**The Formation of Youth Subcultures**

A subculture group forms when the larger culture fails to meet the needs of a particular group of people. They offer different patterns of living values and behaviour norms, but there is dependence on the larger culture for general goals and direction (unlike counter-cultures which seek to destroy or change the larger culture). Subcultures try to compensate for the failure of the larger culture to provide adequate status, acceptance and identity. In the youth subculture, youth find their age-related needs met. It is a way-station in the life of the individual - it is as if society permits the individual to 'drop out' for a period of years and is even willing to subsidise the phase. However, for some people the way-station becomes the place of permanent settlement. This is when a group moves towards becoming a counter-culture.

Industrialisation and the related social-psychological factors of modern industrial societies caused the phenomenon of youth subcultures for the following reasons: (1) The deepening of the division of labour separated the family from the processes of modern production and administration. Youth is a further extension of the same process of institutional separation or differentiation. With the industrial revolution there arose an institutional structure that 'allowed room' for youth. (2) With this division of labour there came an increasing specialisation which led to a lengthening of the period of time that the individual needed to spend in the educational system. Youth were separated from the process of production by child labour laws. (3) The rise of modern medicine and nutrition led to the sheer numbers of youth increasing. (4) The sheer complexity of modern society has meant that different individuals lead vastly different lives. When adults disappear into a strange world, reappearing for limited contact with youth, a degree of estrangement results. This trend has caused youth to become autonomous, establishing norms and patterns of their own that are independent from the adult world. (5) Socialisation in modern societies is characterised by high degrees of discontinuity and inconsistency. This produces individuals who are not well integrated and a period of time is needed where they can complete the process of socialisation - a time to find themselves, hence adolescence.

A number of different theories have been suggested for the formation of youth subcultures:

A. A Natural Part of the Journey from Childhood to Adulthood

As discussed under the youth culture section, there is a journey from childhood to adulthood. Youth ban together for support into groups that function as half-way houses between the world of being a child and the world of being an adult. Here youth subcultures are about survival in an otherwise hostile world.

B. A Class Struggle Expressed Through The Use of Style

In the resistance through rituals understanding of culture the members are always striving against dominant classes; older generations and against those who conform. They are always trying to find ways to disrupt the ideological and generational oppression in order to crease spaces for themselves. The resistance through personal expression is often contrasted against the conformity of the ‘normals’. In many writings youth are counterposed against adults - they hate and avoid adults and oppose them because they represent authority. A dichotomy was created between, for example: Goths and Normals where Goths avoid and hate adults, oppose adults who represent authority and are deemed to resist; while Normals relate well to adults, consult adults with problems and are deemed to conform. Linda Forrester in a web article speaks of youth generated culture where visual communication is predominant and language is subservient to visual means of communications. Visual cultures include: skateboarders; graffiti artists; street dancers and street machiners which communicate through movement or gesture. These are periphery groups empowered by the space that they have created through visual representation. Their cultural production is recognised by mainstream culture and in that recognition they are given power to speak. The process empowers them and provides identity. Group control is managed through the visual display of creative talent, ie, skaters out-skate each other, graffiti artists out-image each other; street machines out-car each other; street dancers fight each other through art. In mainstream culture discourse is primarily verbal but in youth generated culture discourse is primarily visual. It is through style that criticism of performance and image occurs and it is through criticism that higher forms of visual representation occur.

C. A Rebellion Against the Dominant Culture Using Shock Tactics

Young people in creating subcultures are setting out to shock. One of the key ways in which they shock is through the clothes they wear. Oppositional subcultures (ie. Punk and Hip-hop subcultures) are movements dedicated to rebellion against the dominant culture.

D. A Construction of New Identities Based on Individualisation

The new ideas in youth culture suggest a more positive view of the role of youth in society. Youth is viewed as an active category - a sociocultural view of youth is introduced where youth are involved in the development of society through their creations. Youth must be allowed to exercise the power to bring change - they do so in their cultural expressions all the time. Youth culture is about individualism - an expanding degree of separation of individuals from their traditional ties and restrictions. As people have 'broken free' they feel a need to look for fixing points - material with which to form a new social and cultural identity. The motivation behind participating in the activities of a subculture involves coping with suffering (the sense of loss at being cut off from the past and hence one’s identity), ie. alienation, loneliness, meaningless, etc. The motive is to be reinstated into responsive and responsible relationships. The individualisation has produced post-traditional communities - because they are focussed on the individual they are looser and more fluid than traditional communities but they are still settings in which youth find self-expression and identity. The subculture is an identity-related substitute for the lost collective world of modernism but with the disintegration of tradition, subcultures has lost their identity-creating potential. There is a now a pluralisation of needs and interests that result from the process of individualisation and culturalisation - so culture ruptures are normal. Not only do these ruptures affect all social classes, but the traditional generational gap is also blurred. Alongside individualisation there is a tendency towards self-organisation - probably the new communities will be organised around the needs of the individuals and their interests. Douglas Rushkoff, in Playing the Future, suggests that as the world has become increasingly complex the children have adapted to its demands, and they have the ability to navigate it's terrain - adults must learn from them!

A whole new approach to the field of subculture theory is emerging. It is an approach that is critical of the subculture theory approach popular since the seventies.