

Revival: The Aesthetics of Revival
Subcultures and Re-enactment Groups
Explored Through Fashion Image-making

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Abstract

This research aims, through performance, fashion photography, video making and the theatrical devices that accompany such practice, to explore the style of a contemporary, largely male, subcultural collective. The common term that joins these loosely bound groups is revival as they appear driven by an impulse to simulate and re-enact the dress, rites and rituals of British and American subcultures from a perceived golden era. The similarities with re-enactment societies are also explored and exploited to the end of developing new style-based aesthetics in male fashion image-making formed around an elaborate re-enactment of Spartacus and the Third Servile Wars. Examined through comparative visuals (revivalists / re-enactors) a common thread is found in the wearing of leather as a metaphor for resistance, style and a pupa-like second skin. Subsequent findings of this research suggest that the cuirass of popular culture emerges as the motorcycle jacket of both the sword and sandal epic and the historical re-enactor.

Addressing extremes in narcissistic dress and behaviour amongst certain individuals within these older male communities, this study also questions parts of established theory on subcultural development within the field of cultural studies and postulates on a metaphorical dandy gene. Citing two leading practitioners in the field of fashion photography the work of both Richard Prince and Bruce Weber is viewed through the lens of the subcultural aesthete and conclusions drawn as to their role as agents provocateurs in the development of the fashion image with a revival based narrative. In addition the often used term retro is examined, categorised and granted its own genre within fashion image-making and defined as being separate from the practice element of this research.

Reflecting a multi-disciplinary approach that engages the researcher as Bricoleur and participant observer this research operates in the reflexive realm and uses simulation as a key method of enquiry. The practice-led outcome of this investigation takes the form of a final research exhibition that takes the form of a substantial installation of photography, video, clothing and textile prints.

Key terms: dandy gene, historical re-enactment groups, internal theatre, narcissism, narrative image-making, reflexive practice, revival as theatre, subcultures,

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2. *The Leather Jacket: A Selective History*. A collection of photographs and text from the second year of this research that frames the leather jacket as a totem of resistance and style.
3. *Retro and Revival as a Genre Within Contemporary Menswear Fashion Photography: Background to a Method*. Completed in the third year of this study, this is an illustrated essay on the current and historical situation relating to the representation of menswear in the genre employed by this research.
4. *Revival*. The photographic and video images and clothing featured in final the exhibition of this research at the Royal College of Art in May 2011. This section also includes actual images of the exhibition in the gallery space.
5. *Men's File*. Issues, 01, 02, 03 and 04. Originally intended as a means by which the practice element of this research might be disseminated, *Men's File* magazine has become both a reference manual and influential journal for the revival community.

Technical Appendix

Stills Photography

1. The same camera was used throughout this study. The Canon EOS 1D Mk2.
2. Two lenses were employed in the making of the photographs of 50mm and 85mm. Both traditional choices.
3. The lighting followed the approach of positioning the subjects in the best available light according to the location. The three formulae are essentially (i) front-lit, (ii) back-lit and (iii) bright shadow. These are the foundation lighting techniques of fashion image-making.
4. Cropping of the images has been kept to a minimum. Most images are only cropped (if a vertical format) top and bottom to make a more elegant and square final image and this is allowed for when composing the image in the camera.
5. Digital image-capture sensors often leave the image of a dust spec on the final photograph. Digital re-touching is used to remove that blemish and large skin spots are also removed from faces in the same manner. Very little extra digital manipulation of the images in the practice section of this research has been carried out.
6. Of the prints in this final exhibition of this research two printing techniques were employed. (i) Digital prints on photographic paper made directly from the original digital file. (ii) Traditional photographic bromide prints stained with cold tea. These were printed from negatives produced directly from the original digital files.

Moving Images

1. The moving images were shot on a digital stills camera with a moving image facility, the Canon 7D, using the same lenses as above but adding numerous Promist and ND filters. Editing was done with Final Cut Pro software.

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The Gauntlett Gallery

Gavin Schneider Productions

The Government of the Kingdom of Jordan

Lewis Leathers

Reflections Italia

Roman Army and Chariot Experience

Saint James Tricot

Stetson

The Hot Rod Hayride

Watsonian Squire (Royal Enfield importers)

Author's Declaration

1. During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.
2. The material in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than for that for which it is now submitted.

N. S. Clements, April 2011

Introduction

Fashion Image-making as a Method of Enquiry

Although a significant cultural phenomenon, serious critics and academics have largely overlooked fashion photography. Perhaps afraid of being tainted by “its flirtation with the frivolous and ephemeral” or, even more morally reprehensible, the role it has in the “marketing and selling of garments” (Shinkle, 2008, p.1)? One speculates that in the hallowed realm of the cultural discourse fashion image-making has been designated as trade and not art, rendering it unworthy of critical attention. In opposition to this view this study embraces the position of the fashion image as often temporary, sometimes trivial and beholden to the market place, as a mirror on contemporary culture and declares fashion photography as an aesthetic highpoint in the realm of desire driven consumerism. Furthermore it side-lines the traditional view of fashion image-making as a vehicle, devised by men and designated to facilitate the male gaze for the consumption of the female body as object and instead centres on the imagery surrounding *male* fashion and style as a performance, citing the realm of subculture as the centre stage on which much of this theatre takes place. More specifically it is in the dress, rites and rituals of contemporary revival orientated subcultures that my practice finds its aesthetic momentum and in the same social space that my textual work attempts a precise positioning of today’s revival movement with a re-evaluation of subcultural theory. Finding similarities between D’Aurevilly’s 19th century observations on the London based aesthete George (Beau) Brummell (D’Aurevilly, 1928) and the initial findings of this research the existence of a dandy gene, whether literal or metaphorical is explored in both practical work and text. This suggestion, no matter how fanciful, is used as a lens through which the older male, working-class aesthete might be viewed and better understood. Furthermore, contradicting conventional thought in subcultural studies, this research postulates that the existence of the proletarian dandy is more than merely a response to oppressive external forces and has much to do with the internal landscape of the individual in question.

My ultimate aim is to move the depiction of men's style (and fashion), using performance and other devices employed in theatre and film, into new areas, opening doors that have, thus far, been closed to the uninitiated. But I have my doubts. Evoking Baurillard's almost visceral observation that "for ethnology to live, its subject must die" (Baudrillard, 1983, p.12), as a practitioner and participant observer I constantly tread precariously on the narrow path between aesthetic enlightenment and exploitation.

So as to avoid the exploitation of my subjects I present my practice in a literal and naturalistic form. This might be interpreted as a parody of various post-war styles but there is little parody. My work touches the naïve and includes little that is ironic or political as it does not seek to cut my actors or audience with the stiletto blade of wit and irony but takes them and their journey seriously. The artifice is in the nature of the work and not in my relationship with my performers. Furthermore my practice seeks to expand the aesthetic ambitions of my subjects (most of whom, I assess, carry the dandy gene) while simultaneously expanding my own aesthetic universe and follows my intended approach of process as a method of enquiry. To the uninitiated my approach is one of pure aesthetics and like the classic fashion image – one dimensional. This is the seduction of the representation of fashion, you draw the viewer in to the picture with superficial and seemingly innocent beauty, then you test their allegiances with your own language of signs.

Chapter One of this thesis (*Revival as a Genre Within Contemporary Men's Fashion Image-making: Context for a Method*) frames my very specific practice within the wider world of the fashion image and evaluates the loaded vocabulary inherent in my work such as retro, revival, pastiche and parody and links their multi-contextual meanings with the backward looking relationship photography still has with painting. This chapter also names some of the leading practitioners within fashion image-making who have consciously adopted a retro style of fashion photography (and film making). A term described by Elizabeth Guffey in

Retro: The Culture of Revival as being “unconcerned with the sanctity of tradition or reinforcing social values: indeed, it often insinuates a form of subversion while sidestepping historical accuracy” (Guffey, 2006, p.11). Like the fashion photographers and editors who promote retro style as a valid entity within fashion representation, Guffey deals mainly with the superficial aesthetics of the genre and certainly shies away from addressing the subcultural milieu. This research seeks to refute the idea that retro fashion image-making is a form of subversion and instead presents it as culturally one dimensional finding more fertile ground in the world of revival subcultures and their representation in the work of Richard Prince. Here I postulate on Prince’s work bridging the gap between the ephemeral and the profound in fashion image-making and – at least partially – solving the practitioner / researcher’s dilemma of joining beauty and theory.

Prince’s practice in appropriation and replication follows the contours of the post-subcultural landscape and parallels much in revivalist culture. This trajectory guides us away from the now established theoretical works on subculture – that emanated from the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) – and results in a reading of David Muggleton’s revisionary look at subcultural theory in *Inside Subculture* (2000).

The Cultural Studies Perspective

While acknowledging the debt subcultural studies owes to the output of the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) during the 1960s and 70s and to, what Gelder (Gelder, 2007, p.83) describes as “Two remarkably influential books: Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson’s edited collection, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (1975), and Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979)”. This study questions some of the CCCS’s foundational precepts and backs-up David Muggleton’s concept of the post-Punk epoch being (postmodern and) “post-subculturalist” (Muggleton, 2000,p.47). However it seeks to refute Muggleton’s

support of Polhemus' idea of "style surfing" (Polhemus, 1996) in relation to the revival subcultures framed in this research.

Using men's fashion image-making as a lens through which contemporary revival subcultures and re-enactment groups can be viewed, this project seeks out a new context for the representation of men's style uninfluenced by the existing fashion-system cartel of design houses, models agencies and advertisers. Implicit in both the written and image centred work is the juxtaposition of revival style and its oppositional counterpart – that of contemporary men's fashion – notable in the practice for its total absence. This might generate resistance from those engaged in the creation of avant-garde male fashion, however it is the role of this research to provide evidence of revival and its representation as achieving something new within the men's style milieu, albeit from old. It is my thesis that, far from being conservative, revival is dynamic and forward looking but driven by a respect for the artisan and traditional scales of production and thus a subject of study sympathetic to any maker / practitioner. Although the fashion images of this project are constructed around an older male subculture, thus outside the regular commercial environment that demands (youthful) models, clothing and location all be validated by current market trends, they do not shy away from the consistent aim of the fashion image which is seduction.

Questioning cultural theorists Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's need for perceived authenticity in order to validate subcultural life, neither the subcultures cited in my research question, myself (as participant observer) or the final fashion-image as object seek the stamp of authenticity. This research views the authentic in terms of the "continuation" (Prince, 2008, no page numbers) of total emersion in subcultural style, what I term 'our thing' and what essayist Tom Wolfe calls in his mid-1960s account of London's lunchtime mod scene, *The Noonday Underground*, "The Life" (Wolfe 1999, p.91).

Speaking through the language of signs embedded in revival orientated subcultures and re-enactment lore, the practice based element of this study

attempts fashion image-making as a performance by both subject and practitioner using photography and video as a method by which these aesthetic acts are recorded. Such a strategy endorses Hebdige's assertion that "Participant observation continues to produce some of the most interesting and evocative accounts of subculture" (Hebdige, 1979, p.75).

The Provenance of Revival Subcultures in the Post-subcultural Landscape

Starting amidst a "glut of revivals" (Muggleton, 2000, p.47) in the aftermath of punk and viewing the revival of the golden era of subculture [c.1953 to c.1979] as a living theatre, revivalist subcultures find much in common with Hebdige's subcultural "bricoleurs" (Hebdige, 2003, p.104). Acting as historical and cultural editors they carefully choose signs and symbols from their chosen period or historical social group (not always subcultural). There are dozens of sub-groups in this structure that elect to revive the style of specific youth subcultures, car and motorcycle culture, working or industrial style and military dress (to name a few). Each uses a historical platform after which original and replica commodities are obtained and endowed with new meanings creating a vivid and dynamic "symbolic ensemble" (Hebdige, 2003, p. 104). The act of appropriation of goods, perceived as worthless to the general public, is seen, within these small societies, as a form of resistance while simultaneously assuring the continuation of their performance. Being closer to historical re-enactment groups than to the "spectacular" youth subcultures so well described by Hebdige (Hebdige, 2003, p.81), contemporary revivalists are defined more by aesthetic considerations and their own internal landscape than by high-modern social contradictions of the post-war years or Clarke et al.'s "problematic experience" (2004, p.47). What appears problematic is that certain areas of my practice-based work, that record the revivalists (in photography and video), contradict all in both subcultural and post-subcultural theory. The images reveal the individual members of the subcultures in question not to be youths but adults aged between 25 to 65. This participation by (much) older males in style orientated subcultures undermines the position of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and post-subcultural

theory notions that are specific to youth. Furthermore the section of my photography that employs semi-documentary methods suggests that revival subcultures offer a (highly productive) refuge for the former youth subculture member (punk, skinhead, rudeboy etc.) who, I propose, took the role within that earlier group of “stylist” (Hebdige, 2003, p.122). This is an area towards which *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* pays scant attention as instead it focuses on delinquency, class, the traditional working-class family structure and the relationship of youth with the dominant culture. In stark contrast this research offers-up the proletarian dandy, an individual, separate from the crowd and a working-class proto-bohemian as the most significant driver behind male subcultural style and all that emanates from it. Hebdige hints at the possibility that things other than a “direct challenge to the dominant culture” (Muggleton, 2000, p.131) might account for an aberration in *his* version of youth subculture with a short observation on the “Bowie-ites”. Hebdige suggests that (Hebdige, (2003), p.88):

The Bowie-ites were certainly not grappling in any *direct* way with the familiar set of problems encountered on the shop floor and in the classroom: problems which revolve around relations with authority... None the less, they were attempting to negotiate a meaningful intermediate space somewhere between the parent culture and the dominant ideology: a space where an alternative identity could be discovered and expressed.

