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National College of Art & Design

Design - **Visual Communications**

"Perception is Reality"

(a study of how sub-culture style influences advertising

by
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Submitted to the Faculty of History and Design
and
Complementary Studies
in Candidacy for the Degree of

B.des in Visual Communications

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Thank you
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Every society consists of many different cultures, each helping to shape and define that society. The Aim of this Thesis is to show the many facets of any particular society and how the balance of power is won and lost amongst the many cultures and sub-cultures present within that society.

The thesis intends to show how the **Dominant Culture**, through advertising, the media and commerce, combats against any threat posed to its dominance by sub-cultures by disarming, naturalising and dehistorizing them and turning their **signs** of revolt into **myth.**

The Dominant culture creates a common sense ideology that the majority of its members subscribe to. Sub-cultures express their distrust of the Dominant culture through style. This Style manifests itself through a collection of signs. The clothes they wear, the music they listen to, their hair-styles, speech and mannerisms, all come under the heading of style. Every aspect of one's life must be read as a sign.

The criticisms of a common ideology that a subculture wants to express are portrayed through deviance, at every point of contact with the public, subcultural style may be regarded as a sign:

".....A gesture of deviance or contempt, a smile or a sneer. [Style] signifies a refusal."

Consumption was and still is the key to sub-cultural styles. Sub-cultures **steal** objects or commodities and place new meanings on these objects, elevating common objects (like, safety pins, Brylcreem and scooters) into symbols. Symbols of defiance and deviance. In time these symbols become re-appropriated by the dominant culture through advertising and the media, (e.g. Denim and Dr.Martens) and eventually get sold back to the youth as icons of what is "cool" and "hip".

Advertising agencies realise the power the youth held in the market place. The youth have money and hardly any financial responsibilities. The youth markets in fashion and music dictate all other market trends and so for this reason advertisers need to attract youth audiences.

Sub-culture style does not represent the model for all youths but it does represent a symbol. A "cool" aesthetic that most youths aspire to. Designers, such as **Neville Brody** and **David Carson** use their respective sub-cultural styles, (i.e. punk and skate culture) in their work.

Both designers epitomise the "cool" aesthetic of their sub-culture, making their styles of design atractive to most teenagers.

If a company seems to speak a common language, the language of the youth, it does not matter what that company sells or what it stands for. Designers such as David Carson and Neville Brody are employed by advertising agencies to create advertisements that use sub-cultural style and speak directly to the youth. In so doing large companies like, "Microsoft", "Nike", "Levis", "Pepsi" and "M.G.M." achieve a "cool" aesthetic, giving these companies the edge in a highly competitive market.

.....image is everything and unfortunately thirst is nothing.....

1 chapter

1: The search for a definition of **culture**

R.williams
M. Arnold
T.s. Eliot

2: Roland Barthes and **Mythologies**

3: Antonio Gramsci and **Hegonomy**

4: Summery of findings

Even as a scientific term the word "culture" is hard to define. It refers to both a process and a product. The process being the artificial development of microscopic organisms and the product being the organisms that occur. Many great linguists, including M. Arnold and Raymond Williams, have spent their whole lives attempting to give an accurate definition of what the word culture might mean. Two basic definitions of culture have emerged. One adopted a view that culture was almost sacred and was essentially classical and conservative, representing a standard of excellence:

"The best that has been thought and said in the world."
(M. Arnold, 1868)

The second definition suggested that culture referred to a whole way of life, not simply art, literature and learning but was:

"The study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life."
(R. Williams, 1965)

This definition sought to understand the meanings and values attached to elements, be they objects, words or people, within a particular way of life or a particular culture. This in turn proposed that culture was not a permanent unchangeable thing but was transient and in a constant change of flux. It was necessary Williams thought, to understand the *general causes* and social *trends* which lie behind the way a, "whole way of life," looks and feels. In so doing one could understand, in T.S. Eliot's words:

".....all the characteristic activities and interests of a people. Derby Day, a cup final, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, the music of Elgar..."
(T.S. Eliot, 1948)

Raymond Williams had suggested that *trends and general causes* had to

be found for the appearance of a "whole way of life". He talked of the relationship between different elements within a culture and the many different meanings and values attached to them. A French writer, Roland Barthes, found a way to investigate these *trends* in a method called semiotics - a way of reading signs. As Barthes saw it the elements and the meanings attached to those elements could be thought of as signs.

Roland Barthes studied the work of a Swiss linguist called Ferdinand de Sassure. Sassure felt that language was a system of signs. In order to communicate a message to another member of a society each party had to understand these signs. The system consisted of "signifiers" (e.g. words) which were linked to "signifieds" ("concepts.....negatively defined by their relations with other terms in the system"). The combination of a "signifier" coupled with a "signified" created arbitrary signs and in turn messages.

Roland Barthes used models derived from the work of Sassure to discuss not only language but all aspects of everyday life, suggesting that every element within a culture operates as a sign with a "signifier" and a "signified". In his work entitled "Mythologies", Barthes examines the normally hidden set of rules, codes and conventions through which meanings are rendered universal by particular social groups (i.e those in power). Barthes talks of "myth" as a prevailing common sense with which all signs are read and understood. All rituals and *happenings* within contemporary society are liable at any given moment to become *dehistorized* and *naturalized.* This means that without the members of a culture realising, new ways of thinking and behaving become converted into myth. These myths inturn create a common sense ideology that the majority of people within a culture subscribe to, although not consciously. Ideology exists beneath consciousness.

Most people within a culture are unaware that ideology even exists.

Through experiences of life within their particular culture and an acceptance of common held myths and beliefs about the objects and signs within that culture, the majority of people will subscribe to the common sense ideology (generally the common sense ideology of those in power) without even knowing it.

The Union Jack and the Queen are examples of how the dominant ideology of Great Britain dictates the common sense myths on how to approach such objects. Both "signifiers" are words and both "signifieds" evoke the concept of royalty and reverence. This is because, although it is impossible to say when this occurred (since they have been naturalized) myths surround the Queen and the Union Jack. Connotations are also important when considering the impact an object might have. If the Queen is photographed in soft light, in focus and presented regally then these connotations fall comfortably into the common sense ideology. If, however, She is ripped up, cropped and on the cover of a punk L.P. these connotations insult common held myths that the Queen should be shown respect. Thus problems are bound to occur when a particular group in society disregards common held myths, replacing them with their own set of rules, codes and conventions.

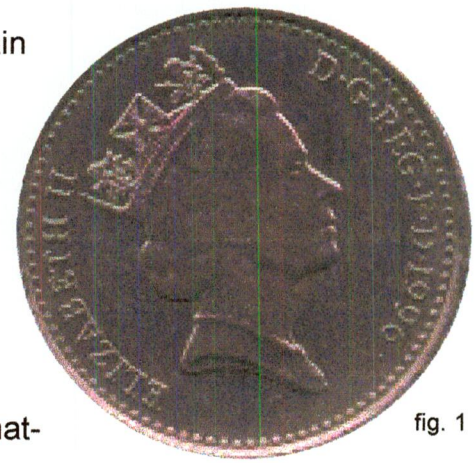


fig. 1

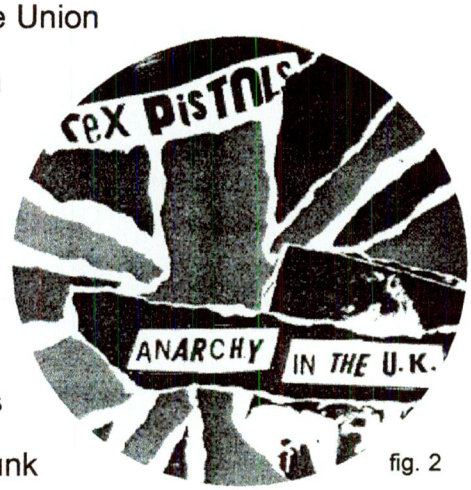


fig. 2

fig. 3

Barthes found that ideology is anonymous and penetrates every possible level of social life but

ideology is also by no means neutral. Some groups have more say and more opportunity to make the rules and thus to organise meaning. In the words of Karl Marx:

"The ideas of the ruling classes are in every epoch the ruling ideas...."
(K.Marx, 1970)

This, then allows for another possible definition of what culture might mean; another linguist, E.P. Thompson, sought to replace Raymond William's definition:

(".....a theory of the relations between elements in a whole way of life")

with his own Marxist formulation:

".....the study of relationships in a whole way of conflict."
(E.P. Thompson, 1960)

Antonio Gramsci, a sociologist, was the man who was thought to have provided the most adequate account of how and why dominant ideologies prevail within contemporary western cultures with his theory of *hegonomy*

The term *hegonomy* refers to how a collection of social groups can exert, "total social authority" over other subordinate groups by, as Stuart Hall says:

"Winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural."
(S.Hall, 1977)

Within a primitive society, everyone is expected to think the same and to behave in the same way, to observe the same customs and use the same words in the same rigid fashion. In developed societies a common ideology surfaces not through coercion but by the process of *hegonomy* . There is a common ideology created by the dominant or core culture, which the educational system is more or less expected to perpetuate, which the government and state institutions (i.e. the media and religion) encourage and to which ambitious and successful people conform and aspire to.

