the words of the record store proprietor, LR. He tentatively presents the ideal of a scene whereby fashion-consciousness of any form is absent:

> Some of these people are people who will be at a show and it's a bit too fashion conscious maybe and a bit too . . . [concerned with appearance]. They've got to wear the right gear or wear the right band shirt. Maybe if everyone just stoped worrying too much about what's going on around them and just enjoyed themselves it might be a bit of a different vibe (LR 2004).

Note that this attitude holds as much against people who do appropriate more overt fashions associated with old school British punk. ST speaks candidly about his concerns with such "fashionable" kids:

> I mean, I don't give a fuck if you want to wear make-up; I don't care if you want to wear tight jeans, but if he wants to come to a show and waste everybody's time by sitting around and staring at his mate who's wearing

makeup and tight jeans and comparing that's just fucked. That's not what it's about (ST 2005).

So rather than a particular fashion style being essential for hardcore kids, it is *the way that the fashion is worn* that counts; that is to say, it should decidedly *not* be worn for "calculated effect" (Hebdige 1979, 114). Of course, though it would not do to interpret the inclusivist rhetoric of ST too literally, and to believe that all styles are welcome in the hardcore family, it is evident from ST's account that those who try too hard to appear hardcore are not really hardcore. To be concerned with fashion (whatever the fashion) suggests inauthenticity, which is, as ST explains, "not what it's about".[6] Many hardcore kids attempt to shift the focus away from hardcore *fashion* and towards hardcore *truth* (qualities such as commitment, passion and sincerity as we shall see below) wherever possible. For hardcore kids, hardcore style is DIY, is direct, is loud and unmistakably represents an embodied and experienced truth, passion and commitment.

Reclaiming Substance Over Style: Making Style Mean Again

I don't give a fuck about your hardcore sound.
It doesn't make sense to me if the words are so fucking dumb.
Words not just music.
                    "Words not Just Music" *(Seein' red 1998)*

Post-subculturalist explanations often rest uneasily against the explanations hardcore kids have of what they are doing. The picture these theorists paint of subcultures is as nothing but layers of style *sans* meaning. From the perspective of the participants, their practices are thought to embody an (un)style, which

166

unambiguously refers. Though it would certainly not do to prioritise insider accounts

we should understand what the implications of accepting uncritically the post-

subculturalists view would mean for hardcore kids themselves. From the insider's

perspective, what they are doing is meaningful and this emphasis of meaning making

runs contrary in post-subculturalist theories. Thus to focus on such theories at the

expense of insider accounts, runs the risk of occluding the voice of the participant

and in doing so, missing an essential dimension of the hardcore experience.

Rather than "revelling in [a] simulation culture, refusing meaning in the name of

spectacle" (Muggleton 2000, 46), hardcore kids tend to posit a reality behind the

style, a set of core truths informing, and underpinning it. But this process is creative,

not revelatory. What I mean to suggest is not that such a meaning is real—in a

traditional structuralist sense—a reality which is uncovered, but that is it is a reality

which is made true by the act of communal positing. It is the *collusio*, an "immediate

agreement" between kids, or a pre-communicative shared understanding which

renders this reality meaningful (Bourdieu 1997, 145). Through the shared investment

in a set of beliefs and practices, those practices acquire cultural currency and are

legitimated (Moore 2004, 46-47).

According to Brett in a zine interview,

> [h]ardcore is meant to be a vehicle of anger and thought, not meaningless
> drive. Think about the reasons for being involved in HC/punk—if it's just for
> the music, you may as well not have lyrics. Hardcore is a certain musical style
> yes. But without substance, its just that . . . a musical style (Shorty n.d.).

TB also makes the distinction between those kids who are into hardcore purely for

the music and those, like himself, who are able to *read* hardcore, to *decode* the message, to understand the substance *underneath* the style. He considers himself to be "one of those people that really embraced it. A lot of people just like the music but don't take anything else away from it" (TB 2005). Here we see the process of laying claim to one's own authentic subcultural lifestyle by counterpointing its negation. In this case, the *inauthentic* kid is understood as one who cannot read the collective truth behind hardcore style.

Likewise Lex, an articulate sXe kid, draws the distinction between, on the one hand, those who are fans of the music and who play at being hardcore, and on the other those who are engaged in the esoteric coding and decoding of the messages behind the music.

> A lot of people might look at it as a hobby, in that they go to shows on the weekend, maybe their band plays in the show, and then they go to work on Monday, and all they take form hardcore is a sense of having fun and playing music, they've missed the point. I think starting bands, though, is an important first step. If you can encourage people to start bands, to have a message, to try to affect people's lives in a small way, then these kinds of things will take effect (Lex C 2003).

Those who are into hardcore purely because they enjoy the music have "missed the point." This suggests that for Lex, as for TB and Brett, hardcore is something substantially more than a fan culture. The subculture is charged with meaning.

So hardcore, from the insider's perpective is not just *about the music*, but also about the messages behind it. The "songs with a message" and the "bands that have something to say" (BR 2005) are valued above "empty" music. The content of such "messages" may be "sXe", "vegetarianism", "Doing It Yourself [DIY]" or "political

views" (BR 2005); "women's rights", "animal liberation" and "social issues" (JK 2005). Although these seem to have a socio-political dimension, hardcore songs need not share any such dimension. For BR, "songs about partying" are also an important part of the subcultural experience (BR 2005). What unites these themes, these messages, is the passion with which they are held and the fervour with which they are delivered. We shall see below that this passion is one of a number of markers of hardcore authenticity.

The insistence on the message of the music can be understood as an attempt to ground the real in a climate of floating identities. This conversation rarely, if ever speaks directly to the post-subcultural theorists but occurs at various other levels. Sometimes it is between hardcore kids and kids of other subcultures who have less emphasis on scene or subcultural commitment; at other times it is between hardcore kids and general youth culture with its pop sensibility and high turnover of members; or between hardcore kids and, to once again employ the lyrics of the band DYS, "the world that's wrong" (DYS, 1983), which in this particular case means the world of consumerist-fuelled, hyper-reality. Constructions of hardcore identity are generated from such articulations which refocus the meaning of truth in hardcore. It is through such positive claims of "this is what hardcore is" that the meaning of hardcore gets made. In the next sections I will examine one way in which hardcore kids seek to claim and reclaim hardcore truth, a method by which such "truth" becomes constructed.

3. Recognising the Authentic

Fuck your definition of perfection.
That smiling commodity that isn't allowed to step off the page and testify this isn't real.

"Body Count" *(Born Against 1995)*

We cannot fail to note the traditional dichotomy of true and fake in hardcore punk language. However, what I am most concerned with in this section is how hardcore kids are able to recognise true hardcore members; and what methods they use to distinguish the true and the fake.