It is clear that Bowie was not about class. The fact that he was working-class gave him access to Wolfe’s, *The Life*, which he used as a stepping-stone towards an avant-garde position within popular culture. Bowie and his followers removed themselves from the traditional conflicts between classes and the struggle for territory in the street and concentrated on an aesthetic response to their individual situations. Hebdige realises something else is going on when he sees the Bowie crowd as:

adapting images, styles and ideologies made available elsewhere on television and in films (e.g. the nostalgia cult of the early 1970s), in magazines and newspapers (high fashion, the emergence of feminism in its commodity form, e.g. *Cosmopolitan*) in order to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness (Hebdige, 2003, p.88).

This otherness was a challenge to what the writer goes on to describe as the inevitability of certain outcomes for working-class youth, or from the perspective of this research, those specific working-class youths for whom aesthetics was a fundamental consideration.

At this point it must be said that the CCCS's use of a Marxist perspective often frames working-class youth as victims, constantly reacting, albeit in a stylish manner, to the hegemony of the established structures of family, expectation and wider bourgeois society. Clarke et al.'s assertion that the "working-class have won space for their own forms of life" (Hall and Jefferson, 2004, p.43) presents such a situation as an outcome of a battle between the classes. While their approach might offer historical background, the subcultures that existed within that won space were, according to Wolfe's (mid-1960s) account living "The Life" and finding a way "to drop out almost totally from the conventional class-job system into a world they control" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 91). Suggested by the findings of this (qualitative) investigation the working-class aesthete was, after the mid-1960s, able to operate from a position of strength. The agency being offered to youth and the wider working-classes as a response to the demand for goods and the need for consumer growth, had not (until the end of the 1970s) reached the (post 1979) tipping point. This watershed date – referencing the demise of punk and the rise of Thatcher – signals an epoch when youth began to place more importance on the act of consumption of goods than on the extra significance that might have been attributed to the goods themselves. This post-punk / Thatcher / Regan period can be viewed as having the effect of a pacification of style within youth cultures as the established structure was able to offer a vast choice of commodities each with their own pre-packaged meanings. To acknowledge that, in perhaps 15 years (from high mod culture to the end of punk), there was an

almost total commodification of the spectacular subcultures, is to understand much about post-subcultural revival groups today.

During the golden era of spectacular subcultures British working-class youth had something that everyone wanted, the 'our thing' or The Life from which so much style poured forth.

Returning again to Wolfe's *The Noonday Underground*, in which he observes the Home Counties based, middle-class Sebastian Keep who frequents the Tiles. On first impressions Keep seems out of place as this daytime – noonday underground – dance club (Tiles), used by the working-class mods during their lunch break as an escape from their mundane office jobs. According to Wolfe, young Keep was a photographer's assistant who wore his hair in the "mode of the Rolling Stones", adding that the mods called him a "Scruffy 'erbert" (Wolfe, 1999, p. 93-94). Wolfe reaches no strong conclusions but for me the significance of his observations is clear. It would be naive to think that Wolfe was not fully aware of the symbolism of this mixture. A room full of totally self confident but equally unaware working-class teenagers and one clever public school boy with his finger on the consumer's pulse. The Life was like an orchard ready to pick, ripe with signifiers in costume and music that could be packaged and commodified. My thesis is predicated on today's revival being a response to the loss of The Life – to the market and wider areas of commodification – by those who were once touched by it. They express the emptiness they feel through a complex series of performances or re-enactments of the past. It is perhaps as much by happenstance as design that new space has been gained, by this group, within the realm of contemporary culture. It is my intention that my photographs and videos and the process of making them – of which my design of fashion items and textile prints are a part – will bring us closer to an understanding of this phenomenon while simultaneously developing men's fashion image-making as a practice.

Process as a Performance

As significant elements of male style, from the subcultural to the highly formal, derive from military costume, ritual and heroism then we might conjecture that the performance inherent in historical military re-enactment is a manifestation of male display of a similar type also present in style based subcultures. Before continuing on this route it is important to establish that such (re-enactment) groups actually exist as these subcultures often lay outside the public sphere. Moving a finger along a British re-enactment time line we jump centuries as we go from Vicus' Imperial Rome (www.vicus.org.uk) to the Sealed Knot's English Civil War (www.thesealedknot.org.uk), then on to the mid-twentieth century where we find Second World War re-enactors such as Spirit of Britain (www.spiritofbritain.net). A visual investigation into historical re-enactment is key to producing evocative representational work as this research suggests parallels with revival subcultures and seeks to redirect the male style-performance, inherent in both re-enactment and revival, into the realm of the fashion image.

Partaking in practice-based research is an act that in itself suggests a default position of bricolage. The marrying of the two quite distinct areas of theory and practice clearly demands a multi-disciplinary approach. The main problem is to find the most suitable methodology to apply to the research at hand. A cultural studies model works well in the classroom but what about at the workbench? Noting Michael Bérubé's work on *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies* (Bérubé et al., 2005), this research has no choice but to join the discourse between two dissonant schools of critical thought within cultural studies. The first is the model that centres on phenomena in popular culture, making few judgments on the aesthetic quality of the work under discussion. The second seeks a critical position from which to evaluate purely aesthetic modes of practice in literature and art. Felski tells us, "Cultural Studies has declared war on art and aesthetics... pleasure, beauty and style", then showing the other side of the coin saying "Hebdige made a persuasive case for the parallels between the aesthetics of the European avant-garde and 1970s British subcultural style" (Bérubé et al.,

2005, p. 28 and p.33). Quoting from Raymond Williams in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, Felski perhaps gives the researcher some hope of a convergence between cultural, social, economic and purely aesthetic considerations with the comment that cultural studies is about “discovering the nature of a practice and its conditions” (Bérubé et al. 2005, p.38). In short my theoretical position acknowledges context while my practice attempts beauty.

Consequently Chapter Two of the project, *The Myth of Spartacus: Defiance as an Aesthetic in Popular Culture*, not only explores the political and cultural implications of resistance but also the fundamental aesthetic of the rebellious male and its roots in popular visual culture. Working with dedicated re-enactors, actors and costumiers, this totally scripted, staged and choreographed series of tableaux reference the historical exploitation movies – from *Spartacus* (1960) to *Animal House* (1979) – that are so influential on my work. Perhaps no more than a collection of signs strung together by a script, the crass metaphors of the loner, the rebel, still defiant to the last, seemed as powerful to me as a child as any contemporary drama and the exploitation genre still resonates in my work today. What is even more affecting in the films on classical antiquity is the styling of the male. An arrogant aesthetic – from both Roman and slave – that appears to endorse Barthes’ idea that “Statistically, myth is on the right” (Barthes, 2000, p.148). Citing both Kubrick’s *Spartacus* (1960) and contemporary accounts from Roman historians the aesthetics of male beauty, heroism and myth are translated into images after a style, described in *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre as the “Pictorialistic tableau”* (Pauli, 2006 p.102).

Training with a wooden gladius (Roman short sword) for three years, losing seven kilos in body weight and subsisting on a staple diet consisting mainly of farro (Roman grain or spelt), anchovies and wine (I did not drink alcohol before this project) my own process and performance in these events is recorded and pays homage to the dedication of the re-enactor. The resulting collection of photographs both acknowledge Barthes’ position on the significance of (popular) myth and the role played by representation as part of mythological “speech”

(Barthes, 2000, p.110) and simultaneously reflects my response to a single fashion image by Bruce Weber (Fig. 1.). Perhaps the photograph that most influenced my work after my first viewing in the mid-1980s in Italian (men's) fashion magazine *Per Lui* (Weber, 1985).

A group of four muscular young models stand in and around a mid-1950s Chevrolet Bel Air car, they are dressed as if back-stage of a gladiator movie set. The essence of this image is maleness and performance with costume acting as a vital signifier and giving so many clues to the viewer about the connections between style, theatre and re-enactment. When contemplating men's fashion I find it impossible to separate male style and performance and, for me at least, this picture confirms such a notion as entirely plausible and, more importantly, showed me the traditional tableau form in use in a contemporary fashion context. The significance of this photograph in terms of its place in the canon of narrative-led fashion photography, the depiction of male beauty and sexuality in the fashion image and the role of signs and symbols of subculture within such narrative visual structures are all discussed at length in Chapter Three. Entitled *The Theatre of Bruce Weber: Decoding the Narrative Fashion Image*, this chapter takes a reflexive approach drawing from semiotics and also citing Paul Jobling's work on Bruce Weber and the role of the fashion image as a component of the "Fashion Spread" (Jobling, 2006). Contrasting Barthes' intellectual fascination with the "insistent fringes" of *The Romans in Films* (Barthes, 2000, p.26) with my proletarian and populist view of the sword and sandal movie as a source of inspiration, bricolage emerges as an invaluable methodological approach.

Commodities in Revival Subcultures

When attempting to explain his own work – which in the context of style sits clearly in the world of revival as it deals with appropriation, replication and nostalgia – artist Richard Prince makes this observation: "Continuation is a term first used in car culture. It's (sic) suggests nothing old, nothing new... it's a way to

connect the past and still be in the present” (Prince, 2008, p. no page number). I find Prince’s simplistic explanation to the re-working of his youth, directed through the lens of American biker and auto subcultures, to be a profound analysis of my own approach to practice, whether making images or designing clothing and textile prints. Prince reduces subcultures to their symbolic components then re-makes those corresponding objects or things either by re-photographing them or latterly continuing to make where the original (industrial) manufacturers left off. These fetishized commodities include such items as an early 1970s Dodge Challenger or something more ephemeral such a photograph of a tire burn-out (acceleration induced skid) on a deserted road. Like Prince I use existing or found locations and objects and I manufacture new goods and landscapes where I wish to transmit a particular message. We adopt similar methods and sometimes get similar results, the divergence comes in the intended receiver of the final image. Prince pitches much of his work to the art world for whom he presents his subcultural references as ironic or enigmatic whereas my practice is aimed at the consumer of dress and style – with revivalist tendencies – who reads the signs like a woodsman reads a trail.

This concern with commodities and their meaning, as bestowed by the various subcultures that appropriate them, is perhaps the strongest link between theory and practice. The cultural studies practitioner and theorist both have to work within this semiotic framework using established theoretical perspectives to decode and translate, however it is only the researcher in the role of artist-maker who is able to introduce their own signs as metaphors or for purely aesthetic effect. This relationship reflects that of the re-enactor and the revivalist. The re-enactor sees their task as one of replication and simulation while the revivalist is the true Bricoleur, re-cutting, re-colouring and constantly re-assessing their style possibilities within the sphere of an ever expanding canon of historical goods. This has been my approach as a maker in that I have re-modeled and re-made signifiers to be used both as elements in my representational work and to be displayed as objects in themselves.

By approaching Chapter Four (*The Black Leather Jacket: A Selective History*) with a multi-disciplinary perspective an attempt is made to provide historical provenance and decode cultural and subcultural meanings bestowed on an item that once signified defiance but today, like the ubiquitous tattoo and other symbols appropriated by the mainstream (market-place), is used more often in a parody of resistance and rebellion. This case study offers a critical view of the black leather jacket and its passage through the twentieth century following militarisation, sexualisation, appropriation by youth, commodification and eventual re-appropriation by revivalist subcultures. It is the granting of a new hyperreal status by the re-enactors and revivalists that has permitted the leather jacket to live again, albeit in a simulated landscape and it is I who facilitates the representation of this living stage and the players on it. At this point I remind the reader of the first paragraph of this introduction and of my partial and subjective view that fashion image-making (like fashion itself) is frivolous and ephemeral and thus a mirror on contemporary culture. The following chapters are not an exhaustive study of fashion image-making or subculture but reflect my research findings on the position of the male fashion image and the process of the practitioner who juggles a plethora of fetishized commodities in one hand while focusing the camera with the other.

Chapter One. Revival as a Genre Within Contemporary Men's Fashion Image-making: Context for a Method

Introduction

In the vast world of the visual exists a significant space influenced by architecture, art, commerce, film, sport, subculture, technology and theatre. This space is inhabited by a number of genres all of which fall under the single umbrella of fashion photography. This chapter attempts to isolate what I describe as the revival genre and presents the life and work of the artist Richard Prince as a metaphor for the complex contradictions and ambiguities inherent in this field in which simulation and artifice are basic building blocks. It is my thesis that revival appears not to be a static and dogmatic affectation but a constantly evolving movement that I utilise as a driver for my fashion image-making. Furthermore it is my intention, through my practice, to simultaneously explore the aesthetics of revival subcultures and re-enactment groups and to use those aesthetics movements as inspiration for the creative practice of photography.

What is Retro and Revival: What is Pastiche and Parody?

Elizabeth E. Guffey's book – *Retro: the Culture of Revival* (Guffey, 2006), is an enlightening read and offers much knowledge on this subject although its remit is a general one and does not move into the area of contemporary fashion photography or subculture. My own Guffey influenced interpretation defines, retro as a term in contemporary usage that encompasses any cultural event, film, visual image or object that draws aesthetic inspiration from one, or sometimes an amalgam, of epochs – usually from the second half of the twentieth century. Laden with sentimentality and nostalgia, retro representations are often considered, especially in postmodern criticism, to be superficial and meaningless. If this partly explains the meaning of retro in today's currency then, this research proposes that revival is grounded in the actual re-enactment of a historical period by adopting the manners and style of this period whilst simultaneously

disassociating oneself, to varying degrees, with mainstream life. This disassociation with the mainstream being particularly significant to the revivalist and historical re-enactor as it could be conjectured that it represents an attempt – albeit deeply flawed – to bring the experience into the realm of the authentic. As Guffey's book confirms, up until today revival has been mostly associated with the reintroduction of defunct decorative art or theatre movements and nostalgia films during the twentieth century. Guffey cites a spectrum of post war revivals including Art Nouveau, Art Deco and the French film genre, mode rétro. Also mentioned is a cover-all term that echoing Thomas Hine's Chapter in *Populux* (Hine, 2007, p.123) entitled "Just Push the Button" is named by Guffey as "Retro-futurism" (Guffey, 2006, p.152). Taking such literature into account it is the intention of this research to subtly reposition this term or at least add another layer of meaning to it.

