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REGGAE RASTAS & RUDIES: STYLE AND THE SUBVERSION OF FORM

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Introduction

In the section entitled "The Style of the Mods" (Part 1), I attempted to describe a specific style of the sixties, and to distinguish in what ways it was innovative. I put forward a theory of style as a means whereby commodities can be redefined and used to signal a measure of freedom (albeit circumscribed) from the values of the dominant groups which control the production of those commodities. In the study of the Kray Twins (part 2) I looked at the equally exclusive style of the London Gangster, who shared not only the same space (Soho) and time (the mid 60's) as the mainstream metropolitan mod, but aspired towards a similarly pernicious hedonism and suffered from the same dependence upon identical forms of popular fantasy. I attempted to show how, through the sanctification of style, the unstable and volatile Ronnie Kray managed to avert the crisis and chaos which permanently threatened him. Beyond this, the daily devotions of the Firm assisted the deification of Kray and validated the formalisation of style into a complete system of closure. The world was thereby rendered controllable and comprehensible.

Both the mods and the gangsters participated in the same Dream and evolved styles by which the successful fulfilment of that Dream was, at least symbolically, denoted. Whilst caricaturing certain aspects of the dominant culture, they remained ultimately inaccessible to mainstream analyses and orthodox sympathies, and were conspicuously excluded - disreputable and dangerous. Whilst not suggesting that the mods' style and the Kray Twins' closed system possessed any overtly oppositional potency, I think they can both be legitimately termed techniques of cultural appropriation - ways in which an increasingly alien environment could be conquered and invested with meaning.

The traditionally tense relationship between sections of the working-class community in certain areas of London and the agencies of social control (school, work, police, etc.) had, of course, created deviant subcultures in the past – subcultures which had sought to evade and subvert the classifications imposed upon them. In the sixties, as the processes of change were accelerated (by large scale redevelopment, and rehousing programmes etc) the need for alternative self-definitions became increasingly urgent. The council flat and family car demanded at least a modification in the old aggressive consciousness of class and seemed to forbode assimilation, and the onus fell more and more upon the deviant group to effect the required inversion of the dominant perspective, to articulate the feelings of exclusion which persisted despite the greater opportunities for consumption which the post-war world offered. The temporary suspension of large-scale class antagonisms led to a kind of cultural implosion whereby the keen and bitter awareness of class was dispersed throughout the

community and reconstituted itself in a distilled form inside the deviant group. Consequently, postures of defiance became more visible and extreme, the ways in which that defiance was communicated became at once more sophisticated, more subtle and more various.

But the sensational excursions undertaken by the mods (to the coast, to the West End) and the gangsters (into Soho, into violence) merely aggravated the myopic condition endemic to both groups and indicated only a partial disaffiliation from the values and goals of those in power. Ronnie Kray, in particular, was incarcerated within bourgeois modes of expression, bourgeois standards of success, and the mod's habitual consumption of commodities (no matter how radical the redefinition of those commodities) was ultimately debilitating. Neither group was sufficiently disaffected to draw out the implications of its position to a point where an ideological break with the dominant system was possible. Or, to apply Paul Willis's terminology, the mod and the gangster were unwilling or unable to transcend that time-scale in which each cultural "moment", each "apparently spontaneous, concrete circumstance, constitutes a reaffirmation of the econimic base."(1) I shall now turn to other subcultures, more or less contemprancous with those already studied, which , to a greater or lesser extent, understood the subtle mechanics of internalisation and determined to reverse that insidious process whereby ideology perpetuates itself in a disguised form (as "common sense" etc) by evolving more radical and effective techniques of cultural appropriation.

I shall start by pursuing a subculture from its point of origin in Jamaica to its transplantation inside the immigrant communities of South London. Apart from illustrating how the development of class-consciousness can be facilitated by a recognition of the added dimension of colour, I intend to indicate in what ways the immigrant subculture interacted and converged with similar subcultures generated within the host community, and in what ways it retained its integrity.

1. Notting Hill Nightmare, Brixton's Broken Dreams

"Man to man is so injust,
The man in whom you place your trust,
He's the man to do you an injust.
And that's life, you know
But life is the thing which is "life"
And life is not just "life"
And life is what you make it, as I will say.
So if you try it-you can break it

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1) In "Performance and Meaning"

If you try it you can make it, if you try."

Big Youth in reggae lyric "The Facts of Life"

In his book, "Black British, White British", Dilip Hiro describes how emigration proved a profoundly disorienting and disappointing experience for the majority of West Indians who entered this country in the fifties and sixties. The post-war economic boom in Britain left a demand for unskilled labour which the native worker was either reluctant or unable to supply, and many of the skilled and semi-skilled workers who figured largely in the first wave of immigration were themselves forced to take on menial jobs. The formation of black communities, where deplorable conditions prevailed, followed exactly that pattern set years before in the States. As the West Indians moved in, the whites tended to move out and profiteering landlords exploited to the full the limited accommodation available to blacks. In London, the West Indians largely concentrated in the South - in Paddington, Brixton and Notting Hill, and, as immigration from the Caribbean accelerated until a peak was reached in 1962, these areas became saturated and there was a concommitant deterioration both in housing conditions and in relations with the host community. The good jobs, improved status and sanitary housing which the West Indian had come to expect from the mother country (which, according to Hiro, was presented as "the historico-cultural navel of West Indian society") were not forthcoming and his disappointment was compounded by the often hostile attitude exhibited by members of the white community - an attitude which found climactic expression in the 1958 race riots in Nottingham and Notting Hill, and in the hysterical support which Enoch Powell received in the sixties.

Paradoxically, Powell's manipulation of white hysteria helped the immigrant community to clarify certain questions of racial identity which had previously been baulked and confused by the official West Indian policy of multi-racialism, which had been enshrined in ideal form in the national motto of the newly independent Jamaica ("Out of many, one people"). The arrival in Britain, in December 1964, of Malcolm X and the formation by Roy Sawh, Jan Carew and Michael de Freitas of the Racial Adjustment Action Society (abbreviated with aggressive irony to the Jamaican swear-word RAAS) helped the concept of blackness to be evaluated positively by many West Indians. But the new consciousness of colour flowed through other and less formal channels than those constructed by either Malcolm or Michael X. It was embedded in the patois, the reggae and the "rudeness", which was beginning to emerge from the slums of Kingston. The Bulk of the immigrants who flocked to this country in the early sixties as the "open door" threatened to close once and for all, were drawn from the ranks of the poor and the unskilled and, if they were not directly responsible for the importation of the new styles, then they were clearly extremely receptive (more so, perhaps, than the earlier immigrants who were largely committed to middle-class goals) to

the collective redemption and personal confidence which such styles promised. To understand these developments and to ensure an accurate assessment of their impact on, and applicability to the standard West Indian community in Britain, we must first consider the Jamaican context.

2. Sun, Sea, and Slavery

"There are no facts in Jamaica everybody has his own version of everything" Michael Thomas in "The Wild Side of Paradise" (Rolling Stone" July 19, 1973)

"Statements which are believed to be true are often sociologically more important than those which are true".
University College of West Indies report: "The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica".

In 1962, Jamaica won its independence, and its commitment to racial integration was advertised in the already mentioned national motto. In 1965, Marcus Garvey, the founder of the "Back to Africa" movement of the 1920's was nominated Jamaica's first national hero by the new government. These two apparently irreconcilable gestures expose the central contradiction in Jamaican society, which, despite national autonomy, remains unresolved. Jamaica's parliament and judiciary (both modelled directly on their English counterparts) continued, for many years, to function as though the ideals of harmonious coexistence and equal opportunity had already been realised.[1] These myths (precious, of course, to all Western democracies) were particularly dear to a Jamaica which was anxious to achieve recognition as a "civilised" nation and to win respect from the White Powers. The posthumous honours bestowed upon Garvey were a concession to public opinion inside Jamaica and completely undercut the impulse towards racial syntheses.

To fully explore this contradiction, one should really resort to a more detailed analysis of a history of Jamaican race relations than I am prepared to undertake. Rex Nettleford accomplishes this task admirably in his book "Mirror, Mirror" and does justice to the complexity of the subject. These relations are indeed complex, but the basic issues seem remarkably clear (at least from a distance!). The simple facts of economic exploitation are transparent; or, to be more precise, they are written in colour across the face of Jamaican society. The white colonial aristocracy lingers on above a middle class which is chiefly brown (mulatto, Indian, "Syrian") or yellow (Chinese immigrants own many of the larger shops) and the blacks

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1. The fulminations of the Black Power movement, centred in Trinidad and the University of the West Indies, soon put paid to this policy, and the law and order police campaign recently launched and the massive crusade currently under way show just how completely it has been abandoned.

remain on the bottom in the appalling slums of Ghost Town, Trench Town, Greenwich Farm and the Dungles in West Kingston, and in the shanty towns of the rural districts. Colonial exploitation persists in a thinly-disguised form as tourism, and the north coast is more or less constantly besieged by armies of very rich, very rapacious Americans and Europeans whose involvement in local culture extends to the occasional bland calypso,[1] and, of course, the ubiquitous bacardi and coke. The depredations of the tourists are only surpassed by those of the large American companies who control the mining of bauxite which is extracted in huge quantities and shipped out to the States, where it is used in the production of aluminium. The American reliance on Jamaican bauxite guarantees that every proposal to establish a Jamaican-based aluminium industry is baulked and circumvented at a governmental level. To the dispossessed black it would appear that the white man only interrupts his colossal programme of play and consumption to devour the very land on which he lives. In effect, the position of the black in Jamaican society has not improved qualitatively since the days of slavery.

If the account seems loaded, it is because the facts themselves are loaded, and it is because exploitation is so visible in Jamaica and proceeds so consistently on strict racial lines, that it is so amenable to metaphorical analysis. Indeed the structure of Jamaican society seems to lend itself to the type of poetic exegesis which we shall encounter when examining the subcultures of the Kingston slums, and the awareness of the continuance of a modified form of slavery provides the necessary fuel for the hell-fire rhetoric of the various apocalyptic cults which proliferate throughout the Caribbean, supplies the Ras Tafarian with the experimental foundation upon which his elaborate metaphorical system is built, and shapes the angry and violent response of the urban Rude Boy. And so I shall pass from the Sorelian "diremption" (a heuristic device used to further the argument) to the infinitely more significant collective "myth" (from which, as Sorel asserts, "proceeds action").

3. Babylon on Beeston Street

"The bars they could not hold me
Walls could not control me"
from The Wailer's "Duppy Conqueror"

"I was born with the English language and it proved to be my enemy".
James Baldwin.

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1. Bland in form if not in content the satirical lyrics of "The Sparrow's" calypsoes lie concealed inside the deceptively light musical structure. Reggae is intrinsically less acceptable - the form itself is "heavier".

"Revolution soon-come"

Bulldog quoted in "The Wild Side of Paradise"

The experience of slavery recapitulates itself perpetually in the everyday interactions of the Jamaican black. It is principally responsible for the unstable, familial structure (disrupting the traditionally strong kinship networks which even now survive among the peoples of West Africa) and obviously goes on determining patterns of work and relations with authority. It remains an invisible shaping prescence which haunts the slums of Ghost Town and even now defies exorcism. In fact it is interpolated into every verbal exchange which takes place on the teeming streets of every Jamaican slum. As Dilip Hiro points out: "the evolution of the creole language was related directly to the mechanics of slavery". Communication was systematically blocked by the white overseer who banded slaves of different tribes together so that cultural links with Africa were effectively severed. The laws which forbade the teaching of English to slaves meant that the new language was secretly appropriated (by rough approximation, by lip reading etc) and transmitted orally. The 17th century English spoken by the master class was refracted through the illicit channels of communication available to the black and used to embody the subterranean semantics of a nascent culture which developed in direct defiance of the master's wishes. Distortion was inevitable, perhaps even deliberate.