Negotiating authenticity in hardcore is an uneasy process; it is a field where everything is subject to contestation; a subculture that is "contradictory by nature" (LM 2005). There is no single person, band or institution endowed with the responsibility to determine what constitutes authenticity; no one source in a position to "consecrate" a certain set of practices and validate them as authentic over another (Bourdieu 1984, 13). There is no-one who unproblematically fulfils the role of cultural gatekeeper; with sufficient (sub)cultural capital, or in punk terminology, enough "scene points" to be an uncontested authority. There are, patterns of idolisation and respect, sites within which authority may temporarily reside, but each "god" or "rockstar" is tenuously posited and, as Neil describes in his zine, they are short-lived.

> One of the biggest downfalls that keeps punk as little more than a youth-orientated "scene" is the nomination of "gods and sods". Unintentional as is may be, certain "doers" such as band members, promoters, record label kids and to a certain extent, the good looking kids are often held in higher regard than other kids. Their views and style often get adopted by the less adventurous. . . super-human qualities are bestowed upon the very human; discrepancies ignored by the easily lead; worthwhile messages are lost in the

sea of nay-sayers and the rumour mill.

But the cultural heroes, unfailingly fall.

> The idol will eventually falter in one way or another, be it denouncing what they'd formally been a part of (Ian Mackaye, Pat Dubar from Uniform Choice who discovered magic mushies); moving toward the more commercial (Ray Cappo) or giving up (Kurt Cobain); the followers move on for guidance, the critics find fresh fish to fry, nothing changes and the cycle continues (Neil, Nurtured C 2005).

Those who are looked to as "doers", as creators of the scene, are, perhaps by virtue of being in the spotlight, subject to the harshest scrutiny. Rather than be the recipients of respect, they are subject to all the more abuse. For example, the writer of the above rant is still particularly active in the Brisbane DIY punk scene. He humbly explained that being criticised is the "quandary of being influential in punk." He explained, of his current band's last tour:

> I'm talking about the kid the other night who called out my name, came over, kneed me gently in the balls and requested a song . . . I slapped him lightly in the face, told him not to kick people in the balls, and that we were playing it anyway (Neil 2014).

It is such tendencies that render the struggle over hardcore authenticity all the more vehement. Competition over what is real, and more importantly, who is in a position to decide, who is an "agent of consecration" to "symbolically sanction" practices and people (Bourdieu 1984, 13), constitute the battle for true hardcore.

Ultimately, so the hardcore rhetoric runs, one should not follow others, but instead rely upon one's own discriminations as to what is true: to be their own guide. The result is a plethora of competing notions of truth. Although there is not a single hardcore truth, there are some common threads (passion, commitment, sincerity, honesty and knowledge) and ways of recognising these features in others. I will now

draw these out.

Performing Passion

Feeling our youth go through our fingers like a razor to the bone.
Let's burn the dry brush of our hearts and fill them with song once more.
Deserts without mirages.
Generations without rain.
Let's shoot like rockets through the sky and leave this world in flames.
                                        "Passion" *(Catharsis 1999)*

> I love the anger, the passion. I love to play air guitar, drums, bass and air sing, this shit drives me nuts, it makes me drive my car fast, makes me smile, air punch, I put it on when I'm in a cunt of a mood or when I'm in a good mood! (TB 2005).

Hardcore kids often describe the authentic hardcore experience in phenomenological terms: that is, as embodied, somatic experience. The intensity of the music provokes consistent responses: articulations of passionate aggression and blissful ferocity. It is the music that TB, a loud-mouthed hardcore veteran describes, as making him happily crazy; as generating zeal and inciting fire.

NK is a young friendly kid who DJs a hardcore programme on community radio in Sydney. He explains how he got into hardcore: "I got into it mainly because it was music I'd never heard before, it was fast, it was aggressive and it was passionate, basically" (GH 2005). AB likewise describes her initial attraction to hardcore music as due to the "hostile, aggressive *meatiness*" of it, which was "screaming, thrashing hard and full on grrrr!" (Williams 2011). Hardcore kids often refer to the fury of the music to account for their dedication to the subculture. However this "passion" is not merely confined to a musicological style. It is also, and more crucially, a performative

style and a lifestyle.

The passion of hardcore is embodied in the performers, which is to say, in the band at a show. That the band "has heart" supersedes in importance their technical proficiency.[7] At live shows, this enthusiasm is conveyed to the audience. ST, an earnest, enthusiastic informant, describes, with some adulation, the live shows of one of his favourite bands:

> You watch the Refused. That's fucking' passion. You see those guys; any set, any show, anywhere. If you see a dude running around and doing this shit, a kick here and a kick there. You see some guy having a convulsion on stage you know he's feeling the music. You know he's just "oh fuck my god!" (ST 2005).

What matters for ST is that "whatever the guitarist is playing and the drummer is playing, *they're feeling it*" (my emphasis). In other words, though the music is loud, fast and powerful, this intensity is reflective of the emotional state of the physical performance itself rather than constitutive of it. The passion which is demanded of hardcore bands cannot be feigned: there is no faking it . . . or so we are assured. The show of spirit without the "real" feeling behind it will not suffice to satisfy the astute hardcore show-goer, and any suspicion of showiness (if they recognise it as such) is not tolerated. Moreover, they are uncompromising in respect to real emotion. As ST told me, "if you're not finding the passion every time you do it, its not important to you so find something else to do" (ST 2005).

ST is tapping into something important about what it means for hardcore to be real. Many hardcore kids understand their behaviour natural and spontaneous acts, the free expression of what lies within them, even in the practiced context of the live

performance. It should be noted that for ST, if the singer to whom ST refers has (and

no doubt be has) rehearsed his performance, this does not amount to "faking it, " so

long as the passion is innate. The hardcore show is thus the venue and the

framework within which to open the door to the musicians' internal substantial

selves, and let the juices of hardcore passion flow out to the audience.

However, this raises some dilemma of interpretation. If hardcore truth is truly

something constructed, generated by performative acts inside and outside of the

hardcore show, then how can it be, as implied above, a mere expression of a fixed

identity? As I touched upon in chapter four, in regards to straightedge, I am not

concerned specifically with the origin of this passion, any more than with the origin of

straightedge morality, and whether or not such indicators of authenticity have

"always been there" (BC 2005), abiding in the self and waiting to be released. This

would entail an ambitious psychological and metaphysical project well beyond the

scope of this work. My concern here is to do with how ST's description, and others

that similarly undersand hardcore authenticity as expressions of internal identity,

work to inform hardcore notions of what constitutes true identity.

Hardcore identity may well be, as Judith Butler argued in the case of gender identity

> instituted through acts with are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (Butler 1988, 520).

Nonetheless, it is through such acts, which are discursively generated (and we have

seen, problematised,) that formulates what hardcore identity really is. And the

meanings made by Bourdieuan *collusio*, as no less real for their being created. If identity is an act made real by repetition, then claims to merely be doing what is in one's nature, to be giving expression to one's core identity, even (especially) in the manufactured context of a "show," is then just part of the script. The question is less to do with whether such claims are true than with understanding them as methods of making truth. It is in this way that I wish to view the dealing with hardcore passion, which as, we shall now see, is one tool for distinguishing true from fake hardcore.

