Boots and Braces

Early Skinhead Culture and its
Techniques of Constructing the Self

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1. Introduction

Today, the term ´skinhead´ in (not only) popular terminology is used within the political rather than the cultural or social field. An indepth look at the early stage of the skinhead movement might provide us with necessary insight to understand how this particular youth culture developed as a subsystem of its parent culture and offspring of various subcultures, but got stuck on its way and was damned to oscillate between the states of subculture and parent culture. The aim of this work is to analyse how this state affected this highly popular[1] cult of the self, and how it was reflected in fashion, self-staging, music and micropolitics, hence to contribute to a phenomenology of British popular youth culture of the late 60s and early 70s.

The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and its early approaches of analysis and criticism of youth/sub-culture, are still considered to be of crucial importance, yet I would want to take the critical notes by Griese[2] into consideration when refering to material by the CCCS. The methods of analysing youth culture with all its facettes, according to Griese, should be carefully used, that is with their inherent ambivalence in mind. The youth-cultural approach and its methods are emancipatory, supportive and biased. At the same time, they are colonialising, assimilative and controlling. Furthermore, if they are not supported by the analysis of the complex eco-nomic and societal situation youth cultures stem from, they might be functio-nalised to stabilise the existing hierarchies of power.

Furthermore, as the title of this paper announces, I would want to refer to Foucault's notion of `technology of the self`, but weaken the term to `technique`. Most of the early skinheads' actions have to be analysed as sub-divisions and as parts of the western culture of the self. The `techniques` were modulised and canonised, and thus potentially became learnable and reproducable. `Technology` would demand a theoretical super-structure, and a reflecting consciousness of scientific approach.

If pop culture is not only defined by its aesthetic materialisation and quantitatively broad acceptance within society, but is furthermore accepted as an indicator of, and reaction to social processes, then subcultures and youth cultures are of significant importance. Thus, this work does analyse the early skinhead cult not only in its aesthetic development solely, but, as „all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and
to social and historical structures"[3], contextualises it with the help of the analysis of its construction and manifestation. Hopefully, some reasons for the impact of the movement will become apparent.

Within youth culture the emphasis on the construction of the self, to my opinion,

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[1] To prove the public effect of late 60's skinheads: „(...)the tabloid headlines were full of boots and braces, (...) skinheads represented some of the most style conscious kids ever." „(...)the USA's military top brass were so concerned that servicemen posted in the UK might be mistaken for skinheads, that they allowed them to wear hairpieces when off duty for the first time in 1969" -- George Marshall: Spirit of '69. p 15-20

[2] Hartmut M. Griese „Jugend(sub)kultur(en): Facetten, Probleme und Diskurse" in: Jugendkulturen, Politik und Protest. p. 44f

[3] Nelson, Treichler and Grossberg „Introduction" in: Cultural Studies. p. 4

never before was more crucial and of stronger effect on the public image, only the beginning Punk movement of the middle 70s could be con-sidered to be based on a similar structure. Various cultural studies state the first half of the 20th century as the birth date of youth culture as it is defined today, since especially urban environments of late capitalistic societies, shaken by transformational processes on almost every societal plane can give rise to youth declaring their own rights and developing their own group conciousness. Small numbers of youth gangs of the 20s are often named as predecessors of the post-war mass movements leading to a distinct youth culture which was defined rather by generation than by class. The societies of Europe and North America were the first to encounter a growing number of adolescents de-manding and creating their own lifestyle, which often was contrary and oppositional to their parents'. Parallel to its struggle to become emancipated from parental and societal control, youth soon became co-constructed as such and exploited by the consumer society.

Phil Cohen[4] characterises the social and economic situation of British, and especially London youth in the late 60s as determined by the re-arrangement of the working-class neighbourhoods along with the partial de-struction of the supportive networks of economic, kinship and cultural relations within their population. Rehousing and redevelopment forced most of the population to adopt the ´atomic family´ lifestyle, deterritorialised geographically and emotionally, and stripped off its usually diverse grown solidarity relations. Conflict solution had to be intensified on the inter-personal plane and at the same time did economic instability and enforced social mobility add to the constant struggle within the families and within the class hierarchies. The proclaimed disappearance of class boundaries was in fact the disappearance or loosening of security networks, which up to then prevented the individual's decline from working-class to lumpen-proletarian status. Basically, the boundaries upwards had proven to be still intact.

From these conflicts and tensions, which to my opinion were regressive developments, suffered not only the parents, but also the youth of England's bigger cities. The fragmentation of their cultural, social, economic and material relations had to be re-located within what was left of the community. Especially the youth cultures of the late 60's could be interpreted as a means to cope with, and rearrange the fragments of the own, the families' and the class' history of dislocation. Territory, objects, rituals and kin/friendship were up-valued to extreme fetishisation by some of the cults, mostly based on the traditional patterns developed within and acquired from the parent culture.