Subsequently, the language developed its own vocabulary syntax and grammar; but it remains essentially a shadow-language fulfilling in a more exaggerated and dramatic way those requirements, which, under normal circumstances, are satisfied by regional working-class accents and group argot. Form implicitly dictates content, and poles of meaning, fixed immutably in a bitter and irreversible experience silently reconstruct that experience in everyday exchange. The "langue" indeed, proclaims its parenthood in everyday "parole". As we shall see later, this fact is intuitively grasped by the members of certain West Indian subcultures, and language is used as a particularly effective means of resisting assimilation and preventing infiltration by members of the dominant groups. As a screening device it has proved to be invaluable; and the "Bongo talk" and patois of the Rude Boy deliberately emphasise its subversive rhythms so that it becomes an aggressive assertion of racial and class identities. As a living index to the extent of the black's alienation from the cultural norms and goals of those who occupy higher positions in the social structure, the creole language is unique.

The expulsion of the black from the wider linguistic community meant that a whole culture evolved by a secret and forbidden osmosis. Deprived of any

legitimate cultural exchange, the slave developed an excessive individualism and a set of cultural artefacts which together represent the vital symbolic transactions which had to be made between slavery and freedom, between his material condition and his spiritual life, between his experience of Jamaica and his memories of Africa. In a sense, the transition was never satisfactorily accomplished, and the black Jamaican remains suspended uneasily between two worlds neither of which commands a total commitment. Unable to repair this cultural and psychological breach, he tends to oscillate violently from one world to the other, and ultimately he idealizes both. Ultimately, indeed, he is exiled from Jamaica, from Britain and from Brixton, and sacrifices his place in the real world to occupy an exalted position in some imaginative inner dimension where action dissolves into being, where movement is invalidated and difficult at the best of times, where solutions are religious rather than revolutionary.

In fact, the initial rationalisations of slavery took an explicitly religious form. Barred from the white man's churches, the slave learnt the Christian doctrine obliquely and grafted it, with varying degrees of success, onto the body of pagan beliefs which he had carried overfrom Africa. The residual superstitions (voodoo, witchcraft, etc) persist even now beneath the surface of the Christian faith and periodically reassert themselves in their original forms in the hills and rural areas of Jamaica, and are resurrected in the music of the more esoteric city-based bands.[1] The schools of Christian worship native to Jamaica still retain the ancient practises of the trance, spirit-possession and "speaking in tongues", and these Churches (the Pentecostal Church, the Church of God in Christ, etc) continue to attract enormous congregations. As a means of consolidating group ties and of articulating a group response to slavery, these nonconformist churches were to prove very valuable indeed. By appealing at once to the individual (by subscribing to the doctrine of personal "grace") and to the group (by promising collective redemption), they provided an irresistible solution – a means not of closing the gulf but of transcending it completely. The Bible offered limitless scope for improvisation and interpretation. The story of Moses leading the suffering Israelites out of captivity was immediately applicable and won a permanent place in the mythology of the Jamaican black. The various cults pursued the ambiguous apocalypse along exactly those paths traced out elsewhere by Norman Cohn,[2] proclaiming at different times divine revolutions, post-mortem revelations.

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1. Exuma, for example, sing of the Obeahman, duppies (ghosts) and zombies.

2. In "Pursuit of the Millenium".

Whenever God seemed to be procrastinating, there were always the chiliastic cults of the rural areas ready to hurry things up. Even now, on occasion, "Pocomania" (literally "a little madness") spreads with brief but devastating effect through the townships of the hills, and the Revival is, of course, always there to be revived. A million millennia counted out in days and months and minutes have come and gone and still God speaks to wild-eyed men in dreams. Judgement Day, the Day of Turnabout is never remote: it is always the day after tomorrow. And Judgement Day is dear to the heart of every Rasta and every other Rudie; and for these it means the redistribution of an exclusively secular power.

The displacement of material problems onto a spiritual plane is of course by no means peculiar to the black Jamaican. The ways in which this essentially religious perspective is transmuted into a purely idealist existentialist one are, perhaps, more extraordinary and certainly more pertinent to the phenomenon under consideration here. Christianity still permeates the West Indian imagination, and a Biblical mythology continues to dominate; but, at certain given points in the social structure[1], this mythology has been turned back upon itself so that the declared ascendancy of Judeao-Christian culture (with its emphasis on work and repression) can be seriously scrutinized and ultimately rejected. Instrumental in this symbolic reversal were the Rastafarians.

The Rastafarians believe that the Emperor Haille Sellassie of Ethiopia is God and that his accession to the Ethiopian throne fulfils the prophecy made by Marcus Garvey ("Look to Africa, when a Black King shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near") and a plethora of additional prophecies gleaned from the Book of Revelations. He is the Ras Tafari, the Negus, the King of Kings, the Living God, Lord of Lords, the Conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah. More recently, the simple appellation "Jah" has been used. Thus, the racial and religious problems which had preoccupied the Jamaican black for centuries converged and found immediate and simultaneous resolution. Predictably, the cult drew its support chiefly from the slums of Kingston.

Events conspired to give the movement maximum exposure. An article in the "Jamaica Times" (December 7, 1935) assisted the identification of the cult with a certain militancy of opinion as regards matters of race and class. This is again somewhat ironic (of effect of Powell on West Indian immigrants in Britain), as the article itself was derived from a piece of

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1. Namely among the unemployed young and the deviant adult population.

Italian propaganda designed to discredit the Ethiopian people with whom the Italians were at war. It drew attention to the alleged emergence in Ethiopia and the Congo of a fanatical sect headed by Haille Sellassie and called the Niyabinghi Order, which was dedicated to the overthrow of white domination by racial war. Niyabinghi was translated in Jamaica,[1] as "Death to black and white oppressors" and adopted by the violent fringe of the Rasta movement who hence-forth called themselves Niyamen.[2] The arrest of two Rasta leaders, L.P.Howell and H.Dunkley, for various breaches of the peace lent the movement a further notoriety, and the formation of the Pinnacle community by Howell in 1941 began that long association of Rastafarianism with the cultivation and smoking of ganja, "the holy herb", which was grown in large quantities in the commune. Pinnacle also showed how strongly the authorities were prepared to react to the Rastas' attempts at economic and ideological autonomy and the commune was perpetually besieged by police.

By 1943, after serving another term in prison, Howell had supplemented the original doctrine with many of his own personal beliefs. Two additions deserve a special mention. Firstly, Howell encouraged the men of Pinnacle to emulate the long, plaited hairstyles of the East African Somali, Masai and Galla tribesmen who were appearing regularly in magazine photographs at the time. Those who adopted the style thus advertised their faith and invited stigma. They were called "locksmen" or "men of dreadlocks" ("dread" meaning "capable of inspiring fear and awe"). By 1947, the men of dreadlocks were being sighted in the streets of Kingston.

The other crucial improvisation for which Howell was responsible involved a redefinition of the Divinity. Haille Sellassie was internalised by a total act of sympathetic assimilation (I know Him, therefore I am Him?) which was interpreted by the individual Rasta not as a personality disorder so much as a real way of dealing with an intolerable and burdensome alienation. It was the supreme act of faith which diminished the distance between ego and Godhead, between mythical past and fantasy future; and even if it was just an illusion fostered by too much of the "holy herb", it certainly produced results and prophets by the score. Perceptions were suddenly endowed with an extraordinary potency. They became galvanic, and

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1. Cyamande, a British group made up of six Jamaican and two Guyanan musicians play a unique mixture of soul, rock and reggae which they call Nyah Rock and one of their numbers is called Nyabbingh. The cult apparently survives.

2. Is this another example of a "flawed fantasy" creating the conditions of its own realisation?

the act of seeing became indeed an act, until "seeing" was itself a verb of startling transitivity. In short, the identification of God with Man, implicit in the cult of Ras Tafari became explicit. This development is again by no means unique (many of the primitive apocalyptic cults studied by Cohn conform to this pattern), but the transformation of the Rasta's self-image endowed his suffering with the most profound significance and gave it the supreme validation. It helped him to survive (perhaps, even to thrive on) prejudice and official disapproval and enabled him to adopt a position of "Anastasias contra mundum". But more than this, it gave him the confidence with which to explore the possibilities for freedom within that mythical Africa which was, quite simply, all those things which Jamaica was not. It allowed him to embellish those Old Testament archetypes with new and vital meanings to locate hell and the land of milk and honey in the here and now. It enabled him to leave the Western world, the Babylon of change, of "suffering", of "fantasy" and "vanity", and to enter that timeless Zion which is present time itself. As we shall see, the Rastaman renegotiated his relationship with the universe by means of infrastructural innovations at the complementary levels of language and perception. He cast himself in the role of prophet destined to heal that age-old breach between the unchanging Word of God and the mortal world of sensation by presenting himself as the Living Apocrypha in whom was written the impending debacle of the White Way of Life. Needless to say, Howell was committed to a mental hospital in 1960 (and doubtless diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic).

Meanwhile, the disintegration of the Pinnacle commune, following a series of police raids in 1954, led to the dispersal of the dreadlocksmen throughout the black community of Kingston and marked a further deterioration in relations with the law. The movement began to grow as large-scale immigration and a fast approaching independence made prominent the old problems of national identity. Simultaneously, the victimisation of the highly visible locksmen dramatized larger class conflicts, and tended to concentrate attention upon the condition of the impoverished black. Tacit support was won from those who, whilst unprepared to make the locksman's complete break with the social norms were nonetheless willing to extend their sympathy and respect. The authorities' determination to extirpate the Rasta "menace" from the streets of the capital merely hardened the locksman's resolve to publicize his estrangement from the moral and legal codes of Babylon. In February 1954, one group of 18 Rastas was charged with rioting, and in April, 32 locksmen were arrested at North Street while marching with banner and Bible demanding freedom.

This increased harassment coincided with an intensification of interest at a governmental level in the cultivation of ganja. To the middle class, Rasta meant ganja and ganja meant crime and subversion. This simple equation inaugurated a massive campaign against drug usage (which had previously been more or less tolerated amongst the poor and unemployed). In 1957, the Government denied the special privileges traditionally claimed by the Maroons of Accompong involving ganja cultivation. The ritual smoking of grass had performed a sacramental function for most dedicated Ras Tafarians who identified ganja as the "herb" of Genesis 8, Psalm 18 and Rev22, and the rigorous enforcement of stricter legislation was aimed specifically at the locksman who boldly paraded his African affiliations and acutely embarrassed a Government which was desperately trying to consolidate its nationhood and improve its international image.[1] The periodic calls for repatriation to Africa threw these official plans into even greater jeopardy and were greeted with a correspondingly hostile reaction by the dominant sections of opinion. In 1958, the convention at Kingston Pen called by Prince Edward C. Edwards to discuss the project of mass repatriation was met with blanket disapproval in the press. The activities of the Reverend Claudius Henry, who, in 1959 organised an Emancipation Jubilee to celebrate an imminent return to African received even stronger censure. Henry, who had founded the Africa Reform Church and styled himself "The Repairer of the Breach", was arrested and charged with felonious treason after an association with black American communists was uncovered. That liaison between the disciples of the Ras Tafari and the exponents of revolutionary politics most feared by orthodox Jamaican opinion had finally taken place. Henry's house was found to contain an arsenal of guns, explosives and machetes; and letters were found in his possession addressed to Fidel Castro along with open incitements to violence.