The popularity of today's historical re-enactment groups suggests a frustration with the perceived inauthenticity of contemporary life and a need to find something more real somewhere in the past. At its most visible this desire continues to manifest itself through the language of fashion photography in which simulation is an everyday tool. This simulation and replication, not just of historical epochs and the objects associated with them but of entire styles and genres of art, design, film, literature and photography is often described as pastiche. Says Jameson, "Pastiche is like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives" and continues later "Pastiche is thus blank parody" (Jameson, 1993, p.17). Jameson brings harsh criticism into the arena, effectively trashing the type of representation that might be described as pastiche as blank Parody. So where does that leave my revival based practice?

As it is my intention that my practice should be constructed from numerous layers of meaning, each representing a slightly different realm within the world of male subcultural style, a clear position for the two terms – retro and revival – should be

defined for the purposes of this research. In an attempt to bring clarity to this situation I propose the positioning of retro and of revival as separate entities in contemporary fashion image making. Thus, I suggest that retro implies an easy to understand prettiness or charm, a half way house for the uninitiated, a pastiche in which little is at stake, whereas in the context of this research, revival evokes a suggested disconnection from the mainstream and a position of otherness and might evoke an internal parody of an already secret language.

Photography: A Backward Looking Process?

Here I postulate that both retro and revival style – within fashion image-making – occupy logical positions as all photography suffers from two great preoccupations: that of retrospective envy of painting and a maniacal search for the new. These elements are still shaping its progress even today and it is to these preoccupations, in equal parts, that the genre of the contemporary photographic tableau – central to my own practice – owes much as it aspires to speak a new language through an approach authorized by numerous historical schools of painting. Barthes makes an enlightening comment on this situation in *Camera Lucida* saying, “Photography has been, and still is, tormented by the ghost of painting” (Barthes, 2000, p.30). A cursory glance at any well-produced fashion magazine will confirm the debt fashion photography still owes to painting – and particularly portraiture – a point not lost on Charlotte Cotton, author of *The Photograph as Contemporary Art* (2004), in which she notes that the contemporary tableau photograph has characteristics that “relate most directly to the pre-photographic era of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western figurative painting”.

Like a film or theatre production the fashion photograph is usually a team effort depending heavily on the quality or importance of the model, the clothing to be featured, the location in which the model will be placed, lighting and the overall idea that is employed to link these disparate elements together. Barthes states in clear terms: “Yet it is not (it seems to me) by painting that photography touches

art, but by theatre” (Barthes, 2000, p.31). Fashion photography – in particular – is a form of theatre and the genre of revival sits at the more theatrical end of the spectrum melding the devices of theatre and film with the compositional elements of the traditional tableau painting.

Richard Prince: Revival Fashion Photography in the Postmodern Context

Since the mid-1980s the work of one fashion editor, Franca Sozzani¹ and several fashion photographers – all extensively employed by Condé Nast – including Koto Bolofo, Peter Lindbergh and Steven Meisel stands out as being guided by a strong retro current. Drawing from a range of aesthetic epochs for inspiration their fashion photography has appeared in many of the most influential fashion magazines and numerous art galleries of international importance, however it is only fellow Condé Nast photographer, Bruce Weber that stands out and his work is addressed at length later in this research (see Chapter Three). While I acknowledge the Condé Nast group and owe much to Bruce Weber for a cathartic introduction to the fashion tableau in the mid-1980s, it is not here in a sentimental and nostalgic world of retro that one finds new and innovative ideas within revival orientated representation. As in subculture revival style develops and moves with the times, while retro stands still.

Both fashion and fashion image-making have a voracious appetite for new influences and will appropriate any genre in representation in conceptual art, film, painting or indeed art photography. Moreover the relationship between the latter and fashion photography has been an ambiguous one as some art practitioners appear to be making fashion images that are then billed as art. Emerging, as Charlotte Cotton describes it “within the first wave of postmodernist use of photography in the late 1970s” (Cotton, 2004, p.209), Richard Prince is both a successful art photographer and fashion image-maker. He is not only an instigator of a new aesthetic within revival fashion photography² but within fashion in general.

In the modern day world of contemporary art Richard Prince (b.1949) has an unassailable position as a leading artist of international stature having had solo and group exhibitions in national museums across Europe and North America culminating in 2007 with a solo retrospective at New York's Guggenheim Museum.

Prince's work seems positioned in the – now traditional – postmodern role of cultural commentator with himself as participant observer. In the 370 page catalogue for Prince's Guggenheim exhibition (Spector, 2008) Prince refers frequently to the era of the American muscle car (late 1960s to mid-1970s), the films that relate to those cars such as "*Vanishing Point*" (Sarafian, 1971) and "*Bull!*" (Yates, 1968) and his ownership of particular cars in Los Angeles (Spector, 2008, p.328-331) and Upstate New York³ (Spector, 2008, p.335). This role of participant in his own on-going revival art story continues and is described by Jack Bankowsky (Spector, 2008, p.345):

Prince, of course, has long melded replacement hoods and wooden supports to produce his signature sculptures, but work on real cars is new to the Body Shop⁴. New, too, is a separate initiative that began with the customization of a 1970 Dodge Challenger¹⁰ the artist fully intends to drive.

Bankowsky goes on to quote Prince, "I don't know if it's art, and I don't really care.... Basically it is a Challenger but it will drive like an Audi." The art establishment grants Richard Prince full status as an artist of substance but it's his personal taste that tells us more about the nature of revival and its significance in the realm of fashion photography and art. As an acclaimed fashion photographer Prince has had assignments published in several directional fashion magazines including the avant-garde *Purple*⁵ and POP. A double page photograph from a fashion shoot, featuring super-model Stella Tenent with a customised early 1960s Harley Davidson FL (Mitchel, 1997, p.194), appears in the 2008 Guggenheim exhibition catalogue (Spector, 2008, p.146-147) as the only original photograph in a series of re-photographed images. This image is related in the exhibition catalogue to an extensive body of Prince's work with the

collective title: *Girlfriends* (dated from 1986 to 1999) and relates to a subcultural rite within outlaw biker⁶ culture involving women, within this subculture, bearing their breasts in public. This ritual has developed since the 1970s, in parallel with the growth of biker magazines such as *Easyriders*⁷, into a photographic ritual in which a male biker photographs his girlfriend in various stages of undress and in self-conscious poses and submits these amateur images to the previously mentioned magazines for publication. Prince's artworks are literally re-photography of such images directly from the magazines in which they featured. It is through this process that Prince has moved these images from subculture into the world of art photography. Significantly, Paul Jobling refers to Baudrillard when commenting on the "hyperreal" aspect of (Bruce) "Weber's" work that equally applies to Prince; "hyperreality is the condition of a society in crisis – one that takes refuge in images because it does not know how to mourn the loss of what it once regarded as truthful or real" (Jobling, 2006, p.30). This background knowledge helps to ask an important question about the previously mentioned Stella Tenent photograph – is this Prince making a pastiche of his own work and if so where does this image sit within the genre of revival fashion photography?

There's much to be learned from the work of Richard Prince in terms of the simulation and appropriation of subcultural signs and in his approach to the representation of fashion in, what I will term, revivalist art-photography. Far more conventional is his approach to fashion itself. Prince's fashion images are designed to sell clothes and gain their capital from his reputation as an artist. When shooting for *Purple* (Zahm, 2008, no page numbers) and *POP* (Spring / Summer 2010), we, as fashion magazine consumers, are being offered the proposition that because Prince is a successful artist then we should buy the clothes in the photographs as if they had become part of an artwork. A simplistic reading and I feel, an accurate one.

Although Prince and I share subcultural references (e.g. hot rod cars and motorcycles) our presentation of them differs greatly. We both acknowledge the role of the brand in the semiotic lore of subculture and the graphic and cultural

significance such symbols carry. Prince, however, relies on a postmodern ironic position in his representation of fashion and cars – perhaps the most prominent of all consumer goods – while I adopt the devices of the theatre. In *Acting the Part: Photography as Theatre* (Pauli, 2006, p.133), Karen Henry comments on the contemporary tableau photograph, “On this shifting ground, theatricality is a natural recourse that artists, whose *métier* is representation, have readily adopted”.

I have already mentioned my adherence to the aims of my subjects rather than their exploitation and my naïve, non-ironic approach to image-making, so what does my practice represent? Is it Muggleton’s post-subcultural condition, a world in which “subculturalists revel in this simulation culture, refusing meaning in the name of spectacle” (Muggleton, 2000, p.46)? Or, like the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, does Muggleton underplay the importance of the stylist? Here my practice attempts the representation of a lineage that can be traced back before the modern and postmodern eras, and even before Brummel to the visual manifestation of male performance for its own sake. Such a dandy genealogy is explored to a fine degree by Farid Chenoune’s book *A History of Men’s Fashion* in which the author takes us from the English upper-class macaroni’s “baroque narcissism” (Chenoune, 1993, p.10) of the latter part of the eighteenth century to the petit bourgeois Parisian minets of 1968 whom he describes as “indefatigable fops” (Chenoune, 1993, p.268).

Finally I set down the three main strategies that shape this practice within the genre of revival fashion image-making.

- i. Re-enactors in situ. Within the period of this research I have visited numerous twentieth century re-enactment events, during which I have created photographic tableaux. My technique is to find subjects who will agree to use their own clothing and available props and to act out a scene in a location of my choosing which I then record. This is done in the mode of an improvised theatre workshop.
- ii. Revival as theatre. Working on the idea that revival style is a form of internal theatre, with a cast of one, I ask individuals involved in revival subcultures to

take part in a series of scenes from which my tableaux are created. I assemble vehicles and props and manufacture clothing and textile prints that form a visual background story for the participants. The tableaux are then created by the players acting out scenes that relate to that predetermined storyline. The role of the individual subcultural stylist is paramount as each brings a lifetime of style to the image.

iii. Historical re-enactment. Mixing the aesthetics of the traditional tableau on classical antiquity with the sword and sandal exploitation films of the 1950s and 1960s, this strategy seeks to test some of the precepts of my theses on male style and its basis in military costume, ritual and performance. This historical re-enactment project concentrates on a single piece of research entitled *The Legend of Spartacus* and was performed in Italy, Jordan, South Africa and the United Kingdom over a protracted period. This is the only project for which a written treatment (the precursor to a script in film production) was produced. These theatrical events, totally staged, directed and produced as part of this research, used the devices of traditional theatre and filmmaking and, like my other work, were produced without significant digital manipulation.

Conclusion

This research suggests that there are existing autonomous genres of both retro and revival influenced photography within contemporary fashion image-making (both men's and women's). Both fashion design and fashion photography owe much to the past whether via painting, in the case of fashion photography, or the plundering of any evocative epoch that has caught the zeitgeist of the day by fashion design. Cited as a leading practitioner in the genre, Prince's approach mirrors much in revival as it constantly re-frames the past. Re-photographing the nostalgic icons of a now lost America, Richard Prince literally revives and renews. His replication of a forty-year-old hot rod car as an art statement suggests an ambiguous approach, intentionally presenting such subcultural commodities to his patrons as aesthetic objects. Here, yet again, we find the parallel with revival fashion image-making. The photographer reveals the signs and symbols of the subculture for all to see but their full significance is not understood by the wider public. This is the joy of subculture – the ownership of the secret sign. The work of Richard Prince, above all others, was chosen for this

chapter as it provides a useful sounding-board against which I am able to compare and contrast my practice and at the same time allude to the work of one of the most important practitioners in the field of fashion image-making today.

End notes

1. *Vogue Italia*, edited by Franca Sozzani since 1988, is considered to be an arbiter of cutting edge high-fashion style although the signature of the magazine has distinct 'retro' tendencies and often draws from films, literature and photography from the early to mid-twentieth century for inspiration. Sozzani also edits *L'Uomo Vogue*, the male counterpart to *Vogue Italia*.
2. In the critical essays and books cited in this work there is no mention of Richard Prince being an artist associated with revival. This idea of Prince's work being part of revival culture and, indeed, owing some of its success to that culture comes from my own observations.
3. In an interview with Prince's alter ego, John Dogg (Spector, 2008, p.328-333), Prince claims ownership of several modified muscle cars – including models such as the: Dodge Charger, Dodge Challenger, Mustang Boss 302, GTO and Hemi 'Cuda – whilst living in LA. Following on from this interview (p.334) is a photograph of a Plymouth, Hemi 'Cuda (painted in (hot rod) matt black) parked in a field outside Prince's Rensselaerville, NY studio.
4. The "body shop" (Spector, 2008, p.345) refers to an area in Prince's studio in which traditional auto-body shop activities take place.
5. *Purple* (sometimes subtitled: Prose, Fiction, Fashion, Polytix, Sexe, etc.) was started in 1992 by Elein Fleiss and Olivier Zahm. According to the jacket of *Purple Anthology* (Fleiss and Zahm, 2008), a book covering the history of the magazine from 1992 to 2006: "PURPLE magazine revolutionized fashion photography in the 1990s by linking the art and fashion worlds as never before".
6. The American outlaw biker is a continuation of a Post Second World War subculture that developed in parallel with mainstream motorcycle clubs across the US. Defined in the 1950s by the American Motorcycle Association as representing only 1% of American motorcyclists, these individuals often affiliate themselves with a particular motorcycle club that advocates a life totally dedicated to motorcycle riding and related activities. These clubs are known by such names as: Banditos, Hell's Angels and Sons of Silence.
7. *Easyriders* is an American motorcycle magazine dedicated to a particular strand of American motorcycle culture somewhere between the outlaw biker and the Weekend Warrior (a very mainstream Harley-Davidson owner riding only at weekends). Since its inception in 1971, *Easyriders* has featured customized Harley-Davidson motorcycles and nude or topless women.