By controlling these institutions the dominant culture can define, order and classify the society they live in. The dominant culture may only remain in power as long as it controls, through majority consensus, the reigns of power. It is the media that holds the key to power, since this gives access to how ideas are portrayed and therefore perceived (i.e. the correct connotations to fit comfortably into the common sense myths.)

The media through clever manipulation can protect the dominant culture. A case in point happened in Britain, when on the first of december, 1976, "the sex pistols" appeared on the Thames T.V. programme, *Today* and said "sod", "bastard" and "fuck" carried live to the nations homes at tea-time. There was gleeful moral outrage in the newspaper accounts of jammed switch-boards, shocked parents, the suspended interviewer and the unrepentant pop group.

fig.4

However, it was not long before articles began to appear deliberately minimising the alienation of sub-cultural style by dwelling on the mundane details of punk lives. Saying "bastard" on day-time television exited many young

teenagers, just as much as it infuriated their parents. But, the media, controlled by the dominant culture, must disarm the sub-culture (which is viewed as a threat) by targeting on the mundane, "un-cool" aspects of that particular way of life. The media disarmed punk by removing its most offensive weapon; shock. Homing in on poverty, unemployment, addiction and unhappiness the media domesticated punk and naturalised its members, allowing punk to be appropriated.

Antonio Gramsci talks of *hegonomy* as a "moving equilibrium". By this he means that the reigns of power are not universal and "given" to the continuing rule of one social group or particular class. Rule must be won and sustained and must appropriate any threat posed to that particular rule by dehistorizing and naturalising, thus converting them into myth.

whether culture is a relationship between elements in a whole way of life or a conflict between those two elements depends on one's politics. A culture can be as narrow as a supermarket circular, a club flyer or as broad as the national news. Societies are made up of a vast web of overlapping mass cultures and sub-cultures, organised around class, race, geography and many more affiliations.

For a culture to exist at any one time, it must have its ideal: its standard of aesthetic excellence from which all aspects of "a whole way of life" are judged. Each group, be they lawyers, doctors and bishops or punks, skinheads and mods, deviate to a greater or lesser degrees from this ideal.

A visual representation of this phenomenon may be represented using a Venn Diagram. The point at which all three circles intersect may be thought of as the aesthetic ideal. Elements whithin each circle exist, to greater or lesser degrees from this point of intersection.

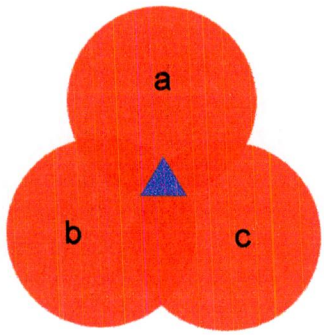


fig.5

A VENN DIAGRAM

▲ the point at which all circles intersect is the aesthetic ideal

a culture

a=blacks

b=lawyers

c=mods

The *Venn Diagram* can represent any three social groups within a culture.

Where A and C intersect indicates blacks who are also mods
Where B and C intersect indicates lawyers who are/were mods
Where A and B intersect indicates blacks who are lawyers.

In summery, any culture consists of a collection of diverse smaller, less powerful sub-cultures. Through a process of dehistorizing and naturalising all rituals and *happenings* within society are converted in to myth. These myths form common held beliefs about all objects within the society. These common held believes form a common sense and an ideology that the majority of the members of a society subscribe to. However, the process by which ideas, and later myths, are formed is controlled by the dominant members of a particular society. Those members who control the way in which ideas are portrayed, i.e through the media, control the reigns of power. As Marx said:"The ruling classes are in every epoch the ruling ideas." Every culture is in, "moving equilibrium", where power must be won and sustained. The Dominant culture must appropriate any threat posed by other sub-cultures, disarm them through the media, dehistorize them, and turn them into myth.

2 chapter

1: The search for a definition of sub-culture

Examples of sub-culture style:

a) **teddy boy**

b) **mod**

c) **punk**

d) **skate culture**

2: Consumption:-

communication through commodities

3: Bricolage and the collage aesthetic

4: New meanings attached to objects

Within developed societies work has become increasingly specialised and social conditions vary a great deal. Groups of people with similar tastes, occupations, incomes and attitudes will tend to form identifiable groups and classes. Where these display certain characteristics which are visibly different from those of the controlling groups or dominant culture within a particular society, one is entitled to speak of a sub-culture, a culture within a culture.

Lawyers, doctors, art critics and bishops are a social group with recognisable characteristics especially of speech and dress. Their style of speaking and dress codes are exchangeable for cash and are deliberately cultivated with this in mind. Their roots are in a class. They live their lives and earn their living within an established tradition. They have their own professional associations and their own methods of defending their interests. Their style indicates to the world that they consider themselves successful and their speech and dress is the rhetoric of their style. Since they subscribe to the common ideology, their style fits comfortably into the common myths of success achieved through *normality* as opposed to *deviance.*

As opposed to the acceptance of normality a sub-culture must make fundamental criticisms of the common ideologies. These criticisms are expressed through deviance. In order that the protests can be clearly seen and understood every external detail of one's life, every point of contact with the public has to be regarded as a signal or a sign. Objects; clothes, food, possessions of any kind become style. Dick Hebdige, a cultural critic on British society, talks of style as;

"....a gesture of deviance or contempt, a smile or a sneer. It signifies a refusal" (D.Hebdige, 1979)

Hebdige goes on to say that any sub-culture is essentially aggressive, committed to ending the status quo and to the renewal and re-shaping of society. These sub-cultures regard social consensus as a dangerous myth and consider it to be their duty to carry out a continuous campaign of offending and challenging the principals of unity and cohesion within the silent majority. Each sub-culture expresses;

"A fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second class lives."
(D.Hebdige, 1979)

In Britain the 1960's saw an influx of black culture that ignited the flame among the latent youth of that time. The music and style of black culture, condemned as the devils music and a threat to established white society provided the impetus British youths needed to express their frustration with the dominant culture. The black man signified a hero, achieving a "freedom in bondage" which was attractive to young Britains fighting against the oppressive ideologies of their parents. To the dominant culture the black man was feared and many working class sub-cultures used this fear and black "style" as a starting point to develop their own styles and deviance.

it was the coming together of black music (gospel and blues) with white country and western music in America that formed rock and roll. This music signified youth completely, sex drugs and rock and roll was an irresistible combination for many young people. the Teddy boy style incorporated this but was set against the backdrop of mondain British working class life. The Teddy boys disguised the drab routines of school, the job and home by implementing an exaggerated style which juxtaposed two blatantly stolen forms; black rhythm and blues and the Edwardian aristocratic style of dress. The quiffs, the drapes, the Brylcreem and flicks meant America. A fantasy world of gangsters, luxury, glamour and automobiles. The Edwardian garb served to heighten the fantasy.

the aristocratic nature of the style lifted the Teddy Boy from a mondain working class background into new heights of self-esteem and worth. Perhaps another contradiction in the Teddy Boy style was their hatred toward the blacks. They could not accept that the music they danced to was of black origin. Their working class backgrounds and low income jobs perhaps forced them to hate the black people who were presumably taking "their jobs". The punks on the other hand, welcomed the black culture, especially reggae music, since they enjoyed the reaction it received from the dominant culture, i.e. one of hatred and distrust. For this reason the punks and the Teddy boys were involved in pitch battles every Saturday afternoon along the Kings Road in London. Within all subcultures unity and tribalism were important factors, this was often expressed through gang warfare. Although the style of the Teddy boy was of a some what "poncy nature", machoism was extremely important and physical violence was a strong characteristic of their deviance.

