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Abstract

Punk fashion, which helped define the punk movement in the 1970s, has been ever changing as it adapts to modern times. Before it was the watered-down, mainstream mass-produced aesthetic that it is today, punk style was full of counterculture meaning and signs that communicated counter-hegemonic ideologies to the public. Vivienne Westwood, one of the contributors to early punk culture and the mother of British punk style, designed clothing that was central to the ethos of the early punk movement. Through a semiotic analysis of five of Westwood's designs from the 1970s, this study aims to demonstrate how Westwood's early punk designs encouraged rebellion against normative power structures. This analysis highlights how her designs challenged dominant beliefs about class, gender, and sexuality.

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Introduction

In suburban towns around the world, preteens and teenagers frequent their local malls both for necessary shopping and as a fun weekend activity. When I was a young girl, my friends and I went through phases in our trips to the mall. At first, we spent most of our time at Claire's buying cheap jewelry and brightly colored hair accessories. As we grew up, Claire's became Forever 21 and H&M. However, nestled into a corner of our mall, away from the strip of young girl's stores, but never too far away, was the store Hot Topic. Unlike the safe options, like Claire's, Forever 21, and H&M, Hot Topic seemed scary. It represented something more hardcore than the typical teen girl stores that we knew and loved. As a preteen, I thought that Hot Topic was a store for people who were much different than I would ever be. It appeared to be for people who listened to rock music and resonated with punk culture, which could not have been further from who I was. When I finally built up the courage to go inside, I was shocked by how mellow it actually was. Much of the merchandise in a Hot Topic revolves around things that are currently popular, whether it be music, books, TV shows, or movies. Unlike the appearance and marketing of the store, its contents were simple and easy to consume. To a generation of kids, teenagers, and young adults, Hot Topic was what became of punk. What was once a subculture that went against the grain, and was highly controversial, became a commercialized style that lacks its original meaning. Despite the outward differences between punk and mainstream cultures, what currently bears the label "punk" lacks the depth that once made it significant. The watered-down version of punk that exists today leaves many of us questioning how meaningful punk could have been to begin with. Every aspect of early punk was filled with meaning, but the clothing worn during the origins of punk was especially significant.

Clothing, in both design and use, is often employed as a tool to communicate political and social beliefs nonverbally and to find others who share the same beliefs or subcultures. Punk fashion is an instance of this phenomenon. Beginning in the 1970s, youth who identified with punk subculture took on a clothing style that reflected their anti-establishment, anti-tradition, working-class beliefs (Santos & Avery, 2016). The ideology of punk was rooted in rebellion against the upper class as well as the breaking down of societal norms and mainstream ways of thinking, which was reflected in the way members of the subculture dressed (Santos & Avery 2016). This study will explore the phenomenon of British punk clothing in the 1970s, specifically that created by Vivienne Westwood, who is often seen as the mother of punk fashion. Despite the focus on subculture fashion in past research, there is a lack of research on the specific signs and signifiers used by Westwood in her early punk designs. Through analysis of these signs, I set out to understand the way she portrayed meaning in her garments and how that meaning contributed to the punk movement's ethos of rebellion against power dynamics in 1970s Britain. Many scholars cite Westwood as an important figure in punk fashion (Craik & Peoples, 2006; Santos & Avery, 2016; Evans & Thornton, 1991), but there is still a lack of analysis of some of her most important pieces. Before analyzing the connotations of Westwood's punk designs, I review prior research on the use of clothing as communication and the punk movement. I then situate punk subculture within the social, political, and economic histories of the UK in the 60s and 70s, before and during the emergence of punk, and review past literature on the aesthetics of punk style as well as political and social rebellion in fashion. My study uses this history to understand Westwood's designs from the 1970s in order to explain how these designs communicated rebellion against power structures in the UK. This is important to understand because of the way modern-day punk strips meaning from the style. By

understanding the intentions set by punk designers during the emergence of punk, we can better comprehend the way it has changed since its adoption by mainstream society and by the fashion industry.