Several of my informants maintained that they could distinguish between passion authentically felt, and that which was just "put-on" as an act. They avowed that when hardcore bands pretended to this passion, it was evident that they were, in fact, pretending. They were particularly unforgiving to bands and people who intend to dupe by appropriating hardcore musical style, hardcore's husk, unaccompanied by the real feeling. The Lyrics of Jungle Fever's "Hardcore" run thus:[8]

> Who you think you're fooling?
> Who you think you're fooling,
> Muthafucka? Not me!
>
> You can water it down, polish it up,
> Sprinkle it with sugar and a cherry on top
> And the idiots might eat that shit
> But we ain't gonna swallow it!
>
> "Hardcore" (*Jungle Fever 2005*)

Here, Jungle Fever suggest that they are not fooled by appearances. They distinguish themselves from the subculturally illiterate by suggesting that they are able to recognise true hardcore passion, and taunt those who attempt to dupe them. It is through such claims to be able to distinguish the authentic from the inauthentic, that they established their own authenticity and thus confirm their credibility within the

175

scene. After all, it takes a true hardcore kid to recognise a fake.

Others take a softer approach to those without (in particular who have lost their) passion. For example, take the sentiments of Dan, in his zine:

> [b]ecause if this music—and the ideas behind it—doesn't inspire you, then why are you here? If that feeling of passion and inspiration left you behind long ago, and you want it back, well its not too late to catch up with it (Dan C 2003).

In either case, passion is praised; faking it is not tolerated and being in the privileged position of being able to read the difference renders one firmly as part of the truly hardcore community.

The real passion of hardcore is embodied in the performance, and reflected in the sound, but the passion transcends the setting of the show to encompass a general state of being inspired by hardcore as a lifestyle. Living passionately is fundamental to the hardcore lifestyle. It is the performative and musicological energy, which echoes, and is intertwined with this zeal for life.

Negotiating Commitment Defined by Longevity

All we stood for, all our dreams. You've forgotten what they mean. I tell you this; my thoughts are real and I'll never change the way I feel!
"Stabbed in the Back" *(Youth of Today 1986)*

In addition to, and associated with the passion felt by hardcore kids towards the music, hardcore kids profess a strong level of commitment to their culture or to their scene. GL contrasts his emotional commitment to hardcore with hardcore understood as transitory.

> The biggest problem with hardcore punk rock and the way it affects society is that people treat it like a little, like a fucking little passing phase or fashion or something, like maybe I'm wrong but I believe there are elements of humanity that created something special, and to me its special and anyone that tries to take it away from me, shouldn't (GL 2005).

For GL, true hardcore membership is clearly distinguished from the fluidity of Bennett's "floating memberships" of Bennett's neo-tribe (Bennett 1999, 599-600). As explained in Chapter Two, these neo-tribes replace the traditional formulation of subculture but with the connotation of transience, whereby subjects flit between styles, weaving in and out of particular identifications. GL, as others is in no doubt that this is not hardcore.

A kid who is here today and gone tomorrow was never a real hardcore kid. This is the import of the pervasive sXe slogan: If you're not now, you never were" from the straightedge T-shirt[9] and "True to death" (Chain of Strength 1989) which indicate long term commitment.[10] Commitment has a particular place in straightedge, but resonates in hardcore mentality more also. We shall see below the way in which hardcore commitment is measured by the longevity of hardcore identification; it is those who "last the test of time", rather than those who slide in and out of the subculture, who prove themselves to be truly hardcore.

My informant GL equates a lack of commitment with "fashion", a pejorative marker of inauthenticity. After all, most fashion (with the possible exception of body modification) can be changed as quickly as one changes one's clothes. "Subculture hopping" is associated both with fashion and faddism, and with pop culture, which permits of much more "flitting about" (Maffesoli 1996, 144), between different

cultural zones than hardcore kids are comfortable with. Although this may well be the postmodern condition, hardcore kids continue to rail against such transience. TB describes these floating members as "sucky trendoid kids" who are constantly looking for "the next hyped up scene to hang out in" (TB 2005). He, like many, calls them "scenesters": someone who appears to be hardcore, but who the acutely perceptive recognise as too concerned with fashion, with social climbing, with accumulating scene points, and with appearing to be hardcore, to be authentic subcultural members. Put simply, they are fakes. They are related to what Clarke calls the "hangers on" (Clarke 1990, 82-3), except that in the case of hardcore, scenesters may not be on the edges. They may appear to one hundred per cent dedicated, they may seem to be (and are) in the very epicentre of the scene, up until the moment they are revealed. Of course, in any subculture there will be members who demonstrate various levels of commitment. In the case of hardcore, however, what is significant is that a hardcore kid's investment is measured by the duration of their participation. That is to say, their commitment is measured by their lasting the "test of time" in the words of Toe to Toe.

The unreal are often exceptionally difficult to recognise. The social chameleon may take some time to reveal her colours. No-nonsense label owner LR explains how he observes the comings and goings of many kids but declines to get involved in the hardcore of hype and fads. He explains that he encounters many kids who seem to be "very into what they are about, but I just find a lot of them are not, and they'll be on the next trend when it comes along." It is not until then, that the real level of their commitment is evident.

Likewise, MS advocates tolerance of these culture hoppers precisely because their

presence will be short lived.

> I try not to focus on the kids that are just there for fashion…As long as you concentrate on the positive things I find that everything else just goes away. They're not going to be there for very long. I used to be angry about it but you've just got to accept it. With every scene, with every culture, there's going to be people that just want to make money out of it. Girls and guys that will go there just to pick up, or whatever. I just try not to focus on that 'cos I figure whatever, I'm in here for the long term, they're not going to be around all the time. And the people I talk to and the people I care about are the ones that hardcore unity actually really talks to (MS 2005).

Again, we see the distinction between the "true" hardcore kids, who stick to their

convictions, and those who are band-wagoning through a hardcore scene, riding the

volatile tides of fashion. Appropriating hardcore appearance is available to anyone,

but not all can actually be hardcore. Outsiders pose a threat to hardcore by confusing

the meaning of hardcore. As SD puts it, "anyone that has an Exploited shirt can come

into your scene and fuck it up" (SD 2005). It is only the truly subculturally

knowledgeable who can distinguish the authentic from the fakers, and even then,

this is most usually evident retrospectively. For TB, LR, and MS, the rhetoric runs

thus: fakers and fashion punks are inauthentic and time will show them to be such.

MS associates these culture hoppers, these scenesters, as the self-same subjects as

those who as (to use LR's terminology), are "not into hardcore for the right reasons";

that is to say, in this case, into hardcore for money or popularity. Sometime known as

corporate hardcore, those who, in MK words, have "taken a subculture and turned it

into a product" (MK 2004), as opposed to the true DIY proponents, also fall into this

category of the inauthentic. These are the kids that will not stay true.