The element common to both, as well to the parent culture as to its sub-cultures was their resistance against the superordinate bourgeois culture as dominant culture, which at times was encountered as of repressive character. Adding to that, youth subcultures, aside from the class distinction, also developed coherent techniques of generation specific distinctions, and of mediating the generational conflicts on the plane of transformative and subversive stylisation. The objects, the rituals and the micropolitics of the parent generation were taken as pre-existing commodities with their own in-herent cultural meanings. They were then adopted and transformed by using them within a new social context, which could be as well oppositional as affirmative, as well of expropriative as of appropriative nature.

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[4] As quoted by Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts in: Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson „Resistance through Rituals". p. 30

We need to keep in mind that the early skinhead culture in various ways seems very remote from today's, but nonetheless canonised a distinctive style and certain attitudes and techniques to set skinheads as a group apart from other youth cultures. To define and conquer spaces for the self to develop and live in, use is made of various cultural techniques and social extensions of the self, which are based on the cult's micropolitics, on reaction to the environment (rejective as well as affirmative), and on almost autogenetic techniques. According to this, quality and effect of the micro-politics could be analysed at their intersection with style and public appearance of the groups and gangs, which both separately play a very important role, and when combined feed a crucial mythic concept. The same probably holds true for the skinhead's affinity for class and inheritance.

The heavily acclaimed „Spirit of '69"[5] as all-time ´glory days´ of the scene, boots and braces as essential clothing, a cropped skalp as a must and the aggro days are only a few, yet important, parts in a wide range of specific techniques of constructing and staging the self within society.

The sources and secondary literature used for this paper are of historical approach mainly, and were produced within the skinhead subculture itself. The books by Griffiths, McKenna and Marshall are considered standard works among skinheads, but as the texts are of rather enthusiastic and uncritical na-ture, they occasionally lack the self-distance of the author, which historical works should provide. Hence the above mentioned demand a critical reception in order to tell the historic facts from mystification.

The novels by Richard Allen (one of the various pseudonyms of James Moffatt) and Stewart Home link skinploitation to historically accurate facts, as both authors, of whom only Home has a skinhead background to himself, set their novels within the skinhead cult and exaggerated its distinc-
tive features.

For literature of theoretical analysis, use is mainly made of essays by members of the CCCS, University of Birmingham, since their analysis has proven to be most productive for the contextualisation of the cult, and for the semantic analysis of fashion and self-staging.

Internet pages of merely fanzine nature, as well as recent mailorder catalogues and web-presences, album covers and last but not least, personal involvement and recollection were used to distill what survived the now 30 years of „the greatest of all British youth cults"[6]

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[5] „They had spread in popularity throughout the length and breadth of the country during the early Seventies, after first going public in 1969 during the Rolling Stones free festival in Hyde Park (...) the skinheads clashed with the notoriously violent Hell'sAngels under the hot London sun. The skinheads had arrived and they weren't going to go away." Pete McKenna: Nightshift. p.22
[6] George Marshall in his foreword to „Spirit of `69"

2.   Cultural and Social Extensions as Techniques of Constructing the Self

2.1.   The Semantics of Fashion
Shirt by Fred. 'Nuff said

The advertising slogan[7] above, coined to promote Fred Perry's tennis shirts, in its seemingly honest and simple slang style might symbolise what skinhead fashion is about: straight, unspectacular, functional, convenient, and yet stylish (at least considered as such) clothing. As not all of these qualities were promoted by the dominant and widely available pop and hippie fashion of the late 60s and early 70s, they had to be borrowed from various styles, which were used as well for their functional as for their aesthetic contribution to the new style. The skin-
head style had its function not only on the level of individual taste, but served as a uniform-like means to establish the sought Togetherness[8] by outer appear-ance and group action. The semantics of the chosen cultural symbols and their function as space-providing extensions within the social field will take up the main part of this chapter. The importance of the new social meaning the adopted dress acquired, and of the process of adoption itself must not be underestimated. In the late 60s youth still were considered to be a problem that had to be repressively dealt with, rather than to be emancipatingly supported. Hence youth themselfes had to construct their own social environment of rituals, relations and symbols which were collectively and independently defined.

Group conciousness and the values and concerns of the group have to be represented by the parts chosen for the new style, since the potential sources all hold

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[7] Marshall. p. 20
[8] Name of a famous Northern Soul Magazine, recently published in England

their particular meaning within their fields. They might be chosen for the effect of transgression, be they class boundaries or generational boundaries, or for the act of assimilation, of mainly relatively remote cultural symbols.