Unlike the defiantly obtrusive teddy boys, the mods were more subtle and subdued. They wore apparently conservative suits and were obsessively neat and tidy. The mods reacted positively to the presence of black people and sought to emulate their style. Like the black hipster style of 1950's America (sharp suits and polished shoes) the mod was, as a cultural critic of the day, (A. Goldman), put it,

"...a typical lower class dandy"
(*A.Goldman 1974,* Rees. H, 1986)

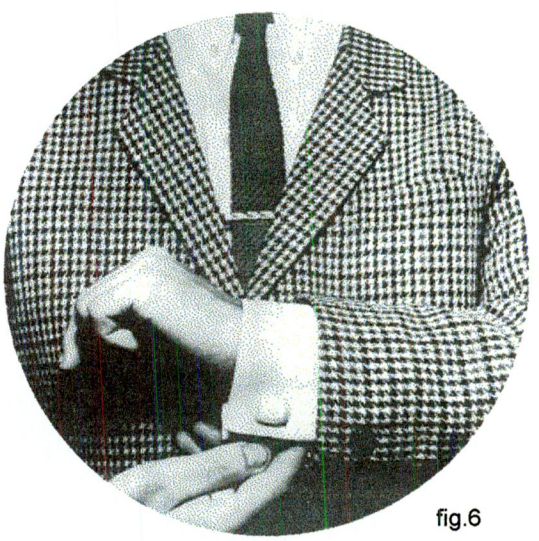


fig.6

Hair was generally short and clean and was maintained using invisible lacquer rather than plastered with grease and stinking of engine oil, like their more overtly masculine enemies, the rockers. Through their style the mods quietly disrupted the conventional meanings of a collar, suit and tie, pushing neatness to the point of obsurdity. They disregarded and challenged what smart, tidy and respectable might mean. In doing this they disrupted the sequence of "signifer" and "signified" by giving secret codes and concepts to established objects e.g. collar, suit and tie.

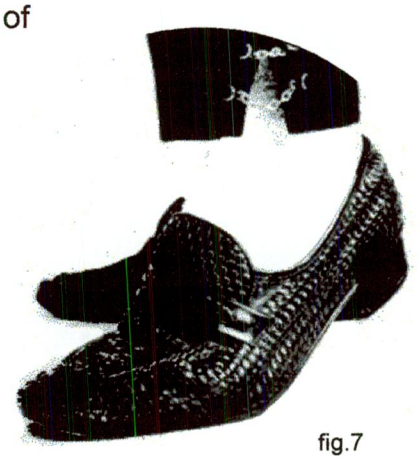


fig.7

According to a survey carried out in 1964, (by economists, P. Barker and A. Little), an average mod earned about £11 per week and was either a semi-skilled or more typically an office worker. The mod style made stringent demands on the pockets of these youths and since one could not be seen to be wearing the same pair of trousers twice at a night club, these youths were comparatively well off compared to others of the same age.

Bill Norman, a former mod, talks of what the style meant to him;

"When you were at work you were a nobody. So when you put on you suede or mohair suit and desert boots and went to the dance hall, you want to be somebody to you mates. It's your mates you want to impress, not the girls. You make a statement through your clothes, or your dancing, or your scooter. You had to be cool. You didn't want to lose face with the other guys."
(Rees, H 1986)

Whereas the mods showed their deviance through a subtle form of rejection, the punk sub-culture did everything possible to shock and outrage their elders. No other sub-culture took such pains to detach itself from the normality

or brought such outspoken public disapproval upon itself. Although it was often directly offensive and threatening, i.e. tee-shirts covered in swear words and terrorist or guerrilla outfits, punk was defined principally through the violence of its "cut-ups". A safety pin, a clothes peg, a broken test-tube, a tampon - all these objects could be brought within the province of punk (un)fashion.

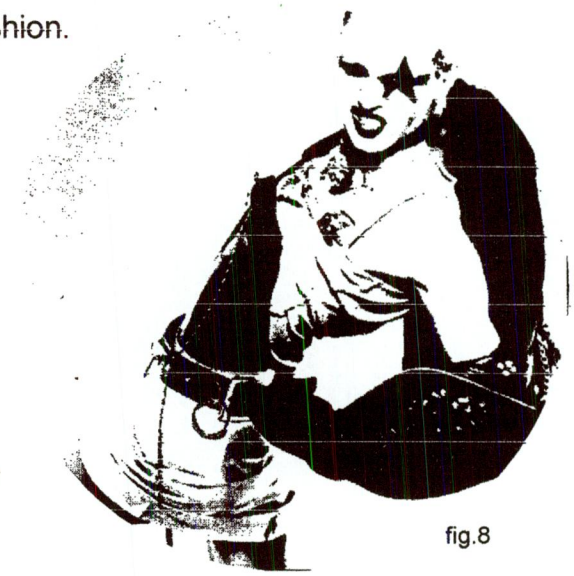


fig.8

Objects "stolen" from the most sordid of contexts were often favoured. Lavatory chains, bin liners and bondage gear were draped over the body. Safety pins were taken out of their domestic, safe setting and thrust through the cheek, ear or lip. Any garments or fabrics that had been dismissed by the "quality end" of the fashion industry as obsolete were salvaged by the punks, e.g. *cheap* and *nasty* drain pipe trousers and *common* mini-skirts. Conventional ideas of beauty were thrown out of the window and both boys and girls became abstract canvases splattered with make-up. The perverse and the abnormal were fetishzised. Anything that was revolting was used in an attempt to shock and disgust. Dancing and courting were reduced to;

"....a dumb show of blank robotics"
(D. Hebdige 1979)

Conventional courtship patterns found no place among the dances such as; the pogo, the pose and the robot. The music of punk was equally unconventional and undesigned, usually consisting of one or two chords and thrashing the instruments as loudly and as crudely as possible. Johnny Rotten of the

"Sex Pistols" said;

"...he wanted to be an amateur and .....we're into chaos not music"
(D.Hebdige, 1979)

An alternative punk press also existed, produced with the same immediacy, amateurism and cheapness as the clothes and music. These magazines were known as fanzines. Examples of such fanzines include "Ripped and Torn" and "Sniffin Glue" (which was established in 1976). These fanzines were produced on a small scale and as cheaply as possible, sold through dealers on the street and a few sympathetic shop keepers. The fanzines were completely self sufficient and did not have to rely on advertising for their survival. This gave them the freedom to cleverly extend the fractured style of punk, consisting of spelling mistakes, typing errors, crossing out and slashed graphics and typography. Most popular among the cut-ups of random images was the ransom note style were by individual letters in different typeface were pasted down to form anonymous, threatening messages.

fig.9

Teddy boys, mods and punks were all identifiable sub-cultures. These sub-cultures existed within *pop culture*. Pop culture being the fashion and music of the youth of the time. Although, pop culture in general was afraid of the written word (partly because what is set down on paper is permanent and partly because reading was a solitary, un-shared experience), the fanzines managed to give the impression of urgency and immediacy, a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line and so were widely accepted. The skate culture of today bears many resemblances to the sub-cultures of the

'60's and '70's. Like these sub-cultures skate culture grew out of a gelling together of seemingly different ways of life. Firstly the hard, pull no punches East coast hip-hop culture of New York which was predominantly black. Secondly, the soft, relaxed beach culture of the Californian surfers (which was predominantly a white culture). These two cultures came together to form the skate culture. As with the sub-cultures that preceded it the skate culture acquired objects and styles of dress that it transformed into symbols. The skateboard symbolised the freedom of the surf board but was juxtaposed with the limiting boundaries of the urban landscape. The style included spiky hair, large gold chains and baggy trousers, emulating the gangster style of the East coast blacks. The *tune in, turn on, drop out* philosophy first developed amongst the hippie culture of the '60's, was reincarnated in skate culture. The skate cultures deviance is signified through its gangster looks and also through its surfer/hippie philosophy giving a strong message to the common ideologies of the dominant culture, namely one of refusal.

Each sub-culture, from the Teddy boys of the late 1950's through to the mods and punks of the 1960's and 1970's and today's sub-cultures, the skaters, have all expressed one gesture - one of defiance. Each sub-culture has stolen objects, given them private meanings and elevated these objects into symbols, which are ultimately interpreted as defiance. The quiffs, the drapes, the Byrlcreem and the "flicks" of the Teddy boys. The mohair suit, desert boots and scooters of the mods. The drain pipe trousers, safety pins, ripped shirts and fanzines of the punks. And the baggy trousers and thick gold chains of the skaters. All these objects originally innocent, when placed in a sub-cultural context, become gestures of defiance and signify refusal.