Having Heart

Hats off to bands that changed
Good luck go your own way
Why play for us if your heart's not in it?
Cos what might seem dumb to you is burning in my heart.
                              "New Direction" *(Gorilla Biscuits 1989)*

Sincerity in hardcore was described as having "heart." My informants tended to

distinguish those that had it from those that didn't (who were posers, scenesters or

fakes.) This shows how true hardcore is truly internal (or internalised).

> To me, its something that I feel . . . you might not know the person personally
> whatever . . . and in a lot of cases I do you know. I spend a lot of time around
> people who are involved. But to me it's about where their heart is. It comes
> from their heart. Like me, they are the same sort of people…I don't know
> what the metre of people's commitment is or whatever but it's about how
> you feel and who you are (GL 2005).

The true hardcore kids are the ones who have "heart." Likewise LR describes those

that have heart in opposition to those who lack fidelity to hardcore (that is to say, the

kids for whom hardcore is a passing phase). Again we see longevity as the measure of

one's authenticity (in this case of one's "heart".)

> The turnover rate for kids now is like 6 months and I see a lot of kids at a
> show, like if a band comes to town that they're the biggest fan of and then
> that band comes again and that kids not even seen. That's always gonna
> happen its not gonna change, but if people put a bit more heart into it, it
> might be a bit better, I don't know (LR 2004).

In an interview, TB also contrasts the kids who lack commitment with those who

"have hardcore in their hearts."

> The main thing I think is crap is the lack of substance or commitment shown
> by the younger generation. I think the younger generation now has watered
> down the ethics behind the hardcore punk scene. I can't say everyone is like
> that but year after year now the people that really give a fuck about it and
> want to learn, teach and live a hardcore way of life are getting smaller and
> smaller. I still meet kids from all over Australia that I can tell have it in their
> hearts, kids that are just like me, kids that come from the suburbs and have
> lived in middle class suburbia that now are over the mainstream society and

are searching for a way out. The rest of the scene, fuck it (TB 2005).

Note that both GL and TB use the having of heart to draw themselves and the authentic hardcore kids into a single class. They are "the same sort of people"; they are "just like me". Moreover these two long time hardcore punks can assess the other as sincere, precisely because they themselves have sincerity and can thus recognise it in others. The commitment and endurance of these informants to their scenes lends legitimacy to their claims to be able to distinguish the hardcore wheat from the chaff, to recognise the real in each new crop of kids.

Speaking Honestly

I'm through with your games.
I'm through with your shit!
Try to play it cool, but we don't give a fuck.
It's all a fucking facade, and we've had enough!
                    "Cut the Bullshit" *(Cut the Shit 2003)*

In addition to having a true heart, hardcore kids place emphasis on honesty; that is, being true to others and to oneself. Mikey, from the band, Crimespree, explains in the zine *Piece of Cake*:

> [t]o me its attitude and music, but mainly attitude (hardcore has a fairly broad range of sounds I guess.) Just being in a band and doing shit on your own terms, calling things how you see them (Billy, Interview with Crime Spree C 2005).

For Mikey the important thing about hardcore is being without pretention and falsity, living truly, by a code of sometimes brutal honesty.

Of course the "truth" in "being-true-to-oneself" is prone to change. For LM, what is necessary is that, at any given moment, one is talking and living in a way that is as close as possible to truth. LM explains:

> I look back on some of my lyrics still and think well I wrote that two weeks ago, that's fucking bullshit. I shouldn't have printed that it's terrible. But that's all part and parcel of it and I think that's part of the pureness of it, that's what makes it so good. Because it's honest. At that point in time you're feeling that and you're gonna get that message across, you're gonna yell and scream it. And it should be the whole concept of selling out. Of course hardcore is full of contradictions, its contradictory by nature. Anyone that gets on a pedestal or a soapbox, your not gonna feel the same way in 10 years time hopefully your not, hopefully you're going to grow as a person and rethink.

> People might come up to you and say "you wrote this in a song 10 years ago and now you're doing the opposite." Well I fucking hope so, I hope I'm doing something different. I hope I have evolved in some way. Unfortunately, it can stagnate sometimes because people expect you to be the same as you were 10 years ago, 15 years ago and it's not going to happen (LM 2005).

What is interesting here is that the honesty of the message is measured by the directness of its communication. As we shall see in the next section on DIY, there is a correlation between level of mediation and the truth of an expression.

Knowing Your History and cultural capital

Thornton explains the role of subcultural capital as important to subcultural members. In hardcore it is important for kids to "know their history." The accumulation of such knowledge, as that which "confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder", is a form of subcultural capital which she presents as one type of Bourdieu's "social capital" (Thornton 1996, 11). Knowledge of the early bands is a central source of such capital, as LR explains, many newer kids are lacking this wealth because they are deficient in

knowing and the knowledge of what the hell's going on. I find it pretty weird when a band covers a modern day band. A lot of kids are not even aware of Minor Threat or of any of the early Revelation bands. When I was just getting into hardcore I couldn't get enough of the early bands. Some of the early, early, early, bands I was like this is pretty bad but at the same time there'd be a few bands that were amazing. I just think a lot of kids nowadays, they'd get into bands that were around for the last six months and that to them is where hardcore ends. Hardcore started in December 2005 and they don't want to go back, back, back.

I think they should know the history because hardcore didn't come from Atrayu, hardcore didn't come from The Used, it didn't come from Thrice (LR 2004).[11]

For LR, whilst he respects this new style of hardcore, he insists that one's hardcore purview should not begin and end with them. To be wilfully ignorant of the depth and scope of hardcore music (even that which is "pretty bad") is to misconstrue hardcore. Another enthusiastic informant ST explains:

It's fucking unreal isn't it. And none of these kids are going to get educated about it. Like I just don't get it. I mean when I was younger I didn't look up to every single older guy and oh what do you like cause I like it. But if they showed me shit I'd be oh I like that or I don't. This is the thing, you cant half-ass these sorts of things you just can't do it.

It just really, really shits me that there's all this sort of garbage being churned out and there's no history lesson for these kids. None at all . . . hardcore punk wouldn't be where it is if it wasn't for Black Flag, Bad Brains, et cetera (ST 2005).[12]

So for ST and for LR, it is important for hardcore kids to be discerning about what music they like, and not glorify all the old school bands simply because of their connection to some hardcore golden era. However, the kids should be aware of these bands, and the role they played in the development of hardcore. They must take their "history lesson."

One zine author, in an article from 2006, writes:

> [t]he problem I see with hardcore in 2006 is that kids seem to be either ignoring or just simply not caring about the roots of hardcore.
>
> I think it is not only a problem because kids are missing out on about 100,000 amazing bands but also how can you understand what you're listening to if you don't understand where it came from? One reason I see for this is the almost total demise of tape trading and older kids no longer giving the newer kids to the scene a chance (although I am more guilty of this than anybody). … If you're keen to check out any of the stuff I review without throwing down piles of cash just hit me up at a show with a blank tape and I will happily tape any of it for you. Someone you know should know who I am (Can I scream 2006).

