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The Evolution of Emo
and Its Theoretical Implications

The purpose of this article is to analyze how emo, a youth subculture, evolved in the United States during a period of approximately twenty five years, since the mid-1980s, particularly focusing on how it changed in regard to the zeitgeist of the time period, as well as how it appropriated various elements of past subcultures into itself in order to create its own subcultural identity. Special attention will be paid to the third incarnation, which emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century and proved to be the most widespread variation of the subculture. It is also interesting how this incarnation was affected by historical events such as the Columbine High School Massacre and 9/11.

The theoretical implications of emo are the second issue that this article attempts to tackle. In particular, when viewed from the perspective of post-subculture studies, it allows one to revisit certain theories of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (CCCS), which pioneered subculture studies in the 1960s and 70s. The relationship between post-subculture studies and the CCCS's approach has always been very complex. Even though many representatives of post-subculture studies criticized the CCCS for various shortcomings, most significantly for an *a priori* approach that ignores empirical evidence and limits the concept of authenticity within subcultures (Muggleton 19–30). At the same time, the work of the CCCS has been always treated with respect and considered a milestone. However, one of the issues that post-subculture researchers believed to be irrelevant was class background, to the point that sometimes subcultures were considered ultimately classless (Thornton 55–56, Muggleton 161–162, 165–166). Yet the example of emo shows that class can nonetheless be an element that plays a role within subculture.

Emo's roots lie in the early 1980s hardcore scene after it moved to the American East Coast from the West Coast, where it originally appeared. Three major stages of the subculture's development can be distinguished. The first incarnation was characterized by a break with the general hardcore scene and a development of a separate identity. The second incarnation was a logical continuation of and an elaboration on the movement's previous variant. The third incarnation is of

particular interest because not only did it redefine the movement substantially, but also finally allowed it to be fully acknowledged as a youth subculture.

Although most publications claim that punk was originally a British subculture, it is generally acknowledged that it was influenced by the American music scene, particularly such groups as The Stooges, The Ramones, The MC5, and such places as CBGB, a New York club that became dominated by bands playing in a similar fashion. After punk broke out in the UK in the second half of the 1970s, it gained popularity in the US, and, as an immediate result, both the supply of and demand for punk bands increased. A new variant, native to the US, was thus born: hardcore.

Hardcore, or hardcore punk, was faster, heavier and more aggressive than earlier punk music. As with punk, the hardcore scene was often politically charged. It was particularly very vocal against the Reagan administration, which was the target of raw and explicit criticism. Ronald Reagan was often credited, albeit somewhat mockingly, as the "godfather" of the American hardcore and punk scene. The author of Ronald Reagan's obituary in *Ear Candy* magazine recalls:

> Once in concert, the vocalist for D.O.A. asked the audience,
> 'who was the person who did more for punk rock in the '80s than anyone? And I ain't talking about Jello Biafra or John Lydon.'
> There was a pregnant pause and then he finally answered,
> '... it was Ronald Reagan! Everyone got into punk bands because of him.' (Giving the Punk/Hardcore Rockers of the '80s a Reason?) ("Ronald Reagan")

The same author explains:

> This pretty much hits the nail on the head. Punk feeds on anger and aggression. Look at the English punks of the '70s—they had the massive unemployment of the U.K., sparking the Sex Pistols to utter the immortal 'no future.' But what did the American punks of the '80s have to complain about or protest? I tell you what … Ronald Reagan. By sheer force of personality, Reagan gave the punks of the '80s something to sing about. Can you imagine what they would have sung about had Carter been re-elected in 1980 or Mondale in 1984? That is some pretty lame material. ("Ronald Reagan")

As Kelefa Sanneh writes, Reagan permeated the scene in many ways. Even though some attempted to forego direct references to him in their music in order to render their message more universal, his image, often altered, was present on CD covers, flyers and posters, promoting bands and concerts etc. (Sanneh). Some

bands, such as Reagan Youth, even named themselves after the American presi-
dent. Nevertheless, Sanneh argues, hardcore cannot be called protest music as it
never gained a following significant enough to become a voice of the generation.
Lyrically it focused on the hardcore scene itself, alienating people from outside
of this community. Hardcore also encountered another problem: as a result of
the aggressive style of music, events and concerts frequently ended in brawls and
attracted white-power skinheads (*American Hardcore*; Blush, 33–35, 39).