Chapter Two. The Myth of Spartacus: Defiance as an Aesthetic in Popular Culture

Here we find the grandiloquence which must have been that of the ancient theatres.... An open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or arena what they are is not the sky.... It is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light.... The nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bull fights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve. (Barthes, 2000, p.15).

While re-enactors can reference any epoch revivalists generally refer their visual appearance to the codes of clothing and conduct first attributed to the founding moment of youth subculture – the emergence of proletarian, masculine, post war youth in Britain and the USA. If there are stories to be found in the rituals of collecting, customising, restoring, admiring, racing or simply wearing leather and driving hot rod cars and bikes, these stories integrate the truth of experience, fantasy, history and desire. My practice in these areas manifests itself in three substantial parts all opening up avenues of enquiry. The first being that of enquiry through the process of staging a series of large scale re-enactments. This mixes the practice of collecting or making – the goods and commodities appropriate to the historical period at hand – and the act of directing and producing such events that shares much with film-making, theatre and fashion photography. The second adopts the method of action-research as it involves my own performance as a further method of enquiry and the third being the recording of these events with photography – the moment of the click of the shutter. It is through the role of action-researcher / participant-observer in my own Spartacus re-enactment event (that took three years to complete) that I have been able to experience, at first hand, the similarities in dedication to style and performance exemplified by both subculture and re-enactment members alike.

The Significance of Spartacus

To understand the parallels of the Spartacus legend with the style-rituals identified as components of subcultural resistance is to begin to unravel a series

of interconnecting threads of thought, feeling, fantasy, history and culture. Through both the practice based and textual work in this research I conjecture that it is not only popular cinema's youth exploitation films of the 1950s and 60s and the corresponding nostalgia films, that followed a generation later, that exert considerable influence over revivalists and twentieth century re-enactors, but also the epic historical dramas – of the post-war era – set in classical antiquity. Furthermore that the transmission of signs, used in the formulaic visual language of the sword and sandal film, has much in common with the (leather jacket) B movies so often referenced as historical indicators of the state of youth resistance and indeed male subcultural language in general.

If we are to give these propositions any credence we must ask, why should contemporary males with a tendency towards creative expression through subcultural dress and style find something meaningful in images that could be placed in the genre of parody, camp or kitsch – whether Roman or American? Such a question can be explored through a visual process that might be described as re-coding. Here we aim to explore the complex interaction of artifice, image, re-enactment and desire in the way that subcultural masculinity creates its own history. With this approach a group of males aged from 25 to 70, all judged by me to carry the dandy gene and with firm revivalist credentials were assembled in the manner of a repertory company and a written treatment entitled *The Legend of Spartacus*¹ (Appendix. 1) used as a storyline. Continuing in this process, various wilderness locations were selected (Italy, Jordan and S. Africa) and photographic tableaux created with the coded signs and symbols of modern-day resistance and style and the structure of the fashion image inserted into the classical Roman context. The outcome of this visual investigation is then contrasted with other images from this research – also photographed in similar wilderness locations – of a group of hot rod car and motorcycle revivalists. This is not an attempt at pseudo-social-science but a playful and imaginative look at the layers of visual convergence that can be found in codes of resistance and style and the representational meta-language they share.



Fig. 4. It is the meanings these images (above) have in common that are far more informative than what separates them: the aesthetics of speed, the grand exit, the testing of masculinity in the wilderness and a multiplicity of other signifiers of resistance and style (Clements, 2007 / 2008).

These images of Roman re-enactors might well offer some insight into the representation of male style and the increase in seduction that occurs when certain coded messages are evoked, but why Spartacus? As a metaphor I have found it instructive to juxtapose the authorized history of say, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Gibbon, 1997) and the inherently unauthorised myth of Spartacus imagined within Hollywood's popular cinema. It is one of the theses tested here that the history of those whose experience is not recorded in authorized versions of what took place becomes sought within unauthorised cultures, legends and myths. It is my suggestion that those proletarian youths, the stylists, who carry the (metaphorical) dandy gene, deprived of cultural capital and aesthetic stimulation, have sought knowledge in the only place accessible to them: the unauthorised version, whether from Hollywood, pulp novels and comics or from the words and images associated with popular music. Whereas Barthes' *Myth Today?* states that myth has the function of transforming "history into nature" (Barthes, 2000, p.141) and thereby stabilising as eternal truths situations that have been fought and constructed through historical processes. It is my contention, that there may be a subtler and more modulated use of myth that is being made by revival subcultures today.

The Legend of Spartacus: a Story in Words and Pictures

This research seeks, not just to arrange a series of performances and present them as aesthetic based practice, but, like the revivalists, to find resonance in historical moments (ancient and modern). This approach typifies my work at the RCA as I attempt to complete the visual narrative with background research that, in the case of Spartacus, is grounded in the beginnings of the contemporary political struggle and critical Marxist thought. Out of the long history of resistance and political struggle I attempt to find beauty.

My approach to the Spartacus story starts not with a Thracian slave who defied Rome a generation before the birth of Christ but a German Jew living in London during the middle of the nineteenth century. It was a few well chosen words in a letter to his co-author of the communist manifesto that would eventually move Spartacus into the centre of Roman history and contemporary myth.

In 1861 Karl Marx wrote to Friedrich Engels:

As a relaxation in the evenings I have been reading Appian on the Roman Civil Wars.... Spartacus is revealed as the most splendid fellow in the whole of ancient history. Great general (no Garibaldi), noble character, real representative of the ancient proletariat (Marx, 1979, p.141).

Brent D. Shaw postulates in the introduction to his book, *Spartacus and The Slave Wars* that Marx's curiosity about Spartacus came about due to the "American Crisis, as the U.S. Civil War was then referred to in Europe" and "the revolutionary feats of Giuseppe Garibaldi, the romantic nineteenth-century rebel who was engaged in liberating Sicily and southern Italy from foreign domination" (Shaw, 2001, p.14).

Being chosen as much for his defiant stance as for his proto-political position the name came to the forefront of the political arena in Germany during the turbulent period directly after the First World War with the leftist Spartacus League. Defiance and sacrifice are central to the Spartacus story, two values the founders

of the League held in high regard. After a risky confrontation with the authorities in Berlin in 1919 both were arrested and, separately, “rifle-butted” and “shot”. (Red) Rosa Luxemburg in the head and Karl Liebknecht while trying to escape (Trow, 2006, p.14).

American writer, Howard Fast’s 1951 novel, *Spartacus*, coincided with a plethora of cultural, economic, social and political factors that would bring popular relevance to this ancient story. In Europe and the USA during the immediate post Second World War period new paradigms in thought were emerging in the areas of critical theory (from Western Marxism), Neo-Aristotelianism (from the Chicago School), feminism, (what would become) post-colonial theory and ethnology centred on popular culture and society’s underclass. In the rarefied atmosphere of high academia the voice of the foot soldier was becoming as important as that of the officer class².

A new generation of students across the human disciplines encountered new interpretive theories (ethnomethodology, phenomenology, critical theory, feminism). They were drawn to qualitative research practices that would let them give a voice to society’s underclass. Post-positivism functioned as a powerful epistemological paradigm. Researchers attempted to fit Campbell and Stanley’s model of internal and external validity to constructionist and interactionist conceptions of the research act. They returned to the Chicago school as sources of inspiration (Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 2003).

That is not to say that powerful reactionary forces were not trying to impede the progress of these schools of thought at every turn. This was however only one battlefield in the cultural and social wars of the early 1950s as there was also the tacit resistance to the hegemony of the officer class that emerged from those members of this generation that, although untutored in the new methodology of post-war thinking, were no less revolutionary for articulating their resistance through experimentation in style. The language of ritual, dance and dress acted

with an uncoordinated social choreography that proved to be as expressive and as powerful as any academic revolution.

The Author as Rebel With a Cause

The House Committee on Un-American Activities was set up in 1938 by the United States House of Representatives to weed out leftist thinkers, writers and performers from positions through which they might spread their subversive message to wider American society. Howard Fast was called before the committee, refused to answer questions about colleagues and was jailed for three months in 1950. Fast was blacklisted and unable to work as a writer for mainstream media and only got *Spartacus* published under his own name after considerable effort (Fast, 1996, p.vii). Organizations such as the HCUA were attempting to hold back a tide of change that would ultimately come, not from the intellectuals and academics (although they might analyse or even support it), but from the need for economic growth and consumption. This suited the Hollywood dream factory that made good revenue from its marketing of myths and fantasies that proved to be sustaining to an audience with new stories in mind. In American popular culture heroes were no longer chosen by the ruling class to represent the status quo but by a consumer machine that needed to sell a version of the world with which the new affluent proletariat could identify themselves as proxy players. Granted agency by the main structure of society, forms of expression unseen before in the mainstream were, by the mid-1950s, manifesting themselves in music, film and literature. In a repetitive re-enactment of the Oedipus story popular films portrayed the struggle between the new order (male youth) with the ineffectual old order (father or father figure). Those who played roles representing this struggle such as James Dean (1931 – 1955) and Marlon Brando (1924 – 2004) remain iconic figures within popular culture. In films such as *East of Eden* (Elia Kazan, 1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955) one observes the youthful hero attempting to usurp the position of the father (or father figure) while, at the same time, seeking his approval. In the early Brando film *The Wild One* (Laslo Benedek, 1953) the youthful rebel and leader of a motorcycle

gang (Johnny – played by Brando) tries to usurp the older established male authority in a small American town. Brando's second in command, Chino (played by Lee Marvin) is represented as a risk taking drunk and is probably modeled on an unidentified member of the Boozefighters Motor Cycle Club on whose exploits in the 1947, Gypsy Tour Motorcycle Rally at Hollister the film was based. Ultimately Brando does not conform and is badly beaten by the men of the town's business community and the gang run out of town. The film was deemed unsuitable for a British audience and was banned until 1968.

It's difficult not to notice the parallels between Spartacus and Crixus (Spartacus' lieutenant – played by John Ireland) and Johnny and Chino. The loose semi-anarchistic non-structured group/gang structure, the use of leather cladding/clothing as a means of defence and as a warning sign to outsiders, the freedom, mobility and power offered by the motorcycle/horse, defiance, glory and sacrifice all resonate in the same way whether describing motorcycle gangs or Kubrick's slave army. In a quote from *The Original Wild Ones: Tales of the Boozefighters Motorcycle Club* (Hayes, 2005, p.25), Wino (one of the original members who were at Hollister in 1947) says "And the original didn't discriminate towards any ethnic, religious or political group". Talking about the Second World War, Wino adds "we fought side by side for all Americans (could we say slaves here?) to have freedom of choice". Again one wonders if this conversation had happened in 25 BC (over 50 years after Spartacus' uprising in 73 BC), could a veteran of the Third Servile Wars have said the same words but substituted the word 'slaves' for 'Americans'?

Drawing from what they observed on the street corners of metropolitan American scriptwriters packaged functional work wear and cheap transport into the signs easily recognizable today as belonging to youth subcultures and presented that package as a representation of youth.

In Hollywood by 1960 the leather-clad rebel had exchanged his motorcycle for a horse and a new element of nihilism had crept into the (now classic) story of

rebellion. This was no longer a controlled explosion, a scheduled period of teenage angst during which the offending youth joins the teen-market and at one point emerges a responsible adult choosing a reputable career. This was the next stage: total war by the exploited on the exploiter in which the usurper pays the ultimate price. The youth against the parent and wider society, the still disenfranchised African American against white supremacy, the oppressed woman against a male dominated system, the immigrant against the host culture and the worker against the bosses. The published version of the Spartacus story (Fast, 1951) resonated with the social turmoil of the period, Fast's book was picked up by Kirk Douglas acting as producer and, \$12,000,000 later, released as the film: *Spartacus*.

Leather and Iron: The Emblems of Resistance

In what I describe (in Britain and the USA) as a golden age of subcultures [c.1953 to c.1979] an element of working class youth tried hard to subvert the apparatus of control by adopting a stance of otherness through dress and behaviour. As contemporary post-industrial society carries us further away from a "violent" time when Baudrillard suggests "life and death were at stake" (Baudrillard, 2006, p.44), and even a glimpse of the a perceived authenticity connected with those (real) times still has the capability to excite young men who momentarily connect with a history from which they are now totally disconnect. The leather jacket / cladding and motorcycle / horse, cynically placed by the forces of repression as signs of defiance within a film are actually seen by youth as signs of hope. The path to "embourgeoisement" of the British working class is highlighted in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's book *Resistance Through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson, 2004, p.21) by markers such as: "affluence" and "consensus". In other words the working class has been complicate in loosing touch with its roots in an act of conscious abandonment during the post War period when the left sort to replace violence and day to day survival with socialism (since totally rejected by the working classes of most Western societies). It was only youth that tried to hang-on to something real which either

manifested itself in the street through fighting or vicariously through the cinema. Intentionally or not, perhaps films like *The Wild One* and *Spartacus* both went too far for the controlling elements of society as the first was banned and the latter, due to political blacklisting and pressure from the security services, was almost never made.

Speeding Across the Wilderness

As mentioned earlier in this research it is possible, by juxtaposing images from *The Legend of Spartacus* (Appendix 1) and photographs of modern day revivalists racing hot rod cars and motorcycles, to reflect on the significance speed (the grand exit) within male subcultures. In my photographs the racing of revival hot rod cars and motorcycles evokes the chariot race of the Hollywood epic and demonstrates the aesthetic of speed in a parallel context. Such images raise questions around the obligatory testing of masculinity within the wilderness something that we still relate to rites of passage and asks, does the sight of men racing in the wilderness on chariots or in dragster cars reignite, in male youth, the same primal urges that guided humans into such rituals in pre-history?