Interestingly enough, the nationwide canonised dress-code the British skinheads developed did not promote a style uniform in itself, like e.g. the coherent hoodlum style of the hard mods, but of rather patchworked nature. This hints at the process that led to the new style, and according to John Clarke the process can be considered a bricolage (Levi-Strauss), which consists of „*commodities*, produced originally for special markets. That is, their pre-transformation existence was posited on the existence also of other groups (...)"[9] and different social fields, of which the main sources were: youth culture, labour, immigrant culture, sports and military. These social fields might further each be attributed with functional reasons and/or aesthetic and sym-
bolic meaning for which they were incorporated throughout the development of skinhead fashion. Differing from the mod's „appropriation and reorganisation (...) of elements in the objective world which would otherwise determine and constrict him"[10], an early skinhead absorbed not so much for the subversive effects of escapism, but took for rather functional hedonistic ends what was within reach and fit the task to dress smart and hard. The dominant cultural sources thus seem to be wisely chosen.

Most of the following examples are taken from Marshall's „A-Z of Skinwear"[11] since his collection has proven most useful. The collection was assembled in retrospect and the rather strictly limited canon of skinhead fashion and the scene's constant conservative approach to its `true` roots and its pride in inheritance conserved much of the original style. McKenna also gives a brief account of early skinhead fashion, refering to Richard Allen's novels:

> „The books rapidly became popular and serverd as readily available style guides for all potential recruits who wanted the clothes Joe and his gang wore. Contained in the pages were the essential items that made up the skinhead uniform. An image that to this day remains one of the most striking of all the images youth cultures have developed. (...) Levi's Denim jackets and jeans. Fred Perry sportshirts. Ben Sherman and Brutus shirts. Sta prest trousers. Two tone suits and crombie overcoats. And of course the item that above all others has come to symbolise the skinhead movement. The Doctor Marten Air Wear boot. The good old bovver boot. Everyone has either owned a pair of these boots or been on the receiving end of them".[12]

Youth culture

As this source of skinhead culture recycled the fashion of its parent culture, with accesoires (e.g. patches) as only self-produced exception, it mainly contributed to the emerging style by processes which are comparable to the concepts of inheritance and ´semantic cannibalism´. Inheritance, if members of a subculture offensively add new features, but still cling to reminiscences to their original cult for historic reasons; semantic cannibalism, if members of a emerging subculture partially borrow from an exisitng style for the transferral and reapplication of symbolic power and mythical background.

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[9] Hall, Jefferson. p. 178
[10] Hall, Jefferson. p. 93
[11] Marshall. p. 167f
[12] McKenna. p. 23

There was no such ´original skinhead´ which might serve as the initial model of the cult, but „(...) kids wearing boots and sporting crops were seen in mod circles as early as 1964"[13], that is within in a youth culture of complex, almost situationistic self-stylisation, declared to be „pure unadulterated STYLE, the essence of style"[14]. The mods´ semantic rearrangement of their parent culture´s symbols, mostly of consumer habits and products, their distortion and inversion served as a means to establish a, to outsiders, highly encrypted culture providing unmonitored space of freely chosen symbolism, relations and rituals.

The new branch within mod fashion emerged mainly from the groups of hard mods[15] as ancestors, who gave rise to the new style which should soon grow into a cult of its own. Again, a new cult developed along the rejection of the massive influx of younger followers said to lack the original roots and aspiration, who were declared „´states´ because they didn't have the faintest idea about class or style, and had to rely on the High Street to tell them what to wear"[16]. (Aside: the term ´hard core´ as label might fit, but for a youth cult was, to my knowledge, first used with the early 80´s US movement of punk which rejected the ´no future´ attitude of the early days and was con-cerned in social and political committment, and ever since denotes a movement ´back to the roots´ and back to the/an authentic [sic!] style of life and art.) Only partially could skinhead culture be considered as being a hard-core reduction to mod roots, but set apart as a cult of its own right for its ability to adopt from various fields and its own distinctive characteristics which soon attracted public attention.

Shirts by Ben Sherman were most popular among mods, which ultimately lead to company advertisements which read: "Ben Sherman was a Mod God"[17]. Ben Sherman not only endulged himself in mod life of party, speed and amphetamine, but also formed a crucial part of the mod´s fashion. "Our Generation" as headline of the brand´s history exemplifies the company´s playfully referral to its part of mod history.