The result was a highly politicized, hyper-masculine subculture, which, in
turn, alienated both certain artists as well as groups of hardcore punks. During
the mid-1980s this was perceived as a significant problem to such an extent that
certain hardcore bands from the Washington D.C. area decided to make their
sound more melodic and remove heavy political content from their lyrics. A new
term was used to describe this movement: emotional hardcore, or, for the sake
of brevity, emocore. Even though the press employed it, the label was rejected by
many bands, such as Embrace and Rites of Spring, both which were headed by
Ian MacKaye, who is considered a figurehead of emocore ("Ian MacKaye—1986—
Emocore Is Stupid").

Alienated from the community it used to be a part of, emocore started to
emphasize values often neglected within the hardcore scene. It should be stressed,
however, that neither was hardcore devoid of any themes of emotion, nor was
emocore devoid of any political content. The major difference was in how these
issues were articulated. Hardcore was full of anger directed at political struc-
tures and expressed an anti-establishment stance, whereas emocore focused on
matters closely related to alienation, particularly social alienation, teenage angst,
as well as themes of male/female romantic relationships. Like hardcore, emocore
was also associated with liberal and left-wing politics. It embraced the straight
edge ideology, which advocated abstinence from alcohol, drugs, promiscuous
sex and sometimes caffeine (Greenwald 10). It is noteworthy that this ideology
developed from a song by the band Minor Threat, which was also headed by
Ian MacKaye.

The movement remained without a mass following until the beginning of the
1990s, when it started attracting more attention. This was a sign of the times:
many new musical styles that were thought to lack mainstream potential became
popular to the extent of occupying the top places on the Billboard charts. It was
not uncommon for albums recorded by alternative rock bands to attain platinum
and even multi-platinum status (the examples of Nirvana, The Smashing Pump-
kins, Pearl Jam, Nine Inch Nails or Ministry can be given). This was followed
by a growing amount of media coverage, which stimulated a greater interest in
the alternative rock scene (Greenwald 18–20).

A characteristic element of early-90s alternative rock music is the focus on themes of dejection as well as teenage angst. Such album and single titles as *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, *The Downward Spiral* or *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness* illustrate this tendency sufficiently. Although alternative rock often was different musically from emocore, both shared certain lyrical qualities, which helped the latter reach a broader audience. Furthermore, the popularity of grunge, represented by such bands as Nirvana and Soundgarden, aroused the interest in other, less popular bands on the same record label, Sub Pop. One of these bands was Sunny Day Real Estate, an emo group which quickly gained popularity in the US and brought this genre of music to a wider audience, essentially merging certain elements of it with the mainstream (Greenwald 18–28). Ian MacKaye's new band, Fugazi also deserves to be mentioned. Although it differed from his previous bands that had been labeled emocore, its fans soon became interested in MacKaye's previous career and sought out his earlier work. In late 1997 Deep Elm Records launched a series of compilations called *The Emo Diaries*, and thus emo, as a musical style, was recognized as a distinct element of the indie rock scene.

Yet it was not until the first years of the twenty-first century that emo gained a large following and a concrete subcultural consciousness. This third incarnation greatly differs from the previous ones, which never happened on a big scale, and therefore were rarely distinguished as subcultures; they were rather considered an offshoot or niche within other movements. Contrary to those past variants, modern emo not only developed an identity as such, but it also became so significant in size and popularity that it could have even been called a "mainstream subculture" in the first several years of the 2000s. There were many reasons for this beside its popularity, especially the movement's approach to consumerism, which may be considered unique within the field of subcultural studies.