It is important that hardcore kids are informed about their history. This history understood is primarily in the form of knowing songs and bands. It is necessary, in the author's opinion, in order to really understand contemporary hardcore, to be aware of its cultural context, its musicological and philosophical progression or evolution: this is the only way to "understand what you're listening to". Moreover, the author does more than simply lecture on the importance of cultural knowledge; he champions the need to circulate hardcore history, and take on the personal responsibility of aiding newer kids to acquire such knowledge, (through the valued punk technique of tape trading).

4. Doing It Yourself

You think you can use them but they are using you.
They don't care about what you say or do. . .
Keep businessman mentality out of hardcore punk
I remain DIY, I stay hardcore punk.

<div align="right">"D.I.Y" (Betercore 2001)</div>

From the early days of punk, Do it Yourself methodology became more than a means to get things done, it became an ethic to live by. Punk DIY is embodied in the famous

quote from an early punk zine: "This is a chord. This is another. This is a third. Now form a band" (1976).[13]

Do it yourself is taken to the extreme in hardcore. One writer of 80s hardcore describes DIY's relation to early hardcore thus: "punk gave lip service to 'Do It Yourself' DIY and democratisation of the rock scene, but hardcore transcended all commercial and corporate concerns" (Blush 2001, 275). Whilst this is a rather idealistic claim, it is true that bands such as Black Flag pioneered the extreme self-reliance idiosyncratic of the hardcore lifestyle. From Greg Ginn's "tinkering" with musical and recording equipment (Waksman 2004) to forging new roads in self-touring, and creating venues out of communal living spaces, (Babcock 2001). Kids were now encouraged not just to *start* a band, but also to control all aspects of the creative process and of their lives.

The DIY ideal in hardcore is persistent, and many Australian hardcore kids see DIY modes of cultural creation as central to their hardcore identity. TB is a notoriously outspoken and politically incorrect vocalist in several Sydney bands. He describes the DIY ethic as central to hardcore and very meaningful for him personally. He explained that "to me, the DIY ethic, now that's definitely something I hold true to my heart again and always will. There isn't enough of it these days." TB does not only talk about DIY, he actively lives it and encourages others to do so. For example, he cites a desire to encourage the DIY spirit in others as part of his motivation for writing a zine.

> I've done this zine for two reasons, firstly because I'm passionate about this hardcore/punk scene no matter how fucking . . . trendy it has become and secondly to show you all, you don't need to be a fucking brain surgeon or

some scene or record label hot shot to put a fucking zine out, any asshole can do It, and here Is the proof . . . now go out and do your own (Blurter C 2006).

For hardcore kids the DIY ethic is simple: get out there and give it a go; do not be stymied by your own amateurism; do not be disheartened by the dominance of the forces of mass production; celebrate imperfection and revel in the process of creation as a technique of self-empowerment (and even resistance). The DIY kids tend to value the process over the end result; and the act of creation is prized for its own sake.

A band that puts out their own record will spend a great many hours practicing, self-recording, mixing and mastering. They will spend many more writing, designing, screen-printing and folding covers. They will then send their records directly to other bands, distros,[14] independent record stores, zines, friends and anyone else who shows an interest in hearing it. More hours of letter and email-writing to acquaintances nationally and Internationally may result in a tour. The band will design and make photocopied flyers and posters which they will distribute or post. They will publicise on the internet, in forums and in online zines. With the help of other hardcore kids, they will book venues, sleep on fellow punks' floors and repair vans as they travel on tour.

Activities like self-recording, distributing records, writing and photocopying zines or lyric sheets, making T-shirts, screen-printing patches, putting on shows, music festivals and workshops, these are all part of DIY. So are vegan cooking, graffiti art,

illegal solar panel instillation, bicycle maintenance, making mix tapes to exchange, root beer brewing and herbal abortions (Bravo 2005). For many hardcore kids (as for others in related DIY communities), DIY infuses every aspect of life.

This process of DIY implies complete control of the individual over the method and result. Individuals are encouraged to act rather than watch, create rather than consume, on their own but also, and more importantly, in collaboration with other kids in the subculture. At one hardcore/DIY festival in Brisbane, there were a number of workshops on subjects ranging from animal rights discussions to DIY haircuts; the creation of men-only spaces to women's mental health; from debriefing on recent G20 rallies to how to use facial glitter. It is evident that the scope of DIY extends beyond merely the music production, and encompasses the political and the personal, the profound and the whimsical.

Neil, a witty hardcore kid from Brisbane explains his understanding of DIY. It is for him, an ideal to which one should aspire, but which is not ultimately attainable.

> DIY to me has little to do with how much money you make, its about control and community, applying and extending beyond music. Control of your artistic integrity, of how the money you earn is divided (i.e. Not in the hands of managers, record companies and hangers on) and control of where the money is spent (i.e. Not on nuclear weapons or further globalisation). A community that exists outside of the established channels AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE (since in this day and age, the best you can do is try and control your levels of hypocrisy): based on goodwill and passion, not on hype and ladder climbing (at least in theory anyway) (Neil C 2005).

In the following sections we will see DIY as a response to consumer culture and to mediation.

Consumer Culture

A critic, a fool, a cheap design.
You're just toeing the company line.
You lack a feeling, you don't create.
Your shit just happened five minutes too late.

"Sheep" *(Toe to Toe 1997)*

Style is often used to mean consumer style; fashion, purchased off the supermarket

shelf, thus reducing the subcultures to an expression of consumer culture. As

Williams points out, "subcultural style are almost invariably based on consumption—

listening to the right bands, having the coolest haircut, and wearing the sharpest

clothes" (Williams 2011, 83). In this section we shall see how, although hardcore kids

recognise this consumerist identity construction as present in their culture (collecting

records, sporting band t-shirts and buying tickets to concerts, their relationship to

such consumerism is problematic. They are by and large hostile to identities that are

completely reducible to "consumer style" and they thus engage in activities that work

to subvert, and minimise in various ways the inevitability of purchasing to construct

individual and communal identities. In other words, hardcore kids persist in their

view of purchased identity as artificial and they seek alternate ways of subjugating

these methods of subcultural creation. For them the distinction of authentic and

inauthentic is real enough, (though difficult to articulate). Though it is hard to say

exactly what it is, they are clear about what it is not: consumer culture, fashion

culture, fan culture and popular youth culture.

One main problem with the post-subculturalist accounts such as Thornton's and

Bennett's work, is the understanding of subcultures as consumer cultures in "a celebration of consumerism" (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 39), whereby identity is, effectively purchased. According to Polhemus, the process of self-creation is found in the "Supermarket of Style" where "everything and nothing is the Genuine Article" (Polhemus 1997, 150).