Gangs of inner cities´ hard mods, of whom the largest numbers were counted in London and Glasgow, had a more aggressive approach towards public appearance and eventually their opponents. They swapped their smart suits and expensive shoes for casual sportswear, jeans and boots, which served better for the regular ´aggro action´ and the notorious soccer trouble and street fights. The parole of upcoming skinheads „to dress smart and hard" thus reveals in how far their distinctive style was a functionalised patchwork of reaffirmed borrowings from the mods, and from the rude boys of the West Indian communities of Britain. Both subcultures drew their attraction from their latent violence, and from their permanent rebellion against the parent culture and the majorities' culture by rearranging and transforming their symbols and clothes into one's own, and finally re-presenting them to the public in a manner which would not be accepted by the British majority.

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[13] Marshall. p. 8
[14] Hall, Jefferson. p. 93
[15] for hard mods´ roots see: paragraph on immigrant culture
[16] Marshall. p. 8. The negative publicity of the bank holiday riots of the years 1963 and '64 is considered to be the first sign of the decline of the mods (The Who's *My Generation* was released in 1965)
[17] History chapter of www.bensherman.co.uk

Labour

Today's most famous skinhead apparel, the pair of „Docs", as Dr. Marten's Air Wear boots are usually called, virtually won the ´competition´ against army boots and National Coal Board miners boots. As Marshall reports[18], they were often worn one or two sizes too big, to support a martial look and heavy feel that was needed and feared. Not only style, but function made steel cap boots first choice as footwear, until they were declared „offensive weapons" by authorities and banned from soccer stadiums. At times they were even delaced and/or confiscated until the rivaling fans were

out of reach, which might have added to their mythification as the essential gear.

It took a youth cult less than 5 years to turn their fathers' boots into a classified weapon.

Boots[19] were, and still are, objects of fetishisation and narcisstic at-tention, since their aggressive appearance, combined with the ritual of preparation and showing off as a group embodies the skinhead approach to the outer world, thus the symbol has to be intensively taken care of. „Worn with Levi's jeans that were turned up to display the boots to their full menacing potential. Everybody I knew nurtured their Martens with the care and attention usually only reserved for dying relatives or girlfriends (...) bulling them up to a mirror-like shine that a guardsman would have been proud of (...) it was like sex sometimes (...) Exhausting, demanding and ritualistic (...)."[20]

By wearing their fathers' boots, the skinheads made their pride in their working-class background public, first to rebel against the decency of the parents' generation, second to independently declare style to be a matter of individually defined function. But, to avoid a masquerade like outfit, special apparel designed for work solely was rejected in favour of what might be labelled as ´connotative clothing´, such as the donkey jacket with a waterproof top of the back, worn by dockers and miners. Special desings or cuts were, if at all, chosen very carefully, more important was the regular environment the clothes were used in, and if an item was exclusively worn by blue collar workers, then it would fit the skinhead style.

To declare jeans an original borrowing from the field of labour would do injustice to the 50's cult of early rock'n'roll teddyboys, which first transformed blue denim into a leisure symbol of a youth cult, and thus completely suspending its original use. Nonetheless, the choice of jeans again hints at the semantically rather strict code of early skinhead fashion, demanding hard, but smart clothing.

Compared to borrowed army or sports wear, labour gear was not as-sociated with a special task or leisure activity, but with the inescapable economic basis, and the habitus of necessity[21] of ones class. For outsiders it was hard to tell the source the clothing was borrowed from, because the 60s youth fashion heavily drew from pop music and its colourful and screaming approach to style and clothes. Thus their fashion could easily be

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[18] Marshall. p. 17

[19] „Most of his mates wore new boots bought for a high price in a High Street shop. But not Joe's. His were genuine army-disposal boots; thick-soled, studded, heavy to wear and heavy to feel if slammed against a rib." Richard Allen „Skinhead" in: The Complete Richard Allen. p. 14

[20] McKenna. p. 24

[21] Pierre Bourdieu's notion of „habitus" denotes a set of flexible dispositions causing unintentional action within a distinct social setting, as their flexibility prevents a individual reflection on the activity. For the implementation of Bourdieu's concept of habitus in cultural studies, see: John Fiske „Cultural Studies and the Everyday Life" in: Cultural Studies. p 154

distinguished from the dominant fashion. But in the skinheads' case, there was less distance of original use and borrowed use.

The exaggerated and subversive approach of mod fashion was taken back in favour of more decent, thus assimilating clothing, which was laden with symbolic power only when associated with the skinhead lifestyle.

Immigrant culture

West Indian music with its most popular offshoots ska, rock steady, reggae and blue beat (see chapter 2.2.) was the main transmitter for the according culture of hoodlum and rude boy style to influence the founding developments of a distinct skinhead style. The sub-culture of immigrant youth was the only aspect of immigrant culture as a whole contributing to skinhead fashion, but nonetheless with strong effect. Mainly the bigger cities of Britain saw the immigrant youth dressed like the rude boy gangs of Kingston, whose style was then further condensed by the smart mod-fashion centered around suits, shortened trousers and polished shoes, often supported by shades and trilby hats.