In the classical theory of youth subcultures, such movements are formed by adolescents searching for their own identity and a sense of community, this search being an expression of certain "deviant norms" which become engaged in negotiations with hegemonic culture. According to the original CCCS view, the working-class parent culture was a result of a negotiation with the dominant culture, which placed a number of constraints on the entire social class. Nonetheless, young people still experienced conflicts between the parent culture and the mediating institutions of the dominant culture, such as schools, social workers or the police. It was believed that youth subcultures are the result of mixing certain elements from the parent culture with a new kind of generational and group consciousness, which was subversive not only in relation to the dominant culture, but also in relation to the parent culture from which some elements

were borrowed, the whole process signifying a negotiation between young people (in the CCCS paradigm these were mostly males, for which the center was criticized) and the dominant part of society. The CCCS saw adolescents from the working class as being in a more complex situation than their parents because of susceptibility to unemployment on the one hand, and social mobility on the other (Hall et al. 48–53).

Another element that the CCCS recognized was that young people had more money at their disposal. This affluence, along with the factors described above, led the early theorists of subculture to the conclusion that the main line of resistance was their style, the meaning of which was not determined by the producer, but solely by the young consumers (Hall et al. 53–56). The rituals of resistance were closely tied to leisure, the sphere wherein members of subcultures could live out the subversive values of the movement.

This approach has been criticized for several shortcomings and for its general view of youth subcultures as ideologically-driven, idealistic and even heroic (Muggleton and Weinzierl 6–13). It also downplayed such issues as geographical specificity, placing too much emphasis on the issue of deviation from mainstream social values, focusing on teenagers with a working-class background or ignoring such elements as the mixture of various, seemingly incompatible styles, which are developed by producers as well as consumers (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 6–13; Gottdiener 979–1001). These issues are of crucial importance for emo, which stressed its middle-class roots, distanced itself from overtly deviant or subversive norms, especially in relation to the authorities of the "dominant" culture, most noticeably after 1999. Since the stylistic aspect is so fundamental for emo in the twenty-first century, I shall discuss it first.

The modern-day emo movement differs greatly from the previous incarnations known from the hardcore scene. Although there are certain stylistic elements common both to modern emo music and post-hardcore music, as exemplified by such bands as Bad Religion or Pennywise, the subculture is often disconnected from its past variants. Many factors contributed to this: first of all, the movement was never recognized as a full-fledged subculture, nor was "emotional hardcore" considered an independent music genre. Thus, emo chose to draw upon many different subcultures from the past. Stylistically, it employs certain elements of the dress styles of indie-rock fans of the late 1990s, e.g. vintage track jackets, t-shirts, black-rimmed glasses, sneakers or training shoes, mid-length hair. These were combined with elements characteristic of goth and punk subcultures, with their strong preference for black or neon bright colors (particularly pink), hand warmers, slim-fit trousers (often in plaid, characteristic of punk), as well as specific clothing adornments (skulls and crossbones, black and white or black and

red stripes). With respect to appearance, one should also mention the tendency to dye hair (black or neon hues, or a combination of both). They often sported an androgynous look; for example, men sometimes used makeup, particularly eyeliner (Simon 42–59; "Emo Scene Fashion").

Similarly, the kind of music that modern-day members of this subculture listen to is eclectic, not necessarily reminiscent of the music they originally appreciated. Among the many genres enjoyed by this movement one may find post-hardcore, British punk, post-punk (Joy Division enjoyed a great surge of popularity), and new wave. Psychobilly elements are also present. Though most of the musical groups that have been described as emo or screamo still shun these labels, there are some that accept them—My Chemical Romance or Good Charlotte—which has to do with a band's identification with the movement. However, there are many subcultures that consist of fans of a great diversity of musical styles; one can think of metalheads, who may enjoy anything from melodic glam metal up to grindcore, or goths, who may choose from a spectrum that includes acoustic-guitar-based neofolk, guitar-laden gothic rock, all the way to futurepop, which at times is difficult to distinguish from trance music. The fact is that music is not as central to emo and other contemporary subcultures as it had been previously. Style and fashion have replaced it. In addition, subculture movements are no longer seen as age-based, and many members of different subcultures identify with them as adults, though emo retains its preference for people in their adolescent years, most likely because of their expressed values.