Youth culture (which organises itself into various sub-cultures) is primarily concerned with commodities, even when they are deliberately distorted and rejected. Once any object reaches the marketplace, it has become a product

and is already loaded with significance and subsequent youthful (miss) appropriation trades on that. With little or no financial responsibilities (and a little money) these youths entered into a world of consumerism. Although many sub-cultures overtly rejected consumerism, e.g. punk, they all revealed themselves through the objects of consumption.

Consumption was the language of communication, and style was the usage of these objects and the rhetoric of each sub-culture. Style manifested itself through music, fashion and the written word. However these young consumers chose to give different meanings to the objects that they bought. Each group gave different meanings, sometimes to the same objects. For example, the mods turned the *object*, the Union Jack into a *symbol*, a tailored jacket, the skinheads reduced it to a sleeve-less vest and the punks ripped it to shreds.

Doctor Klaus Maertens invented the air cushioned sole in 1947 and the Dr. Marten boot was born. Originally these boots were worn by labourers and stall holders who appreciated the benefits and comforts of an air cushioned sole. However this object of function was turned into a symbol of desire when incorporated into the sub-cultural repertoires of the skinheads and the punks. The boots signified working classness, and were simple and affordable. When worn by either of the two sub-cultural groups, the boots became symbols of menace and deviance. Dr. Martens were no longer known for their original design qualities but had now become a stolen object elevated to symbolise "cool" amongst skinheads and punks.

fig.10

In America, Levis, the original jeans were regarded as something of a national asset. In Britain they spelt trouble because the object was hi-jacked by the sub-cultures. Denim proved to be the most durable of all teenage styles. From macho rockers to immaculate mods, from patched and embroidered hippie styles to the bleached drainpipe skin-head style, jeans maintained the loy-alty of successive sub-cultures. Jean/denim was originally invented as a durable, strong fabric worn by trades men and labourers. Like Dr. Martens it signified working classness, simplicity and dura-bility. Each sub-culture removed denim from its original context and placed their own new meanings on the object. The rockers and the skinheads focused on the durability and toughness of the fabric to symbolise their own image of machoism. The hippies patched, embroidered and flared the jeans focusing on the comfort and relaxed feel. And the mods enjoyed the idea of a tailored pair of trousers made from a fabric synonymous with working classness and indus-try.

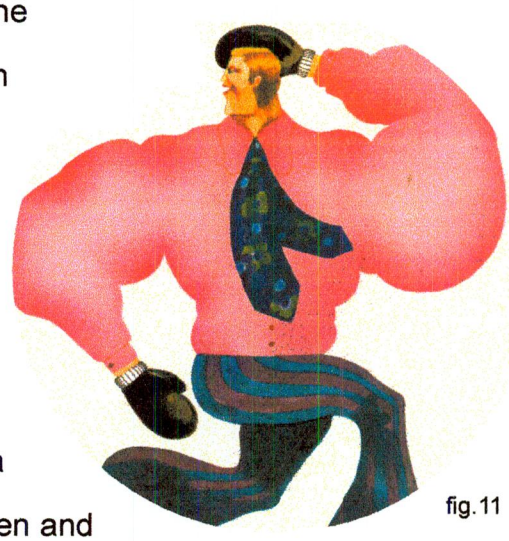


fig.11

This re-appropriation of objects can be better understood by using a term from anthropology (i.e. the study of ancient peoples). *Bricolage* is a con-cept that explains how primitive peoples used the objects they found around them. Basic elements that they found could be used in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings.

"Bricolage refers to the means by which the non-literate, non-technical mind of so-called 'primitive' man responds to the world around him"
(*T. Hawkes,* D.Hebdige, 1979)

John Clarke (cultural critic) talked of sub-cultures as bricoleurs. They take objects (like the Union Jack) out of their original context and combine a number of different elements to create a variety of new meanings.

"....the bricoleur re-locates the significant object in a different position creating a different message"
(J. clarke, 1976)

The theft and transformation of the Edwardian style by the Teddy boys was an act of bricolage. The mods placed new meanings on commodities, erasing their original straight meanings and replacing them with symbolic subversive ones. Originally an ultra-respectable means of transport, the scooter was turned into a menacing symbol of group solidarity. The conventional signs of the business world - the suit, collar and tie, short hair etc. were stripped of their original connotations - efficiency, ambition and compliance with authority - and transformed into "empty" fetishes, objects to be desired, fondled and valued in their own right. Every object the punks used was an act of bricolage. The safety pin, the cosmetics, the PVC and fragments of school uniforms were all objects that had "signified" meanings that the punks re-appropriated for their own ends.
Each sub-culture used the *collage aesthetic* :

"Juxtaposing two apparently incompatible objects to create an explosive junction"
(Max Ernst 1948)

These groups in the words of Umberto Eco (Linguist):

"....took part in semiotic guerrilla warfare"
(U.Eco 1972)

Although to the outside world sub-cultures portrayed chaos and lawlessness at every level, in "Profane Culture", Paul Willis (cultural analyst) applies the term "homology" to the sub-cultures. Each sub-culture was (according to P. Willis, 1978) characterised by an extreme orderliness: a set of codes and conventions that allowed the members to make sense of their surroundings. Another cultural analyst, Stewart Hall, in his book "Resistance Through Rituals", 1976, talks of homology;

"The symbolic objects - dress, appearance, language, ritual occasions, styles of interaction, music - were made to form a unity with the group's relations, situation, experience"
(S. Hall 1976)

The new meanings attached to objects and signs that the sub-cultures had cultivated were *understood* only within their particular group. Only in retrospect can one decipher what the relevance of a safety pin through a cheek might mean to a punk. To a punk it signified a group aesthetic, an unquestioned sign of being a punk (perhaps also an affinity with Eastern cultures such as India, etc.). Therefore within the punk sub-culture the safety pin itself was fetishsized and given a secret meaning and importance.

To the outside world the punk aesthetic of collage and revolt was met with the desired disgust and hatred that punk intended. In the British event guide magazine "Time out" (issue 17-23 December 1977) a young punk was asked why she wore a swastika on her arm? She replied ;

"Punks just like to be hated"
(D. Hebdige,1979)

The secret concepts (or *signifieds*) that each object (or *signifier*) carries for the sub-culture is irrelevant, or at least not understood by the outside world

looking in. The outside world only sees the *signifier* (the object) re-appropriated and (miss)placed. The *signifier* had become more important than the *signified* (within the context of the world outside looking in). If one takes the object to be the *signifier* and that meaning simply: what that object is and how it looks, one may talk of the *signifier* as the form. Similarly, the *signified* (being the concept) may come to mean the content.

Therefore the triumph of *signifier* over *signified* is also the triumph of form over content and one may speak of a visual vocabulary being born.

chapter 3

1: Reasons behind youth Markets importance for Advertising and commerce

2: commercial exploitation of sub-culture style

3: The rhetoric of style:-

Music

Fashion

4: The emergence of the, **"Teenager"**

E.Gilbert

M. Abrams

With the end of the second world war, production was turned over to peacetime consumption and commerce began to replace traditional values and culture. Sources from which meanings and moral values had once been found, such as the Church and one's elders, were no longer respected by a young generation more concerned with material goods than religion. Traditional culture, as a source of values, was replaced by commerce. After 1945 the world economy was rebuilt around the United States and America became the model for all consumption. The "American Dream" was a vision of pleasure and curiosity, offering images of abundance and vitality.

American domination of popular entertainment was established throughout the early part of the century, through dance music and cinema, but it was after 1945 that America established itself as the symbol of the future and the influence America had on Britain in the 1950's was enormous. Old working class values of honesty, comradeship and honour were set aside in favour of consumption. The Teddy boys saw American consumer culture as the way forward, the dinners, the movies, the automobiles and the music were all lived out through their style of drapes, "filcks" and Brylcreem.

Britain has always regarded itself as an island , very aware of it's own soverenty and was hostile towards American imperialism(this point is highlighted through the actions of the present British government in not entering into the common European Currency, the Euro).

However, despite this distrust of American consumer culture, all youth cultures express themselves through consumption.