The fraction of mods turning into skinheads embraced the style which was staged by immigrant youth at the famous soul allnighters, hoping that some of the backstreet and hoodlum flavour would rub off on them. But, the style was only partially adopted and therefore did not bear every facette of the original: in opposition to the West Indian immigrant kids', the skinheads' trousers were not handed down from their older brothers, but newly pur-chased, and thus had to be cut for the original look, which transformed a neccessity into fashion. Aside from this borrowed look of poverty, wrap-around shades, worn at any time of day and at any location, symbolised the mythical power of the violent aspects of the jamaican rude boy style, which probably was most important to British youth.

What sets immigrant culture as source apart is the variety of channels to transmit cultural extensions from one group to another. With medialised images of immigrants as first impressions of West Indians and very few social contact, it took until immigrant youth developed their own distinctive subculture that British youth became attracted to this, in various ways similarly organised cult. From then on, not only street buddies and school mates[22] served as link, but the growing number of soul parties and all-nighters made the two sub-cultures mingle. According to the fashion, skinheads made the music their no. 1 choice. Griffiths' *Boss Sounds* features a newspaper clipping with the head-line reading „Bluebeats Greatest Fans - the Skinheads"[23] and states the importance of the West Indian communities in Britain for the formation of what today might be called the canon of initial skinhead culture. (see chapter 2.2.)

Sports

Blending the working-class based football and boxing-culture with upper-class leisure like tennis by wearing brands associated with either of them, skinhead culture again

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[22] Marc Griffiths in his foreword to Boss Sounds: „(...) I first became interested in reggae when i heard *Israelites.* During the summer of 1970, a Burmese kid joined my school class and we often exchanged views on the latest reggae and soul sounds. He had three older brothers who were into reggae, and (...) it wasn't long before I was invited round to his place to listen to records on strange labels (...)"
[23] Griffiths. p. 7

chose and assimilated clothing for reasons of style as well as for the impact of the semantic shift the clothing underwent as it was recontextualised.

Fred Perry, Britain's most famous tennis player, lent his name to a range of tennis wear, which soon became popular among mods. Mainly the short-sleeved 4-button shirts, sporting the laurel wreath like all Perry clothes, turned into standard skinhead apparel, often chosen by their color schemes to match the favoured football team's colors. By the time, all different cuts of skinhead clothing, like Harrington jackets, cardigans, button down shirts or vests soon became available also by the most popular brands Fred Perry, Ben Sherman and Lonsdale.

As the majority of early skinheads had very little connection to the habits of upper class leisure, Perry shirts, as well as Ben Sherman shirts, were chosen for their comparatively high quality and durability, but mainly for aesthetic reasons, since their button down collars served as ´counterstyle´ against the hippie-look of broad, floating flares and wide collars.

The same holds true for the straight and unspectacular (even when compared to their parent's clothing in the late 60s) style of boxing equipment by Lonsdale London. Ex-professional boxer Bernard Hart opened his shop in 1960, but not until 1966 did his fashion become popular with the growing mod and rock'n'roll wave. „[...] because of the [...] shop just off Carnaby Street as much as for the love of the noble art"[24]. Their customers, who mainly belonged to each of the youth cults, chose Lonsdale sweatshirts and vests. The close relatedness of sports and subculture becomes apparent if the WBA logo below might serve as symbol for some of the skinhead culture's principles: cooperation, which leads to uniformity and control.

Football colours, patches and team shirts did not only serve as symbols of pride, but also did they symbolise the committment of the loyal supporters to a team, respectively to a sport itself and its principles.

THE WORLD BOXING ASSOCIATION
COOPERATION
UNIFORMITY   WBA   CONTROL
BOXING AS AN INTERNATIONAL SPORT

Hence, the choice of sports fashion fills the gap between the style-laden mod fashion and the function-laden and durable work apparel.

The affection for sports like boxing or football, which are based on the seemingly authentic ´proletarian´ principles of competition, might stem from the two schemes of aggressive manhood and violent conflict solution (see chapter 2.3.) inherent in skinhead culture from the very beginning.

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[24] Marshall, p. 170

Military

The today infamous adoption of military apparel among skinheads can be regarded as functional choice, since most of the movement's followers were short of money and thus had to rely on durable and yet cheap clothing. The recession hitting on the lower working class from the mid 60s on forced parents to cut down the expences provided for their children, and although youth always was the most affluent group of the British working class, compared to mod fashion skinhead apparel could be purchased at relatively low cost. Nonetheless, the importance of the symbolised, if not materialised aggression, together with the martial appearance of army clothing should not be underestimated as decisive factor for its growing popularity.