> But perhaps what really sets our age apart from the golden age of subcultures is the sheer proliferation of options. We now inhabit a Supermarket of Style where, like tins of soup lined up on endless shelves, we can choose between more than fifty different styletribes (Polhemus 1997, 150).

Polhemus goes on to pose the question: "Who is real? Who is a replicant? Who cares? Enjoy" (Polhemus 1997, 151). The problem is that hardcore kids care, and care very much. They are heavily invested in their culture and thus are concerned to affirm the real as the authentic, a subcultural project which is ignored in many post-subcultural accounts.

> The cultural implication of saturation by simulacra, then, are that consumers become free from coherent, distinctive or meaningful cultural ties. They choose from and mix diverse and fleeting points of identification from the immense range of images on offer (Hodkinson 2002, 17).

The critiques that hardcore kids proffer are by and large ignorant of the "high" theories such as described here. However, from my research there appears to be intuitive hostility for consumerist reductionism of hardcore and for the fake styles that rob hardcore kids of a fixed, "true" communal identity. Purchased identity is too easily won and to readily discarded.

 For example, note the attitude to "fashion core bands", denoting bands more concerned with their appearance—with their apparel, their popularity (and perhaps with making money)—than with the "real" hardcore. This plays into the prevalent

dichotomies of underground/popular, subcultural/mainstream, and authentic/sellout. One informant, TB, explains of hardcore that "in the real underground it's more a feeling not a fashion" (TB 2005). The "real" underground is contrasted with the "unreal" fashion scene. For the young BR,

> there's a lot of people wrecking it . . . kids come in with their two hundred dollar shoes and two hundred dollar jackets and stuff. And they are just there to beat up on other kids. But that's what happens when it gets popular (BR 2005).

Attitude towards consumer cultures echoes the attitudes of style as fashion cultures described earlier in this chapter, and of youth cultures in Chapter Five. Again and again, hardcore kids seek to unify the fragmented, and to distinguish what they are doing from a mere craze, a phase, an impotent fashion statement or a choice of which record to buy. From the insider's perspective, participation in hardcore punk subculture should not be a matter of mere consumption. Whilst kids do buy records, zines and pay entry fees, they largely understand such transactions as secondary to, and supportive of, the creative potential of hardcore kids.

Importantly, many hardcore kids distinguish themselves from other consumer-based cultures by understanding hardcore as an active process. One older informant, CH, explains this active process of discovering hardcore:

> That was something also that drew me in that the more you dug down the more you actually found out about the music. It was active. And I think that's one of the problems when you see youth cultures now is that to get into something you can do it in a matter of days whereas for me from when I was fourteen to when I was twenty the journey that I had to go on and the dead ends. There were no top records you should buy. It was going to this guys house and listening to some music and seeing some band and someone had a tatty old MDC shirt and you'd wonder what they were like and then you'd

meet someone's older brother and it would sort of evolve like that. It was really active, you had to search it out (CH 2005).

So for CH, whose experience of "seeking out" the music is representative of several informants, this was music fandom, but not one which was easily accessible. To be into hardcore, as opposed to pop music, one could not passively acquire insider knowledge and status: the accumulation of the cultural knowledge had to be worked at, sought after and actively pursued.

For hardcore kids, "action" is preferred over "style" (Lex C 2003). This sense of activeness is, I propose, a response to the role of passive consumer that many youth subcultural members are painted in. Again we see in the following call to arms, the drive to act, to create. It is a warning against passivity. Hardcore is not just the kids "who got into it" but those who "got something out of it" (Dan, Interview with Christian from Blood of Others C 2003).

> Tell me this. Where else can an 18-year-old kid put on and organise shows without hassles? Nowhere except in the underground system we have. So there's all the proof you need to get off your sorry asses and do something. Stand up for what you believe in. Let your views be heard. If you are going to do something, do it right. If you want to do something, but no-one else is doing it, fuck them off and do it. Start doing something constructive. Run a mock. And stop being stoopid (Damien n.d.).

The DIY Ethic as a Response to the Passivity of Consumer Culture

3 chords and a cloud of dust.
In DIY I fucking trust.
Commodified, gentrified and overexposed.
Bought and Sold.

<div align="right">

"Bought and Sold"
(Gordon Solie Motherfuckers! 2000)

</div>

Hardcore kids, then, are engaged not just with consumption but also with cultural creation. Being hardcore comes from doing, not just buying things. This "doing" is often formulated as the Do It Yourself ethic. It involves playing in bands, writing zines, making mix tapes. As explained above, DIY can be many things but it is always an active process.

It is "making stuff and doing things" (Bravo 2005). "Making stuff" yourself, in contrast to being dependent on buying a product; "Doing things" yourself, as opposed to paying for a service is glorified as a mode of living by many hardcore kids. DIY is conceived as a positive form of resistance against particular groups; a major record label, a glossy magazine, a fast food outlet, a clothing label. Rather than attack such institutions directly, a positive and highly personal solution is to create an alternative oneself. DIY production creates an alternative.

TB owns and runs a tiny DIY punk store in Sydney called Paint it Black. The walls are plastered with posters, fliers and artwork by local artists. Demo CDs, demo tapes, badges, patches and various zines littler the cramped space. A few kids help out by working there for free a few days a week and the shop is most of the time in debt to

the landlord or distributers. TB Is gentle and polite, and a strong advocate of DIY. He explained to me that when you buy something from big corporate producers, you have little choice over what happens to your money once it leaves your hands. DIY is then also a response to the weariness of hardcore kids towards what they understand as unethical business practices.[15]

Mediation

This negative media attention is going to bury us alive.
Youth denied expression from what the public misunderstands.
We won't turn out back, we will stand strong.

"The Insider" (*Champion 2003*)

Media for Thornton, is not, as it is often conceived by subcultural insiders, in opposition to subculture, but essential to it. The media is essential to subcultures from their inception. Thornton outlines three levels of media which, although are not exhaustive, go some way to dislodging what she considers the myth of media as a unified anti-subcultural force.

She explains that "[f]rom the point of view of clubbers and ravers, in particular, micro, niche and mass media have markedly different cultural connotations." (Thornton 1996, 122). Micro media consists of forms like flyers, fanzines, pirate radio and online forums. Niche media seems to be constituted of forms such as street presses and music magazines. Mass media is forms such as television programmes and national newspapers. Thornton maintains that whilst the first two are central in constructing subcultural groups and allowing them to flourish, the latter is important in a negative sense. That is to say that negative press at the level of mass media, can

constitute a kind of "moral panic", the same kind of moral panic with which Stanley

Cohen analyses the rise of mod and rocker subculture in Britain in the 1960s (Cohen

1972). For Thornton however, the misinterpretation by mass media is desired by the

subculturalists, and operates to unify a subculture.

> Mass media misunderstanding is often a goal, not just an effect, of youth's cultural pursuits. As a result, "moral panic" has become a routine way of marketing popular music to youth (Thornton 1996, 120).