Public opinion was predictably mortified when, on June 21,1960, as the Henry trial was still under way, there occured a bloody confrontation at Red Hills between police, national guardsmen and a group of "bearded men", after a secret cache of arms had been discovered. Two officers were killed, and subsequently the bodies of three Ras Tafarians were found in a grave in Red Hills; all allegedly members of Henry's Church; all apparently victims of military-style executions. The theory was promulgated in the press that those men were murdered by black American militants who had thereby usurped their position as leaders of the group.

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1. The U.S.A. which provided Jamaica with much of its revenue would be particularly anxious that the flow of drugs from the island be controlled.

This violent incident had obvious repercussions for Henry who was held up as an example to all would-be revolutionaries. Rastafarianism was decried from the bench as a "wicked doctrine" of "fantastic stupidity" which had been foisted by certain ruthless and dangerous men upon "the poor and illiterate people of the island". Three years later, another sensational outbreak of what this time appeared to be a purely spontaneous violence occured on the north coast. On Holy Thursday, 1963, a group of Rasta men attacked and set on fire a gas station at Coral Gardens, 10miles from Montego Bay, the famous holiday resort, and killed the attendant. They then went on to murder a Jamaican guest at a nearby motel and to attack the house of a local overseer. A skirmish broke out with the police and 8 people were killed (two policemen, three Ras Tafarians, and three passers-by who were drawn into the battle). Three Rastafarians were arrested and charged with murder. Even the opulent tourist centres were no longer sacrosanct and the Coral Gardens incident provoked an even fiercer panic than that generated by the confrontation at Red Hills, three years earlier. Some 150 Ras Tafarians were arrested in police raids on four different parishes and brought up before the courts on charges ranging from vagrancy to unlawful possession; from being a "suspected person" to being in possession of dangerous drugs and dangerous weapons. A clergyman conducting the funeral service of one of the policemen killed in the incident delivered a torrent of invective during his ovation which aptly summarizes the outraged attitude of the authorities:

"The Rastafarians" he said "are .... a band of vicious people whose doctrine and activities could not suit this or any other government".

(From report in "Daily Gleaner" 16.4.1963).

The ostracization of the Rastaman was thus completed. The original intimations of a profound and onerous alienation which found symbolic expression in the cult of Ras Tafari had merely been confirmed by the official reaction. The dreadlocksmen had touched upon certain deeply-rooted prejudices, and racial and cultural anxieties by making an art form out of exclusion. Protracted class and racial antagonisms had created amongst the Rastamen and the constituted authorities mutual expectations of violence, and these expectations, along with a host of Biblical prophecies (the primitive prologue to revolution) had found bloody and disasterous fulfillment in the incident at Red Hills and Coral Gardens.

But these spectacular events should not be allowed to obscure the quieter development within the cult itself of a psychology of withdrawal and an accompanying aesthetic far removed from that which had produced the

tragic and cathartic denouements of 1960 and 1963. To understand these developments, we must return to the historically important perceptual adjustment already mentioned in relation to Howell.

The identification of Man with God meant that the minutiae of religious theory and practice could only be decided in the individual conscience. Although the Bible did indeed contain the Word of God, Scripture had indicated that half of this has "not been written except in the believer's heart" and so ample space was left for improvisation. The movement was of course innately heretical and the concept of an orthodoxy would have been unthinkable. The doctrine of Ras Tafarianism tended to evolve by schizogenesis and conflicting interpretations of the Biblical and Garveyite scriptures led to the formation of countless independent schools of thought. To reduce this chaos the U.C.W.I. research paper of 1960managed to set out a broad base of beliefs common to all Rastafarians. The 4 points manifesto went as follows:

1. Ras Tafari is the Living God.
2. Ethiopia is the black man's home.
3. Repatriation is the way of redemption for black men. It has been foretold and will occur shortly.
4. The ways of the white man are evil, especially for the black.

I shall briefly suggest a clarification of each of these tenets and shall attempt to pursue them to their point of origin in the material situation of the believer. This is undertaken in the interests notso much of demystification (which I don't think is necessary)[1] as of simple decodification of a set of symbolic responses.

The location of the Godhead in Ras Tafari, a living man (whether this be the Emperor of Ethiopia, Self, or species-Man) represents the secularization of what were originally religious terms of reference and constitutes the final appropriation of an alien faith. The deification of the Black Man concludes that process whereby the white man's belief-system was encountered, adapted, and inverted to serve the totally different needs of the slave-caste.

Ethiopia provides the group with a collective id which promises to dissolve all tension and to reintegrate the Rasta with his tribe, his culture and himself. Dialectically it provides that ideal dimension

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1. i.e. I would argue that the believer was himself aware of the symbolic dimension.

(Utopia) against which the Rastafarian can judge his present condition and assess in what ways it is lacking.

As Rex Nettleford notes in "Mirror Mirror" emigration is the black Jamaican's conditioned response to "pressure" (excessive economic determination, severe privation, unbearable cultural contradictions). The question whether this repatriation should take place literally, by a physical journey in the real world or in the imagination by a systematic reclamation of the African cultural heritage is almost irrelevant when we remember what Ethiopia has come to mean to the Rasta man.

The total rejection of the white man and his ways is, of course, predictable when one considers the experience of slavery, and although the conspiracy-theories[1] which are used to back up this rejection are somewhat biassed, they do facilitate the reinterpretation of history. They do enable the Rastafarian to find his own history.

Thus, the four precepts represent symbolisations of a whole complex of responses to a situation of extreme alienation. To apply an exclusively literal interpretation would be to underestimate the sophistication of those responses. The religious milieu in which Rastafarianism was evolved demanded a specifically Biblical mythology and this mythology had to be appropriated and made to serve a different set of cultural needs if it was to win support from a people who were accustomed to look for salvation amongst the pages of the Book of Revelations. By a dialectical process of redefinition, the Scriptures, which had constantly absorbed and deflected the revolutionary potential of the Jamaican black, were used to locate that potential, to negate the Judeao-Christian culture which had originally produced those very scriptures. Or, in the more concise idiom of the Jamaican street-boys, the Bible was taken, read and "flung back rude".

The points of faith which I have tried to elucidate form a common conceptual base for all the various schools of Rastafarianism. As the 1960 report emphasised, the "locksmen" were merely the militant and

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1. For example, Michael Thomas mentions a group of Rastafarians who refused to attend a series of lectures on contraception because they saw the course as part of a world wide plan launched by the whites to decimate the black races and render their black "queens" infertile.

conspicuous fringe of a movement which had drawn support from much wider sections of the black community.[1]

But the "locksmen" constitute an exotic elite which has influenced directly and decisively the rebellious responses of the young urban unemployed of Jamaica and Great Britain by incorporating the cult of Ras Tafari into every aspect of their daily lives, and by seeking resolution now in the extension of anomie into exile.[2] In the problematic areas of lifestyle, language and perception, the men of the dreadlocks introduced major qualitiative innovations which prefigured many of the more familiar developments in Western youth culture during the sixties. Following in the footsteps of Howell, some locksmen banded together in communes,[3] and lived off the land, adopting a Nazarene code of conduct which helped to guarantee them a high status inside the movement, and facilitated their acceptance as prophets by many groups sympathetic to the cause of African redemption.

More important still, the locksmen pursued Howell's extreme formulations to a point where a complete break with the dominant ideology became possible. The Biblical metaphors were elaborated into a total system - a code of seeing - which was at once supple and holistic, universal in application, and lateral in direction. If we are to appreciate just how completely the locksman has managed to sever the social and psychological ties which theoretically bind him to Jamaica, I must attempt a further explication of this system. I shall merely precis the account given in the 1960 report.

The black races are interpreted as the true Israelites and Solomon and Sheba are the black ancestors of Haille Sellassie, the black God. Babylon really covers the western world (though many locksmen exclude Russia which has been identified as the Bear with three ribs which "will come to stamp up the residue thereof so that Babylon shall be a desolation among the nations" (Rev III).) The police, the Church and the Government

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1. Surveys into the number of Rastafarians in Jamaica have produced wildly conflicting results. A government survey characteristically gives a conservative estimate (15,000) whilst Mr. Horace Gordon of the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission made a more generous approximation in 1959 (70,000).

2. Some 20 locksmen and their families have actually emigrated to Ethiopia where they have been granted land by the Emporer.

3. The hippie and the locksman converge at other points: the smoking of grass was a ritual, central to both movements; long hair was the most important single mark of identification, and the Rasta greeting ("Peace and love") was later adopted by the hippie.

(particularly Sir Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley) are the agents of imperialism and will share the terrible fate of the white oppressors. Ethiopia is the true name for all Africa. Since 1655, the white man and his brown ally have held the black man in slavery; and although physical slavery was abolished in 1838, it continues in a disguised form. All black men are Ethiopians and the Jamaican government is the theocracy of the Emperor Haille Sellassie though communism is much more desirable than capitalism - which is the system of Babylon. Marriage in church is sinful and the true Ethiopian should merely live with a black "Queen" whom he should treat with the utmost respect (She for her part, must never straighten her hair). Alcohol is forbidden, as is gambling. Jamaican beliefs in obeah, magic and witchcraft are superstitious nonsense and have no empirical validity. Revivalism compounds mental slavery. Ganja is sacred. Wordly possessions are not necessary in Jamaica and the individual ownership of property is frowned upon. Work is good but alienated labour is quite simply a perpetuation of slavery. All brethren are reincarnations of ancestral slaves; reincarnation is the reaffirmation of a lost culture and tradition. All brethren who regard Ras Tafari as God, regard man as God. Men are mortal sinners and oppressors. Men are those who know the Living God, the brethren, and are immortal and One, living eternally in the flesh of all brethren - (One locksman will address another as "bra" (brother) and will double up the first person singular - "I and I" - instead of using the "you and I" construction).

Beyond these "certainties" which remain relatively static, the locksman habitually resorts to the rhetorical modes of the Bible - the riddle, the paradox, the parable - to demonstrate that he is in possession of the "true word". Michael Thomas quotes a hermetic locksman called Cunchyman who tells how he has conquered the tyranny of work by "capturing" an axe (which can kill 13 men who use it for chopping wood all their lives) and hanging it on the wall. In an interview with "Rolling Stone", Bob Marley, the Rasta leader of the "Wailers" (perhaps the first reggae band with a truly international following) shows how "destruction come outta material things" by using his guitar as a reified metaphor (the guitar plays beautiful music but it can kill if there is a short circuit). Such syncretic and associative patterns of thought make all knowledge immediately (i.e. magically) accessible. Thus, when sufficiently stoned, the locksmen will, as Michael Thomas asserts, discuss literally anything (e.g. which is more powerful - lightning or electricity; which is faster - the shark or the porpoise) with all the casuistry and conviction of a Jesuit priest. Ultimately, technology capitulates to belief; belief

succumbs to knowledge; and thought is really felt. At this point, a harmonious relationship between the inner and outer dimensions is made possible and the "bra" is said to "head rest (or "indwell") with Jah." This explicit identification with the Godhead automatically demands a denial of linear systems; an end to all distinctions, and invites an extreme subjectivism. Mysticism, of course, means stasis and the movement suffered ultimately from the quietist position towards which it naturally inclined.[1] The conversion of science into poetry did not lead to the expected redistribution of real power (even though this power was merely "apparent"; in Rastafarian mythology, a "figment" of Babylonian "vanity".)[2] But the crucial act of faith constitutes an archetypal technique of appropriation which escaped the traditional religious displacement by grounding God; which entailed a radical reappraisal of the black Jamaican's potential and enabled the locksman to reassess his position in society. And if all this seems a little too esoteric, we need only turn to the Rude Boy to confirm the validity of the Rasta perspective. For the secularisation of the Rasta Godhead coincided with the politicization of the dispossed Rude Boy, and the new aesthetic which directed and organised the locksman's perceptions, found a perfect form in reggae.