Second hand army boots were chosen for their durability and their ´lifting´ wear experience. Even in the first novels to exploit the new youth cult, army boots are presented as essential footwear (see footnote # 19) worn as well for their heavyness supporting the ´weekend parade´ down the street, as for their impact when used in ´aggro´ action.

Camouflage jackets and trousers and, mainly olive green flight jackets were popular among the young. Interestingly though, for reasons of style army clothing was mostly combined with a ´civil´ style. First, not to appear too clumsy, and second to avoid the impression of having a too strong affection for the military and royal sytem, or ambitions towards upper-class uniform appear-ance. Although the skinheads developed and defined a coherent uniform-like canon of hard dress, smart dress or casual dress, the congruence of original use and borrowed use of a fully fledged military outfit seems to have distracted them.

Unlike other youth cults, the early skinheads were at the same time extremely style-conscious, and yet tried to avoid all extraordinarity or too offensive appearance. The adopted sources youth culture, labour, immigrant culture, sports and military could have easily had provided a more shocking bricolage, but the working class background seems to have led to a down to earth style of nearly every day clothing, which was mainly chosen for function, and second for style. This difference, among others, probably made the skinheads emerge from the culture of mods and hard mods, and for the first time did a youth cult embrace the symbols of the parent generation without exaggeratingly altering or ironically distorting them, the combinations were at times unconventional, but never offensive, let alone subversive.

It was the fame the skinheads earned for their ´aggro´ action by which their style acquired its violent and martial symbolism. Especially heavy steel capped boots until today are the main symbol for the cult, and the main requisite to be part of it.

2.2. **Music**
Skinhead Moonstomp

Not only was the fashion of British immigrant youth adopted (see chapter 2.1.), but also the early reggae sound and blue-beat of uprising Jamaican artists and labels became fashionable. Seaside mod weekends of speed and scooters were exchanged for soul and reggae all-nighters at designated clubs and venues, which became focal points of attraction and gave rise to the northern soul scene. Early skinhead sounds ranged from the UK chart hits by the mass compatible stars of blue beat, reggae and two tone, like Desmond Dekker, Don Drummond or Bob Marley, to the rather uncommercial sixties underground sound of northern soul, „so called because of its popularity in the clubs and discos of northern England".[25] Although the West Indian sound was topping the charts, and seemingly attracted a broad following, second to the immigrant youth it was mainly the skinhead scene, which provided fans and customers for the sound systems, record shops and dance hall owners.

It took the punk uproar and its offspring Oi! until skinheads played for skinheads. Before, bands eventually adopted a skin-like outfit and style, like Slade[26], but in the late 60s and early 70s it was mainly the music of the west-indian immigrants that drew crowds of skinheads into dancing halls and famous all-nighters. The blend of physical unity on the dancefloor and mythical unity through fashion attracted youth seeking to make up for the five every-days
of the week. To adopt the style and music of the immigrant youth was a means to symbolise the felt similarities of social subordination and economic depression, which were considered to be a shared injustice and thus worth
the solidarity.

The inherent differences of social status and economic capital of white East-End working-class kids and their West-Indian counterparts were sym-bolically amalgamated by the early skinhead cult, respectively were transgressed by a modeling and styling of re-creative and autogenetic measures. As albums and singles became widely available at relatively low cost, the construction of an individual aural channel, adding to the visual channel had a strong effect on parents as well as on the peer group, since sound is inescapable and sensually more intense than fashion. Its versatility and inter-changeability on the one hand provided a extension of rather simple con-sumer patterns, adoptable by every affluent youth, on the other hand did the all-night culture demand its follower's commitment.

Rebellion against the parents' culture, but also against the dominant culture had found a form opposing the theatrical pathos of `dinosaur` rock and the screaming day-glo hippie psychedelia, which both did not match their promises of rebellion and liberation, but became part of the dominant culture and its cultural industry. Soulful hoodlum types who were still working their way up against various odds became teenage idols, not only

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[25] McKenna. p.9

[26] „At first, the band didn't want to go along with it, but Chas Chandler [ex-Animals] persuaded them that the skinheads were crying out for a band that they could identify with, and it could be their passport to the big time. (...) so with nothing to lose, they became overnight converts to the skinhead cause."
Marshall. p. 61

for their sound, but also for their mythically blurred background of Kingston gangdom and underdog status. But, even skinhead clientele was subordinate to manipulation, as told by Tony Cousins, then booker for Jamaica's Desmond Dekker's first UK appearance in 1967: „When we brought Desmond Dekker over we gave him a suit, but he insisted that the bottom six inches of the trousers should be cut off. Then the kids began to follow him, they rolled up their trousers and had their hair cut short."[27]

SKINHEADS

2.3. **Micropolitics**

The Dispositive of Style and Staging

In the case of micropolitics, the object of analysis is of immaterial nature, hence usually we would rely on indepth reports and psychological interviews to fully cover the whole range of processes within individuals and within the groups they define as theirs. But, as the purpose of this paper is to mainly present the cultural techniques and their application, the underlying principles are analysed with the help of medialised images only.