Though such a claim would be particularly offensive to hardcore punks, who no

doubt would insist that they do not need the mirror of the mass media to (mis)reflect

their defiant character. It is not uncommon to hear claims that hardcore should be

kept out of the media; the preference is for hardcore to remain invisible to the

mainstream.

This grates against Thornton's concept of subcultures, wherein media is there from

the beginning:

> [c]ontrary to youth subcultural ideologies, "subcultures" do not germinate from a seed and grow by force of their own energy into mysterious "movements" only to be belatedly digested by the media. Rather, media and other culture industries are there and effective right form the start (Thornton 1996, 117).

Thornton uses the schema of three types of media to show the role that each plays in

helping to define the culture from the outset. The difference between the first two

medias and the third seems to turn on the origin of the media; i.e. in the hands of the

subcultural members themselves, or from an outside source.

Hardcore kids recognise a similar distinction between the various types of media;

originating from without and from within. My informant, TB, assures that "I don't really see hardcore in the media too much. The shit I see in the media (unless it's a small zine), ain't hardcore to me" (TB 2005). TB is defining the real hardcore as being mediated only on the micro level. Anything which is in the style of hardcore on the mass (or even niche) level, for TB, is not true hardcore perhaps even by definition. It is not that he is ignorant of "hardcore" bands in glossy magazines, in newpapers, commercial radio stations and music video channels, but that he defies the claim that these bands are authentic. Thus, although they may appear hardcore, by permitting to be presented in a particular context, such bands disclose their inauthenticity to the savvy and vigilant insider such as TB.

TB, amongst others, seem to fall into the misunderstanding about subcultures against which Thornton warns; specifically, '[t]he idea that authentic culture is somehow outside the media and commerce" (Thornton 1996, 116) or that subcultures are "organic, unmediated social formations," or "autonomous, grass-roots cultures which only meet the media upon recuperative 'selling out' or 'moral panic'" (Thornton 1996, 116). In spite of the fact that hardcore kids are aware of "hardcore" in the media, they nonetheless conceive of hardcore as, in one sense a project of creating spaces as far away from mass media attention as possible, of keeping their practices as grounded as possible, of protecting their art as much as possible from the impurity of corporate corruption. If hardcore kids do recognise the influence of mass media, they would not accept a view that posited mass media as essential or formative of authentic hardcore.

On the other hand, hardcore kids acknowledge the importance of what Thornton calls micro media. Hardcore is mediated by certain "culture transmitters" (Wood 200), such as zines, fliers, music recordings and websites. These are essential to the formulation of hardcore and embody a particular flavour. This style is urgent, messy and DIY. It prioritises pixelated zines, hastily written songs, lo fi recordings over the clean, the neat and the sophisticated. Further, the ugly, the homemade, unprofessional and the offensive are aesthetic values prized and even romanticised within hardcore punk. Respected zines usually are cut-and-paste, contain spelling and grammatical errors and have a rough, cluttered layout, making them difficult to read. They are informal, personal and esoteric, (referencing and parodying bands, album covers, zines and lyrics), making them difficult for outsiders to understand. Similar visual artefacts such as record covers, filers and the like are informed by this aggressive, even frenzied DIY style. Such stylistic features signal it as *less* mediated, and thus more authentic.

In other words, DIY style is about the *right now*. When Luke explains that hardcore is about "getting up their with a microphone in your hand and not knowing what they fuck you're talking about but fucking saying it anyway", he is expressing that the ideal the authentic hardcore experience, is the one which is unmediated and propelled by a sense of urgency.

Hardcore thus celebrates the direct. It is, in this sense, about haste, the messiness of the frantic, the focus on process over product reflected in the DIY cut-and-paste aesthetic. Perfection and revision is not necessary, and realness comes from the

speed of communication, not of high levels of intervention, professionalism and editing. Rapidity of the zine, the spluttering of recently written lyrics links into the amateurishness of the DIY ethic and aesthetic: and the focus on the present.

The music's speed is reflective of the urgency, directness of production and bluntness of language. Artefacts such as records, tapes, CDs, zines, lyric sheets, fliers etc. are often created hastily, with an urgent momentum, and little inclination to edit, polish, or clean up the design, sound or text. This is reflective of the general tendency towards the unmediated in hardcore. Things are done fast, from the performance of the music, to the creation of a zine. The rush of participation means that there is little time to reflect on consequences, or to self-censor. Directness is thus a yardstick of authenticity, and that which is created by DIY is the most directly, unimpeachably *real*.

5. Conclusion

I'll remain true to da end.
I'll remain true to my friends.
<div align="right">"Loyal to da Grave" (25 ta Life 1997)</div>

In a (post) punk climate where conceptions of self are often defined by processes of consumption, are anti-essentialist, and (subculturally) stylistic, hardcore kids work against such notions by re(positing) a true self, and standards of being true to hardcore. This is not to say that they always believe such claims. We have learned from the preceding chapters that vigilantly questioning, arguing, debating are common to hardcore kids, but such practices are in themselves, practices which are

cherished as authentic to the hardcore experience. As we have seen, it is passion, commitment and sincerity and subcultural knowledge that are the markers of hardcore authenticity. It is these features that establish the binding ties to hardcore music, people and culture. Importantly, they are real because they come from inside; they are from the "heart".

Endnotes

[1] "Hardcore".

[2] While it is likely that Redhead's understanding was informed particularly by his choice of subject matter (acid house and rave scenes), we should be cautious about abstracting findings from one subculture and applying this to all of them. The history of subcultures is a tale of complex, overlapping, contradictory and fragmented social biographies. In fact, I suggest that hyper-reality does not account for the existence and personality of relatively traditional and static subcultures, such as hardcore punk.

[3] Sleeve tattoos hastily made upon turning 18 by rich kids, apparently "because they've all cashed in their trust funds" (TP 2005).

[4] Though his essay on punk relations to sadomasochism illustrates merely one of the many manifestations of punk, as it exists today, distinguished by various contexts, music styles, peoples, attitudes, ideals, etc.

[5] See Chapter One.

[6] Similarly, the label owner of 2 Buck records explains that "our music scene is not a place for fashion" (Stars C 2005).

[7] LR, a record store proprietor from Sydney sums this outlook up when he explains that "your band doesn't have to be technically good to be a good band" (LR 2004), and indeed "good bands" range drastically in musicological ability.

[8] The quotation marks are in the original, indicating that the topic of the song is the so-called hardcore, as distinguished from "real hardcore".

[9] From straightedge t-shirt, see for example see Catalyst Records http://www.xcatalystx.com/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=65_77&products_id=207. The back of this t-shirt reads, "Straightedge is not for a day, a month or a year . . . it is a commitment for life, nothing less". Accessed 12.01.2014. See also Haenfler (2006, 70).

[10] See Chapter Four.

[11] Atreyu, the Used and Thrice are all American hardcore/metalcore bands that were experiencing relative mainstream success at the time of interviewing GR.