Literature Review

Meaning in clothing

Like all art forms, fashion designs can be analyzed for their meaning, purpose, and significance (Barthes, 2013). Cultural scholar Roland Barthes used semiotics to understand how meaning is constructed and communicated in clothing. The study of signs, known as semiotics, explores how meaning is communicated through codes that go beyond spoken language (Chandler, 2002). Barthes (2013) described an entire system of codification that makes clothing meaningful, in which the signifier, an element in a clothing piece, and the signified, what this element represents, can either be explicitly named, supported by "contingent signifieds which make up its links," or simply implied (p. 49). Barthes further explained that while one single piece of clothing can be meaningful, the way it is put together with other pieces and worn in an outfit achieves an even higher status of meaning. While clothing trends in a society can play a huge role in someone's style choices, clothing choices are less attached to trends and more dependent upon the psyche of the individual wearing them, expressing a "psychological depth" (Barthes, 2013). When we see style as solely the product of our surroundings, it erases a whole system of meaning that can be found within clothing. Even when someone chooses to strictly follow the norms of fashion and style, they are expressing a great deal about themselves. Signification does not need to be intentional because even the most conventional outfits are "chosen within the constraints of finance, 'taste,' preference, etc. and these choices are

undoubtedly significant" (Hebdige, 1988, p. 101). From the production of a design to consumer choices, clothing and style is full of meaning.

The semiotics of clothing must be understood in relation to the society and the fashion systems around it. Joanne Entwistle (2015) explained that in order to understand a piece of clothing, you must understand the relationship between "different bodies operating within the fashion system," including a designer's relationship with design houses, tailors with seamstresses, models with photographers, and fashion editors with retailers, shops, buyers, and consumers (p. 1). Researchers of fashion have stated that fashion sociology, especially within punk subculture, offers a wide-scale understanding of the conditions surrounding it both globally and historically (Almila & Inglis, 2020). This concept implies that the significance of a piece of clothing can be different depending on time and place. What we consider acceptable in fashion today would have been considered absurd years ago or even right now in different cultures. Similarly, Evans and Thornton (1991) discuss the way women's fashion makes a statement not only on the woman wearing the clothing, but also on their surroundings. Women's fashion is often an extension of societal values and ideologies about the female body, and therefore clothing becomes a prime example of how a culture views femininity and how that is represented to women (Evans & Thornton, 1991). Simply put, the way the fashion industry encourages women to dress is a direct reflection of how they view women at that time and in that place. All of this directly ties into the idea that wearing clothing, though it can be seen as merely a barrier between our bodies and the world, is a very social act full of meaning that communicates something about us to the people around us (Barthes, 2013).

What is punk?

Punk, despite being commonly watered down to just a musical genre, was a style, a scene, and a movement in the 1970s (Ilić, 2020). The mainstream adoption of this style in the present day has caused the true meaning of punk to be stripped away in favor of commercialization, but the original punk era of the 1970s was rich with spirit and shared values (Santos & Avery, 2016). Punk has been called a reaction to something, whether it is something socio-political or something artistic (Almila & Inglis, 2020). Because of the reactive nature of punk, it is not something that can be replicated or commodified without losing its meaning and authenticity. People within the punk community saw institutionalization as the main enemy (Almila & Inglis, 2020), making it impossible to commercialize without losing the spirit of what punk truly was.

Punk's influence did, however, carry on to present day, and it was largely influenced by the subcultures that came before it. It has been said that punk style contained "distorted reflections of all the major post-war subcultures" (Hebdige, 1988, p. 26). Punk was not a direct copy of these other styles though. The ethos of any post-war subculture is going to have similarities, and because of this, the punks borrowed cues and codes from the rebellious subcultures that came before it, including skinhead culture of the 1960s (Weiner, 2018). Punk culture took inspiration from the eras of the past and, in turn, contributed to future subcultures. This is important because understanding both the eras that influenced punk style and the influence it would have on future styles aids in understanding the ethos of 1970s punk.

An aspect of punk that separates it from some other types of socio-political commentary is its contradictory nature. Punk was heavily political but never took a stance that was too specific and would therefore cause conflict within the scene or potentially isolate anybody from it. Craik and Peoples (2006) describe punk as a teenage rebellion rather than a political

revolution. While the movement allowed people to express their frustration and their problems with societal norms, they were not a united front that was trying to change the world in any specific way. Punk has been called a "marriage of contradictions" for the way that it is both ideologically specific and vague at the same time, allowing members to position themselves within it without feeling excluded at any point (Percival, 2020). The punk scene was not full of identical people. Everyone had unique experiences, distinct views, and different ways of expressing their distaste for society, but they all intersected in the belief that traditional systems of power that organized society in relation to class, taste, and aesthetics, had to be challenged.

The 1970s social, political, and artistic climate contributing to punk

In order to fully conceptualize punk counterculture, one must first understand the social, political, and artistic climate at the time of its origin. The punk movement found its roots in the UK in the 1970s, but this did not just happen spontaneously. During this era, the social and political climate in Britain was full of tension. The country had been shaken by Civil Rights protests and rising unemployment of the lower and middle classes (Ilić, 2020). Following the post-war boom of the 1950s, political, social, and economic uncertainty were high in the UK in the 1960s and 70s. Punk was said to dramatize the instability in British society by creating a culture that contrasted the largely conservative rhetoric of Britain that was popular at that time (Hebdige, 1988). Tension and instability like this gave youth a reason to rebel against the norm, as different parts of the world have seen throughout history.