The wasteland features centrally in Old Testament stories as punishment by exile from paradise and in the Christian New Testament by stories of Christ's forty days in the wilderness as a testing of self doubt. The Hollywood Western genre makes full use of the concept of wilderness as the antithesis of the civilised world of the city, and locates its hero cowboy as the agent who creates and patrols the frontier that demarcates nature from culture, creating the law of man's agency from the lawlessness of the natural wilderness. It is not hard to see how these myths from Genesis to Hollywood provide not only an Oedipal significance – escape for the family home – but also a real sense of history for men creating their own terms of social agency, outside the roles attributed to them by the scripts of bourgeois narratives. Speed, whether on horseback, scooter, motorcycle or customised hot rod confers an autonomy on the masculine hero's journey from captivity towards the "demi-paradise" of Baudrillard's "Great Salt

Lake Desert, where, he notes, they had to invent the speed of prototype cars to cope with absolute horizontality” (Baudrillard, 1999, p.2). This concentration on the vanishing point is heightened by the desert and propels the male to a new place, as yet unknown, a ‘somewhere else’.

In the practice that accompanies this entire research text the work might be divided into two approaches, the first being documentary (hot rod racers) and the second theatrical. (Spartacus) However this is not my reading of the situation. These Roman images are theatrical and prearranged to the last detail and the participants are a mixture of carefully chosen aesthetes and (historical) re-enactors while the hot rod racing photographs are actually documenting the rituals of a current revival subculture. However this is not (only) a document but a series of performances.

Conclusion

My Spartacus project suggests to me that it is performance, without an audience and for its own sake that is at the heart of serious re-enactment. Also that subcultural style leaders who have today found refuge in revival subcultures, are driven by the same desire to perform. The nature of such performances may well be guided by the social, political and economic factors of the day, which in recent times have granted the proletarian dandy dominium over that realm, however the metaphorical rogue gene that predetermines a male as a “stylist” (Hebdige, 2003, p.122) knows no class boundary. In D. B. Wyndam Lewis’ translation of D’Aurevilly’s *The Anatomy of Dandyism* (D’Aurevilly, 1928) (a privately published book on the aristocratic English Dandy and socialite, Beau Brummell) the author alludes to the internal landscape of the dandy and the performance that seeks no acknowledgement, “A Dandy may, if he cares, spend ten hours over his toilet, but once dressed he forgets it.” (D’Aurevilly, 1928, p.31). If this observation is indeed true, although one suspects there is an element of posturing in such a position, then what better way to express such tendencies than by absencing oneself to the wilderness and dressing as a Roman general or a desert racer of a

bygone heroic period? The others who witness this performance are also performing and the whole re-enactment becomes abstract in its perspective. So it is with the more extreme ends of male style within subculture. A Spartacus re-enactment, like the spectacular teddy boy or mod subcultures, is approached, by some, merely a vehicle, a theme, through which the individual might express their creativity in dress and style. My approach attempts, through the language of the fashion image, to illustrate the extent of the shared space inhabited by both the subcultural style-leader and the re-enactor whose motivation to re-enact is based on aesthetics.

End notes

1. *The Legend of Spartacus* consists of a film treatment – the outline of a film story at a stage before the script is written – of around nine thousand words illustrated by a series of photographs.
2. In *National Lampoon's Animal House* (Landis, 1979) – an early pattern for the my own revival aesthetic – the sub-narrative divides America into three classes: The Establishment represented by the Omega fraternity and the cadet corps, the new liberals represented by the Delta fraternity and the underclass represented by the African American musicians admired by the liberals. At one point in the film Neidermeyer (played by Mark Metcalf), a member of the Omega House and cadet officer describes his family as “Patrician”. This part of the script clearly references the appropriation of classical antiquity by the ruling classes as much as Delta's infamous toga party lampoons those same references.

Chapter Three. The Theatre of Bruce Weber: Decoding the Narrative

Fashion Image

The fashion photograph is not just any photograph, it bears little relation to the news photograph or snapshot, for example; it has its own units and rules; within photographic communication, it forms a specific language which no doubt has its own lexicon and syntax, its own banned or approved “turns of phrase” (Barthes, 1990, p.4).

Introduction

From starting as a consumer of fashion photography in the early 1980s to becoming a producer by the end of that decade, the work of one single practitioner stands out as my constant inspiration and indeed has acted as a template for my practice for over twenty years. The American photographer, Bruce Weber (b.1946) is the master of the narrative-led fashion image, a genre that is central to the practice element of this research. In order that my work might be better understood I take a critical look at the Weber images that most influenced me during my formative years as a fashion image-maker and attempt a critical review of his photographic language to which my practice often pays homage.

During the mid-1980s Weber moved from the position of top photographer to that of a metaphorical giant in men’s fashion and style photography – a position that he still maintains today. Moving away from mainstream fashion in the early 1980s Weber used a language of signs, mainly derived from American myth and subcultures, that attempted representation of an idealised (young) American male through allegory and symbolism. Weber’s camp, pictorialist style made the conventional fashion images of *Vogue* and *Elle* look outmoded and the experimental work seen in cutting edge publications such as *The Face* and *i-D* look contrived and lacking in authenticity. Weber’s images suggest a charming but totally illusory real by using historical symbols as triggers that evoke, not actual recollections of a golden past, but memories of films, books and photography that depicted such happy times. When commenting on Halbwachs

theories on collective memory Aleida Assmann says “Not only collective memory depends on social frames, the memories of individuals are also supported and defined by them” (Tilmans et al. eds. (2010) p.37). In this case Weber’s “social frames” exist within the world of the Hollywood epic, American literature, the depiction of male beauty and youthful rebellion. Weber remembers for all of us and his memories are translated into style images. His is the landscape of the collective memory of the new real, mediated, not through experience but through representation and combining the techniques of “nostalgia films” (Jameson, 1993, p.287) with a strong narcissistic component.

For the purposes of this chapter I have chosen one photograph, taken at the start of Weber’s adoption of this creative strategy, to mark the starting point of my own relationship with Pictorialist photography and the narrative-led fashion image.



Fig. 1. My introduction to the fashion tableau: Bruce Weber’s image brings narrative and theatre to the men’s fashion arena. (Weber, 1985).

The image in question (Fig. 1.) is the opening of a spread of photographs, by Bruce Weber, published in *Per Lui*, July / August, 1985 under the title, *Hollywood Movie*. Following Jobling’s lead on the analysis of fashion photography in the context of the magazine (Jobling, 2006), this image is viewed as both an

individual object and a component of a fashion spread. These pages place fashion models and (one assumes) street (or gym) cast characters or movie extras in the back-lot of Hollywood's Zoetrope studios as if behind the scenes of a sword and sandal or, as quoted in the caption text, a 1950s "sandaloni" film production. The sepia wash implies a past era but the opening sentence to the introduction is more specific describing the entire spread as (translation from Italian), "Revisiting the Mecca of Cinema, yesterday and today: the films that made an epoch". This is a chapter on my personal translation of this opening image that, to me at least, tells a far more complex story than indicated in the caption writer's prose. By revisiting the photograph and attempting to decode it, I hope to learn more about my own work and develop a greater understanding of both the conscious and intuitive compositional decisions I make during the photographic and film making process.

The Signifiers of Subculture

In a quite deliberate manner, the image in question carries the symbols of three distinctive subcultures that, during the mid-1980s, were still outside of the mainstream but would emerge over the following two decades as significant drivers in the men's fashion and style industry. A semiotic appraisal of the image demands further investigation into such groups.

Subculture 1: The Straight Male Model as Homoerotic Subject

At the centre of the photograph is, what was in 1985, a new type of male model after the fashion of classical Greek art, paradoxically beautiful and manly, straight, yet tolerating the homoerotic as an authentic component of the masculine aesthetic. These model types, that would become synonymous with Weber's style, became a subculture within the international fashion space. Based in the fashion cities, New York, Paris and Milan, the subculture reached its zenith in the early 1990s and centred on the work and personality cult of Weber above all others. It was from these young initiates that the myth of Bruce Weber as guru

and bestower of masculine beauty emanated. A current manifestation of a variant of this subculture is linked to the US Based fashion company Abercrombie and Fitch. Built on the homoerotic images of Bruce Weber, this successful brand has permeated a section of British working-class youth culture whose lineage can be traced, through the casuals of the 1980s, back to the mods.

In a chapter headed “Statue Men: The Phallic Body, Identity and Ambiguity in Fashion Photography”, Paul Jobling (Jobling, 2006, p.143) addresses the strongly homoerotic work of both Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts. Suggesting a potential conflict between the artistic intentions of the photographer and the background culture of the straight male model, Jobling cites an article in a 1993 *FHM* stating: “The American supermodel, Hoyt Richards, for example, has testified to the way the fashion industry forced both him and his family to confront their own, latent homophobia” (p.144). Richards was often photographed by both Weber and Ritts and consequently earned the title of first male supermodel. I asked Hoyt Richards to recount, in his own words, the mood of the younger male model community after Weber’s watershed *Per Lui*, *Hollywood* issue of July / August 1985 and *Summer Diary* issue of July / August 1986.

When I entered the modeling world in the mid-eighties, I didn't know anything about fashion or certainly fashion photographers. But the moment that Ford Models picked me up from obscurity and began sending me out to meet clients there was one name that kept emerging: Bruce Weber. Almost every appointment I went on the person would say, "Have they sent you to see Bruce yet? Bruce would love you". I knew models who were having very successful careers but felt jilted because they had not yet been selected for that rarified air of being a "Weber guy."

Subculture 2: The Cult of the Body

The second reference is to a nascent subculture, in the realm of physical culture, that could be both gay and straight, and was given a voice by the film *Pumping Iron* (George Butler and Robert Fiore, 1977). Centred, during the 1980s, in the greater Los Angeles area and in certain Manhattan neighbourhoods, tanned and

heavily muscular, straight acting, young men emerged from bunker-like gymnasiums. Blinking in the sunlight they headed towards health restaurants, linked with the well established Californian fitness culture, consuming copious amounts of protein and vitamins. Their aim was to get 'big' and in Weber's own words "Buffed. It means they look swell" (*Per Lui*, Summer Diary, 1986).

What better confirmation of this subculture than a contemporary account from Jean Baudrillard during his travels in California in the early 1980s (Baudrillard, 1999, p.35)? "This omnipresent cult of the body is extraordinary. It is the only object on which everyone is made to concentrate, not as a source of pleasure, but as an object of frantic concern, in the obsessive fear of failure or substandard performance".

Homing in on the essence of many subcultures, Baudrillard recognises the importance of the internal landscape of the individual in postmodern society. In my experience subculture membership is often a response to the banality of mainstream consumption and those who becomes part of such a group are participating in an unconscious quest for self-realisation. Baudrillard identifies this as "into", although he misses the point that the body-builders he observes are not aligned with the norms and conventions of wider society and are, at that stage of muscular development, already well established as subculture members.

This 'into' is the key to everything. The point is not to be or even *have* a body, but to be into your own body. Into your sexuality, into your desire. Into your own functions, as if they were energy differentials or video screens. The hedonism of the 'into': the body is a scenario and the curious hygienist threnody devoted to it runs through the innumerable fitness centres, body-building gyms, stimulation and simulation studios that stretch from Venice to Tupanga Canyon, bearing witness to a collective asexual obsession.

Like so many in the public eye with ambiguous sexuality Weber is careful never to divulge his true sexual identity and even poses the question of his sexual nature to himself. In the opening passages of an autobiographical section of his

1991 monograph (Weber, 1991, no page numbers) the author recalls a conversation with his mother at the age of thirteen.

After the taxi stopped at another red light, she turned to me, stared straight into my eyes and said, "Which way are you swinging?" I was used to these kinds of questions from her so I just closed my eyes, and being lucky, I could transport myself to another time and place.

Later at the end of the same autobiographical tract the photographer remembers that same question being asked again by his mother when he was twenty years old and recounts his own response: "I told her that the night before I had carried a drunken Tennessee Williams up the stairs of a restaurant, and as I put him into a taxi, he turned to me, gently putting a hand on my cheek and just said, "Oh, beauty –"

It's a paradox but all this muscular flesh, so well studied and represented by Bruce Weber, appears to tally with Baudrillard's verdict of asexuality. One speculates that Weber's obsession with male beauty, in all its forms, is no more sexual than that of person who studies the finer points of race horse form and quite literally adores the animal for its bodily form, speed and grace. Is Weber's frequent allusion to the, covertly gay, muscle magazine "Young Physique¹" (*Per Lui*, Summer Diary, 1986) any more than a connoisseur studying the objects that fix his gaze? Furthermore, are the muscle-men in this image any more to Weber than a representation of all he would have liked to have been in one of those dream periods when his mother asked a difficult question and he closed his eyes?

Subculture 3: Hot Rod Revival

The third and final subculture (or subcultural collective) alluded to is that of, what I have termed in this research, Revival. For many in the numerous revival orientated subcultures the central figure in the photograph would be the 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air car. In Stephen Bayley's book on automobile designer Harley

Earl (Bayley, 1990, p.122), a short description of the machine, as it was seen during the 1950s, explains why it is revered by retro-styled hot rod enthusiasts today.

The 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air, named after a suburb of Earl's native Los Angeles, became an object of veneration for American youth. It was this car, powered by a 270hp fuel-injected lightweight V-8 engine, that made Chevrolet's reputation with the street racers.

Remembering that a photographer such as Bruce Weber directs each image down to the last detail we must assume that, like the car, Thom Priano's styling of the model's hair was requested by the photographer himself. The muscular models (perhaps twins) are dressed in a Greco-Roman style as if extras in a gladiator film and wear retro-military hair cuts that also resemble that worn by Kirk Douglas in Kubrick's *Spartacus* (dir. Kubrick, 1960). This style, known as a flat-top, has been common in revival subcultures since the early 1980s (Jones, 2001, p.93 and 564). The central model, styled as if in an edition of a 1950s or 60s *Young Physique*, rather than a fashion magazine, sports a pompadour that closely resembles that of a young Clint Eastwood during the time Weber describes as "when he was a swimming pool cleaner in Los Angeles" (Weber, 1991, no page numbers). Looking through *Blood, Sweat and Tears* (Weber, 2005), a 450 page retrospective of Weber's work, one notes that these signifiers of revival subcultures, and indeed other authentic youth activities, are addressed not only to the bourgeois fashion industry, for whom such cultural symbols are designed simply to add charm to a fashion image, but also aimed at future models who, seeing Weber's enthusiasm for their subcultural territory, will agree to act in his theatre.