4. Music, Film and the Overthrow of Form

"A hungry man becomes an angry man"
A rude boy quoted in Garth White's "Rudie, Oh Rudie".

"Preacher man say Great God come down from the sky
Make every body feel happy, make everybody feel high.
But if you know what life is worth
You will look for your's on earth
So now I seen the light
I'm gonna stand up for me rights"
From the Wailer's "Get up, Stand up for Your Rights"

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1. In "Mirror, Mirror", Rex Nettleford claims this drift towards quietism was accelerated by the excesses of Red Hills and Coral Gardens which turned many locksmen away from violent solutions.

2. This was perhaps the great disappointment of the sixties (of the demise of the hippies, and the Paris students of 1968, also the failure of Laing's "meta-journey" to really get him anywhere). Rex Nettleford criticizes the emergent Black consciousness in Jamaica for failing to adopt a more rigorous, and analytical approach to African Studies.

As with most cultures which depend primarily upon oral communication, it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to ascertain the "facts" of Jamaican social history. The past appears irrevocable and the absence of written documents encourages "unscientific" speculation. Reconstruction, which is, of course, never straightforward, becomes even more of a hit and miss affair, and a batch of contradictory, blatantly partisan "versions" (all reasonably credible; all hopelessly suspect) spring up to explain the most insignificant of cultural "events". It is hardly surprising, then, that the development of reggae should have attracted such a variety of conflicting interpretations. Reggae itself is polymorphous - and to concentrate upon one component at the expense of all others involves a reduction of what are complex cultural processes. Thus, reggae is transmogrified American soul, with an overlay of salvaged African rhythms, and an undercurrent of pure Jamaican rebellion. Reggae is transplanted Pentecostal. Reggae is the Rasta hymnal, the heart cry of the Kingston Rude Boy, the nativised national anthem of the new Jamaican government. The music is all these things and more - a mosaic which incorporates all the strands that make up black Jamaican culture; the call and response patterns of the Pentecostal Church, the devious scansion of Jamaican street talk, the sex and the cool of U.S. R and B, the insistent percussion of the locksmen's jam-sessions, all find representation in reggae.

Even the etymology of the word "reggae" invites controversy. In Michael Thomas's article, Bulldog, a rude boy who has made the grade in West Kingston, claims that it was derived from "ragga" which was an "uptown" way of saying "raggamuffin" and that the implied disapproval was welcomed by those who had liked the music. Alternatively, there have been readings which stress the similarity with the word raga (the Indian form) and still others which claim that reggae is simply a distortion of Reco (who, with Don Drummond, was one of the original "ska" musicians). The emergence of the music itself has provoked even fiercer debate, and one's response to the music depends upon whether one believes the music evolved spontaneously out of a group experience or as part of a conscious policy of "nativisation" dictated from above. Orlando Patterson tends to play down the folk-aspects of reggae and gives a correspondingly unsympathetic account of Rastafarianism (which he interprets as mystification through "group fantasy").[1] Rolston Kallyndyr and Henderson Dalrymple mention only those folk-aspects in their pamphlet (Reggae, A People's Music") and tend to be somewhat uncritical. In Colin McGlashan's article "Reggae, Reggae"

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1. In "Ras Tafari: Cult of Outcasts" New Society, November 12,1964.

(Sunday Times, February 4, 1973) and the King (a leading sound system man amongst the black British community) offers a characteristically unempirical and metaphorical explanation which provides another prime example of Rasta "logic":

"Reggae is protest, formed out of suffering....You got to have that hard strong feeling....That feeling come from mothers' breast, man, the breast milk. It's true! .... the natural milk come from the mother's breast, man. It give you that .... that ....stickiness in your body man, an' that feelings, man, to create things that supposed to been created".

Whilst acknowledging the fallibility of such rhetorical excesses, I should support the King against Patterson, simply because the commercial interests of the entrepreneurs who controlled the new record industry militated against any kind of intervention by the central government. Moreover, the impetus toward Africanisation required no encouragement from above - it was already showing itself in the development of the Ras Tafari movement, and in the disillusioned withdrawal of the unemployed youth. The locksmen were not only the militant core of the Rasta movement; they also provided a nucleus around which less coherent forms of protest could gather, and the dialogue which ensued found operatic expression in reggae. But if these conclusions appear to be somewhat premature, I shall now offer an account of reggae which hopefully synthesizes all the available sources.

Before "ska" (the forerunner of reggae), Jamaica had no distinctive music of its own. The satirical and articulate calypsoes of Trinidad were processed and pruned down before being played to the tourists. Jamaican calypso or "mento", which developed in the 50's was never more than a mild emasculated form derived from what had originally been very potent stuff indeed. Beyond this and Harry Belafonte, the North Coast did the samba to the strains of Willy Lopez and his swish Latin orchestra. But in West Kingston, R & B, imported from America, began to attract attention. Men like Duke Reid were quick to recognise the potential for profit and launched themselves as disc-jockeys forming the flamboyant aristocracy of the shantytown slums; and the era of the sound system began. Survival in the highly competitive world of the backyard discos, where rival disc-jockeys vied for the title of the "boss-sound", demanded alertness, ingenuity and enterprise, and, as American R & B began to lose its original impetus in the late fifties, a new expedient was tried by the more ambitious d-j's who branched out into record production themselves. Usually, an instrumental

recording was all that was necessary, and the d-j would improvise the lyrics (usually simple and formulaic; "work-it-out, work-it-out" etc) during "live" performances. Certain important precedents were set by these early recordings. Firstly, the musicians were generally selected from the vast bank of unemployed labour; used for one session, paid a pittance, and returned to the streets. The ruthless exploitation of young talent contin ues unabated in certain sections of the record industry. Secondly, the music remains, even now, essentially tied to the discos and is designed principally for dancing. Thirdly, the tradition of "scatting" across a simple repetitive backing with impromptu lyrics, continues to produce some of the more interesting and exciting reggae. Lastly, and most importantly, the "ska" beat made its debut on these early unlabelled discs, Ska is a kind of jerky shuffle played on an electric guitar with the treble turned right up. The emphasis falls on the upbeat rather than on the offbeat as in R and B, and is accentuated by the bass, drums and bass sections (trombones were an indispensable part of early ska). Ska is structurally a back-to-front version of R and B.

Once again, as with language and religion, distortion of the original form appears to be deliberate, as well as inevitable; and inversion seems to denote appropriation, signifying that a cultural transaction has taken place. However, the alchemy which turned soul into ska was by no means simple. The imported music interacted with the established subterranean forms of Jamaica. The Cumina, Big Drum, and burra dances had long since ressurected the rhythms of Africa, and the context in which these forms were evolved directly determined their shape and content; and left an indelible mark on the semantics of ska. The burra dance was particularly significant; played on the bass, funde and repeater drums, the burra constituted an open celebration of criminality. Since the early 30's, it had been the custom for the inhabitants of the West Kingston slums to welcome discharged prisoners back into the communities with the "burra". The music consolidated local allegiances and criminal affiliations at the expense of commitments to the larger society beyond the slums. As the locksmen began to clash regularly with the police in the late 40's, a liason developed between locksmen and hardened criminals. The dreadlocks of the Rastamen were absorbed into the arcane iconography of the outcast and many Rastas openly embraced the outlaw status which the authorities seemed determined to thrust upon them. Still more made permanent contacts in the Jamaican underworld whilst serving prison terms for ganja offences. This drift toward a consciously anti-social and anarchist position was assisted by the police who attempted to discredit the movement by labelling

all locksmen as potentially dangerous criminals who were merely using mysticism as a front for their subversive activities. As has been observed so often elsewhere, predictions such as these have a tendency to find fulfilment, and men like Woppy King, who was later executed for murder and rape, joined the Rastafarian fraternity and affected the extravagant style of the dreadlocks. In time, the locksmen took over the burra dance completely, calling the burra drums "akete drums." Inevitably, the criminal ambiance which surrounded the music survived the transferrence and the Niyabingi dance which replaced the burra translated the original identification with criminal values into an open commitment to terrorist violence. The crime and music of West Kingston were thus linked in a subtle and enduring symbiosis; and they remained yoked together even after the infiltration of soul. Moreover, the locksmen continued to direct the new music, and to involve themselves creatively in its production. Meanwhile, a survey in 1957 had revealed that 18% of the labour force was without work, and, as the Doxey Report was to state 12 years later, it had now become conceivable that; "many young persons will pass through the greater part of their lives having never been regularly employed". And the embittered youth of West Kingston abandoned by the society which claimed to serve them, were ready to look to the locksman for explanations, to listen to his music, and emulate his posture of withdrawal. Thus, it should hardly surprise us to find that behind the swagger and the sex, the violence and the cool of the Rude Boy music of the sixties stands the visionary Rastaman with his commodious rhetoric; his all-embracing metaphors.

And so, ska was resilient, armoured music; "rough and tough" in more ways than one. Its inception guaranteed it against serious interference from above or manipulation at the level of meaning. The stigma which was originally attached to ska by the official arbiters of good taste in Jamaica relates directly to the criminal connotations of the "burra" dance, and the early attempts on the part of the government at manufacturing a national sound were frankly unsuccessful. Eddie Seaga, who set up one of first record companies in Jamaica (West Indies Records) was one of those who tried to promote ska to the world as a representative (and therefore respectable) "native" form. His admission to the Labour Cabinet encouraged him in this project and he recruited Byron Lee and the Dragonaires, a "class act" which was currently playing the North Coast; and sent them first to West Kingston to study the new music, and then to New York to present the finished product. The music suffered somewhat in the translation. Byron Lee was too policed to play ska properly, and raw ska was too "rude"

to interest a world market at that time.

So, ska was left, more or less to its own devices. Before I attempt a critical analysis of the content of the music, I shall briefly summarize the chronology. In the early sixties, the record industry developed under the auspices of Seaga at West Indies Records, Ken Khouri at Federal Studios and Chris Blackwell, a white man and son of a plantation owner, at "Island" records. But Blackwell did not confine himself to the West Indies, he soon went on to exploit the market in England, where more records were being sold to the homesick rudies than to the native Jamaicans. Blackwell bought premises in the Kilburn Road and began to challenge the monopoly which the Bluebeat label had managed to acquire over the West Indian record market in Britain.

His triumph over Bluebeat was publicly acknowledged in 1964, when he launched the first nationally popular ska record "My Boy Lollipop" sung with an endearing nasal urgency by the 16 year old Millie Small. Blackwell set up another label "Trojan" which dealt with most of the British releases and left Lee Gopthal to supervise the distribution from South London.[1] Then, sometime in the summer of 1966, the music altered recognisably and ska modulated into rocksteady. The horns were given less emphasis or were dropped altogether, and the sound became somewhat slower more somnabulent and erotic. The bass began to dominate and, as rocksteady, in its turn, became heavier it became known as reggae.[2] Over the years reggae attracted such a huge following that Michael Manley used a reggae song "Better Must Come" in the 1972 election campaign.[3] His People's National Party won by an overwhelming majority.