Despite youth rebellion often being characterized as angsty and immature, the punk scene was also heavily influenced by deeper intellectual concepts and thinkers. These concepts and the artistic climate of the time acted as building blocks of the punk movement. This is evident in the presence of intellectual ideas, such as Situationism in art as well as cultural critiques of

capitalism (Percival, 2020). Malcolm McLaren, manager of the Sex Pistols and one of the leaders of the British punk movement, expressed his distaste for the social climate of Britain throughout the 1970s. In his shop with then-partner Vivienne Westwood, McLaren hung banners which depicted political cartoons promoting anarchy and rebellion within the working class (Craik & Peoples, 2006). This direct criticism of the state of the world was very much what punk was all about. All of punk was "drenched in apocalypse" (Hebdige, 1988, p. 27), reflecting the political climate of the 1970s in Britain.

Situationism, an art style influenced by avant-garde, was largely focused on radical political theory and Marxism (Matthews, 2005). This art style was seen on album covers for punk bands as well as on t-shirts made by punk designers. These influences are seen in every aspect of punk despite the fact that they are often overlooked in favor of depicting punk as immature.

Art in all forms, especially music, was what led to the emergence of punk as a movement, and so much of this art depended on the artist relating to the struggle of common people. The bands and musicians that were popular within the community placed emphasis on reflecting the reality of their fans, whether this be through class struggle or gender and sexuality oppression (Weiner, 2018). The 1970s youth, who encountered the everyday problems of adolescence while also witnessing social and political disparity, sought out art that represented their own feelings toward society. These social, political, and artistic aspects of life in 1970s Britain set the stage for the punk movement to take off.

Aesthetics of punk style

Punk valued a sartorial aesthetic that challenged the norms of fashion as well as dominant ideologies. This was achieved through various methods including pairing disparate styles and

visually destroying symbols of dominant ideology. For example, school uniforms might be paired with leather or safety pins or shocking, contrasting colors might be worn, or random rips might be added to clothing. All of these were used as a means to "defile" the idea of uniformity and to dismantle the system in which uniformity and power were valued (Hebdige, 1988).

Another style technique used by punks to challenge the social norm was the appropriation of the symbols of the working-class, upper class, and royalty. For example, Dr. Martens boots, which had first been marketed as orthopedic shoes and then used as work boots, became a mainstay of fashion, first by skinheads and eventually by punks (Weiner, 2018). Similarly, punk fashion appropriated the leather motorcycle jacket (Weiner, 2018). The adoption of working-class elements and style was very important in punk culture. Similar to the presence of ripped fabrics, the use of working-class items can be seen as both support for the working class and a rejection of style that emulates the upper class. In previous eras, trends were set by royalty or Hollywood elite, never by the common person. The twentieth century was one of the first times that fashion was less influenced by royalty, celebrities, and designers; in this era fashion was more heavily led by "aesthetic cues and interactive consumer behavior" (Sklar & Donahue, 2018). Punk culture took everyday items, repurposed them or altered them and delivered them to a new audience where they took on more rebellious meaning. At the same time, punk fashion also appropriated from the upper class, such as adopting the Harrington jacket, a cropped jacket with a tartan lining that originated as a jacket for men to wear while golfing (Weiner, 2018). By taking this piece from the upper class and making it a symbol for working-class people, the punk community was able to rebel against the elite by destroying the status symbolism of this item of clothing.

Along with these techniques, the fashion of the punk scene was heavily reliant on a DIY (Do It Yourself) methodology and on individuals' personalization of existing clothing. People would cut their clothing, paint and draw on it and even make new use of old items. Sklar and Donahue (2018) credited this to the overall message of self-respect and acceptance of individuality that was spread within punk youth. Even if personalization followed the trends of pairing contrasting colors and styles or of borrowing from class-based aesthetics, there was still an encouragement to make clothing your own, unlike the typical mass produced fashion at this time (Sklar & Donahue, 2018). Self-expression is often seen in the way people pick clothing, but the punk scene normalized completely transforming the clothing that was bought and obtained. The combination of different styles and use of old items in new ways, also known as bricolage, was common in the punk community, and it gave new meaning to articles of clothing that were otherwise used by different groups of people (Hebdige, 1988). This was especially significant when upper class styles and pieces were put with working-class styles because it symbolized the destruction of class systems and high society.