In Britain the 1960's and the emergence of consumerism signaled an increased prosperity. The affluence of the youth and their freedom from financial obligations made way for the *teenage consumer.* The emergence of the Welfare State

enabled these consumers to become powerful economic players within society. Lacking power in the *real world* of; work, family and politics, the young transferred their power as consumers to the pursuit of pleasure. In particular the power of goods to establish youthfulness and in-group membership.

Between 1956-1966 the income of the average 16 year old had doubled. Commodities such as music and fashion were what the youth were spending this money on. In 1963 alone, 60 million singles were purchased in Britain. The record boom had began in the 1950's with artists such as: Tony Steel, Marty Wier and Billy Fury and the American originals they imitated, including: Elvis, Bill Haily and Little Richard. The formula was always the same, i.e., get a local teen idol, clean him up, and turn it into all round, family entertainment. a formula first established by Elvis, who:

"....started out as sex and ended up as apple pie."
(Channel 4 prog.,"the sixties", R.S.O.,1982)

By the 1960's the roots of British rhythm and blues was forming and by 1963 every youth club in Britain had a band. The North East, by this time, had over six thousand bands. It was "The Beatles" who finally smashed American domination of pop music and they became the centre of "pop culture" as it emerged. As the author and cultural critic of the 1960's, George Melly, says:

",,.[The Beatles] personified everything that pop was about - young, sexy and working class."
(Channel 4 prog., "The sixties", R.S.O.,1982)

The new music was sweaty, noisy and magical. It was Brian Epstein, the manager of "The Beatles", who first decided to invest in magic and realised that rebellion was saleable. Soon others followed. Mickie Most, a record producer, saw the potential of these young and exiting bands, signing bands such as,

"The Animals" and ,"Herman's Hermits". The original contracts allowed for the bands to receive 2% of all British sales and only 1% of all American sales, so obviously Mickie Most and his fellow producers became very rich men by cashing in on a massive youth audience.

fig.12

The established radio was state radio run by the B.B.C. at the time. They catered for pop music in a two hour show on a Sunday afternoon hosted by Alan Freeman. The media soon learned to exploit the possibilities of this massive youth audience. In 1964 Ronan O'Reilly, (son of a rich, rather dubious Dublin *business* man, known only as "THE" O;Reilly) started up the pirate radio station "Radio Caroline". This was soon followed by other pirate radio stations called, "Radio London" and "Radio City". They Broadcast from the high seas where the Wireless and Telegraphy act could not touch them. It was only in 1967, when it was made illegal for people to advertise on these stations, that the pirate radio stations came to an end. However, the scene was now set and D.Js had become heroes with their own fan bases. The public were getting what the public wanted and youth was becoming a cult, music a life-style.

Music was the key to youth consumption and style (namely fashion) was the focus of youth expression.

"The peacock image returned and men's suits were transformed from the grey tube into an assortment of tight-fighting, primary-coloured gaieties."
(Tom Slater,1970)

The pop groups that had sold so many singles now became the advertisements for the shops. The groups continually appeared in new outfits, where-

by fans all over Britain could see London Fashion. One particular London street became synonymous with youth fashion: Carnaby Street. Men's clothing, previously designed for the middle aged in Saville Row, shifted to the demands for a new style. The new style used more colour, new fabrics and was cut to suit a more youthful figure. John Stevens set up his first shop, "Male West One" when he was twenty in Carnaby Street. The Mods required a new outfit every week and John Stevens' shops catered to that demand. By the mid sixties John Stevens owned half the shops in Carnaby Street, selling clothes that only homo-sexuals would have worn five years previously.

In Britain by the 1960's fashion had become a uni-sex pastime. In fact the men were actually out-doing the women in the fashion stakes. However, in 1964, designers such as Mary Quant and Barbara Hulanicki (of "Biba") were designing the clothes half the *pop*-ulation had been screaming out for.

After the war the age of the fashionable woman was 35 but in the sixties fashionable women were the masses and known as the "Dollys", young girls who wanted small, tight and sexy clothes and Biba and Mary Quant supplied clothes for this demand. It was Mary Quant, Barbara Hulanicki and John Stevens that started what one might call:

"An improvised amateur revolution, led by the young for the young and for the first time it was the designer who carried the flag".
(Channel 4 prog., "The sixties", R.S.O.,1982)

It was a retailer's dream. If you could get the clothes in, then you could sell them. You just had to make sure that they were the "right" kind of clothes. The power of money did not distinguish between normality and deviance and retail-ers wanted the designs that more often than not had originated from sub-cul-tures such as the mods. Sub-cultures predominantly the mods had begun to

influence fashion on a grand scale. The mods, through their patronage of boutiques set the style for Carnaby Street and the Kings Road, symbols of *swinging London*, that filtered through to every high street in Britain. Boutiques went multiple and soon every shopping centre and precinct was dominated by shops selling cheap and cheerful clothes to teenage girls and boys:

"Everything went young in 1964. The kids were throwing out all the preppy outfits and the dress up clothes that made them look like their mothers and fathers, and suddenly everything was reversed - the mothers and fathers were trying to look like the kids"
(Andy Warhol, 1964)

Long established magazines such as "Melody Maker" and "The New Musical Express" had given voice to the music industry but now the changes in fashion were chronicled by new magazines. In 1966, "Honey" was formed. It was young, trendy and with it. It was a classless magazine that aimed to bring fashion to the masses. In affect it was nothing more than a catalogue. It tied in with a chain of boutiques, guaranteeing you could buy the dresses that were illustrated in the magazine.

Although magazines brought the London fashion scene to many people around Britain, the "with it" world was always kept a little bit out of reach. This was because the people making money from this youth revolution wanted to keep up demand, i.e. to keep the tongues wagging for the next big craze. Or as suggested by George Melly, youth culture was not a completely classless phenomena. George Melly talks in 1965, of "young affluents" who set the tone and gave journalists something to write about. People, not strictly between the age of 13 and 20 but a monied group between those ages who were able to afford what they wanted and decide their own patterns of life, which was very different from that of their parents. These youths created what Melly called "a popocracy" that came from from the upper working and lower middle classes.

Although, not all adolescents were represented in sub-cultures and certainly something much less than "a generation" sub-cultures such as punks, mods and skinheads became symbols if not models. A youth aesthetic of *cool* was (and still is) what sub-cultures provide to the young and the obvious vehicle used by advertising to get their ideas across.

The "teenager" was invented in 1945 as a category of market research by 19 year old Eugene Gilbert. Setting up "Gil-bert Teenage Services" while he was still a student at Chicago University, he offered a range of services, to enable advertisers to reach those very customers he was defining and shaping:

"....you want copy that talks to the guys and gals in their own language? We can write it for you! You want fresh ideas, grovy stuff? We can turn it out!" (E. Gilbert 1945)

Having made a fortune as a youth expert in America, he opened an office in London in 1956. It closed the same year, with Gilbert declaring:

"Teenagers in England haven't enough freedom or money to be commercially interesting"
(*E.Gilbert 1956*) D.Hebdige, 1979)

Three years later Mark Abrams, published "The Teenage Consumer" which identified the lucrative British youth market that Gilbert had failed to discover. Mark Abrams was involved in market research rather than sociology and was interested specifically in opening up a youth market in Britain based on the American model, created by Eugene Gilbert. Abrams findings found that age rather than class was the single most important factor in creating difference in an affluent post war society:

"Under conditions of general prosperity the social study of society in class terms is less and less illuminating. And its place is taken by differences related to age."
(*M. Abrams 1959*) D.Hebdige,1979)

One might say that the work of both Eugene Gilbert and Mark Abrams was not so much a question of perceiving a niche in the market which needed to be filled, as gouging out the niche and then creating the consumers to fill it. A more recent example of the way in which marketing and advertising people *create* as opposed to *follow* is when Bartle Bogle Hegerty (BBH) won the advertising account for Levis in 1982. At this time the market in denim and jeans was particularly stagnant. BBH recognised that the strength of levis was its history and decided to stress the quality and strength of original cowboy jeans. The agency focused on folk memory by extracting an image of innocent times, characterised by good music and good looks. The advertisements seemed to be set in the 1950's but the details were vague. The music, Marvin Gaye's "Heard it Through The Grapevine" was originally released in 1968. In 1982 the single achieved considerable chart success, once again, but this time as a direct result of the advert. Commerce had re-invented culture for a new generation of record buyers, thereby creating a niche and filling it.