But this does not mean that the music had been defused; for simultaneously, during this period, the Rude Boys were evolving a visual style which did justice to the tesselated structure of ska. The American soul-element was reflected most clearly in the self-assured demeanour; the sharp

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1. In Brixton, for instance, 80% of the black population came from Jamaica, and the record shops in the area soon began to specialise in bluebeat and ska.

2. I shall review the history of reggae in England more thoroughly in a later section.

3. Manley also won support in the rural areas where a Holy Roller type of religion still lingers on, by appearing in public carrying a stick which he called "The Rod of Correction" with which he promised to beat out all "duppies" (ghosts), and to drive injustice away.

flashy clothes, the "jive-ass" walk which the street boys affected. The politics of ghetto pimpery found their way into the street-talk of shanty-town Jamaica, and every Rude Boy, fresh from some poor rural outback, soon began to wheel and deal with the best of them in the ubiquitous bars of Ghost Town and Back O'wall. The rude boy lived for the luminous moment, playing dominoes[1] as though his life depended on the outcome - a big-city hustler with nothing to so, and, all the time rocksteady ska and reggae gave him the means with which to move effortlessly - without even thinking. Cool, that distant and indefineable quality, became almost abstract, almost metaphysical, intimating a stylish kind of stoicism - survival and something more.

And, of course, there were the clashes with the police. The ganja, and the guns, and the "pressure" produced a steady stream of rude boys desperate to test their strength against the law, and the judges replied with longer and longer sentences. In the words of Michael Thomas, every rudie was "dancing in the dark" with ambitions to be "the coolest Johnny-Too-Bad on Beeston Street". This was the chaotic period of ska, and Prince Buster lampooned the Bench and sang of Judge Dread who, on side one, sentences weeping Rude Boys ("Order! Order! Rude Boys don't cry!") to 500years and 10,000 lashes, and, on side two, grants them a pardon, and throws a party to celebrate their release. The dreary mechanics of crime and punishment are reproduced endlessly in tragi-comic form on these early records, and the ska classics, like the music of the "burra" which preceded them, were often simple celebration of deviant and violent behaviour. Sound system rivalries, street fights[2], sexual encounters,[3] boxing matches,[4] horse races,[5] and experiences in prison[6] were immediately converted into folk-song and stamped with the ska beat. The disinherited Dukes and Earls, the Popes and Princes of early ska came across as music-hall gangsters and Prince Buster warned in deadly earnest, with a half-smile that "Al Capone's guns don't argue".[7]

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1. A popular game amongst the Jamaican working class.
2. See "Earthquake in which Prince Buster challenges a rival to do battle on Orange Street.
3. See every other record of this period.
4. See Niney's "Fiery Foreman meets Smokey Joe Frazier"
5. See The Pioneers' "Long Shot Kick the Bucket" about a horse which dies with everybody's money on it.
6. See "54-46" by the Maytals again (this is the number Toots was given when imprisoned on a ganja charge).
7. Lyrics from "Al capone" by Prince Buster.

But in the world of "007"[1] where the rude boys "loot" and"shoot" and "wail" while "out on probation","the policemen get taller", and "the soldiers get longer " by the hour; and in the final confrontation the authorities must always triumph. So there is always one more confrontation on the cards, and there is always a higher authority still, and that is where Judgement Day works itself back into Reggae, and the Rastas sing of an end to "sufferation" on the day when Judge Dread will be consumed in his own fire. The Rastafarian influence on reggae had been strong since the earliest days - ever since Don Drummond and Reco Rodriguez had played tunes like "Father East" "Addis Ababa" "Tribute to Marcus Garvey" and "Reincarnation" to a receptive audience. And even Prince Buster, the "boss", the Main Man, the individualist par excellence, at the height of the anarchic Rude Boy period, could exhort his followers in "Free Love" to "act true", to "speak true", to "learn to love each other", advising the dissident rudies that "truth is our best weapon" and that "our unity will conquer". In the burlesque "Ten Commandments", Prince Buster is typically ambivalent, proselytizing, and preaching, and poking fun all at the same time; but the internalization of God which marks the Rasta Creed is there nonetheless behind all the blustering chauvanism:

"These are the ten commandments of man given to woman
By me, Prince Buster, through the inspiration of I. "

As the decade wore on, the music shifted away from America towards Ethiopia, and the rude boys moved with the music. Racial and class loyalties were intensified, and, as the music matured, it made certain crucial breaks with the R and B which had provided the original catalyst. It became more "ethnic", less frenzied[2], more thoughtful, and the political metaphors and dense mythology of the locksmen began to insinuate themselves more obtrusively into the lyrics. Groups like the Wailers, the Upsetters, The Melodians and the Lionaires emerged with new material which was often revolutionary, and was always intrinsically Jamaican. Some rude boys began to grow the dreadlocks, and many took to wearing woollen stocking caps often in the green, gold and red of the Ethiopian flag to proclaim their alienation from the west. This transformation (if such a subtle change of gear deserves such apocalyptic terminology), went beyond style to modify and channel the rude boys' consciousness of class and colour.

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1. From "Shanty Town" by Desmond Dekker.
2. Cunchyman says that the Americans "don't know how to move slow" (R.S. July 19, 1973)

Without overstressing the point there was a trend away from the undirected violence and competitive individualism of the early sixties, towards a more articulate and informed anger, and if crime continued to offer the only solution available, then there were new distinctions to be made. A Rude Boy quoted by Rex Nettleford in "Mirror,Mirror"exhibits a "higher consciousness" in his comments on violence:

"It's not the suffering brother you should really stick up it is these big merchants that have all these twelve places .... with the whole heap of different luxurious facilities".

He goes on

"What we really want is this equal rights and justice. Everyman have a good living condition, good schooling, and then I feels things will be much better".

At the risk of oversimplifying the issue (and overstating my case), I would suggest that, as the Rastas themselves began to turn away from violent solutions to direct the new aesthetic, the rude boys, steeped in ska, soon acquired the locksmen's term of reference, and became the militant arm of the Rasta movement. Thus, as the music evolved and passed into the hands of the locksmen there was an accompanying expansion of class and colour consciousness throughout the West Indian community. Of course, I would not isolate the emergence of a "higher consciousness" from larger developments in the ghettoes and on the campuses of the United States. Nor would I dismiss the stimulative effect of the Jamaican Black Power movement which, by the late sixties, was being led by the middle-class students and was clustered around the University of the West Indies.[1] But I would stress the unique way in which these external developments were mediated to the Rude Boy (in Brixton as well as Back O' Wall) how they were digested, interpreted and reassembled by the omniscient Rasta Logos situated at the heart of reggae music. In spite of Manley and Seaga, reggae remained intact. It was never dirigible, protected,

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1. "Abeng", the official organ of the Black Power movement in Jamaica, translated Rastafarian "metaphorics" straight into Marxian dialectics. Economic analysis jostled uneasily against the intensely personal testamonies of individual "sufferers" in the columns of the paper.

as it was, by language, by colour, and by a culture which had been forced, in its very inception, to cultivate secrecy and to elaborate defences against the intrusions of the Master Class.

Moreover, the form of reggae, itself militated against outside interference and guaranteed a certain amount of autonomy. The dialectical process which lay behind the formation of reggae enabled it to escape the limitations of a Western aesthetic; and, if it imposed its own boundaries, then these were never immutably fixed. So reggae reversed the established pattern of pop music[1] by dictating a strong repetitive bassline which communicated directly to the body and allowed the singer to "scat" across the undulating surface of the rhythm. The music and the words are synchronised in good reggae and co-ordinated at a level which transcends meaning and eludes a fixed interpretation. Linguistic patterns become musical patterns; both merge with the metabolism until sound becomes abstract, meaning non-specific. Thus, on the "heavy" fringes of reggae, beyond the lucid but literal denunciations of the Wailers, Count Ossie and the Mystic Revelation of Ras-Tafar-I, condemn the ways of Babylon implicitly, taking reggae right back to Africa, and the rudie dee-jays (like Big Youth, Ninoy, I-Roy and U-Roy) threaten to undermine language itself with syncopated creole scansion and an eye for the inexpressible (see the "Big Youth lyric which introduces this paper). Language (foreign in the first place if we really want to be retrospective) abdicates to body-talk, belief and intuition; and by definition, reggae resists definition.[2] The form then, is inherently subversive, and it was in the area of form that the Jamaican street-boys made their most important innovations.

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1. Though "heavy rock" also has an emphatic and hypnotic bass line, there is nothing equivalent to the "scat" in rock. Some modern jazz plays with language at this level but this jazz is produced principally by black musicians (Albert Ayler, Roland Kirk, Pharoah Saunders, John Coltrane etc)

2. In a similar way, the syntax of "heavy"soul obviates the need for lexical meaning. James Brown looks at the relationship between "the pronunciation and the realisation" in "Stoned to the Bone" and gives a catalogue of the various words used to denote "mind-power": ("vibes E.S.P.", "positive-thinking" etc) but discards them all by discarding language itself: "But I call it What it is what it is".
This tautologous equation is repeated again and again until it synchronizes with the strong, repetitive backing and is eventually absorbed.

By concentrating upon another medium (film) I hope to demonstrate how some of these innovations were made possible. The dependence of Jamaican street-styles on models provided by the popular American cinema is stressed by Rolston Kallyndyr. The "main points of reference in the West-Indian lifestyles", he writes, were borrowed from the "cheap gangster films and the general bric-a-brac of Western Europe".

Once again, as with the Krays, films (particularly in the gangster genre) provide a vital stimulus and a complete set of ready made myths, images and expectations which can be incorporated into the subculture and used to define its world. The influence of the gangster film shows itself in the flash and swagger of the urban rude boy, and in the ostentatious displays of solvency (the diamond rings, the limousines, the fedorahs) which were used to signify his success. Moreover, those who excelled in the dare-devil art of "tram-hopping"[1] received the rudie honours and were given names like Al Capone, Humphrey Bogart and Peter Loree; and the stacatto rattle of the machine gun blends with the spikey-ska beat of Prince Buster's "Al Capone". Desmond Dekker, a few years later, sang of 007 and the big-city slickers of shanty-town. But already one can detect a movement away from the turbulent destructiveness of the mainstream gangster film, and by 1969, Dekker could openly refer to this aversion in "Israelite"[2]. ("I don't want to end up like Bonnie and Clyde"). As the Rastafarian mythology, with its insistence on racial unity and its "Ethiopian" orientation began to predominate, the gangster material was automatically deprived of much of its potency and appeal. The dissonance between fantasy and fulfilment had always been amplified by colour and Prince Buster seems to acknowledge the fact that ultimately he is disqualified from entering that exclusive coterie of crime. Negroes only carry silver trays in the world of Edward G., and, in big Al's clubs, though the gangsters may move to the moody strains of a late-night blues, the black man who plays it keeps his hands on the keyboard and off of the goods. The "Prince" can only identify with the Hollywood hoodlum up to a point and beyond that he can only shrug and smile. Hence, the mock-heroics and the relentless self-parody.

Dilip Hiro defines the point at which this contradiction becomes intolerable (and a rupture with the dominant ideology becomes possible)

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1. Jumping on and off moving trams - a fad of the 40's and 50's.
2. The first reggae record to reach the number one spot in Britain.

as that mythical moment in the Tarzan epic when the black audience transfers its allegiances from the white protagonist to the dissident "natives" who constantly oppose him. And it is this moment which is frozen, prolonged and held up for inspection in the Jamaican film "The Harder they Come". As the growth of the Jamaican "rude boy" subculture is presented dramatically as personal biography in this film, I feel it deserves special attention.