In addition to everyday punk fashion, there was also a more high-end, designer punk style that emerged in the 1970s. Vivienne Westwood, known today for couture, began incorporating things like tartan, chains, and torn-up shirts in her designs at this time. Along with Malcolm McLaren, Westwood created many of the high-end punk fashions of the 1970s. In a review for a Westwood exhibition that ran from 2004 to 2005, Westwood was quoted as calling her clothing a criticism of "mediocrity and orthodoxy" (Craik & Peoples, 2006, p. 397). The punk clothing Westwood designed for women also often critiqued the standards of sex and sexuality. Sexual clothing and items that parodied pornography were vital to the fashion of women in the punk scene (Evans & Thornton, 1991). This anarchic approach to fashion was new in the designer

world, but it has since impacted couture immensely. The look of Westwood's clothing was described as having a "ripped-and-torn aesthetic" and consisting of purposefully offensive t-shirts, bondage gear, safety pins, spikes, and tartan (Weiner, 2018). Though the punk movement as a whole was not adorned in these designer items, Westwood dressed many of the most famous punk icons of the time, including the Sex Pistols. This set the tone for the style of the punk scene, and its influence is one of the biggest in the fashion industry.

Political and social rebellion in fashion

Fashion's ability to communicate something to the world is often overlooked when it is not blatant. In the age of slogan t-shirts and bold statements on designer dresses, it is important to also look at more subtle style choices that can speak volumes. Throughout history, women's fashion, in particular, has been more likely to be criticized on the basis of being immodest or sexual (Entwistle, 2015). With women's style choices being regulated and judged more often in society, the women of the punk pushed back against these norms by using pornographic imagery and sex-shop clothing to communicate defiance to the world (Evans & Thornton, 1991). The refusal to be pretty and instead trying to appear threatening and menacing was also a powerful way for women to rebel against the patriarchal view of femininity (Almila & Inglis, 2020). This expression of gender was also seen in the pushback against natural beauty where the girls and the boys of the punk scene would wear bold makeup, despite the beauty industry's push to appear natural. It challenged the idea of makeup being feminine and allowed men the same chance at expression. This type of rebellion gave young people a chance to resist a very established way of thinking (Hebdige, 1988). Punk has been referred to as being bad in a good way (Percival, 2020), which is the very essence of what was happening in fashion and culturally within the punk movement. Further, Hebdige (1988) argued that the punks' decision to present themselves as

degenerates was a reflection of the decay of society at that time in Britain. The instability in society caused people to feel less of a need to conform to the norms of the flawed system they were living under. Specifically for women, the punk style allowed them to appear as the caricature of a "bad girl" while also critiquing the institution that created that image to begin with. Clothing choices played a major role in the very ethos of punk.

Subcultural styles, even when they are not taking a specific stance, rely heavily on the inherent rejection of a norm. Vivienne Westwood, as an important figure in punk fashion, had pieces that did make bold political statements, but even her simplest designs were laced with themes of rebellion, opposition, and innovation (Craik & Peoples, 2006). In the act of making something new and different, Westwood critiqued both the fashion world and the social climate of the UK in the 1970s that set the scene for these trends. Sociologists argue that while punk did not take a specific political stance, the music and fashion of the subculture allowed people to express their struggles in society because of gender, sexuality, and class (Ilić, 2020). Pushing back against the norm by expressing this distaste for the state of society was very reflective of the nature of punk culture. Punk is socio-political in its origins and intentions, but the diversity within the scene did not allow it to take specific political stances. There was no direct political agenda or campaigning for specific parties, but their expression of certain struggles made the scene inherently rebellious against society and the politics of the time.

It is very easy for people to see fashion as a dull or shallow industry, but this narrative is ignorant of the fact that clothing possesses the power of expression and communication. This is especially true of the style during the emergence of punk in the 1970s. In this literature review, I have addressed the function of meaning in clothing and how this relates to punk. I discussed the definition of punk, the social and political climate in which it came about, and the aesthetics of

punk fashion in the 1970s. Finally, I explored the existence of political rebellion and social commentary within punk fashion according to various scholars. Each author contributed slightly different perspectives, but all of them align with the fact that fashion, in particular the punk style of the 1970s, can communicate socio-political feelings and beliefs to its audiences.

Research Question/Hypothesis

This thesis explores how punk fashion communicated rebellion against norms in 1970s Britain. Punk fashion, and more specifically the punk clothing of Vivienne Westwood in the 1970s, was representative of a culture that challenged power dynamics in the UK. In this thesis, I ask how early punk clothing conveyed meaning and challenged power dynamics.