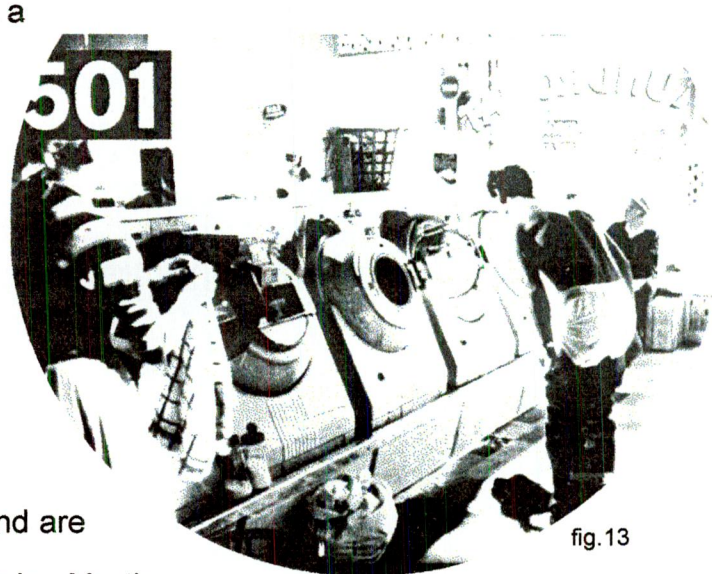


fig.13

Commodities were and are the key to the teenage lifestyle. Youth was the single most important factor with money running a close second. The affluence of the youth and its freedom from financial obligations is the obvious

influence in the emergence of the teenage consumer and the idea of communication through commodities provides the key to that teenage market.

By the start of the 1960's the advertising industry had established their most lucrative market, realising that youth markets dictated the style of most other markets, e.g. women of 30 and upwards. For years women of 30 had nowhere to shop, except "Marks and Spencers", however the late arrivals of shops like "Next" and "Principles" specialising in clothes for the older woman based on young designs, proved that style consumption could be applied to everyone.

The problem now facing advertisers was how to attract this massive consumer youth market that had organised itself into such diverse sub-cultures and systems of complex codes.

chapter 4

1: How advertising works:-
within the context of youth sub-cultures

2: The cycle of an object:-

original meaning

stolen object/symbol

re-appropriation

object re-sold

3: Magazine as a voice and vehicle:-

a) **Sub-cultures**

b) **Advertising**

4: The work of **Neville Brody**

David Carson

1) Sub-culture

2) advertising

Youth sub-culture's power is derived from the consumption of commodities. These commodities are re-appropriated and given new meanings, placed in different contexts and become signs of revolt. The 'spraying' of these signs (signs meaning all outward expressions e.g. words, actions, dress and behaviour) in public gives these signs power. Graffitti is defined as:

"The process of private thoughts in public places"
(D.Hebdige,1979)

Graffitti can be used to describe how sub-cultures portray their thoughts. Initially these private thoughts are paraded by the media as spectacular and threatening and the members of these sub-cultures, as the sociologist S.Cohen says, are paraded as "folk-devils". However, soon society and the media become used to this graffitti and slowly disarm the threat, or "moral panic" it poses, by dwelling on mondain aspects of sub-culture life. The power is taken out of these signs as the media disarms the sub-culture, domesticating and neutralising them. The styles of these sub-cultures are appropriated by taking the *sting* out of them. The style can then be re-sold by the media, from shop window to glossy magazine, to sell commodities back to the youth. The sub-cultures are institutionalised making the *revolt,* a *revolt* against nothing, thus extinguishing the threat.

Some sub-cultures lend themselves to commercial exploitation more readily than others. Mobile and narcisstic, mods treated consumption as a playground, transforming the style of 1960's shopping through their cultivation of the boutique. Even the styles of skinhead and punk, who initially rejected attempts to sell their own styles back to them, were finally consumed. As soon as a sub-cultural style is incorporated into the market, it's meanings change.

Firstly, an object has an initial meaning for the dominant culture within a common ideology.

Secondly, the various sub-cultures steal these objects and give them new private meanings.

Thirdly, in time, the dominant culture re-appropriates these objects, which have now become loaded with various meanings.

And finally, the Dominant culture commodifies the objects and sells them back to the sub-cultures and youth culture in general.

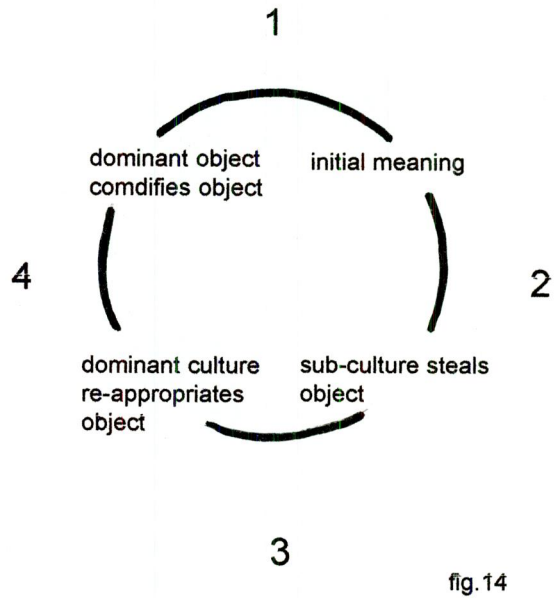


fig.14

An individual challenge is transformed, sanitised and declared fit for public consumption. Like Elvis even punk (which started out not only as sex but anarchy) came out as apple pie. The tension between creativity and commerce which shapes every sub-culture and style is resolved as the innovation feed back into the main stream becoming imitation.

Punk was like the art movement Dadaism in many ways. A Dadaist artist called George Grosz speaks of Dadaism as one might expect he would speak of punk:

"Nothing was holy to us.....we spat at everything, including ourselves"
(D. Hebdige 1979)

But punk did not go the way Dadism did. Dadaism become re-appropri-

ated and *liked,* not hated, and so in effect killed itself. Punk, however, recognised a process of re-appropriation and incorporated it within punk at the same time as the market reaction. Malcom MacLaren managed and clothed the "Sex Pistols" from his shop, "Sex" in the Kings Road. Malcom MacLaren called it a "swindle". If the dominant culture wanted to domesticate punk, why should punks not make money out of it? This disgusted many idealistic punks, who treated their precious sub-culture ideals of disruption and anarchy with kid gloves. However, it also pleased many punks who realised MacLaren was having the last laugh.

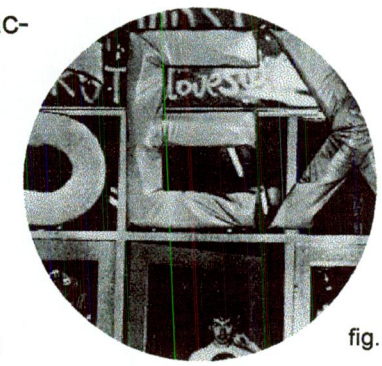


fig.15

fig.16

The DIY principal of punk was anything but *Do It Yourself* when it was deliberately exported. Punk designers such as Vivienne Westwood and Zandra Rhodes, with their "confrontational dressing" and "conceptional chic" collections, transported punk styles from the street in to the hallowed halls of couture fashion. Although these designers were simultaneously robbing punk of its power to shock or inform, they were also making money out of nothing and laughing at the dominant culture's willingness to pay. In a way punk was bought out by the dominant culture. One might say that the exorbitant prices put on to the creative commerce of Vivienne Westwood's and Zandra Rhodes' designs was the price the dominant culture had to pay to neutralise and domesticate punk.

Popular culture, which incorporates all youth cultures and sub-cultures, was ever changing. Fashion and music were here today and gone tomorrow commodities. High Street shops commissioned designs in the full knowledge that in a year they would have to redesign. All that was important was to *signify*

(i.e. to suggest that a shop or a product belonged to a certain group) or rather that your money belonged with that shop and its products. Knowledge of the "grammar" or concept (i.e. the *signifieds*) behind these styles was not important. By understanding and knowing what the latest *fad* among the youth was, advertising agencies could adopt a *surface style* that implied an understanding of a common language. That language was youth, expressed, punctuated, pronounced and highlighted through sub-cultures.

With the influx of Digital Television (DT) and the computer age, people have much more freedom of choice. However, before the introduction of multi-channel television, broadcasting consisted of State-run enterprises (e.g. BBC in the UK) which were firmly under the thumb of the dominant culture and ideology. To publish was truly to make public. As early as 1959, Mark Abrams' survey, "Teenage Consumption" revealed that young people still relied on "Titbits", "The Daily Mirror" and "New Woman" for information and entertainment. Today thousands of magazines exist to give voice and choice to the many different sections of the community. From underground periodicals and mass market fashion magazines to books and electronic media, publishing uses type, pictures and layout to shape ideas.