The Meaning of the Gladiators

Weber's allusions to nostalgic films and subcultures are knowing and yet often invisible to the uninitiated viewer for whom these carefully placed signs appear random and serendipitous in their composition. A further close reading of the photograph reveals even more about Weber's intentions (reading left to right).

Table 1. A semiotic reading of Bruce Weber's tableau in Fig.1.

Signifier	Signified
Very muscular man (left margin)	Body-building subculture
Representation of gladiator	Hollywood
Dashboard of mid-1950s Chevrolet	Revival style
Beefcake pose	Subversion of 1930s fascistic body culture
Symbol	Meaning
Faux Greco-Roman cuirass and helmet	Film genre
1950s Chevrolet	Power and optimism
Flat-top and pompadour hair styles	Revival subcultures
Background and Zoetrope branding (right margin)	Present day context of the image

Weber uses a sign system like a builder uses bricks when constructing an individual image or complete photo-shoot, and it must be remembered that this photograph is part of a larger photo-spread (*Per Lui, Hollywood Movie*, 1985). The last page of that spread depicts another slim muscular model, in brief bathing trunks and retro beefcake pose, standing at the base of a nude male, Greco-roman, plaster cast statue. On the page opposite is a character model wearing a Roman soldier's cuirass, tunic and cloak standing by a similar sculpture (Fig. 2.). His hair mimics that of Mark Anthony (Brando) in Mankiewicz's *Julius Caesar* (dir, Mankiewicz, 1953), a film in which the hair styles invited criticism from Barthes saying: "What then is associated with these insistent fringes? Quite simply the label of Roman-ness. We therefore see here the mainspring of the spectacle – the sign – operating in the open" (Barthes, 2000, p.26).

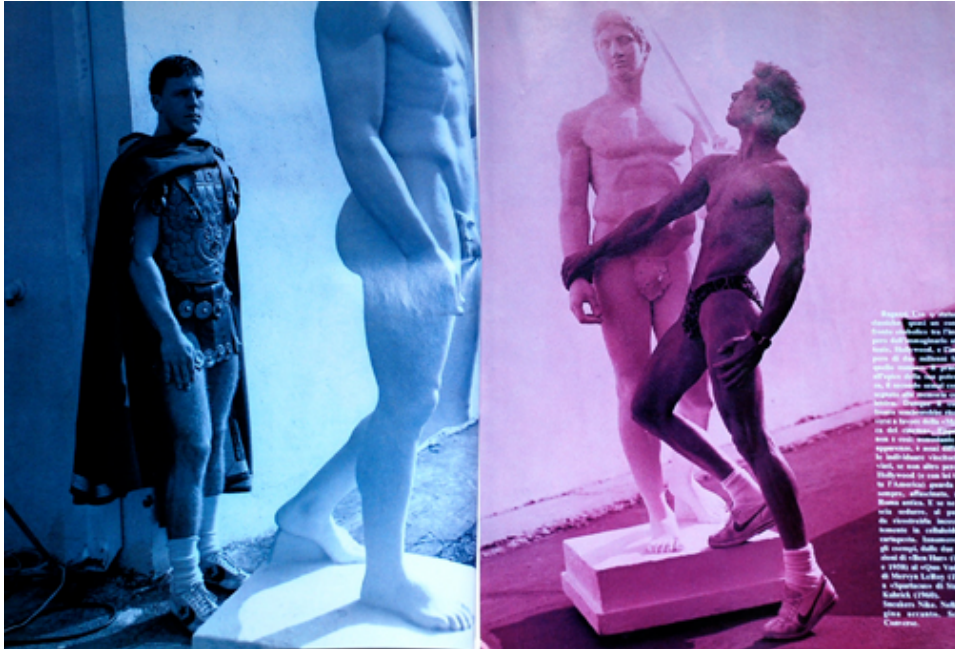


Fig. 2. In a parody of Spartacus and the other sword and sandal movies, Weber teaches the viewer about the roots of male style (Weber, 1985).

Returning to the margins of the right hand page, the un-attributed caption, tucked away on the bottom right, is surprisingly informative (translated from Italian).

American boys and a classical statue: A symbolic confrontation between the imaginary control of today's Hollywood and the rule of Rome two thousand years ago, then at the height of its power but now only a collective memory. Therefore this confrontation should now be resolved in favour of the 'Mecca of Cinema'.... That is if we could leave behind its constant seduction by reproductions in celluloid and papier-mâché. Of these there are innumerable examples from; the two "Ben Hur" (1926 and 1958) to "Quo Vadis" by Melvyn Le Roy (1951) to "Spartacus" by Stanley Kubrick (1960).

These lines are unusual (and there are more in the same vein) as they are completely out of step with any type of fashion commentary style encountered so far in this investigation. This text is written as if a parody of Umberto Eco and his popular columns in various Italian magazines and newspapers during that period that often used such terminology when focusing on popular American culture²? That Weber allowed or even encouraged such unusual writing in his special issue is very much in keeping with the future direction of his work and carefully constructed public image. This talented photographer wants the fashion industry to know that he's more than just a camera-man and takes every visual and

textual opportunity to show-off his knowledge of American literature and film. One assumes that Weber is not only intimate with the film references in the image we are attempting to decode, but also familiar with the literature behind those films: Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* (1880), Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo Vadis* (1896), Arthur Koestler's *The Gladiators* (USA, 1939) and Howard Fast's *Spartacus* (1951). If this speculation were to be correct then another layer of meaning must be attributed to the image in focus.

To make the assumption that a top fashion photographer would be familiar with such literature in Shinkle's world of the "frivolous and ephemeral" (Shinkle, (2008), p.1) might be a step too far, however, in publication after publication (both his own monographs and fashion magazines) the author consistently references American literature and film in his written and visual work. So pronounced has this affectation become that the Spring 2010 edition of New York based men's fashion magazine, *VMAN* (Spring, 2010, p.116-126) features a Weber fashion story entitled *How to Read*, consisting of a series of clothed and unclothed male models holding books. One image, a male nude covered in books, allows the photographer to share his influences by the most literal means imaginable: that of a visual bibliography (see table 1 and 2). By displaying such a book-list Weber confirms himself as Hollywood aficionado, sports spectator, consumer of beat poetry and wider American literature, dog fancier, body-building fan, historian in photography, fashion and art, connoisseur of European gay writing and an intellectual. Each subject representing an individual leitmotif in Weber's continuing narrative.

Table 2. A list of authors quoted in Bruce Weber photo-spread *How to Read* for *VMAN*, Spring 2010.

Edward Albee, James Baldwin, Baudelaire, Jane Bowles, Paul Bowles, Charles Bukowski, Truman Capote, Raymond Carver, Bruce Chatwin, T.S. Eliot, William Faulkner, Robert Frost, Allen Ginsberg, Lillian Hellman, Ernest Hemmingway, Jack Kerouac, Nabakov, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Henry Miller, Edgar Allan Poe, Katherine Anne Porter, Carl Sandburg, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Stephen Spender, Hunter S. Thompson and Eudora Welty.

Table 3. Other book titles visible or partially visible in Bruce Weber's photo-spread *How to Read* for *VMAN*, Spring 2010.

101 Golden (Retrievers), Andy (Wahol?), Born in Paradise, Chanel, Clapton, Diane Arbus, Dior, Every Night Josephine!, Genet, Gorilla Suit, A History of Courting, Hollywood: A Celebration, Lion of Hollywood: The Life and Legend of Louis B. Mayer, The Most Beautiful Woman in Town, Nureyev, Tribe of Tiger and You are my Love.

Conclusion

The nature of Weber's work is transparently reflexive, or should I say confessional, in that the photographer lays himself bare for all in the fashion world to see in each photograph he creates. If we translated our Hollywood image into a series of imaginary statements they might say: "this is when I fell in love with Tony Curtis in *Spartacus*", "I love Leni Riefenstahl's photographs so much, but I hate her Nazi past" or perhaps "don't you just love it when you see a muscular boy with a pompadour and a vintage tattoo, driving on the freeway in a '57 Chevy?"

Weber is concerned about the transience of beauty in men and in particular his own youthful looks to which his lament for Tennessee Williams' comment "Oh, beauty –" testifies. This might be translated simply into a fear of aging and death but seems more complex. In the *Per Lui* image (Fig. 1.) Weber creates a spectacle of his own dreams and desires and uses the language of theatre more than that of fashion photography. The confusion, for me at least, arrives when he attempts simultaneously to join what Barthes says should be separate (Barthes, 2000, p.28).

Signs ought to present themselves only in two extreme forms: either openly intellectual and so remote they are reduced to an algebra, as in the Chinese theatre, where a flag on its own signifies a regiment; or deeply rooted, invented, so to speak, on each occasion, revealing an internal, a hidden facet, and indicative of a moment in time, no longer of a concept (as in the art of Stanislavsky, for instance).

Weber attempts to mix the intellectual with the visceral and somehow gets away with it. He places a mask over another mask and never allows us right inside his world which appears so open and also totally forbidden. His subjects are merely

proxy players in his personal theatre that might well be more of a therapy session than a photo-shoot. But we all want to find out more and Weber just keeps us hanging on, waiting for the next installment of his work.

Regardless of his own sexuality, Weber not only borrows from gay culture but has introduced what might be described as a new Greek aesthetic into both the mainstream gay and straight visual lexicon. Never letting go of the real he also maintains his links with the subcultures established during the 1980s. In the second spread of *Summer Diary* (*Per Lui*, July / August, 1986), a self penned introduction in English mentions the most unlikely set of visual references, placed by the photographer in his hotel room to inspire himself and his models, this text perhaps gives us the greatest insight of all: “*Surfing* magazine’s cover of Ted Robinson, a lot of pink phone messages, more photos of Bob Hoover from “*Young Physique*” magazine, Hot Rod Cars and Babe Paley”.

Endnotes

1. *Young Physique* was an American beefcake magazine (a gay publication pretending to be a muscle magazine) published between 1951 (first called *Physique Photo*) and 1990 by Bob Mizer.
2. Umberto Eco’s collected articles and essays for various Italian magazines and newspapers from 1973 to 1983 can be read in *Faith in Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality* (Eco, 1986).
3. The fashion system alluded to here refers to my own definition from previous writing consisting of: magazine owners and editors, designers, photographers and model agents. Not a reference to Barthes’: *The Fashion System*.

Chapter Four. The Black Leather Jacket: A Selective History



Fig. 3. A participant in his own personal revival theatre, Flynn chooses to wear leather (Clements, 2010).

Introduction

Sitting at the head of this chapter the image of Anthonie Flynn (Fig. 3.) (believed to be his revival name) exists as a visual metaphor for all that I have laid out in this chapter. Born with my theoretical dandy gene – to which I allude in the introduction of this research – and today probably more expressive in dress and style than ever he was in his youth. A walking panoply of subcultural symbols, self assured and comfortable, this man chooses to wear a leather jacket. Even in these cynical times such a garment, emblematic of so much subcultural history, still has the ability to add a small frisson to a fashion image and, as spoken by Denis Hopper in the documentary film, *Black Leather Jacket* (Mead, 1989), the “potential for violence” to any narrative.

This chapter addresses, in a selective mode, the historical and cultural background to just one of a plethora of signifiers of revival style – albeit an important one. Revival is about the editing of objects and phenomena that carry the literal or metaphorical patina of history as without acceptable provenance such items have no value to the revivalist. What is informative in the text of this chapter – as it directly reflects the influences on my practice – is my specific editing of subjects around which representational decisions are made.

Moreover, this chapter seeks to re-evaluate common perceptions and understandings surrounding black leather that has gradually, since the late 1940s, become a universally understood symbol for rebellion, defiance and even alternative sexuality. Referencing the social and political background to this ubiquitous and aesthetic material, I will attempt a subjective mapping of the journey of the black leather jacket from the drawing board of post-war gay artist Tom of Finland to contemporary revivalists and re-enactors at the 2010 Hot Rod Hayride car show, staged in the leafy suburbs of Surrey, at which event the signature image of this research was captured (Fig. 3.).

The Birth of the Leatherman

After surviving the Second World War as a Finnish soldier, Touko Laaksonen mixed his sexual preferences with his ability as an illustrator and was ultimately named by the editor of *Physique Pictorial*: Tom of Finland – eventual creator of the iconic gay symbol: the Leatherman (www.tomoffinlandfoundation.com). In his biography of the artist Valentine F. Hooven describes Tom of Finland's experiences in Nazi occupied Finland during the Second World War (Hooven, 1993, p.30):

Nobody else could strut like a storm trooper in full regalia. Tom, being strongly attuned to the nuances of masculinity, was captivated by the Third Reich warriors in jackboots and *feld-grau* uniforms. They epitomized his sexual ideals.

Linking leather and uniforms with sexuality was not something unique to Tom of Finland, but it was a mixture of his country's liberal approach to sexual expression in publishing during the 1960s combined with Tom of Finland's individual artistic style that allowed the dissemination of Tom's art. By the mid 1970s the representation of the ideal male as being muscular, sexually well endowed and wearing leather jackboots and jacket would hold a dominant place in gay culture into the twenty-first century.

In an interview with Tom of Finland (Hooven, 1993, p.115) an explanation to the development of the Leatherman emerges:

Before and during the Second World War, what leather clothing there was, was always brown. Suddenly, right about 1950, the black biker's 'uniform' appeared. It is amazing how fast it spread around the world. I have been told that I influenced its birth, but the truth is that I copied the biker's leathers, the caps, and engineer boots from English and American photographs.

The suggestion that Tom of Finland played any part in the birth of the American or British biker uniform can be easily refuted – as will become clear in this chapter – but his ability to create authentic art through the parody of uber-masculinity and its relationship with the uniform and sexuality – albeit within gay culture – helps us understand the essence of the leather aesthetic.