[12] Black flag and Bad Brains are two very influential early hardcore bands that helped define the genre.

[13] Jon Savage attributes this quote to the zine *Sideburns* (Savage 1991, 8.12.76). Sabin attributes it to the zine *Sniffin' Glue* (Sabin 1999, 53). Both were early British Punk zines. Regardless of its origin, the quote has come to be regarded as an embodiment the punk DIY spirit.

[14] Independent, grassroots distribution sources of music, zines and so on. They often set up stalls at shows and festivals, and/or operate online and through mail order.

[15] Personal correspondence with TB, 31 November 2004.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Australian hardcore kids draw from a rich heritage of punk and hardcore which, although only stretching back about thirty years, is enormously detailed and complex. This history infuses all aspects of hardcore and informs current practices and views. Sometimes certain features are appropriated. Sometimes past practices are deliberately shunned. Usually the stories are mythologised and knowledge of these hardcore stories is prized. For many, the accumulation of subcultural capital, in the form of knowledge of bands, musical styles, practices, scenes and subcultural figures comes to dominate their lives. They become obsessed with engaging in the esoteric language of hardcore. What makes them do this?

The music of hardcore is generally tough and fast. Its thrashing, pulsating quality provokes physical responses such as the movement of moshing and slamming. Many dedicate their lives to making and listening to this music. They sacrifice careers (and sometimes family) so that they can plan their time around band rehearsals, recording and touring. They expend huge amounts of time and energy in order to be able to be subsumed by hardcore music; getting to shows, buying the records etc. What makes them do this?

Hardcore utilises a DIY methodology as a means of empowering its community. Many kids try as much as possible to refrain from engaging with large corporations and government bodies, and to create an independent sphere beyond their reach. They painstakingly create and maintain DIY venues and alternate spaces. They make their own music, retaining control over all aspects of the production, artwork and distribution (to greater or lesser extents). They work hard creating avenues and alternate modes of cultural production so that the music can be authentically theirs. What makes them do this?

Prompted by such questions, this thesis has engaged in a primarily ethnographically framed investigation of the meaning of hardcore punk in Australian communities. Having been driven by the obsessive energy that many hardcore kids display for their culture and community, the focus of this study was to discern and to present at least a sense of the hardcore feeling, the intense pitch of hardcore passion and commitment. It is this, which prompts so many hardcore kids to commit their time, energy and identity to this subculture.

The framework I used to demonstrate the sensibility of hardcore was to present three aspects of hardcore punk: three through-lines, each of which are posited by hardcore kids as definitive of the culture, but which are also challenged, even from within. I have examined the way in which *unity*, *youth* and *truth* are negotiated and contested, and it is the lines of contestation, rather than of consensus, with which this work is primarily concerned. In the previous chapters, we have seen the extent to which hardcore is a subculture and yet in spite of that, it is not one coherent

phenomena. If we must attribute some meaning to hardcore, it is best understood as the site of conflict over subcultural unity, over the role of the young and over the true meaning of authentic hardcore.

Subcultural unity, in hardcore punk, can be understood at various levels. For example, unity is played out and negotiated within the context of a show, particularly in the pit, by the following and breaking of certain conventions. At the level of one's scene, hardcore unity is drawn from a sense of community, informed often by practical concerns that tend towards maintaining the culture. Within such scenes the attitude to difference is equivocal: on one hand it is the subject of harsh criticism, on the other, it is permitted, even celebrated in order to satisfy the even worse sin of passively accepting conformity. Finally, hardcore kids are often united by their particular practices, such as straightedgers, who view the living of a clean lifestyle as both entirely a personal choice and as part of a social movement. Whilst the first draws apart each straightedger, isolating her by way of her very particular reasons for being straightedge, the latter draws them together, fostering straightedge unity.

The meaning of youth in the context of hardcore primarily relates to a social concept which centres on the subject as a hardcore *kid*: rebellious, energetic, sometimes socially awkward or isolated, and resistant to the normal world of stable career and family. Yet, this kid is more than and different from the traditional teen of Talcot Parson's "youth culture." It is, in the language of the Birmingham theorists, a solution to the problem of teenagehood, as much as it is to that of adulthood. Thus,

in this respect being young in hardcore is seen as a project of imbuing certain characteristics of the adult word on ones social state. The hardcore kid is sensible, serious, responsible, and socially aware. Most importantly, she is not defined (as the traditional teenager is) by patterns of consumption. This is a culture by the kids and for the kids, where youth is more than an age so much as a strategy of equalising, uniting, creating and reminiscing.

Hardcore discourse is pervaded by references to "truth." Here my focus is on the ways in which hardcore kids construct their own meanings of the authentic, and there are three ways that they can be understood to do this. For hardcore kids, true hardcore is something beyond style, not reducible to style but something which nonetheless can be expressed in terms of an anti-fashion style. However, the meaning of such style is not constant but in flux, and true hardcore style calls to be (has been and continues to be) redefined at the point at which it risks becoming a subcultural "uniform"; a straitjacket of behaviours, languages, sounds and embodied ways of being. Recasting style as an expression of truth is one method of creating subcultural meaning. Furthermore, hardcore kids understand real hardcore in terms of one's level of passion, sincerity, honesty, commitment and subcultural knowledge. These themes, their performative negotiation collectively constitute the second way of generating hardcore truth. Finally, the hardcore emphasis on DIY, as a productive, active and relatively unmediated process is a further way or making meaning, and delineating the true from the fake in hardcore terms. These are three distinct tactics but what unites them is that they are all methods of constructing truth and of developing one's cultural self.

Underpinning this discussion of hardcore is a notion of subculture as a distinct entity, which is able to be taken as an object of study. This is informed by contemporary theorists of subcultural studies such as Patrick Williams and Paul Hodkinson, who understand the usefulness of the term. I have, in this thesis, come to present hardcore as a fairly coherent and meaningful whole a more, (especially in relation to some more fluid scene and tribes). For all the internal squabbles and in-fighting and disagreements over its boundaries that hardcore engenders, it is a subculture. It is easy to see that without the benefit of such a concept, the whole project of examining hardcore culture would cease to make sense, as the object of study would melt into obscurity.

This is not to say that the object itself is a natural phenomenon. It is, as are all social formations, delicately, painstakingly made and remade a million times. Understanding hardcore as a living culture was difficult, but necessary, to capture its fluidity as well as its vitality. Such awareness of the object, also necessitated some reflection regarding my own relation to it. This was a project of constantly subjecting my own assumptions and knowledge of hardcore to the critical eye of the theorist, and my theoretical assumptions and knowledge to the critical eye of the hardcore kid.

Through the words of the subcultural members, through examining their social spaces, their subcultural practices, their music and their beliefs; and armed with

critical reflectivity, I have examined their equivocal and often difficult relationship

with hardcore. Why it means so much to them. And why it makes them fucking sick.

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