Methodology

To carry out this study, I conducted a semiotic analysis of five designs from Vivienne Westwood's punk fashion archive in order to show the way Westwood's clothing was used to communicate socio-political beliefs, feelings, and attitudes in the 1970s. Semiotic analysis is used to discover how an object communicates meaning through signs, but beyond just what is commonly considered a 'sign,' semiotics also analyzes anything that can convey meaning (Chandler, 2002). This approach allowed me to uncover the way the aesthetics of these pieces of clothing convey the ethos of punk beliefs during this time. Semiotic analysis is a conventional and common research method within both communication studies and fashion studies because it allows researchers to find the meaning in visual forms of communication through identification of signs and their connotations.

In order to conduct my semiotic analysis, I selected five of Vivienne Westwood's punk designs from her archives at both the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London. I chose these pieces because they were each popular punk designs

put out by Westwood at her SEX boutique between 1974 and 1977. I then analyzed each piece to

find the design elements that acted as signifiers to communicate common signified meanings.

The signifieds that I found related to the themes of gender, class/status, and sexuality. In addition

to these common signifieds, I also analyzed for connoted meanings that were created through

combinations of signifiers and central oppositions within the signifiers that added to the overall

meaning of the pieces. These all contribute to the communicated meaning of the designs, and

each of these elements was analyzed within the pieces of clothing and within the scene of the

punk movement. By conducting semiotic analysis on these pieces, I aim to show just how

meaningful Westwood's early punk designs were to the message that the punk scene was trying

to spread, the message being an encouragement to rebel against power dynamics by expressing

gender, class, and sexuality freely.

Figure 1: "Only Anarchists Are Pretty" shirt

This shirt, currently in the possession of The Met, was designed in 1976 by Vivienne Westwood and her then partner Malcom McLaren for their shop SEX. It features vertical stripes, a portrait of Karl Marx, and words and phrases including "Only Anarchists Are Pretty," "Try subversion," and "Chaos."

Figure 2: "Anarchy in the UK" handkerchief

This handkerchief, currently in the possession of The Met, was designed in 1977 by Westwood, McLaren, and artist Jamie Reid. It features an image of the British flag torn, burned, and pinned back together with "Anarchy in the UK / Sex Pistols" pinned to it. This is a reference to the Sex Pistols song.

Figure 3: "Tits" shirt and trousers ensemble

This top and these trousers, currently in the possession of The Met, were both designed in 1976 by Westwood and McLaren for their shop SEX. The top features an image of a woman's naked chest. The trousers are tartan pants with bondage straps, and they have a deconstructed kilt/skirt layered over them.

Figure 4: "God Save the Queen" ensemble

This ensemble, currently in the possession of the Victoria & Albert Museum, was designed in 1976 by Westwood and McLaren. The top features an image of Queen Elizabeth with a safety pin through her lip as well as lyrics from the song "God Save the Queen" by the Sex Pistols. The fabric appears to be distressed. The bottoms are bondage style trousers with a deconstructed kilt/skirt attached.

Figure 5: "Two Cowboys" T-Shirt

This shirt, currently in the possession of The Met, was designed in 1974 by Westwood, McLaren, and artist Jim French. It features an image of two cowboys, naked from the waist down except for cowboy boots. Behind them are the words "DANCE / Saturday Night." The fabric of the shirt appears to be distressed. Below the image, it says "Ello Joe, Been anywhere lately / Nah, its all played aht Bill. / Gettin to straight."

Results/Discussion

Through semiotic analysis of these five pieces of punk-era clothing designed by Vivienne Westwood during the 1970s, I have found common signified meanings through various signifiers. Each of the signifiers communicate a rebellion against power structures and societal norms on the basis of either class/status, gender or sexuality.

Class/Status/Politics

One theme that is found within the signifiers in these designs is rebellion against the government, royalty, and the class system. The UK is and was a capitalist society which places great emphasis on the elite and on the royal family. This kind of society leads to an oppression of the middle and lower classes. While mainstream society might not rebel against this outwardly, the punks were very anti-capitalist and pro-working class.