The Leather Boys

It's hard to know if British writer Eliot George (real name Gillian Freeman) had access to Tom's first work published in the American (beef-cake) magazine *Physique Pictorial* in 1957 (www.tomoffinlandfoundation.org) however her book: *The Leather Boys* certainly focuses on leather fetishism and its connection with homosexuality amongst, or attached to, biker subcultures in Britain during the late 1950s (George, 1961, p.17-18).

It gave Reggie his only sense of belonging and being part of society. The gear was made of leather: leather trousers, leather jackets, leather gloves.... Some men came along dressed in the whole kit, yet Reggie knew they hadn't motor-cycles but cars parked a mile down the road. The boys laughed at them. They called them 'kinky', and 'the leather jonnies', but some of them went off with them. They said it was good for an easy quid or two. Reggie had never tried it himself.

This suggests the real (gay and straight) bikers in Britain were already far in advance of Tom of Finland's fantasy world in Scandinavia.

The Dark side of Black Leather

Perhaps one of the most significant observations made about the progression from functional work-wear and military usage to fetish-wear and subcultural insignia is the transition, so well observed by Tom of Finland himself, from brown to black. It is the *black* leather jacket that is seen, not only, as a potent symbol of defiance and rebellion but also as having cultural links with a dark side of humanity. As brutal as they were, it is not Hitler's paramilitary SA¹ or Brownshirts that have retained cultural significance but the black uniformed SS. This cultural and political cross-over was clearly acknowledged by a British, post-rocker subculture named in Johnny Stuart's *Rockers!* (Stuart, 1987, p.104-109) as the "Greasers". Stuart's book shows a series of photographs, cited as being taken "at the Rolling Stones Concert, 1969, Hyde Park". in which young subculture members have decorated their leather jackets and caps with swastikas, imperial eagles and the SS insignia of the death's head². In five out of the nine images shown, individuals can be seen wearing Second World War, Nazi Storm-trooper style helmets. In all the photographs each individual, both male and female, is wearing a black leather jacket.

The Patchwork Approach: Symbols of Hate Sewn onto Leather

In popular culture there are moments, especially within the context of the mass media of film and television, that when shown for the first time can have a

profound effect on society at large. These visual events send shock waves of fear and excitement through the viewer and sometimes permanently change the lore that determines dress, behavior and mores within both deviant and established cultures. One such moment (a two second scene to be precise) in the documentary film *Gimme Shelter* (Maysles and Maysles, 1970) shows the killing of a young fan by a group of Hell's Angels at the Rolling Stones' free concert at the Altamont Speedway in December 1969. Most are wearing a leather jacket, the sleeves cut-off at the shoulder, their motorcycle club colours embroidered onto canvas patches and sewn on the back. This significance of this event was recognized by the author of *The Black Leather Jacket*, Mick Farren who observes that "the Hell's Angels were tainted by the killing" (Farren, 2008, p.77) but controversially mentions later, "Of course there were still plenty of black leather jackets around, but the magic seemed to have dissipated". Had the magic of the leather jacket gone? My thesis supposes the opposite.

A mixture of the medieval gothic and 20th century fascist symbolism the winged skull motif of the Hell's Angels serves as a warning to the uninitiated and uninvited to stay clear. The filmed scene at Altamont evokes a potent mixture of action and icon that is seared into the collective memory of a generation, having the effect of re-establishing the position of resistant subcultures. In the context of the British subcultures much was consolidated, in the eyes of the general public, through the Granada Television documentary of another Rolling Stones concert (*The Stones in the Park*), this time in London's Hyde Park in July, 1969 (Woodhead, 1969). Flash-cuts of the crowd show young men and women each displaying their subcultural identity through dress, style and attitude. It is the "Greasers" who separate themselves out with chains, fascist graphics and leather. During the Rolling Stones performance of *Honky Tonk Woman* (Jagger and Richards, 1969) what appears to be the Hell's Angels insignia can clearly be seen on the back of one of the fans, sewn to a cut-off denim jacket and worn over a leather garment. Johnny Stuart mentions "Greasers" calling themselves Hell's Angels at the concert and says "They weren't the true Angels of course, but clearly many of them were affected by the changes in the Rock scene. They

knew all about... *Easy Rider*" (Stuart, 1987, p.107). The groundbreaking Granada Television documentary served to establish the greaser as a force on the high-roads of the nation with the editing techniques accentuating their style. This research speculates that the later footage from *Gimme Shelter* (released in 1970), showing bikers acting in total defiance of the law, only served to re-invigorate the leather jacket's position in subculture in both Britain and the USA.

These two events, both captured on film for consumption by a mass audience, show the complexities of the movement and dissemination of subcultural imagery and the need for subcultures to be occasionally at the centre of things to stay relevant, not just to themselves, but to wider society. Such are the contradictions inherent in both subcultures and the signs they use to transmit their messages.

Such contradictions are exemplified by the perverse manner with which the American outlaw biker (a general term for the more extreme end of US biker subcultures, known as motorcycle clubs whose members are often older than their British counterparts) had, by the late 1960s, adopted symbols with clear Nazi overtones. Danny Lyon's collection of photographs described as "taken thirty five years ago in the 1960s" (Lyon, 2003, p.121) shows two leather jacketed bikers wearing Iron Crosses³ on chains around their necks and showing patches sewn to their cut-off denim jackets (worn over the leathers) of the same symbol (Lyon, 2003, p.45). The contradictory nature of the symbolism adopted by the bikers becomes more confused as the American outlaw biker subculture was largely initiated by veterans of the Second World War (Charles, 2002, p.30). Furthermore the photograph in question was taken by an individual (Danny Lyon) described in his own book as "a veteran of the Southern civil rights movement", whom, according to the text, had joined the cycle gang depicted after his civil rights activities (Lyon, 2002, p.121). The clear contradiction being a civil rights activist joining a gang that displays insignia usually associated during that period with white power. Predating Lyon's book, and also produced in the US, is Kenneth Anger's groundbreaking film: *Scorpio Rising* (Anger, 1964). Taking the same ingredients but a slightly different recipe, *Scorpio Rising* presents the

leather-clad bikers, Scorpio and his gang, as ultra camp narcissists using iconography from the occult and Nazism juxtaposed with contemporary popular music to mesmerising affect. As with the dissonance between the values incorporated in Danny Lyon's biker photographs and his personal moral code, similar contradictions arise between the use of Nazi regalia in a movie packed with queer reference and the persecution of homosexuals forced to wear the pink triangle and placed in German concentration camps. As with Nazi regalia, subcultures often appear to appropriate highly emotive signs, then subvert their meaning to suit the needs of the group. Hebdige describes this as a "bricolage" approach citing the teddy boy's appropriation of the long cut drape coat and narrow trousers: "In this way the teddy boy's theft and transformation of the Edwardian style revived in the early 1950s by Savile Row for wealthy young men about town can be construed as an act of bricolage" (Hebdige, 2003, p.104).

Fringed Leather and the Noble Savage

Lewis Leathers and Aviakit were both trademarks of British company D. Lewis as was the Americanised label: Bud Ganz Design. In an example of a company reading the social climate and perfectly pitching a product to the youth market somewhere between aspiration and functionality D. Lewis created the Plainsman. This jacket featured fringed sleeves, chest and back under the Bud Ganz label incorporating an illustration of the American flag. The single-breasted Plainsman worked on several levels as it accessed an interest in contemporary American style and exploited the idea of the motorcyclist being analogous to the cowboy of the popular film genre of the American western. However the fringes referenced not the regular cowboy but a hunter or scout. A plainsman, a loner, carrying the Native American style of a type that had been presented to the European audience since the late nineteenth century. This suggests a connection with the concept of the "noble savage"* which has developed since first evoked by Dryden in his work *The Conquest of Granada* (Dryden, 1978, p.30) and has been viewed through various prisms from primitivism and sentimentalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to its appropriation by mass culture in the twentieth. James

Fenimore Cooper is clear about his admiration of the “red man”, his oneness with nature and understanding of the world lost by the “pale face” through the process of civilisation and industrialization. In his book of 1826, *The Last of the Mohicans* (Cooper, 1998, p.38-39), one of the central protagonists of the story, Hawkeye, states his position to his counterpart from the Mohican nation, Choogachgook, first showing the superiority of white man’s understanding of the scientific world: “But everything depends on what scale you look at things. Now, on the small scale the ‘arth is level; but on the large scale it is round”.

Knowing the easy way the Indian hunts and lives freely in his environment Hawkeye continues a little later: “and as I suppose you hold their gifts, your fathers must have been brave warriors, and wise men at the council fire”.

This vision of so called primitive culture offering much to Western civilisation was very much the theme of the television series *Hawkeye and the Last of the Mohicans* (Newfield, 1957). This series of thirty-nine episodes was produced in Canada and was aired in Britain in 1957 and repeated into the 1960s coinciding with the production of the Bud Ganz, fringed, black leather jacket (the Plainsman).

The costume worn throughout the series by Hawkeye (the white trapper and frontiersman played by John Hart) and Chingachgook (his companion and Indian scout played by Lon Chaney Jr.) was fringed buckskin (suggesting manufacture from indigenous deer or elk and signifying man’s simultaneous oneness with and superiority over, nature).

Using Hebdige’s concept of bricolage within subculture it’s possible to speculate about the cultural properties that the purchaser might have projected onto such a jacket as the Plainsman. This jacket has the basic single-breasted construction and overall silhouette as that of the Luftwaffe pilot’s and such names as von Richthoven⁴ still had firm cultural significance in the 1950s and 1960s.

Footnotes. * “I am as free as Nature first made man, Ere the basic laws of servitude began, When wild in woods the noble savage ran”.

A loner, a maverick, a black knight of the sky as one with his machine dying, travelling at great speed and dying with honour. Or perhaps the frontiersman man, an outsider, free to go where he wants, when he wants, shunning convention and following the way of his noble counterpart the Indian.

For the purposes of this research I hypothesize that a group of working class British teenagers brought up on American cinema might have appropriated some of the symbolism on which Hollywood films were constructed and furthermore that they translated their parent's post-war migration from the city to the suburbs as an opening up of a new frontier? Moreover I suggest the naming of motorcycles of the era of the black leather jacket such as the, BSA Rocket, Enfield / Indian Woodsman, Indian Scout, Triumph Thunderbird (a Native American symbol), Vincent Black Knight etc. reflected the social need for young men to escape their tedious and repressive circumstances and find literal and metaphorical freedom on the open road pushing past the suburban frontier and on to edge of the nation at Brighton or Margate. By the mid 1960s the black leather jacket had become an extension of the motorcycle and everything it stood for. A clear sign of subculture membership understood by both British and American society.

Anarchy Dressed in Leather

The return of the black leather jacket was not to come through the motorcycle but through a subculture that embraced music, fashion and politics in equal measure. From 1977 the black leather motorcycle jacket became part of the punk uniform symbolising all the defiance and resistance associated with the object. In the US, new-wave rockers The Ramones wore the black Schott Bros. Perfecto jacket, while in Britain members of the politically orientated punk band The Clash carried the black, Lewis Leathers, Lightning⁵ jacket through many performances and photo-shoots. Referencing *Punk 365*, a book that takes the reader on a photographic journey through the punk-rock music movement from early innovators such as Wayne County in 1974 to The Clash at the end of their

musically productive career in 1982, the black leather jacket is omnipresent (George-Warren, 2007, p.13, 287, 96, 133, 138, 178,). Sid Vicious is seen in a heavily studded single-breasted jacket similar to the Lewis Leathers, Dominator (Tanaka, 2000, p.208) in London, 1977 then a Perfecto type garment with a skull and cross bones on the lapel and d-rings on the epaulets in the USA in 1978. Other black leather jacket wearers featured are: Rat Scabies and Brian James of The Damned as well as members of SLF and the UK Subs. From 365 separate photographs 67 examples of the black leather motorcycle jacket can be seen.

This position of the (often second hand) leather jacket in the late 1970s simultaneously subverts the consumerist agenda of the establishment and relies on their means of production to produce the object (in the first place) onto which subversive properties have been bestowed. Referring to the year 1976 on the Lewis Leathers website timeline the current proprietor, Derek Harris, echoes Fredrick Jameson's idea of The Clash being "reabsorbed by a system" (Jameson, 1993, p.49) when Harris states, "later that year Paul Simonon and Joe Strummer head for the Lewis Leathers shop where they buy Lightning jackets". This contradictory event reflects the special status certain new products are afforded by subcultures if they are considered to be valid within the specific sign system of that group, no matter how anti-consumerist their position. Quoting Angela McRobbie in *Inside Subculture* (Muggleton, 2000, p.45) punk is noted as intentionally attempting to avoid the consumerist trap that ensnared previous youth subcultures: "The very idea that style could be purchased over the counter went against the grain of those analyses which saw the adoption of punk style as an act of creative defiance far removed from the mundane act of buying". Put in simple terms, the black motorcycle jackets from the 1960s and early 1970s, for which there was no demand, had been passed onto charity shops or provincial second hand shops known in the UK as junk shops and then snapped up by young punks at very low cost.

The black leather jacket had made a comeback, not only to signify rebellion but had also returned as a signifier of rite of passage for British working class youth.

No longer was the motorcycle needed or for that matter the job to get the money to purchase the machine. Unemployment or a life as the Sex Pistols called it with: “No Future” (Sex Pistols, *God Save the Queen*, 1977) was presented as a subversive act and collecting unemployment benefit defiance towards the Establishment. Voicing the dissatisfaction felt by some youth in Britain at that time was The Clash’s anthem to refusal: *Career Opportunities*, (The Clash, 1977).

They offered me the office, offered me the shop
 They said I’d better take anything they’d got
 Do you wanna make tea for the BBC?
 Do you wanna be, do you really wanna be a cop?