Music has historically been associated with a male dominated audience, just as fashion was predominantly a female preoccupation. The fanzines of the 60's and 70's had collapsed due, perhaps to their strictly male audiences. The male orientated music magazines, like "Melody Maker" and "New Musical Express" gave way in the 80's to broader reaching magazines, still incorporating the visual vocabulary of popu-

fig.17

lar sub-cultures but combining pop, politics, fashion and art. These magazines such as "The Face" and "ID" had a broader view of culture and so increased their sales making them very attractive vehicles to carry adverts, visually based on the same codes and rules as their articles. Traditional distinctions between high and low art, opera and pop were swept away, creating exotic juxtapositions of documentary and pastiche. Form was as important, if not more than content. The *look* of "The Face" and "ID" was the selling factor and adverts were constructed visually in the same style as the rest of the magazine and often by the same designers, e.g. Neville Brody.

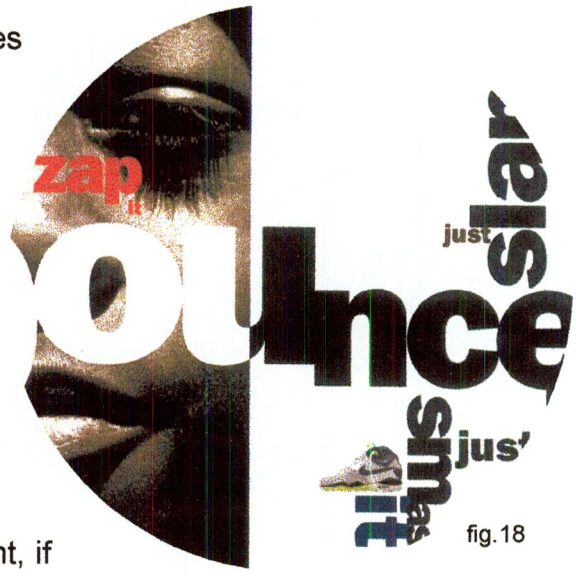


fig.18

Nick Logan, the editor of "The Face" believes that advertisements should form a harmonious unity with the magazine's form and content. The assumption being that his readers are sufficiently, "in the know", to recognise where the articles begin and where the adverts end. However, Logan's staff frequently adopt the rhetoric of advertising; the witty aphorism and quotable image in preference to sustained prose, making the job of deciphering a can of coke from a speech by Tony Blair difficult. Once again the triumph of the *signifier* over the *signified* is the triumph of form over content and arguably the triumph of advertising over society.

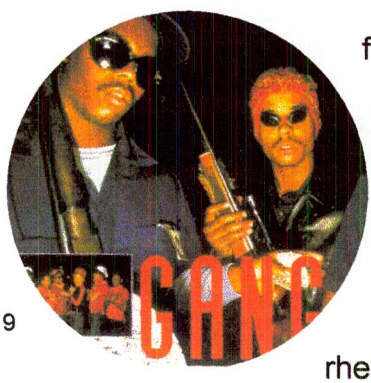


fig.19

"I.D" took the idea of form over content even further. As Terry Jones, founder and editor of the magazine says:

" We're interested in exploring the bounds of illegability."
(Lupton, E.,1996)

The reader is expected to exert a certain amount of effort unscrambling the text from the layout and navigate through the, "controlled Chaos". Many advertising agencies were uneasy about purchasing space in such an "alternative" magazine, but it was only the most perceptive of agencies that realised the more "alternative" a magazine was, the more fashionable their product would appear on it's pages.

The power of magazines as a format to dictate to the design world is personified in David Carson. David Carson is a designer that disregarded the conventional rules of graphic design completely. He is best known for his work with two "alternative" magazines, namely, "Beach Culture" and "Raygun". Both magazines were designed for youth sub-cultures, one a west coast alternative culture magazine the latter a magazine for the alternative music scene. Typographic pyrotechnics found an explosive outlet in the work of David Carson, whose designs for the Califonian magazines: "Beach Culture" and "Raygun" were widely publicizied, making Carson one of the few designers to become a pop culture hero. (Alongside Mary Quant and John Stevens). Carson's typography serves not just to present and interpret editorial content but often takes the place of the content altogether. His style which has its roots in the freedom and experi-

fig.20

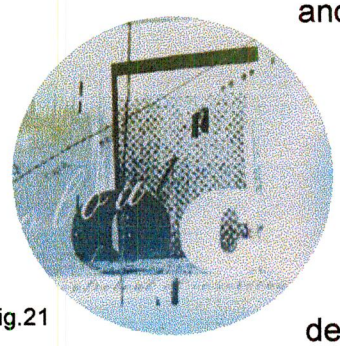


fig.21

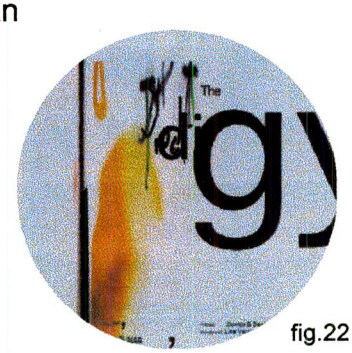


fig.22

mentation of surf boarding and skate culture provided a visual language for generation X: a secret code whose messages are embedded not in words but in the peculiar forms and configurations the alphabet itself can take. At a glance at any of Carson's work, one will immediately become aware of these peculiar forms. Carson twists, turns and juggles texts and images to create an emotional connection between reader and object. The ways in which a page is constructed depends on the people the message is meant for. To Carson:

fig.23

"The most important aspect of any design problem is your audience"
(D.Carson, 1994)

The Sunday Business Post (USA) claimed that the average American experiences over 5,000 marketing slogans in a single day, proving that generation X have to be visually aware, since much of the information they receive in today's society is visual.Today's youths read visual language in a much different way than their parents and generations before them. Another designer, Philip Meggs, points out that today's youth is:

fig.24

"....a generation that not only cuts its teeth on television but hones its reflexes on computer games."
(P.Meggs,1996)

Carson, with his work for "Beach Culture" and "Raygun", seemed to speak directly to his audience, (he was himself a professional surfer, reaching number six in the world at his peak), visualising the desires and ambitions of a specific

sub-culture. However, as the skate and surf sub-cultures became fashionable to a wider audience of youth, Carsons' design aesthetic was in great demand. David Carson, like Neville Brody, was able to transfer the sub-cultural style of his work to the field of advertising, creating distinctive campaigns for "Pepsi", "Levi's", and "Microsoft" and many other manufacturers who sought to appeal to the youth markets addressed by his magazines.

"Raygun" was a monthly alternative music magazine, described in 1994 as "the most important work of the year" by the American Centre for Design. Although underground by name, the "alternative" music scene, which "Raygun" featured, by 1994 had already become mainstream (like Carson's work). "Raygun" was the self proclaimed bible of music and style and the end of print, as many people knew it. The loss of legibility and distortion was balanced by the excitement and enjoyment they caused. Grid lines went out of the window. Great emphasis was placed on areas of white space coupled with letter spacing and novel typography. Names were set in lower case, text was layered, overprinted, up-side-down and floating in and out of the page giving the impression that it was not stuck there. The magazine became a hand held gallery, and one was left searching, squinting and teasing information from the page.

fig.25

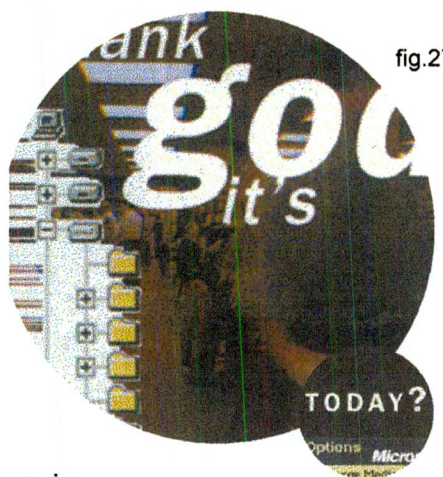
"Microsoft" were eager to impress a youthful audience and sought Carson's help in establishing "Microsoft's" 1998 "Broad reach" campaign. Carson worked on TV, print, outdoor and on-line advertisements for the company. His style, (as described above) was transferred from magazine article to advertising effortlessly. The visual vocabulary that so appealed to the youth audiences "Microsoft" intended to attract was used. Not however, to talk about

alternative music, skate-boarding or dance, but the company "Microsoft" and how it was the product and company that was for the youth. Using David Carson's style (a style directly derived from street-culture itself), "Microsoft" spoke the "common language" of the youth and *signified* or suggested an understanding of what the youth wanted and should have.