In the twenty-first century, emo is one of those subcultures that create eclectic styles by combining seemingly incompatible elements. Classical subcultural theory would try to identify some homologous values expressing deviant norms. Yet, within emo this element does not exist in the same way it did in the subcultures analyzed by this theory. Like its previous iterations, the subculture mostly attracted people of a middle-class background, but it abandoned other elements found in those earlier variants, particularly their very strong anti-consumerist stance. Members of the later iteration of the movement did show a certain ambivalence about their own social position and the expectations placed upon them, yet they did not denounce consumer culture. Clothes were bought in shops that belonged to large chains, though certain retailers, such as Hot Topic, a NASDAQ company, were preferred. Garments were often adorned by pictures of pop-cultural icons, superheroes, protagonists and motifs from cult movies, such as *Tim Burton's Nightmare Before Christmas* or *Star Wars*, as well as with such characters as Hello Kitty or Emily the Strange, along with many other trademarks licensed from their respective owners. This supports Sarah Thornton's point that becoming recognized by certain businesses and media can actually increase a movement's

authenticity (9) rather than denote a subculture's end by depriving it of its deviant values and rendering it inauthentic, as the CCCS's subcultural theory claimed.

Other popular artifacts of mass culture were also present in the emo canon of style. The subculture displayed an affinity for certain electronic devices and gadgets, very often of specific brands, such as Apple products that included computers and iPods, hand-held game consoles and computer games. These were the tokens of their ambivalence about their own social position: on the one hand, they rejected certain notions of conformity, but on the other, they often chose products that were specifically targeted at the middle class as a consumer group. Whereas this was often a question of convenience or personal preference, there were situations in which certain artifacts, such as Apple computers, were seen as "less mainstream." In fact, Apple's "Get a Mac" advertising campaign projected the image of Mac personal computers as a youthful, independent and attractive alternative to traditional PCs, associated with middle-age and the corporate world (Nudd). However, the issue of price, which had an undeniable impact on their small popularity, was ignored (according to StatCounter Global Stats, the median percentage of computers running MacOS, the operating system run by most Apple computers, was 13.61% of all computers connecting to the Internet between July 2008 and November 2012. The peak percentage was 15.58 in April 2012).

Earlier theories concerning subcultures held that certain deviant norms lose their relevance when artifacts specific for such a movement are appropriated by the mainstream. Later theories contested this view, claiming that such norms immediately enter into negotiation with the hegemony, of which emo is a case. This can be seen on the example of the characteristic way in which members of the subculture adapted mainstream elements by translating them into its own aesthetics: fashionable hairstyles were appropriated through the addition of a black dye, skinny-fit trousers, which returned into vogue, were adorned with band logos or bought at specific retail outlets, etc. Although a number of these artifacts were often connected with older subcultures, such as punk or metal, characterized by a significantly higher amount of deviant norms, one notices that the deviant element has long been absent from these artifacts, and they themselves have entered into the mainstream. It may seem that such references to past movements imply the same nonconformist values that these objects used to symbolize, though I argue that the members of the subculture know well that the deviant meaning of such elements as black clothing is long gone. It is a stylistically motivated consumer choice rather than a stance against society at large.

Although emo does not possess the deviant norms once associated with subcultures, some tools developed by the CCCS may nonetheless be of use in the analysis of the movement. One may see emo's stylistic choices in terms of what