"The Harder they Come", which played to packed audiences of West Indians when it was given a limited screening in Britain last year, portrays the desperate life and times of one rude boy (played by Jimmy Cliffe) who arrives in Kingston from the country determined to make the grade. After his failed attempts to break into the rigged record business and equally rigged ganja trade, he turns to the more immediate solution of the young man's Valhalla. With the "pressure" building up to breaking-point, Jimmy buys his guns and shoots a few policemen. He poses for the cameras -all pistols and velvet caps - and enjoys a brief notoriety; the success of his record, a deceptively melodic piece loaded with menace, coinciding with the climax of his career as a rude boy. Unable to escape, despite the assistance of a Rasta friend who tries to smuggle him out to Africa (the myth of emigration?). Jimmy is left "sitting in limbo" looking out to sea and waiting for the inevitable violent conclusion. True to form, the film ends with a bloody gun-battle which paradoxically explodes the form itself. For as Jimmy goes down "like Bonnie and Clyde" caught in between savage police cross-fire and slow motion, the action suddenly shrinks onto a cinema screen somewhere in downtown Kingston, and the audience is suddenly confronted with its own reactions. The idea of the film within the film is, of course, by no means new but it is used with devastating effect in "The Harder they Come". One of the earlier scenes in the film shows Jimmy at the cinema surrounded by raucous rudies who cheer as the obligatory contingent of anonymous cowboys is slaughtered in some standard B-western. As Jimmy, in his turn is shot down in the final scene, this earlier incident is recalled and the hero's death becomes just another meaningless spectacle thrown on to the screen for our amusement. The laughter and the catcalls of the "live" audience are echoed on the sound track, and the rude boys of Brixton and Birmingham are brought face to face with their own mirror-image. Outfoxed and outraged (so the theory goes and so indeed it does in practice) the audience can no longer escape its own alienation: the laughter falters, catches in the throat, and the catcalls die away.

But the resulting cultural deadlock has already been broken elsewhere. For the gangster and the cowboy had only received a temporary and qualified approval[1] and the critical reappraisal of Western forms of fantasy inaugurated by the locksmen, enabled the Jamaican black to postulate the existence of an alternative a sthetic locked somewhere inside an idealized African past. Reggae prpvided the all-important key. Thus, the form remains open and each reggae number occupies an arbitrary position on a rhymic continuum. Thus, reggae is directed at the body and as Hiro asserts, dancing is made to serve "more as a self and communal expression than as a means of entertainment"(my own emphasis). Indeed the gulf between perceiver and performer implicit in the concept of "entertainment" is replaced by a purely qualitative distinction between what Bob Marley calls[2] the"fantasy" (of "material vanity") and the enduring "reality" (of Ras Tafari and reggae). And of course, it is enough to sit in the limbo in between and wait for the boats to come and bring salvation. At least Jimmy's bloody termination is avoided and life can be resumed; the implications of the new aesthetic, then, go beyond the created forms and reverberate along the line of consciousness to orchestrate experience itself.

5. A Method in the Madness

I have chosen to dwell at length on the Jamaican context in which reggae was evolved because that context can be used in an ideal fashion to focus and hopefully to resolve many of the key problems raised by the study of subcultures. Firstly, that crucial "moment" at which the external determinants of race, class, culture, and biography, converge with the consciousness of the individual and the group to produce that apparently indefeasible enigma - the "subculture"- can, to a certain extent, be isolated in the case of the rude boy and his Rasta "bra". This is possible because colour clarifies at the same time as it complicates the problems facing the sociologist. Certainly it brings a whole range of totally different factors into play which demand serious consideration in their own right. But the subsidiary dimension of colour cuts across

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1. The "Superfly" Harlem hustler is a recent addition to the cabalistic vocabulary of "black style" which deserves consideration in its own right. Basically, I would argue that, even in the States, this image is used metaphorically (i.e. to signify an abstract cool). James Brown, for instance, presents himself as the "Godfather of Soul" on his new L.P. and demands recompense in "The Big Payback" (presumably for the centuries of the "big put-down").

2. From "Rolling Stone" (November 3 1973).

and defines the larger dimension of class, and, in many ways, racial distinctions merely overlay basic class distinctions and intensity (dare I say dramatize?) fundamental class conflict. Thus, for the sociologist, colour can serve to illuminate certain cultural processes, which, under normal circumstances remain inaccessible and obscure. To take an example: the furtive acquisition of an alien language and religion by the slave-caste in Jamaica exemplifies the osmotic process whereby dominant values are transmitted via the "stolen" channels of communication to the working class. The subsequent mutation of that language and religion demonstrates the dialectical process whereby those values are systematically broken down and reallocated - reconstituting themselves in a totally different form as working-class culture. These two processes are not fixed in time - they recapitulate themselves in the lives of every working-class individual. For instance, the fact that language is essentially "stolen" perhaps accounts for differential linguistic performance (Bernstein's "restricted" and "elaborated" codes?) amongst working-class and middle-class children. Applied more directly to the subject of deviancy, it can be used to counter Walter Miller's thesis that the delinquent acts of adolescent street-corner groups are gestures of acceptance (of the values of the local parent culture) rather than of denial (of the values of the larger Parent culture). I would maintain that lower-class culture is perpetually recreating itself in its interactions with the dominant class (i.e. on its "deviant" border) and that its integrity depends precisely upon the continuance of this dialectic. The argument sounds, perhaps, a little circular (the "which came first" syndrome) and shifts the emphasis back once more to Albert Cohen's position, but then sociology is (or should be) a science of perspectives, a study of relativities, and it is particularly important to stress this in the problematic area of subcultural theory. I should like to go on to propose a method whereby these relativities can be stabilized temporarily and for a specific theoretical purpose. The fact that I may seem simultaneously to be justifying a rather suspect methodology will, I hope, not detract from the theory itself.

The student who adopts a phenomenological approach to subcultures is faced with a fundamental problem of definition. Whilst the moral faculty of judgement is paralysed, the intellectual capacity for sympathy expands accordingly (perhaps even proportionately) and the subculture under consideration imperceptibly forms the student's frames of reference. It perpetuates itself through him and is validated quite simply in the act of being understood. Of course, this is the standard price we pay for the sharply focussed image and the problems of identity seem irreducible and

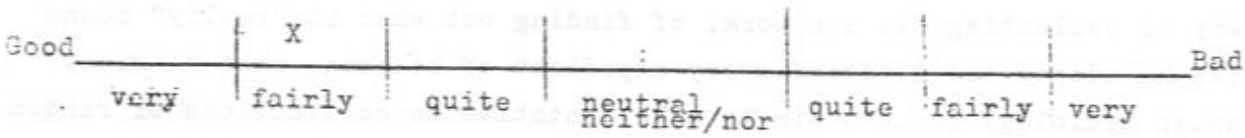
insoluble. The seer stands inside his work, between the lines, as it were, as an invisible and unstated set of assumptions. In short, he is his work, and it is not stipulated that he should know himself. In fact, he rarely does.

Juliet Mitchell appreciates the difficulty. In "Psychoanalysis and Feminism", she undertakes the enormous task of historicizing Freud and his successors. Inevitably, she comes to Laing and tries in her critique to untie the very knot which tied us up in "Knots" (bad puns are, I feel, in the spirit of the thing). She goes on to question the validity of the inversion-principle which generated a "politics of opposites" (old v young, male v female, gay v straight, black v white, mad v sane) during the sixties. Her reservations are, I think, well-founded and her argument is long overdue. The dialectic is written into Laing's work is revived and recreated in the reading, but the author never really declares his part in all this; and, to the extent that Laing remains silent he is being dishonest. He suffers from the revelationist falacy (contingent upon his religious belief in the unfolding Word) and his work deserves a cautious reception. For all his rich and penetrating insights, Laing has failed to recognise the real problem of meaning, and had loaded off the responsibilities of interpretation on to the reader. He has been swayed by his own rhetoric, and rhetoric is not retroactive - it means what it says, and it says with conviction, but it can never say what it means - it will not define itself.

The student of subculture is confronted with a similar temptation. In the absence of a comprehensive theory of cultural semantics, he has no way of evaluating his own work, of finding out what it "really" means unless he adopts the unsatisfactory expedient of becoming what he sees. Although semiology enables him to make tentative decodifications of random cultural signs, he has no way of arranging these in a coherent fashion. Lifted from their syntamatic chains, his models tend to clash and coalesce in the stratosphere and without a sense of sequence, his paradigms tend to jar against each other. As a result, theory and practice have once more gone their separate ways: the more developed subcultural theories (deviancy amplification etc) revolve around their own axes, whilst the in-depth participant-observation studies pursue their own courses else-where. An impasse has been reached - the theorists proceed as though crime is an invention of the press, whilst the "workers in the field" gesticulate angrily at the ivory towers, get lost in their subjects and promptly "go native". By restoring some standard of

measurement to the study of subculture, I hope to bring theory and practice a little closer together. Simultaneously it will give me an opportunity to proclaim my presence in this thesis, so that a small part of the subcultural universe can be explored and interpreted without my having to repair to an invisible bank of undeclared suppositions.

Basically, the method is an adaptation of the "semantic differential" theory put forward by Osgood and Tannenbaum in "The Measurement of Meaning". The two psychologists claimed that the "meaning" of a concept could be quantified by projecting that concept into a series of bipolar adjectival scales. Meaning was defined as a "representational mediation process" linking sign to significate. This was concretized as the "semantic differential", and used as a device for measuring the direction of association and its intensity (i.e. the method combined controlled association and scaling procedures). Meaning was thus translated into spatial terms and bipolar adjectival scales were selected to represent the major dimensions. Thus, the semantic differential could be used to localize a concept as a point in a Euclidean semantic space and a hypothetical universe of meaning could be charted on a series of graphs. In practice, the method is remarkably simple - a scale is suspended between two adjectives which are diametrically opposed (e.g. good .... bad) and divided into seven steps. The subject is given a concept (e.g. "father") and asked to assess its value in terms of the scale (i.e. by marking the appropriate gradation with an X).



where X is the semantic differential

Obviously, this procedure can only be used to delineate a universe of very narrow dimensions indeed. In fact, one feels tempted to assign all concepts to the central neither/nor category. But, if used properly, it can prove more compressive than constrictive, and, as long as we recognise that it is merely an instrument of methodology (and not a whole orchestra) it does offer certain practical advantages. Firstly, it provides a way of objectifying the internal mechanics of meaning (the "representational mediation process") so that the referential milieu in which thought is assembled and judgements are made can be symbolically reconstructed and

held up for analysis. (i.e. it helps the writer to know himself). At the same time, it facilitates our understanding of a given phenomenon by affording us an element of control over a limited number of the variables involved in interpretation (i.e. it helps the writer to know his subject). These two functions are, of course, conterminous; but they are not the same - the one defines what the other interprets. Thus the semantic differential allows form to interosculate with content at a level which, for once, cannot escape detection and therefore provides one solution to the problem of meaning which I outlined above.