On the "Only Anarchists Are Pretty" shirt (Figure 1), there are two important signifiers that tie into this theme. The first signifier is an image of Karl Marx in which the signified is anti-capitalism. Marx's philosophies focused on capitalism as the root of social instability and poverty, and he cited communism as the way to fix the broken societies created under capitalism (Pollard, 2022). This connotes rebellion against the capitalist British government and support for the working class. Malcolm McLaren, who designed this shirt with Westwood, was quoted as having said, "I chose [Marx] because his book started the Socialist and workers' movements in the 19th century" (Gorman, 2013). By highlighting Marx and therefore co-signing his ideas, this shirt acted as a way for people to communicate that they did not agree with the economic state of British society, which often left the working class to struggle. The vertical stripes painted onto the shirt act as another signifier that represents imprisonment because of the reference to prison stripes. But unlike typical horizontal prison stripes, vertical stripes represent imprisonment by

Nazis as seen in Holocaust prison uniforms. The adoption of Nazi prison stripes is very

significant. Not only does this reference the fascist regime of the Nazi government which

demanded uniformity, but it reminds people to reject the idea of blindly following the

government. The totalitarianist Nazi regime was successful because of people's willingness to

trust and follow the government's agenda. By pairing this imagery with references to anarchy

and rebellion, this piece serves as a reminder of what could happen if people do not question

their leaders.

Signified meanings of working-class status and refusal to emulate the upper class are also

common in these pieces. This was achieved through adoption of working class icons (such as

Karl Marx) and style as well as through defiling icons of royalty and upper class status. One

technique Westwood frequently used was distressing fabric. Distressed fabric is seen in both the

"God Save the Queen" shirt (Figure 4), where the fabric appears tattered and held together with

safety pins, and the "Two Cowboys" shirt (Figure 5), where there are raw edges that appear

uneven. Before it became fashionable, raw hem and distressed fabrics meant that a piece of

clothing was worn, presumably because the person wearing it could not afford to buy a new one.

The choice to create a new piece of clothing that already looked worn out represents a rejection

of the idea of clothing as a status symbol. Instead of trying to emulate upper class clothing, as

many fashion trends did, these tattered pieces represented the working-class struggle. Not only

did this help the message that Westwood was trying to get across in her clothing, it can also be

argued that the meaning of these pieces would be undermined or even entirely lost if there was

an attempt to make them look neat and pristine.

Westwood's use of tartan, seen in the Tits ensemble (Figure 3), also signified the punks'

anti-elitism beliefs and their disdain for the upper class. The original use of tartan in Scotland

represented clan kinship, and its revival in the 1800s was dominated by royals and members of the upper class (Johnson, n.d.). Tartans are rich with meaning; they represent both status and royalty in Scotland, and also rebellion as they were banned in the 1700s for decades by the English who used the sartorial ban in an attempt to quell a challenge to the British monarchy (Johnson, n.d.). Westwood's use of tartan signified not only appropriation of the upper class, but also disrespect for high society. The syntagmatic structure of this ensemble further impacts the meaning because not only is tartan being taken and used by working class people, it is being combined with a shirt that features an obscene image of a woman's naked chest. By pairing the tartan trousers with a top that goes against what mainstream British society would deem acceptable at the time, there is another level of disrespect for royalty and the class structure it represents.

In the "God Save the Queen" shirt (Figure 4), the imagery and song lyrics act as the signifiers which have a combined signified meaning of disrespect for the monarchy and, in turn, a rebellion against royalty and British elite. The image of Queen Elizabeth with a safety pin through her lip is an important signifier because British royalty are typically depicted with respect and admiration. By defiling the image, there is a connotation of disrespect for the monarchy and the class structure that it upholds. Some of the lyrics on the shirt from the song God Save the Queen by the Sex Pistols say, "There is no future in England's dream / Don't be told what you want / Don't be told what you need." This further signifies disagreement with Britain's status quo as it urges civilians to think for themselves instead of accepting what they are told to believe. Next to the image of the queen, there are lyrics from the song that state, "She ain't no human being." The connotative meanings of this text are that the queen is not a respectable figure, and that the elite do not care about working class society. The syntagmatic

structure created by putting these lyrics right next to a defiled image of the queen contributes to the overall meaning of this piece because it makes it clear that the queen, a symbol of high class and status, is being depicted as the root of the problem. This rebellion against the monarchy represents the overall disagreement with the power dynamic between the elite and the working class.

In the "Anarchy in the UK" handkerchief (Figure 2), the important signifiers are the tattered flag imagery and the song title which both have a signified meaning of distaste for the British government and encouragement of rebellion by the working class. In the 1970s when this design was made, the UK was plagued by economic instability, leading to the suffering of working-class people. This contributes to the meaning of the flag imagery, which depicts the British flag torn, burned, and pinned back together with safety pins. This signifies not only the declining state of the country but also a lack of faith in the government. The attachment of the song title "Anarchy in the UK" with the Sex Pistols name on the flag is an equally important signifier. Not only is the title alone a powerful message about the state of the country, but it also connotes a support for the message of this song. The song urges people to rebel against the mainstream agenda; the line "Your future dream is a shopping scheme," in particular offers a critique of capitalism and how it impacts the common person. It implies that the average person has their dreams made up for them by the capitalist agenda, which is pushed by the government as well as the upper class and the elite who benefit most from capitalism. This piece endorses the song, and the title itself speaks to the meaning of the tattered flag. These signs come together to encourage people, at least aesthetically, to rebel against the power dynamics that enforce their class and status roles.

