Introduction

The link between patterns of language use and the construction of ethnicities and popular cultural tastes is not necessarily an obvious one. Yet, when given the opportunity in a variety of ways to describe their own patterns of language use, the Blackhill youth themselves made such a link abundantly clear. This worked in a number of ways. First, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, there were patterns involving affiliation to, and the partial absorption of, linguistic forms drawn from sources like African American Vernacular English or Jamaican Creole. Second, particularly in relation to languages like Hindi and Panjabi, issues of expertise interfered with the consumption and production of popular culture. Films and music were especially affected. At the same time, the wider more general references the Blackhill youth made to popular culture, confounded certain familiar essentialist notions. I had anticipated that when discussing music they would make ample and rich references to Bhangra music and Hindi film music, and would claim strong affiliation to these cultural forms. Such expectations amount to the positioning of the tastes of the Blackhill youth as a kind of ‘exotica’, an approach trenchantly critiqued by Hutnyk (2000). According to these discourses, when the youth discussed films the expectation would be that they would have much to say about Hindi language films to which they would, of course, be strongly attached. However, the Blackhill youth expressed relative detachment when mentioning what might be characterised as ‘Asian’ music like Bhangra and Hindi film music, or ‘Asian’ film in the form of Hindi (or Bollywood) films. Instead their most enthusiastically evaluative comments were reserved for a wide variety of Anglo-American popular music and for Hollywood films. This
is in no way to argue that there were not individuals who did express a relatively stronger attachment to South Asian popular cultural aesthetics, nor to deny that there were gendered variations in these attachments. What this chapter will demonstrate, is that a fixation with essentialist conceptualisations of ethnicity and culture can obscure a clear eyed perception of everyday practices and dispositions. The self-representations of the Blackhill youth indicated popular cultural tastes which were at base typical of those of a large number of other British teenagers from other ethnic formations, including white British ones. In the case of the Blackhill youth, though, the dominance of these emergent British inflected tastes was at all times tempered and interrelated with the constantly present contemporary versions of traditional South Asian cultural expression. This chapter traces briefly these different strands of influence in the domains of music, films, and, in a minor way, television and radio. In the process, a constant eye is kept on the role questions of language are playing. One way of grasping the workings of these various elements is to note the intricate interplay between traditional inheritances and contemporary enthusiasms, and between considerations of expertise and affiliation.

Music

Inheritances

Although, as will emerge later, a number of the Blackhill boys expressed relative disdain for Hindi films and their generic music, these same boys showed considerable interest in what they called Hindi remixes. These were musical tracks drawn from Hindi films and remixed with sampled styles and/or beats drawn from Anglo-American popular music. My impression was that the boys found the remixes congenial because they represented some kind of symbol of the emergent and modern in culture as opposed to the residual and traditional culture suggested by the music in its original form. In these circumstances they felt pulled to partly distance themselves from cultural forms perceived as outdated, being associated with feudal/rural aspects of the diaspora, rather than indicative of the more knowing ‘sophisticated’ effects of urban/industrial contemporary Britain. I say that they only partly wanted to distance themselves from the traditional, because an engagement with a type of music, in this case Hindi film music, albeit in a modified form, is nonetheless an engagement and not a complete rupture or alienation. In this sense it is typical of how the Blackhill youth ethnicities are formed. As Raymond Williams suggested in some of his propositions