Career opportunities are the ones that never knock
 Every job they offer you is to keep you out the dock
 Career opportunities, the ones that never knock

In Britain, punk had three main strands of political alliance consisting of a post-modern form of anarchy, a nihilistic tendency embracing Nazi and other offensive symbolism and a left wing movement, exemplified by The Clash, a band that would later join forces with the Socialist Workers Party and the Anti-Nazi League with Rock Against Racism. Punk as a subculture and quasi-political movement burned brightly and then faded within perhaps three years from 1977 to 1980, punk had been in the words of David Muggleton the “historical turning point” (Muggleton, 2000, p.44), the fusion of several other subcultures that had refused to die but had lost all direction and meaning. Leading players in the punk drama such as the Sex Pistols and The Clash paid homage to those movements in their dress and style. All wore the black leather jacket in a visual tribute to the British rocker movement and Dr Martens boots as a nod to skinhead culture. The lead singer of the Sex Pistols, Johnny Rotten, donned a teddy boy drape⁶ and well greased quiff from time to time and Strummer built his entire image from 1979 onwards as a pastiche of the 1950s American outlaw biker. This disparate collection of styles and political aims actually typified punk. There was no unifying manifesto, nor was one desired, a point confirmed by Mick Farren stating, “Not that punk ever promoted itself as a cohesive movement” (Farren, 2008, p.86).

In previous writing I have theorised that punk sounded the death knell of modernism within subculture in the UK and Muggleton appears to concur when referring to punk style at least: “Punk style defies interpretation... (it) has heralded the subcultural break from modernity to postmodernity” (Muggleton, 2000, p.45).

In the Post-punk, Postmodern Era: Leather Lives on in Revival

Before punk had taken its last breaths in the late 1970s the era of pastiche and parody had already begun. *The Lord's of Flatbush* (Davidson and Verona, 1974) and even *Happy Days* (1974 – 1984) had already hinted at the style possibilities open to the subculture member in the realm of nostalgia and homage. By 1978 the American Robert Gordon had left the Tuff Darts to team-up with the renowned guitarist Link Wray and concentrate on the rockabilly sound and The Cramps were laying down the foundations of psychobilly⁷. The Jam were heavily committed to a pastiche of mid-1960s bands that had, in retrospect, been given the mod label such as the Small Faces and The Who, and Sham 69 had created anthems like *Hersham Boys*, (Pursey, 1979) for a skinhead revival that bordered on re-enactment (Knight, 1982). Muggleton notes: “the postmodern 1980s and 1990s have been decades of subcultural fragmentation and proliferation” (Muggleton, 2000, p.47). It's as if a whole generation of young British men, dissatisfied with the meagre rewards offered by the nihilism of punk, were looking back through the lens of revival and saying to their fathers, – look at me dad, I'm having the same authentic experiences you did.

It is clear that post-punk subculture had fragmented into a plethora of revivals of previous subcultures and styles forming a wider revivalist collective. As a contemporary voice Fredric Jameson (Foster, 1998, p.132) made comments on this situation of pastiche in postmodern culture at a talk presented at the Whitney Museum in 1982, “Hence, once again, pastiche: in a world in which stylistic

innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum”.

Black Leather: The Covert Years

Everyday street wear for young rockabillys in the early 1980s was often a pair of very faded Levis, a white t-shirt, crepe soled suede shoes (not Showaddywaddy style creepers) and a black leather Perfecto (American Biker) type jacket. It was important to have a ‘flat-top’ hairstyle too. A version of this look is illustrated in Taschen’s compilation of selected work from the street-fashion magazine *i-D* (Jones, (ed.), 2001, p.565) and in *Denim: From Cowboys to Catwalks* (Marsh and Trynka, 2002, p.115). If anything signaled the need for rockabilly and 1950s revivalists to go underground and express their style in new, more covert, ways it was Levi’s reintroduction of their traditional straight leg jean, the 501, with a middle-of-the-road TV commercial featuring fashion model Nick Kamen (Lyons, 1985) and aimed to appeal to the general public.

In Jameson’s writings on postmodernism (Jameson, 1993, p.49), he highlights the uptake and consequent absorption, by mainstream society of subculture and other counterculture elements:

even overtly political interventions like those of The Clash are somehow disarmed and reabsorbed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered part, since they can achieve no distance from it.

If the defiance, refusal and rebellion, at that point, still inherent in the black leather jacket was to remain even partly in tact as subcultural collateral then a cultural moratorium was needed to take the 1950s revival culture as far from public gaze as possible. Leather jacketed goths and die-hard punks could still be seen littering the main shopping areas of towns across Europe but the revivalists and subcultural re-enactors were maintaining a largely covert position.

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, this research suggests that revivalist subcultures seem to see themselves as participants in a continuous film or theatrical production of which they, depending on their role in their society, play-out as either stars or extras. Jameson's comments on the nostalgia film and wider nostalgic style link the elements of film, representation, image and fashion – all so pertinent to this research. These are the media through which style indicators are received in the world of revival subcultures. These cultural transmissions are mediated through film, photography, illustration and fashion then edited by the subculture member who selects the leather jacket as a sign laden with significance. Once acquired, the object emerges with a changed meaning and role, albeit and subtle one. With this re-born commodity the revivalists transmit their carefully arranged style message to their peers. In this research the practice element of photographic representation of these outcomes adds yet another filter to this continuous process of appropriation and simulation.

Of course, this is not the return of Baudrillard's "*obliged sign*" but nor is it a manifestation of his "emancipated sign, that all classes will partake in equally" (Baudrillard, 1983, p.85) that he heralds so casually. This rolling theatre-in-the-round (as I designate revival) is exclusive as it kicks hard against the accepted norms of the market (the most powerful structure of all), blanks the outsider and changes the meaning of the sign in each scene. Superficially this still conforms to Baudrillard's idea of "a proliferation of signs according to demand", but a demand that comes, not from the wider market, but an internal hunger for selected commodities. When commenting on first order simulacra and the "counterfeit" Baudrillard's comments highlight the situation within revival and re-enactment in which "Theatre is the form which takes over social life" (Baudrillard, 1983, p.87). Like the subcultures in the study, my practice rarely departs from the realm of the "counterfeit" and the simulated. This is the natural and honest position of the fashion image-maker once the Janus-like mask of the 'new' and the 'authentic' is removed.

Endnotes

1. The S.A. or Sturmabteilung, meaning Storm Troop, were a private paramilitary force led by early Nazi Party member Ernst Rohm. Known as the Brownshirts, due to their mid-brown First World War surplus uniforms, Hitler had their leader and other senior members killed in what became known as the Night of the Long Knives. The slaughter of the SA by the SS was depicted as happening during a homosexual orgy in Visconti's *The Damned* (Visconti, 1969).
2. Death's head is a literal translation of the German 'totenkopf'. Bikers and other counter culture members since the mid-1950s have adopted the skull and cross-bones to signify being outside the mainstream. In Britain the insignia of the 17th/21st Lancers, a skull and cross-bones with the legend: Death or Glory, was often seen attached to Rocker's and Greaser's caps and leather jackets.
3. Iron Cross (Eisernes Kreuz): High military decoration in the Prussian then German army, abolished after the Second World War. The Iron Cross is now the unifying symbol that links many diverse parts of contemporary counter- culture.
4. Examples of mainstream cultural references to von Richthoven (the Red Baron) during the 1960s: *The Great Escape*, (film), (1962): Visual reference to von Richthoven in camp commandant's office, *Hogan's Heroes*, (TV), (1965): Colonel Klink sustained a limp from being shot down by the 'Blue Baron', *Snoopy vs. the Red Baron*, (song), (1966): popular hit by The Guardsmen, *The Blue Max*, (film), (1966): drama about the Luftwaffe in the First World War in which the main character saves the life of von Richthoven.
5. Shortly after the so called Hollister (California) motorcycle riots of 1947, on which *The Wild One* was loosely based, the executive secretary of the AMA (American Motorcycle Association), Linton Kuchler, described the "outlaw" element of the motorcyclists in the town as representing only "1%" of American bike riders (Charles, 2002, p.34).
6. The Lewis Leathers Lightning is a classic double-breasted motorcycle jacket with the zip set off-centre. The feature unique to this jacket is a waist adjuster consisting of two thin straps (with buckled adjusters) placed on the waistband front left and front right (Tanaka, 200, p.202).
7. In 1971 Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren (later to become the manager of the Sex Pistols) started Let it Rock in the Kings Road, Chelsea, making bespoke teddy boy drapes to fulfill a demand from the teddy boy revival culture that developed in the early 1970s.
8. It's claimed on the Cramps current website (www.thecramps.com) that the term psychobilly was first coined on their 1976 gig posters. Although the path is a complex one the black leather jacket followed from rockabilly and on to Psychobilly, (certain elements of) Gothism and Cyberpunk. The specific order and route taken must be the subject of another study entirely.

Conclusion to this Research

Counterculture Versus Subculture: A New Proletarian Aesthetic Movement?

Both revival and re-enactment cultures have much in common but perhaps most important to this investigation is their commonality in the tendency to want to remain separate from mainstream society and to keep communications, both ways, down to a minimum. It is this non-political statement that divides proletarian subcultures from bourgeois counterculture as, like the revivalists, the first shuns acceptance by the masses and the second – acting in opposition – desires to shape society in its own image. The revival subcultures featured in this research have no desire for the rest of the world to dress and act like them or to understand their rites and rituals and consequently a subliminal resistance to the consensus is part of the fabric of their existence. Supposing that contemporary liberal versions of concepts like social tolerance, equality and inclusivity find their roots in the counterculture of the late 1960s, then the subcultures of the research want no part of these social-political precepts. On the contrary, the findings of this study show the revivalists, while self-evidently being tolerated, have no wish to be included in the great family of consumers for whom the act of agency (now granted by the counterculture / culture industry) has given the markets endless possibilities for growth. That is not to say the revivalists and re-enactors are against Western values concerning democracy, individual rights or the needs of ethnic minorities, such considerations are simply not relevant to their pursuit of aesthetic fulfillment. It is against this background of proletarian aestheticism and the absence of self-parody that this conclusion is framed.

In this research I suggest that the revivalists and re-enactors, who have been both the subject and aesthetic drivers of my practice, are not following the classical subcultural model as set out by Dick Hebdige (Hebdige, 2003). Indeed, their motivation to participate in marginal subcultures is not founded on resistance against oppressive forces such as class, family, or political structures but on specific aesthetic values and a desire to remove themselves from mainstream life and the

cycle of purchase-discard-purchase that underwrites consumer growth. Furthermore the practice element of this research, which illustrates the extent to which individuals will go to simulate their chosen period of re-enactment, by the appropriation of previously discarded objects, suggests both an implied resistant response to external forces such as consumerism and the primacy of the market and an overt transmission of their dandy tendencies. To sum-up, the practice element of this research opens a window through which it is possible to evaluate, in subjective terms, the extent to which the individuals portrayed are driven first by aesthetics. This study utilises the participant observer methodology to its fullest extent as the embedded nature of this role has broken new ground within fashion image-making as the model and image-maker actually share the same aesthetic goals. This symbiotic relationship in which the revivalist-performer needs the image-maker as much as the image-maker needs his subject, removes much of the element of exploitation that exists in mainstream fashion photography.

Recording a New Stage in the Development in Subcultures

There is a timely element to this research as it coincides with a highpoint in the manifestation of quality hand-made goods within these subcultures (motorcycles, hot rod cars, clothing and other objects of value) that have recently been appropriated by the mainstream consumerist market and have been subsumed into the realm of men's heritage fashion. As fashion constantly seeks new inspiration it seems reasonable to speculate that, having exploited revival style, the men's fashion market will move on. The synchronicity this research has with these events leaves a contemporary record, in terms of text and practice in photography, film and fashion design, for the future fashion historian to consult when examining this minute period in men's fashion history.

The Dandy Gene: Moving Subcultural Studies from the Political to the Visual

Much of the practice work here is predicated on the idea of a metaphorical dandy gene that predetermines certain males as aesthetes and is viewed by this research to be a significant driver behind the style elements of all subcultures. Although alluded to by Hebdige, as subcultural “stylists” (Hebdige, 2003, p.122), the carriers of such a gene (within subcultures) are a group largely ignored by the foundational texts in subcultural studies. While acknowledging D’Aurevilly’s observations on the eighteenth century aristocratic Dandy, Beau Brummell (D’Aurevilly, 1928), this investigation views revival subcultures as a creative outlet for the working-class aesthete, perhaps a former secondary school boy, apprentice and subculture member whose dandy tendencies find an outlet in this subculture of making and showing. Underpinning this thesis the photographic element of the practice clearly indicates that the subcultures in this study consist mainly of older males – often attired in a unique ensemble – and are no longer a temporary aberration of youth. This is clearly a recent phenomenon and puts this research at odds with the traditional cultural studies position that liberally uses the terms youth and style, yet often fails to adequately identify the agents of the latter that drive such phenomena within subculture.

The findings of this research suggest a unique contribution to the body of knowledge in the fields of fashion history and cultural studies that fall into two areas. The first being in the real-time and participatory nature of the study that has tracked and (through the dissemination of practice work connected with this research in *Men’s File* magazine and other media), even influenced the development of revival style within subculture and mainstream men’s fashion between 2007 and 2011. The second contribution is in the element of the research that recognises the closeness of revival subcultures and re-enactment groups previously considered unrelated. This is a response to Muggleton’s (Muggleton, 2000, p.47) noting the “glut of revival styles” that followed punk and his inability to predict that those new teenage revivalists of the post-punk period would become life-long devotees. Or those same revivalists, if centred on aesthetic considerations, might eventually come to see that what began

as a statement of stylish resistance and refusal had become a permanent re-enactment. This is the constant theatre to which this research frequently references. This research makes no attempt to predict the final scenes of this subcultural drama, however it is hoped that the findings of this research might be useful to future scholars who will see new meanings and develop new interpretations based on the observations in this work.

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