Gender

The blurring of gender binaries is a common signified meaning in Westwood's early punk designs. This is done in various ways including the combination of traditionally masculine and feminine pieces as well as the mocking of traditionally gendered pieces. By not sticking to the traditional gender binary in fashion, Westwood rebels against norms. Both the Tits ensemble (Figure 3) and the God Save the Queen ensemble (Figure 4) feature bottoms that are pants with a slightly deconstructed kilt/skirt attached overtop. This style acts as a signifier that conveys this common meaning of blurring the gender binary. Despite the fact that women wearing pants had already been normalized by this time, the connections of pants with men and skirts with women was still evident. The act of connecting a skirt to a pair of pants is a very deliberate choice that combines signs of both masculinity and femininity to rebel against the concept of gender binaries.

This meaning is further developed by the fact that the skirts in both of these ensembles resemble kilts. The kilt has historically been connected to maleness because only men wore kilts and the plaid patterns with which the kilts were made represented specific patrilineal Scottish clans (Greenwood, 2018). However the kilt was also seen as "oppositional dress" during the 18th and 19th centuries because people could not accept the idea of a man wearing a skirt (Greenwood, 2018). Because of this, despite the connection between kilts and masculinity, this garment alone is associated with the blurring of gender norms. In Westwood's pieces in particular, the kilt is deconstructed by having the front and back panels connected by chains on the sides. This deconstruction of the kilt connotes a deconstruction of the meaning of a kilt, particularly the gendered significance in this case. By reworking and changing a piece like a kilt, Westwood borrowed meaning from the kilt while combining it with new signs that contributed to the new meaning of blurring the gender binary.

The Only Anarchists Are Pretty shirt (Figure 1), designed by Westwood and Malcom McLaren, is one that contains many signifiers. The phrase "Only anarchists are pretty" contains many signified meanings, one of them being the gendered meaning behind the word "pretty," The word pretty is connected to femininity, whereas the other signifiers on the shirt (Karl Marx, prison stripes) are associated more with masculinity. This creates a set of opposites within the design that challenges the binaries of gender. Not only are anarchy and rebellion typically depicted as unattractive, they are not concepts that are often tied to femininity. By using the phrase "Only anarchists are pretty," Westwood and McLaren communicate an inclusion of femininity in the punk scene, but they also almost mock the idea of these spaces and ideas as inherently masculine.

The "Anarchy in the UK" handkerchief (Figure 2) is another highly gendered piece. While the image on the piece is full of meaning, the medium itself signifies femininity. Though a handkerchief can be used by men and women alike, it has historically been associated with women, specifically high-status women, either being tied around their necks or being offered to them to cry on (Purbrick, 2014). The blatant masculinity of the image, a tattered flag hailing the words "Anarchy in the U.K. / Sex Pistols," is offset by the medium, a plain handkerchief. This not only signifies femininity, but it also signifies a combination of masculinity and femininity. The existence of these opposites in one piece communicates a refusal to abide by gender norms as well as a disrespect for and rebellion against the system that created these norms to begin with.

Sexuality

The policing of people's sexuality was the norm for much of the 20th century. Not only was heterosexuality seen as the only acceptable sexual orientation in the eyes of the general

public, but women's bodies were also policed in terms of acceptable dress and self-presentation.

Modesty was valued, and women in particular were held to a very high standard of modesty

(Entwistle, 2015). Rebellion against modesty and expression of sexuality are important signified

meanings in a few of Westwood's pieces. In the "Tits" shirt (Figure 3), in which the signifier is

an image of naked breasts, the designer and wearer are committing an act of defiance against the

norm of modesty and respect. Because a woman's naked chest was, and still is, sexualized, the

act of putting this image on a t-shirt and challenging objectification by uncensoring breasts,

suggests a rejection of the norm on the basis of sexuality. The medium of transmission further

contributes to the meaning of this piece because the fact that this image is on a simple white

t-shirt conveys that it is a wearable item of clothing that is meant to be used as an everyday

piece. An image as explicit as this one would take on less of a rebellious meaning if it was

featured in a piece of art or on a magazine, but its placement on a t-shirt not only puts it right out

in the open but also situates it as a casual piece of clothing. The casualness of this piece further

develops its rebellious nature because sexuality was something that was meant to be kept private

and taken seriously. By presenting sexuality both publicly and casually, this piece rejected

everything that the general public pushed about sexuality and modesty.