Dick Hebdige, drawing on Clause Levi-Strauss, has called bricolage, in which a new meaning is imposed on the artifacts of a given subculture (102–106). However, emo does not excavate the deviant norms from the past, but rather emphasizes a certain "collective individuality" of choice (in line with Muggleton's observation that subcultures are "internally homogenous" (42), but also that one's perceived individuality is the cornerstone of subcultural authenticity (77)), at the same time acknowledging the mainstream as a set of cultural artifacts. However, this individuality is virtual: the movement mistakes the inner collective uniformity for individuality, as it differs from the hegemonic uniformity of white, middle-class Anglo-Saxon society. This is homologous with many elements discussed earlier in this article, such as clothing and apparel with images of pop-culture icons, or the popularity of such objects as iPods, which were just as popular in mainstream culture. Emo contests neither popular culture nor Anglo-Saxon middle-class society, but it articulates different values within them. To illustrate this with an example: the bands found on an emo teenager's iPod will differ from those on that of a person of the same age with decidedly mainstream tastes, but chances are that all the bands will be on the same major record labels, such as Warner, Universal or Sony.

The only element of emo that, for a short period of time, the media claimed to be deviant was self-mutilation. The tabloid press attempted to use this to create a folk devil out of the subculture, yet it ultimately failed. According to Andy R. Brown, the movement, through its presence in various niche media and online media, developed a voice of its own and managed to contest the sensationalized news stories about it. Brown looks at the example of Great Britain (19–37), but the situation was similar in the US, though on a smaller scale. When the movement was criticized for encouraging self-harm, for instance by the American conservative blogger Michelle Malkin, both members of the movement and many people outside it started to point out that self-mutilation was not confined to the subculture or inherent to it and that it had various causes. Such discussions were made possible by the movement's access to the media outlets that catered to the subculture and were prepared to act in its defense. Furthermore, the role of the Internet as a means of communication and of establishing a subcultural community through such pages as MySpace and VampireFreaks was also a significant factor here, as it enabled a better coordination of responses to accusations.

One of the unique aspects of emo was its reaction to two significant historical events: the Columbine High School Massacre of 1999 and the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th 2001. After the Columbine High School Massacre, certain subcultural movements, mostly goths, received an increasing amount of bad press (Griffiths 406–409, Williams 4–5), which resulted in

a backlash against them from the authorities, which undertook certain preventive actions, such as reinstating dress codes or issuing warnings to parents. In addition, families that used to accept the fact that their children were members of the subculture were becoming less tolerant (Goldmen 1999). Therefore the newly emerging variation of emo incorporated some elements of popular culture into its style to establish an identity different from, but not opposed to, mainstream culture. The values thus articulated were similar to those of the goth subculture, but expressed in a much more acceptable way.

It should be kept in mind that such a change of an artifact's signification does not only come from the subculture itself. In his article "Hegemony and Mass Culture: A Semiotic Approach" Mark Gottdiener points to the role that producers play in the negotiation of the meaning of such items. He recognizes three stages of semiosis: (1) the producer attempts to influence the object's sign value, for instance by advertising, (2) the users transfunctionalize the object and imbue it with a secondary meaning, and (3) finally, the producers recognize this meaning and supply objects that are characterized by a "symbolically leveled," i.e. negotiated version, often deprived of the most subversive and/or deviant elements (991–999). Normally, subscribing to such a negotiated image was often seen as a sign of selling out or being inauthentic. However, as a result of the events of 1999 and 2001, such a change was actually welcome by emo. In consequence, members of other subcultures, from which emo borrowed certain stylistic elements, began to view it as a substandard imitation. This was particularly visible on the Internet where many images deriding the movement were circulated, such as a picture of an emo youth in the back seat of a car with the caption "Mom's minivan. Less conformist than the bus" or announcements of "National Emo Kid Beatdown Day."

Emo stirred up various animosities. Male emos were perceived as effeminate, though this was only a stylistic element. As Andy Greenwald notices, the subculture was male-centric to some extent: there were rather few women in emo bands, and song lyrics were often about men who had been wronged by women. Nonetheless, Greenwald claims that the expression of emotions in such songs is universal to both sexes, whatever a song's subject might be (133–139). The emo movement was considered "nerdy," which brings up the classic binary opposition of "jocks" and "geeks. As a result, they often were victims of bullying (Brown 30–32).