Novels which exploited the youth-cult can be regarded as useful sources, since they have proven to cover important aspects of the cult, although the exaggerated mystification and stylisation by the authors might have influenced the skinheads' approval of their authenticity. Given the reciprocal relation of micropolitics and style/staging, we must, adding to the literature, co-analytically draw from these paragraphs.

Social extensions, which are usually highly intertwined with their immediate environment, on the level of the individual are almost `naturally` acquired and not independently chosen. Only when they are turned into defining principles of social groups can they be used and functionalised for the group's ends, and might be preserved as learnable techniques which can be reproduced and applied at any time. Fashion and music as social extensions in their own right might be of minor complexity, as they consist of relatively common socio-cultural patterns of consumption and interpretation, but on the plane of micropolitics and self-staging they are functionalised to communicate the various societal forces.

The force relations determining early skinhead micropolitics connect as well the staging as a group and the styling of the individual, as the individual inner world with its almost autogenetic transformational processes. The dispositive of early skinhead micropolitics shows that these force relations are not transmitted in a completely

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[27] Marshall. p. 12

symmetrical way, but are concentrated on the individual, which is influenced by the group and by society. As energy can not be lost, but is transformed, force as the medium of energy increases in intensity the less channels there are. Style as the only means of the individual to transform the forces of society and of the group thus gains crucial importance. Influenced by the parent culture and by the subcultures the skinheads developed from, their micropolitics are mainly subjunct to group processes and acts of staging within society.
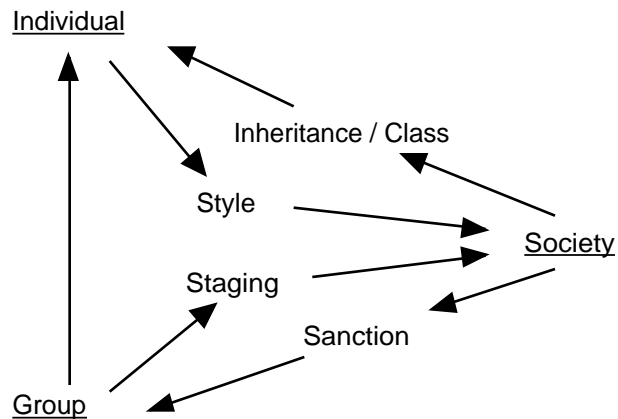
Richard Allen in his 1970 novel „Skinhead" also divides the dispositive of power of his protagonist Joe Hawkins roughly into the two realms of societal control and public staging within/through the group. Joe's relation to family and immediate environment is described as of hierarchic and violent nature, his economic capital is restricted by a job typical for the East End, which Cohen defines as „routine, dead-end, low-paid unskilled [...] associated with the labour intensive sections [...] (of) the service industries [...]"[28], coal delivery, that is. Even in his leisure time he is permanently controlled and restrained by economic forces. The only way to cope with these various compulsory effects seems to be to transform them into latent and finally open aggression in public. Joe's gang, of which he is accepted as leader, usually meets around the local pub, stirs up minor trouble there, and for real `aggro action` joins the ranks of football hooligans or takes part in the bank holiday riots. The basic principles of their action and their staging in all cases are latent brutality and youthful virility, which, when combined, regularly lead to assaults.

Some of these characteristics also hold true for Terry Blake, protagonist of Stewart Home's novel „Defiant Pose"[29], although not only the timely distance, but Home's caricaturistic style and satirical exaggeration make it
difficult to refer to Blake as a representative of the classic skinhead cult. Most of Blake's thoughts center around the dividing of skinheads into nationalists, fascists, pro/pre- or situationists, socialists, anarchists or communists, and around the question of the perfect way to totally destroy capitalism and the power of the ruling class. Home should be mentioned although the crucial days of the cult were definitely over when he turned to novels in 1989, because he provides insight into the theoretical background of the cult. Blake embodies the close relation of sensuality, sexuality, politics and power. His

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[28] Hall, Jefferson. p. 31
[29] I unfortunately had to use the german translation, „Stellungskrieg", Edition Nautilus.

excursions into the realms of polymorphous perversion, which is said to ultimately overthrow the ruling class, are accompanied by citations of Marx and discussions on the nature of real working class revolt and the style all these processes should be subject to.