With homosexuality being so heavily stigmatized at this time, any expression of it was an

inherent act of rebellion. The "Two Cowboys" t-shirt (Figure 5) displays an image of two men,

naked from the waist down except for cowboy boots, close together with one man fixing the

other's collar. This image, the signifier, connotes a rejection of homophobic rhetoric, expression

of sexuality, and rejection of modesty. Within the image itself, there are multiple signifiers that

contribute to the overall meaning of the image. The fact that the men are partially nude and

standing close together has the connotative meaning of a sexual relationship between the two

men. The act of one man fixing the other's collar acts as a signifier where the signified meaning is familiarity between the two. This gesture implies care and intimacy, and it depicts the men in a more gentle fashion. The syntagmatic structure of these signifiers being placed together contributes to the meaning of these men are meant to be seen as sexual partners. This was a blatant rebellion against society's negative view of homosexuality at this time as well as a rejection of the standards of modesty. This piece was very effective in its attempt to upset people who did not agree with this imagery. One woman shared publicly that wearing this shirt in the 1970s in London resulted in her being arrested and charged with obscenity (Alderson, 2016). This exemplifies just how rebellious this shirt and these ideas were at the time. Alderson (2016) discussed the rage-invoking nature of punk style and how controversial it was to wear a piece like this in the 1970s. This type of rebellion was something that people attempted to condemn and erase from society because of the way it went against the power structures and homophobic rhetoric of the times.

Seen in both the tartan pants of the "Tits" ensemble (Figure 3) and the trousers of the "God Save the Queen" ensemble (Figure 4), bondage style trousers act as a signifier in which the signifieds are emulation of sexual bondage gear and expression of sexuality. These trousers are made with bondage straps, elongated zippers, and flaps on the rear. These style choices are deliberate references to sexual bondage gear, which contributes to the overall meaning of both expression of sexuality and rebellion against the status quo on the basis of sexuality and modesty. The Walker Art Gallery in the National Museums Liverpool (2005) described bondage gear and bondage style clothing as having an association with gay male and lesbian subcultures. Being that bondage gear is inherently sexual and historically associated with LGBTQ+ culture, the

bondage elements of these trousers signify not only an expression of sexuality but also a rejection of the rhetoric of modesty which was often linked with homophobia during the 1970s.

Conclusion

When I was twelve and walking into the "punk" store, Hot Topic, in my Upstate New York suburban mall, I was completely unaware of the rich history and deeper acts of rebellion that made punk what it was. The true meaning behind punk is so important in understanding why a store like Hot Topic even exists today. The 1970s British punk subculture's ethos of going against the mainstream and rebelling against societal norms was materialized in punk fashion. Vivienne Westwood, one of the most influential designers within this subculture, created clothing designs that acted as tools of communication for not only her own beliefs, but the beliefs of this community. The pieces I analyzed were five of Westwood's iconic pieces produced between 1974 and 1977, and each of them used a multitude of design elements to communicate rebellion against the norms of 1970s British society. This study has shown that many of Westwood's design choices acted as signifiers to communicate signified meanings which directly aligned with the ethos of punk. These signifiers, which included images, fabric choices, addition of straps/zippers, and actual words, each communicated resistance to norms and power structures on the basis of either gender, class/status, or sexuality. Each of these themes was common within the punk scene and connected to the beliefs and ideologies of the overall movement. Many of these pieces were criticized by the general public, which further shows the impact of the signs Westwood chose to display. These sartorial designs succeeded in the goal of rejecting the status quo and rebelling against the classist and gendered rhetorics of British society.

This study has concluded that Vivienne Westwood's designs from the punk era of the 1970s were effective at signifying a resistance against the norms and the existing power

structures, such as elitism, heteronormativity, and gender binaries, in the UK and therefore successfully expressed the ethos of the punk movement. The meanings of these designs were created not only through the uses of single signifiers, but also through the use of combined and opposing signifiers. In some pieces, such as the "God Save the Queen" shirt, Westwood used several signifiers that all conveyed the same message. On the other hand, some pieces, such as the trousers with a skirt connected, contained signifiers with opposite meanings that contribute to the overall message of the piece. It is important to keep in mind that a single signifier can be analyzed, but the message of a piece is best conveyed through understanding how several signifiers work together. Westwood's overall contribution to punk fashion is very significant, and her use of signs to communicate meaning nonverbally in clothing was extremely vital to the fashion industry and to punk culture.

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