"The crux of the method" as Osgood and Tannenbaum point out "lies in selecting the sample of descriptive polar terms". The terms which I have selected are two disparate but synchronous cultural phenomena - Rastafarianism and the London Gangster Style of the sixties. As will become evident, I do not claim that these two terms are opposed at all levels of the semantic structure, merely on the plane of aesthetics, and whilst not underestimating the importance of such an opposition, I would not grant it absolute determinancy. In both the studies of the Kray Twins and of the Rastafarian/Rude Boy subculture I attempted to penetrate and decipher two distinct worlds of meaning. I termed the existential act of "totalisation", a peculiarly effective technique of cultural appropriation adopted by the subject to overcome and undermine an unusually constrictive set of external determinations, so that action could become once more conceivable and comprehensible. Whilst Ronnie Kray extended himself through the "Firm", the Rastaman converted the rude boy brethren through music - both maintained their positions at the heart of the respective systems. But beyond the original act itself, and the common centrifugal force which disseminated meanings, there are major discrepancies between the two systems. Whereas Ronnie Kray's self-dramatisation and subsequent deification confirmed his imprisonment within those initial determinations, the Rastafarian's assimilation of the Godhead enabled him to transcend them altogether. Ronnie Kray's vision was myopic, one dimensional and circumscribed (a system of closure) the locksman's metaphoric, utopian, and schismatical (a system of transcendence/detachment). Obviously these are fundamental disparities which would seem to force the two subcultures into separate categories which are only tenuously linked (i.e. "straight crime" v "drug culture" subsumed under a major heading of "Deviancy"). But it is only by postulating a hypothetical polarity between two ideal-types that larger definitions become possible, and it is on the parameter of aesthetics (more specifically the gangster genre) that such a polarity

is most appropriately organised. Thus, Ronnie Kray's incarceration within bourgeois forms of expression is encapsulated in his response to the gangster film (total identification = total incorporation), whilst the Rastafarians ideological break, with the dominant system was contingent upon infrastructural innovations at the level of form (i.e language perception, music, etc). We can say that the Rude Boys went through the gangster film during the early sixties in their search for a subcultural identity (which was ultimately synonomous with a racial identity whilst the Kray Twins remained locked inside it to such an extent that we can talk of their actions as being "framed" or "scripted". Obviously, to stress the ascendancy of intermediary aesthetic determinations without paying equal attention to the adjacent dimensions of class and colour involves a reappraisal of subcultural meaning. From this perspective, subcultures can be seen less as solutions to specific set of problems (Jock Young's argument) than as symbolic gestures towards an abstract "freedom". But in practice it merely requires the substitution of one semantic differential for another. Thus the differential response to aesthetic determinations dictates the shape of the subcultural universe at the very "moment" of its inception. This original response determines the range of possibilities open to the actor once the subculture has been established and predisposes him toward a fairly static set of related choices (i.e. with drawal and radical political position v inclusion and profit/power within existing economic framework). Thus scaling on the parameter of aesthetics, corresponds to scaling along other dimensions and a graduated commitment to dominant forms of expression overlays (or symbolically intimates) a graduated commitment to the status quo. I am not suggesting, that revolutionary theory and practice can be automatically translated into radical form and content (the mistake of Marcuse and May '68). The rebellion against the limiting effects of form on consciousness ultimately imposes its own boundaries, and militates against revolutionary action by projecting action itself onto a metaphorical plane — by placing the onus on resolution in the individual psyche rather than on revolution through collective solidarity.[1] For instance, I would

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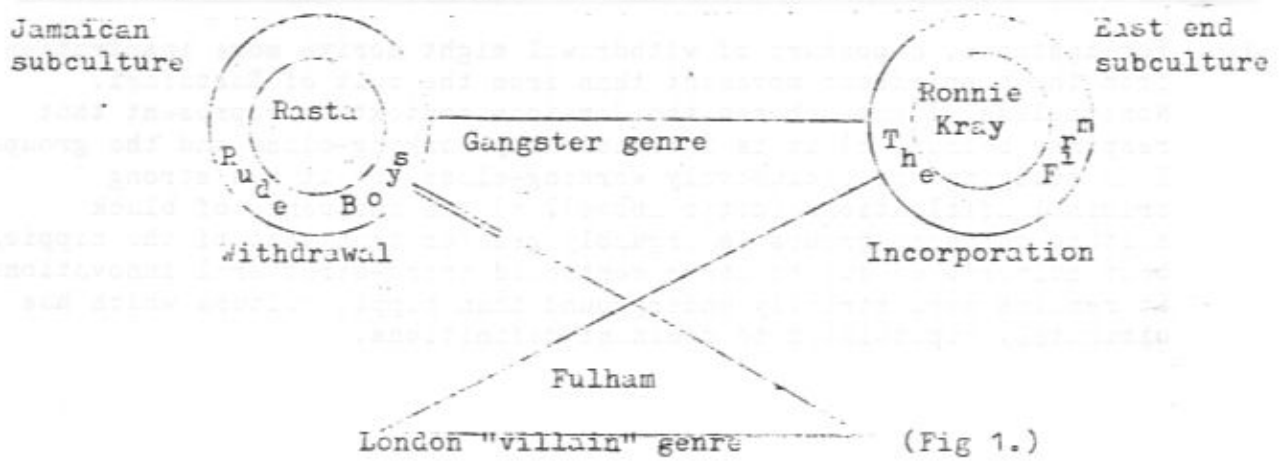
1. What could undermine the subversive potential of reggae more effectively than Prince Charles' eulogy to West Indian rhythm in The Observer (9 June 1974)? In this interview, Charles talks about his innate "feeling for rhythm":

   "Rhythm is deep in me — if I hear rhythmic music, I just want to get up and dance - that's one of the reasons why I had such a marvellous time in the West Indies".

not claim that the incidents at Red Hills and Coral Gardens demonstrate the nascent revolutionary potential of the Rasta movement as a whole; I would merely place those confrontations at one end of a spectrum of possible choices open to the deviant subculture which range from a quasi-revolutionary position on the fringes of society to one of total assimilation at its centre (i.e. Kray's position). In other words, I am interested in delineating as large an area of an exclusively subterranean universe of meaning as is possible so that a fairly exhaustive range of possibilities can be encompassed. By inserting the crucial element of polarity into the analysis of the paradigmatic relationship between two disparate cultural phenomena, I hope to freeze an essentially fluid situation so that wider meanings can be made available. Throughout this paper I have referred to a "vocabulary of style" but I can see no point in using such a concept unless we can construct coherent sentences with that vocabulary. Without polarity there can be no meaning, and unless cultural signs are organised along lines of opposition (the conflict is arbitrary and therefore theoretically infinite) the language of structuralism just will not communicate. By thus setting up a polarity between two ideal responses to the gangster genre, I hope to show how these terms can be brought to bear on a third situation of subcultural conflict and used to interpret the responses to dominant definitions in a totally different locale. I shall do this in two ways. Firstly, I shall be discussing direct influences (from the East End and Jamaica) upon the subcultures of South London in the late sixties. I shall then go on to codify and abstract those influences so that they can serve an adjectival function (very Ronnie! rather rasta!) and can thereby be used to describe and evaluate more adequately the various responses of a deviant subculture in a specific part of South London (Fulham) to an intensified interest from above. Thus I shall be using two parallel points of reference – one literal (dealing with direct influences) and the other symbolic (dealing with codified responses). Obviously the second referential system is the more complex – it can be expressed diagramatically thus:



(Fig 1.)

The bottom half of this diagram needs a further explanation which I will supply later. For now, it is sufficient to clarify the advantages to be gained by using this method. Basically, it allows deviant behaviour to be read back if not to its actual source then to an idealisation of that source.[1]

As we shall see, the various groups I shall be dealing with have considerable contact with both black subcultures and "straight" East End villains, but the resulting interaction is by no means straightforward. It cannot be adequately described in terms of direct influence. By presenting the various possibilities open to the Fulham subcultures in an ideal fashion, I hope to provide some kind of shorthand which does not oversimplify that complex relationship and yet manages to communicate in a distilled form, the essential meaning of the chosen response. Thus the capsulated presentation of the symbolic alternatives open to the different South London subcultures does justice to the indirect way in which alien solutions are mediated to the members of those subcultures without losing their original meaning. And even if there is no direct line of communication at all, the model can still serve as an index against which levels of involvement and detachment can be assessed. Lastly, and perhaps most crucially, it allows me to make a science out of subjectivity so that the dialectic which lies behind my observations (which dictates what I have seen and how I have seen it) can be drawn out and, itself observed and evaluated.

6. The Skinhead Interlude - When the Stomping had to stop.

In the preceding account of the development of reggae and Rude Boy style in Jamaica, I alluded to the formation of an equivalent culture inside the West Indian community in Britain. I shall now expatiate on the context in which reggae was received in South London and shall show

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1. For instance, a posture of withdrawal might derive more inspiration from the hippie/beat movement than from the cult of Rastafari. Nonetheless, I have chosen the Jamaican context to represent that response because a) it is intrinsically working-class and the groups I am studying are exclusively working-class. b) it has strong criminal affiliations (ditto above). c) the influence of black culture on those groups is arguably greater than that of the hippie/beat culture. d) due to above mentioned infra-structural innovations, it remains more strictly underground than hippie culture which has ultimately capitulated to dominant definitions.

how it was used by the young blacks to transmute a situation of extreme cultural dependence into one of virtual autonomy.

There is no need to reiterate the early history of reggae in this country. I have already mentioned the important role played by Chris Blackwell and Lee Gopthal in the importation of the new music. Gradually as "Trojan" began to flood the market, ska took over from bluebeat as the steady pulse which set the pace of the black Britons' nightlife. The era of the African "waterfront boys" which Colin MacInnes describes in "City of Spades" was definitely on the wane and the days of Billy Whispers were numbered at last, as the Jamaican hustler, pimp and dealer began to come into his own. The music was transmitted through an underground network of shebeens (house parties), black clubs, and the records shops in Brixton and Peckham, and Ladbroke Grove which catered almost exclusively to a West Indian clientele. Almost but not quite. As the early music mobilised on undefined aggressiveness and generated a cult of extreme individualism, its appeal was not confined to the members of the black community only. It soon became the theme music of the "hard mods" who often lived in the same depressed areas of South London where the immigrants congregated, and who soon started emulating the style of the Rude Boy contingent. Thus, they were the "stingy-brim" (pork-pie) hats and the shades of the Jamaican hustler and even went out of their way to embrace the emblems of poverty which the immigrant often found unavoidable and most probably undesirable. Thus, the ill-fitting ankle-swinger trousers which usually suggest that the wearer has been forced to accept hand-me-downs were echoed in the excessively short levis for which the "hard mod" showed a marked predilection. Even in 1964, at Margate and Brighton, mods were seen in boots and braces, sporting the close crop which artificially reproduces the texture and appearance of the short negro hair styles, favoured at the time by the West Indian blacks. In 1965, Prince Buster's "Madness" became something of a craze in some mod circles and was regularly requested at the big dance halls frequented by the South London mods. That liaison between black and white rude boy cultures which was to last until the end of the decade and was to provoke such a puzzled reaction from the commentators of youth culture had begun in earnest.

Ska obviously fulfilled the needs which mainstream pop music could no longer supply. It was a subterranean sound which had escaped commercial exploitation at a national level and was still "owned" by the subcultures which had originally championed it. It also hit below the belt in the

pleasantest way possible and spoke of the simplicities of sex and violence in a language which was immediately intelligible to the quasi-delinquent adolescent fringe of working-class culture. The developing white "progressive" music was becoming far too cerebral and drug-orientated to have any relevance for the "hard mods" whose lives remained totally insulated from the articulate and educated milieu in which the new hippy culture was germinating. And of course, the B.B.C. was hardly the ideal medium - ska became scratchy and lost all its punch when played on a transistor - there was simply not enough bass. Moreover, the lyrics of records like Prince Buster's "Ten Commandments" and Max Romeo's "Wet Dream" were rarely acceptable, and most new releases were immediately classified as unsuitable. Thus, the music remained secret and was disseminated in the Masonic atmosphere of close communal and subcultural interactions. The Ram Jam in Brixton was one of the first clubs in London where white and black youths mixed in numbers; but already the disreputable and violent associations began to accumulate round the new music. There were tales of knives, and ganja at the Ram Jam, and there were more than enough risks for any white rudie prepared to take his life into his hands to step into Brixton, and prove his pilled-up manhood.