9/11 crucially influenced the final shape of this incarnation of emo. A patriotic spirit pervaded the nation. According to a Gallup poll, George W. Bush's popularity rose from 51% a week before the attack to 90% immediately after it. Anti-establishment and non-cofnormist stance that characterized different

subcultures (punk, hardcore, indie, hip-hop, etc.) immediately became suspect. Even among adolescents the allure of such movements dropped greatly.

The influence of 9/11 was fully recognized in 2003, when Greenwald made his claim that the rise of emo's popularity was a result of media interest in the subculture after the attacks as something that "would heal us through fashion" (69). However, I believe this to be an overstatement. The media obviously were still interested in the aftermath of the attacks, and this persisted throughout the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent war. The topic that was to be "the next big thing" in the media was broader and more universal than a subculture: the celebrity craze (or, more precisely, its scale) that focused on such personas as Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears. The influence of the attack on emo was different: it facilitated the appropriation of conformist elements into an ostensibly nonconformist subculture.

Towards the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the amount of people interested in emo fell significantly. This is visible in the infrastructure that they used for internet-based communication: Myspace now is a waning band-focused website dedicated to promoting music; VampireFreaks does not mention emo in its history; Hot Topic has concentrated more on elements of popular culture and less on catering for specific subcultures, a development connected with the fact that sartorial references to pop-culture (particularly vintage pop-culture) became popular among young people toward the end of the first decade of the new century. Various other mainstream fashion outlets that once offered clothing or accessories associated with emo, such as H&M, introduced a new assortment that had a more general appeal. As most subcultures before it, emo survived this drop in popularity, and the aesthetics of the movement are still visible. The most popular bands representing this subculture enjoy a massive following, as reflected on social networking sites like Facebook (in December 2012, Good Charlotte had almost 3 million subscribers, My Chemical Romance had almost 10 million), and even a short browse of such web pages as Vampire-Freaks quickly shows that there are many American teenagers who identify with the movement. In addition, many elements that the subculture popularized have also been appropriated by other subcultures, such as hipsters, who share certain ideas and stylistic elements with emo: skinny-fit jeans and horn-rimmed glasses, some types of piercing, as well as a consumer-based elitism.

As stated above, the evolution of emo carries interesting theoretical implications. Classic subcultural theory is no longer sufficient to describe and understand the movement. Its rigid focus on selected aspects and British society, its tendency to explain youth subcultures through their relation to social class, may lead the researcher to ignore significant issues involved in subcultural formation

and identification. The most obvious topics would be its relationship with the media, capitalist production and social change. Even though some of these issues have been already discussed, they merit further elaboration.

The CCCS saw only working-class youth culture as capable of actively contesting dominant culture through the subversive elements and values they subscribed to, while middle-class youth culture was interpreted as passive (Hall et al. 96). This is a major drawback of the theory developed by this school, which not only overestimated the subversive potential of working-class subcultures, but also underestimated the possibilities of those rooted in a middle-class background. Such shortcomings have to do with the specificity of the time when the CCCS theory emerged. For example, the claims that the middle class produces countercultures rather than subcultures (Hall et al. 57–71) were linked to the countercultural movements and organizations of the 1960s. Since then, this approach to middle-class youth culture has been abandoned, and many subcultures, such as goths and twenty-first-century hipsters, are rather closely associated with this social background. Hardcore punk, too, drew its audience mostly from the middle classes, though not exclusively. For example, the New York City hardcore scene attracted many people who had working-class origins, which gave them a pretext to aggressively challenge the authenticity of other members of the movement (*American Hardcore*).

There are post-subculture theorists who see class as increasingly irrelevant in subculture. However, I believe that emo offers evidence that the opposite is the case. Yet, this does not signify a return to the extreme class determinism that the CCCS was criticized for. This situation rather shows that subcultures may have preferences with respect to class. Even if the problem of class is ostensibly neglected or shunned, there are invariably certain class issues at stake. The most obvious of these is money: since many people identifying with emo are teenagers, they need money to purchase the items that constitute their style. This is quite unlike some subcultures of the 1990s, which were strongly anti-consumerist. Post-subculture studies were still at a formative stage at that time, and this partly explains why the paradigm then in process neglected class. Now it is quite evident that class-based studies are an important possibility in the post-subculture paradigm.