In both novels, mainly male aggression, virility and brutality are the most influential aspects to the organisation of skinhead gangs' hierarchies , adding to virility and vitality as threatening outer appearance, especially towards women, to set the group as such apart. This rather archaic concept of the male leader, who has proven his strenght in one way or another, and thus is acclaimed leader of the mob, might have been derived from the all day concepts de-termining the social life, which did not only characterise the individual situation `on the job`, but also that of the parents and families. Furthermore, the skinhead cult itself might have drawn mainly on youth whose individual view on the world was of such nature. In any case, early skinhead culture lacked any approach to develop distinctive ways of organising group life emancipatorily.

Instead, various occasions of public gathering, such as soccer games, disco nights and the notorious bank holidays, but also every day situations were transformed into spectacels to create and undermine the public image of omnipotent strenght and permanent rebellion. As these ends could only be reached by rational and organisational effort, the cult itself developed the techniques of securing existing hierarchic structures as well as recruiting new members willing to fit these hierarchies.

Inheritance might be stated as the prevalent concept underlying most of the social extensions, which ultimately lead to the loss of the almost situationistic appeal of the mod times, and thus skinhead culture applied its conservative approaches to style, music and staging. Two reasons for this development might be: first, to secure the distinct common spaces of the group and unify the group's countermovement to the increasing economic and socio-political pressures on the families (see footnote # 4), second, to regain the pride in working class culture their parents had lost during the economic depression up to the mid 60s, and compensate this lack by overstressing the blue-collar part of the own history.

Cast into a canon of fashion, music and staging, the skinhead way became a rigid set of intertwined techniques which became infamous to the public for their aggression and their violent effects, but nonetheless are still attracting youth. Lasting for more than 30 years, the cult is organised on the same or similar principles, but eventually gave rise to various offsprings, such as the Oi! movement, and inspired the fashion and look of later youth cults. But the classic skinhead style is even for outsiders to the cult still comparatively easy to spot, since the image is coherent and distinct. Only the streetfights and terrace wars are no longer incited by skinhead crowds, but were taken over by hooligans in the 70s and early 80s, who provided a new surface for uncontrolled violence and youth rebellion.

3.   Skinheads Oscillating between Subversive Subculture and Affirmative Parent Culture

The gangs and mobs of skinheads made it to headlines and frontpages of British newspapers and magazines, but not only for their style. It was their violent public appearance, which mainly contributed to their `fame`, but the skinhead movement failed to functionalise this image for emancipating ends. It never was a counterculture of fundamental and radical opposition to the political power, nor to the parents' way of life. As stated earlier, skinheads used the commodities and symbols of the parent generation without altering or ironically distorting them. It took the whole skinhead way with all its facettes to claim distinction, or at least difference from the parent culture. The combinations were at times unconventional, but never offensive or subversive, destructive at best.

Dressed like their fathers' generation and keeping a relatively low profile during their every days, it was the weekend ´aggro´ action, by which skinheads acquired their violent and martial image. The public shock effect of smart dressed, but ultra-violent youth was not as big as in the mod days, since steel cap boots already hint at the latent violence of the mobs, but it was exactly the pre-dictability of trouble to come (when skinheads met one of their proclaimed enemies `hippies`, `greasers` and `pakis`), which contradicted their rather conservative and at times sportive appearance. In a way the exaggerating characteristics of the mods' lifestyle were taken back and stripped of their extravaganza, which turned violence into a commodity. Violence was used against nearly everybody, even within the own peer group there was no refuge.

The retro trend led not only to unmasked violence for its own sake, but also to the re-establishment of working-class community relations. Skinheads most likely shared this effort with their parents, but independently took to action to create spaces of shared experience, which were restricted by societal com-pulsion and economic pressure. With spaces at hand, the self to use them had to be constructed, and the models were chosen from other subcultures mainly, but the influence of the parent culture and even of the dominant culture must
not be underestimated. The concepts of hierarchy, leadership, tradition and conflict solution were adopted from the micropolitics of the parent culture and served as an affirmative link as well as controlling channel of repressive sanctions, which had to be compensated by staging and style. Compen-sation was not achieved via opposition to ruling power, but via transformatio-nal processes which regularly wound up to uncontrollable outbursts of vio-lence, even against passersby.

Early skinhead culture did not develop any technique of emancipating its followers from the restraints of society, but merely contributed to the partial assimilation of youth rebellion and its re-creational effects. The self was not altered from within, was not subject to reflected emancipation, but mainly constructed as immediate reaction to the societal environment, and this construction was based on the assumption that society had to be accepted

as given. The few, but nonetheless important, spaces that were created and colonised were inhabited and defended with the use of the same techniques and principles the bourgeois culture made use of. This lack of independence is up to today compensated by the uncritical fetishisation of the cult's roots.

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