By 1967, the skinhead had emerged from this larval stage and was immediately consigned by the press to the "violent menace" category which the mainstream pop culture of the time appeared increasingly reluctant to occupy. As the startling flora and fauna of San Francisco were making their spectacular debut along the King's Road in the summer, Dandy Livingstone, the first British reggae star to gain national recognition, sang "Rudy a Message to You" to audiences in the less opulent boroughs of South London, and rallied his followers around a different standard altogether. The links which bound the hard mod to the rude boy subculture were drawn even tighter in the case of the skinhead. The long open coats worn by some West Indians were translated by the skinheads into the "crombie" which became a popular article of dress amongst the more reggae-oriented groups (i.e. amongst those who defined themselves more as midnight ramblers than as afternoon Arsenal supporters). Even the erect carriage and the loose limbed walk which characterize the West Indian street-boy were (rather imperfectly) simulated by the aspiring white negroes. In clubs like the A-Train, Sloopy's and Mr. B's, the skinheads mingled with young West Indians, called each other "rass" and "pussy clot",[1] cracked their fingers like

1. Jamaican swear words that don't really bear translating!

thoroughbred Jamaicans with as much panache and as little wincing as possible, talked "'orses" and "pum-pum"[1] and moved with as much studied cool as they could muster.

This spontaneous movement towards cultural integration (with the West Indians only; not, needless to say, with the Pakistani and Indian immigrants) was unprecedented but it was not to have any permanent salutary effect on race relations within South London's working-class communities. For, despite the fact that the skinhead might dance the "shuffle" or the "reggay" with a certain amount of style, despite the fact that he might speak a few random phrases of patois with the necessary disregard for English syntax, it was all a little artificial – just a bit too contrived to be convincing. And despite everything, he could never quite make that cultural transition, and when he found himself unable to follow the thick dialect and densely packed Biblical allusions which mark the later reggae he must have felt even more hopelessly alienated. Excluded even from the ranks of the excluded, he was left out in the cold, condemned to spend his life in Babylon because the concept of Zion just didn't make sense. And even if he could make that sympathetic message from Notting Hill to Addis Ababa, from a whiteness which wasn't worth much anyway, to a blackness which just might mean something more, he only found himself trapped further in an irresolvable contradiction. For the rude boys had come of age and the skins were sentenced to perpetual adolescence, and although Desmond Dekker topped the British Charts in 1969 with "Israelite" (a cry to Ethiopia) the brief miscognation of the sixties was at an end.[2]

The "Africanisation" (or "Rastification") of reggae which I have already emphasised in the sections of Jamaica, militated against any permanently close contact between black and white youth cultures. Once again, the precise "moment" at which the search for racial identity produced a significant rupture with earlier patterns of behaviour can

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1. i.e. gambling and women.

2. The skinhead style of course survived into the 70's particularly in the Midlands and the Northern industrial towns but it did not maintain its early strong links with black culture. Skinheads in Birmingham (where race relations have always left a lot to be desired) were often openly hostile to West Indians, and football tended to take over from reggae as the central preoccupation of the skinhead group.

be expressed mythically. In an article on the Harambee project in the Holloway Road which appeared in "The Sunday Times Colour Supplement" (September 30, 1973), a young West Indian disc jockey based in South London, describes the impact of the record "Young Gifted and Black" on an audience which comprised both black and white rudies:

"There was that song "Young Gifted and Black" by Mike and Marcia, and when we played it all the skinheads used to sing 'young gifted and white' and they used to cut the wires to the speakers and we had some fights and less white people used to come up after that".[1]

This parting of the ways had been preparing for years outside the dancehalls in the daytime world of school and work. Firstly, as Dilip Hiro points out, the close proximity into which black and white children were thrown at school tended to break down the cruder racial myths. The illusion of white superiority, fostered in the black parents by an Anglicized education in the West Indies, could hardly be supported by their children who were growing up next to their supposed superiors without noticing any appreciable difference either in performance or potential. On leaving school, nonetheless, the black youth was often confronted with open discrimination on the part of prospective employers. As the demand for unskilled labour diminished, the black and white school leavers were thrown into fierce competition for that work which was available, and the white youth, more often than not, was given preference. If the black school leaver was more ambitious and sought skilled work, he was likely to be even more bitterly disappointed. A correspondent of the "Observer" (July 14, 1968) showed that white youths in"deprived" areas of black settlement like Paddington and Notting Hill were almost five times more likely to get skilled jobs than coloured youngsters. Michael Burton estimated in an article which appeared in "New Society" (19 November 1967) that by 1974, one in six of the school leavers in the Inner London area would be coloured and the rivalry has obviously escalated accordingly. The predicament facing the black youth on leaving school, then, made him review his position with a more critical eye than his parents. To the first generation of immigrants

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1. Later in the same article, two boys who live at the hostel are reported discussing the finer points of "mugging". Their comments show that they are prepared to make racial distinctions and they refer frequently to "suffering", a key concept in Rastafarianism which seems to be used as an index to the believer's eligibility for salvation by trial: First boy: We don't touch our own people. I never thought of doing it to a black man.
Second Boy: A black man know that we all suffering the same.

from the West Indies, England had promised a golden future, and if that promise had not been fulfilled, there seemed little point in looking elsewhere. In fact to do so would be to admit defeat and failure and so the older immigrant went on working on the buses or queueing up for the dole and kept his bitterness stashed away under his insouciant smile. But the young black Briton was less inclined to shrug and forbear, and the reassessment of the African heritage currently underway in Jamaica and the U.S.A. was bound to provide channels through which his anger could be directed and his dignity retrieved. Thus, the cry of the Rastas for African redemption was welcomed by the disappointed diaspora of South London. Exiled first from Africa, and then from the West Indies to the cold and inhospitable British Isles, the longing for the Healing of the Breach was felt with an even greater poignancy by the dispossessed Rude Boys of Shepherds Bush and Brixton.

Hiro contrasts the new black consciousness of the coloured youth in Britain against the more sober attitude of the West Indian parents in the example of Noel Green, born in London in 1958, whose father Anthony complains:

"'As a young child he wanted to be called an Englishman. But now (in 1969) he considers himself a West Indian and a black person.'"

These developments were translated into specifically Jamaican terms and the men of the dreadlocks began to make an incongruous and sinister appearance once more on the grey streets of the metropolis. By 1973, Colin McGlashan could report the bizzare conjunction of Africa and Ealing at the West London Grand Rastafarian Ball, where Rastas, twice removed from the mythical homeland yearned in unison for an end to "sufferation" as giggling white girls danced to the reggae.[1] The cult of Ras Tafari appealled at least as strongly to the black youth of Great Britain as it did to their cousins in Jamaica. If anything it proved even more irresistable, giving the stranded community at once a name and a future, promising the Lost Tribes of Israel just retribution for the centuries of slavery, cultivating the art of withdrawal so that rejection could be met by rejection. All this was reflected in and communicated through the music which had found in Britain an even larger and more avid audience than in its country of origin. Of course, the skinheads turned away in disbelief as they heard the Rastas sing of the "have-nots" seeking "harmony" and the scatting d-js exhorting

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1. Colin McGlashan, "Reggae, Reggae, Reggae" (S.T. February 4, 1973).

their black brothers to "be good in (their)neighbourhood." More odious still to the skinheads was the Rasta greeting of "Peace and Love" which many young rudies adopted (along with the Rasta handclasp). The wheel had come full circle and the skinheads, who had sought refuge from the posturing beatitudes of the pot-smoking hippie in the introverted coterie of the black delinquent young, was confronted with what appeared to be the very attitudes which had originally dictated his withdrawal. It must have seemed as the rudies closed their ranks, that they had also changed their sides, and the doors were doubly locked against the bewildered skinhead.

We need only turn back to the mythology of Rastafarianism which I have already attempted to decipher, to see that such an outcome was, in fact, inevitable sooner or later. The transposed religion, the language, the rhythm, and the style of the West Indian immigrant guaranteed his culture against any deep penetration by equivalent white groups. Simultaneously, the apothesis of alienation into exile enabled him to maintain his position on the fringes of society without feeling any sense of cultural loss, and distanced him sufficiently so that he could undertake a highly critical analysis of the society to which he owed a nominal allegiance. For the rest, the Biblical terms, the fire, the locks, and Haille Selassie et al served to resurrect politics, providing the mythical wrappings in which the bones of the economic structure could be clothed so that exploitation could be revealed and countered in the ways traditionally recommended by the Rastafarian. The meta-system thus created was constructed around precise and yet ambiguous terms of reference and whilst remaining rooted in the material world of suffering, of Babylon and oppression, it could escape, literally at a "moment's" notice, into an ideal dimension which transcended the time-scale of the dominant ideology which I mentioned in the Introduction. There were practical advantages to be gained by adopting this indirect form of communication, for if a more straightforward language of rebellion had been chosen, it would have been more easily dealt with and assimilated by the dominant class against which it was directed. Paradoxically, "dread" only communicates so long as it remains incomprehensible to its intended victims, suggesting the unspeakable rites of an insatiable vengeance. And the exotica of Rastafarianism provided distractive screens behind which the rude boy culture could pursue its own devious devices unhindered and unseen.

I shall postpone further consideration of the West Indian subcultures in South London until I encounter them again in the more detailed

analysis of subcultural patterns in Fulham which I now intend to undertake. Before I proceed to such an analysis, I should like to take this opportunity to once more clarify my methodology. Basically, what follows is a mixture of recollection, participant observation, and observant participation which I have supplemented with a certain amount of material gleaned from local newspapers (the "Fulham Chronicle" and the "West London Observer"). Beyond this, I hope to define and interpret the various subcultures as they are being studied according to the methods which have been prescribed.

A Short List of Sources

General:

"Black British, White British"	:	Dilip Hiro
"Black British"	:	R.T.Davison
"Mirror, Mirror"	:	Rex Nettleford
"The Wild Side of Paradise"	:	Michael Thomas ("Rolling Stone" July 19 1973)

Introduction:

"Performance and Meaning"	:	Paul Willis (unpublished Paper produced by Centre for Contempory Cultural Studies)

Section 3:

"Pursuit of the Milennium"	:	Norman Cohn
"The Ras Tafari Movement in Kingston Jamaica"	:	University College of West Indies Report

Various Copies of "The Daily Gleaner" and "The Jamaica Times"

Section 4:

"Rudie, Oh Rudie"	:	Garth White
" Reggae, a People's Music"	:	Rollston Kallyndyr and Henderson Dalrymple
"Reggae, Reggae, Reggae"	:	Colin McGlashan ("Sunday Times, February 4,1973)
"Ras Tafari: Cult of Outcasts"	:	Orlando Patterson ("New Society November 12,196[illegible]
"Bob Marley and the Wailers"	:	Interview("Rolling Stone" November 3, 1973)

Section 5:

"Psychoanalysis and Feminism"	:	Juliet Mitchell
" The Measurement of Meaning"	:	Osgood and Tannenbaum

Section 6:

"City of Spades"	:	Colin MacInnes