Emo is ambivalent about consumerism; its members pay less attention to the authenticity of clothing (though this does not extend to electronic equipment) than previous subcultures: they are more concerned with the look than the brand, which has to do with the ways emo expresses the turmoil of adolescence and teenage angst. This does not mean that earlier subcultures were not recognized as valid consumer groups. There were many businesses that saw subcultures as

potential targets and some media corporations explored niche markets, including subcultures. Nonetheless, unlike emo, earlier subcultures often rejected certain popular brands as inauthentic.

The very existence of products for specific subcultures, rather than a general consumer population, proves the economic potential of such groups. Companies may offer goods that do not necessarily target a group, but expresses values and ideas that certain movements would subscribe to, although the economic aim is to create a general demand (as mentioned above, this can be seen in the case of emo on the example of social networks and electronic entertainment). It is worth remembering about the corporate sponsorship of subculture-related events and venues; in fact, companies seldom cut themselves off from subcultures that are typically associated with their products (the great significance of Doc Martens boots and Levi's 501 for skinheads would be a case in point). There have been commercial attempts to exploit the popularity of some subcultures, a tendency believed to mark an end of the true value of a subculture, although it can lead to a "revival" of a given movement.

As Gabriele Klein points out, youth cultures often practice mimesis as a way of establishing their own identity. This should not be seen as an imitation, but as a reinterpretation that yields a new variant of a given subculture, which may become a negotiation of a set of values in a new historical situation (45–48). Such a process was visible in the third generation of emo, which incorporated many "vintage" stylistic elements from the 1980s and early 90s (legwarmers, leggings, albeit in subculturally-correct black or neon colors) or logos of older rock and punk rock bands, e.g. Motörhead and The Ramones. These stylistic choices were not faux-attempts at becoming punks or rockers; they articulated an interest in particular kinds of music that had once been popular, as opposed to the music that was popular then. Between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, music charts were dominated by hip-hop artists, while such types of music as industrial rock were controversial because of the then-recent Columbine massacre.

The engagement of subcultures in consumer (or even consumerist) activities is not a new thing. In the late 1970s Dick Hebdige wrote that "a subculture is concerned first and foremost with consumption" (94–95). However, contrary to what Hebdige and other CCCS theorists have assumed, it seems that consumer goods are not redefined to fit a semiotic system that has been generated by a given subculture. There are processes of appropriation and negotiation (as described by Gottdiener), but the products, when purchased, already fit the subculture's values and styles. The items that emos bought did not need to be transfunctionalized, a sign of consumer consciousness among the members of a subcultural movement.

They may criticize the notions of mainstream culture, but the criticism is voiced from within the market.

However, some products dedicated to the subcultural consumer may be seen as deviant or dangerously non-conformist. In other words, the market not only accepts subcultures and post-subcultural movements, but it is willing to satisfy the demands of this niche. The negotiation of values does not deprive such movements of all its anti-mainstream features. All in all, society has become more tolerant toward (post-)subcultures, which are not seen as a threat, unless some kind of moral panic arises, and even subcultural movements have access to the media. Subcultures primarily express individual tastes, values and styles.

In the light of the CCCS paradigm, such negotiated subcultures may be considered as inauthentic. Yet, I would argue that this is not the case. The development of emo over time serves as an illustration. Despite the continuing presence of hardcore elements, it would be a mistake to label the third generation of emo a revival of American hardcore punks. In a post-subcultural fashion, certain elements were retained, and others transfunctionalized, recontextualized, or abandoned because of their irrelevance in a new social, economic and political situation. This is true of a number of subcultures that have been present for decades, such as punk, metalheads, goths, or emo, all of which have had many incarnations. This further undermines the CCCS linear model (Muggleton and Weinzierl 6) and proves that new incarnations of previous movements should be analyzed as legitimate subcultures in their own right rather than as inauthentic reiterations, deprived of the original subversive value.

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