fig.26

Whatever the advertisement said was basically irrelevant to many young people. The words and letters form shapes making sense visually rather than through a process of being read. David Carson's style was synonymous with the sub-cultures of skate-boarding, snow-boarding and surfing and was fashionable for that reason. Throughout the "Microsoft" campaign, the strong logo type of "Microsoft" was placed at the foot of all the adverts and David Carson's style was intrinsically linked with "Microsoft".

fig.27



Since the sub-cultures that David Carson is Synonymous with symbolise the current youth aesthetic of *cool* or *with it* "Microsoft" was also *cool.*

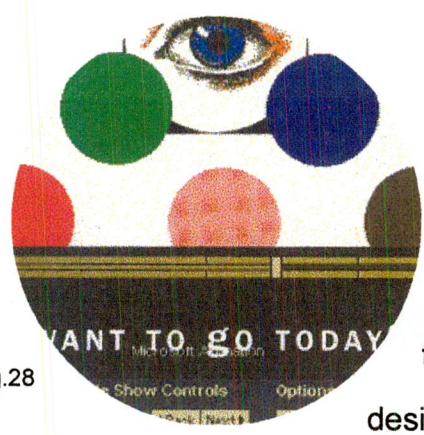


fig.28

Other designers talk of people who accept advertising work as having *sold out.* Designers view advertisers with distrust and dislike just as *artists* viewed designers down their noses. However, in

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today's post modern environment, artists, designers and advertisers all feed off eachother and are viewed at the same level. Fashion, music, high art, low art, advertising and hairstyles are all reduced to the lowest common denominator: style.

Conclusion

Any culture consists of a collection of diverse smaller, less powerful sub-cultures. Through a process of dehistorisizing and naturalising all rituals and *happenings* within society are converted in to what Roland Barthes calls myth. Through experiences of life within their particular culture and an acceptance of common held myths and beliefs about the objects and signs within that culture, the majority of people will subscribe to the common sense ideology (generally that of those in power) without even knowing it.

These myths form common held beliefs about <u>all</u> objects within society, and inturn these common held beliefs form a common ideology that the majority of the members of a society subscribe to. The process by which ideas, and later myths, are formed is controlled by the dominant members of a particular society. Those members who control the way in which ideas are portrayed, i.e through the media, control the reigns of power. As Marx said:

"The ruling classes are in every epoch the ruling ideas."
(K.Marx,1970)

Every culture is in, "moving equilibrium", where power must be won and sustained. The Dominant culture must appropriate any threat posed by other sub-cultures. It must disarm them through the media, dehistorisize them, and turn them into myth. In so doing, the dominant culture successfully incorporates and appropriates the sub-culture on its own terms and neutralises the threat .

Youth culture (which organises itself into various sub-cultures) is primarily concerned with commodities, even when they are deliberately distorted and rejected by many sub-cultures, e.g. Punk and skin-head. Once any object reaches the marketplace, it has become a product and is already processed through the dominant culture and loaded with significance and subsequent

youthful (miss) appropriation trades on that.

Lacking power in the *real world* of; work, family and politics, the young transferred their power as consumers to the pursuit of pleasure. In particular the power of goods to establish youthfulness and in-group membership. These youths entered into a world of consumerism, all revealing themselves through the objects of consumption, although many sub-cultures overtly rejected consumerism, e.g. punk and skinheads.

Consumption is the language of communication, and style is the usage of these objects and the rhetoric of each sub-culture. Style manifested itself through music, fashion and the written word. However these young consumers chose to give different meanings to the objects that they bought.

Mark Abrams, published "The Teenage Consumer", in 1959, which identified a lucrative British youth market. Mark Abrams was involved in market research rather than sociology and was interested specifically in opening up a youth market in Britain based on the American model, created by Eugene Gilbert. Abrams findings found that age rather than class was the single most important factor in creating difference in an affluent post war society:

"Under conditions of general prosperity the social study of society in class terms is less and less illuminating. And its place is taken by differences related to age."
(*M. Abrams 1959*) D.Hebdige,1979)

Commodities were and are the key to the teenage lifestyle. The affluence of the youth and its freedom from financial obligations is the obvious influence in the emergence of the teenage consumer and the idea of communication through commodities provides the key to that teenage market.

By the start of the 1960's the advertising industry had established their

most lucrative market, realising that youth markets dictated the style of most other markets, e.g. women of 30 and upwards. For years women of 30 had nowhere to shop, except "Marks and Spencers", however the late arrivals of shops like "Next" and "Principles" specialising in clothes for the older woman based on young designs, proved that style consumption could be applied to every market. The problem now facing advertisers was how to attract this massive consumer youth market that had organised itself into such diverse sub-cultures and systems of complex codes.

Although, not all adolescents were represented in sub-cultures and certainly something much less than "a generation", sub-cultures such as; punks, mods and skinheads, became symbols for youth culture in general if not models. George Melly talks in 1965, of "young affluents". People, not strictly between the age of 13 and 20 but a monied group between those ages who were able to afford what they wanted and decide their own patterns of life. These youths created what Melly called "a popocracy" that came from the upper working and lower middle classes.

A youth aesthetic of *cool* was (and still is) what sub-cultures provide to the young and the obvious vehicle used by advertising to get their ideas across.

Advertising needed a visual shorthand for the youth of the day and so enlisted the help of sub-cultural designers, such as David Carson and Neville Brody, who could speak visually to the youth market.

Sub-cultures had proved that form, expressed through style, was more important than content. If you carried your "Ramones", L.P. under your arm and wore ripped, torn clothes and sported a Mohican you looked like a punk. Or if you stood so that your suit didn't crease, danced to "The Who", and wore mohair suits you looked like a mod. It didn't matter if you went to work on a

Monday morning as an accountant or a brick-layer or whether you came from this part of town or that. If you looked like either a punk or a mod, then for all intense purposes you were a punk or a mod.

Advertisers wanted to speak this common language, a visual language, the language of style and designers were happy to provide the goods, or at least their bank managers were. Advertising agencies didn't need to know the subtleties of this strange visual language that these designers used, i.e the *grammar*, (i.e the secret codes expressed through the shapes and peculiar forms and configurations the alphabet itself can take). They were only interested in achieving an emotional connection with the youth consumer. An emotional connection that comes before the logic of the sale. A connection that operates beyond the strictly rational. Indeed, youth culture in general would find it hard to rationalise why they like the work of David Carson with his text layered, over-printed, upside down and floating in and out of the page.

The skate sub-culture, from which his style originates, hailed him as their hero. Carson twists, turns and juggles texts and images to create an emotional connection between reader and object. An emotional connection that is made up using private and secret codes understood by the members of the skate culture.

Today youth culture in general find the skate sub-culture to be the modern youth aesthetic of *cool* and so therefore readily accept the visual style of this sub-culture as expressed by David Carson.

Is the progression from a youth sub-culture style like punk or skate culture, (from localised gatherings on The King's Road, London or Washington Square ,N.Y. to the youth aesthetic of *cool* and every high street shop across the world), a progression that advertising and the media wait for and simply react to?

Or does commerce, through advertising, dictate the latest youth aesthetic of *cool* and invent or carve out new niches and markets? Does the public get what the public wants..... or does the public want what the public gets given?

Advertisers call today's youth the "blip", generation. Nurtured on video games and computers, fast food and even faster communication systems, the culture is instant. Information must compete in today's world more aggressively than ever before. With over 5,000 marketing slogans being experienced daily, the advertising industry must continually be looking for new and exciting ways to present information. However, Philip Meggs pionts out that:

" Different readers have different capacities for confronting the unconventional; the more a designer asks from their readers, the more likely they are to turn away."
(P.Meggs, Print, vol 46, no.5, 1996)

Everyone under the age of forty-five was once a teenager and has lived through the blur of commerce and culture. However, the teenagers of today are more aware of the attention directed at them. Their heightened sensitivity and growing sophistication makes marketing and advertising all the more difficult, but the temptation to make money from identifying *or inventing* trends is still impossible to resist.

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