FROM LEADER TO FOLLOWER:
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF STYLE IN A HYPEBEAST CULTURE?
Name: Francesca Schliephake
Student number: 500724343
Department: International Fashion and Management
Coaches: Brigitte Schriks and Karen Bosch
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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides insights into the postmodern streetwear culture with regards to the phenomenon of hype and the valuation of style in that sphere. In particular, it questions whether or not the underlying message as the result of the wearer’s own identity or as the byproduct of hype initiated by brands.

By defining the term of style in postmodernism, I simultaneously, show the means on how to decode and read fashion by transforming it into a language visualised through text and imagery shown on subculture relevant media. Then, I further analyse with the aid of subcultural relevant media, the cultural influences beyond the doctrines of today’s streetwear culture, also in regards to music and technological initiators as those are the driving forces for the hype issue. Through uncovering the ulterior motives for the hype marketing strategies by brands, I then provide the sociological reasonings behind the consumers decisions for following drops. Hence, it indicates that the hype rather attributes artificial value to an object which gets measured by its popularity on Social Media.

The last chapter concludes the paradoxes of the streetwear culture and shows the experience of the “hypebeast’s” in their process of expressing their identity in the plurality of limited streetwear items. Although they are mere representations of external drivers mentioned above, the thesis shows that style goes beyond the surface appearance. The concept of subculture is becoming less applicable at a time around social media and constant representation online making sure that there is no dominant culture against which hype beasts can express its creativity. However, it might only be to the extent the hypebeasts are re-appropriating the streetwear garments themselves.
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CHAPTER 1
RATIONALE

The streetwear culture in fashion has become a driving force and turned around the industry by transforming the perception of clothing as it is based on a form of hype (Sulima, 2018).

The slang word of a “Hypebeast” describing the consumer within the culture has evolved from the eponymous online platform. It characterises a person who is obsessed about acquiring hyped streetwear fashion items propagated by the Internet (Anon, 2019). Aiming to always be ahead of current trends to stand out by wear limited-edition clothing, the consumers within the streetwear culture have formed a community sharing information about brands, releases and limited availabilities online. Although the movement started without the Internet, its rise got immensely shaped by it (Brundage, 2018). Streetwear culture represents not just a product, similar to other subcultures it is a lifestyle shaped by conspicuous consumption (Kim, 2017). With the investment of a scarce product, the consumers are simultaneously investing into their social image aligning with the other “Hypebeasts” (Fowler, 2018). As Dick Hebdige has described that is “through the distinctive rituals of consumption, through style, that the subculture at once reveals its ‘secret’ identity and communicates its [...] meanings” (Hebdige, 1979). However, the aesthetic definition of streetwear is reinventing itself constantly, it is lacking in consistency and becomes thereby hard to define (Kim, 2017). Rooted in skate and hip-hop culture and originated from the street, the visual image implies a rather casual approach of dressing. Streetwear brands distinguish from each other through their independent attitude and their distinctive branding. When asked how he sees his work, Virgil Abloh, the designer of OFF-WHITE declared:

“100% yes I consider my work ‘streetwear’ or any categorization that allows anyone to grasp my point of view and where it comes from.” It’s these personal opinions and narratives – the history – that make streetwear a “life held in common.” [...] ‘Streetwear’ is an art movement, it’s a way of making things,” [...] It’s a rationale birthed by previous art movements and pop-culture life cycles.”
- Virgil Abloh, 2018

Dressing up in the streetwear community is an initial act which stands in close relation to identity as it is “a way one chooses to engage with or disengage from self-styling and branding” (Flower, 2018). With the streetwear’s recognition by the luxury industry, the subculture’s facade has started crumbling because the key term of exclusiveness shifted from rarity to costly (Kim, 2017). Thus, the garment loses its intrinsic value since it only gets determined by hype pushed by an industry-driven product scarcity (Brundage, 2018).

The subcultures ambivalence is performed through the strive for being unique while following trends set by the democratised industry and social media. Creating tension between the self-representation of identity, conspicuous consumption and the preservation of the subcultures aesthetic values. Naming the reasons for investigating the meaning of style and its relevance in an era of social media, especially with regard to the phenomenon of hype. Fashion is consumed as a form of social and cultural participation and is an interplay of different symbolic values worthy of critical examination.

AIM

The aim of the following paper is to explore the meaning of style in the postmodern era of a Hypebeast culture from a qualitative perspective. Laying the main focus on the culture itself, as it is important to understand its various influences in order to decode the visual language represented as body adornment. Starting with the definition of style regards subcultures will help break down the underlying signification chain and the meaning to the Hypebeast’s identity. Further, how the democratisation of fashion has been complicating individual distinction from the masses. With a better understanding of the characteristics, it provides a foundation to put it in relation to Hype and to understand the concept of style nowadays.

Using the thesis results as a source of information and inspiration for a profound article based on the subject. Both thesis and article could be relevant for analytical purposes for streetwear brands to understand the relation between consumer of streetwear and the valuation of a garment influenced by hypes.
QUESTIONS

The topic of this thesis aims to answer:

What is the meaning of style in a hypebeast culture?

The question is divided into three subquestions forming three different chapters:

1. What does style in a postmodern subcultural context mean?

For analysing the meaning of style, the definition of the term needs to be explained first in order to understand the relation to subcultures and their behaviour with a closer look on how these express visually ideologies and identities. The main focus will be on semiology and understanding the method on reading rhetorical codes.

2. Which stylistic and cultural influences lay within streetwears history?

This subquestion investigates the history of streetwear from a once subversive subculture to mainstream with its various cultural influences. By means of that, different aspects which have an actual influence on the aesthetics of the visual language will be explored as well.

3. What are the dimensions of Hype in relation to the style and the identity of the wearer?

This section aims to discuss and determine the influence of the phenomenon of hype affecting the purchase decisions within the Hypebeast culture from a qualitative perspective. The term is going to be analysed around the concept of product scarcity as it certainly impacts the value of streetwear items and the appearance of the culture.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this report used primary qualitative research, providing possible insights into the investigation of the phenomenon of style in a postmodern streetwear culture from a sociological perspective. For the analysis of the meaning of style, I have used both primary and secondary data. The qualitative research focused on the terms style and the culture itself. Also, it refers to a broader consideration of the social and cultural context based on deeper data and more in-depth analysis of the material such as theoretical and academic texts addressing the topic of subcultural style in postmodernism. The analysis and opinions of the sociologists Dick Hebdige, Roland Barthes and Jean Baudrillard provide the foundation for further findings on the style and subculture related explicitly to the streetwear culture.

Through the complexity of various influences within streetwear and its recent cultural relevance, the history of streetwear has been scrutinised with industry-specific data including Highsnobiety, Complex, Medium, and most importantly, Social Media platforms. The purpose was to analyse the varieties of meanings within the streetwear culture, the interactions of hypebeasts, and their influences also about the phenomenon of hype. With streetwear being overrun by the industry, the speed of the subculture has tripled the need for a closer observation of the happenings on the streets, online and in particular on Social Media. Due to streetwear’s short history, the focus has preferably been on primary online data which are relevant for the streetwear culture. However, the topic of hype is examined with sociological literature applied with the aid of online article for understanding the deeper social interactions of following streetwear.

The different methods of secondary data and literature concerning the topics as mentioned above were necessary to analyse the parallels which allowed me to draw conclusions adapted to today’s hypebeast era. Therefore, the last chapter delved deeper into my main question by applying all gathered findings of the previous sections, which then got further examined with semi-structured interviews.
The participants who have been selected based on their Instagram appearance, show all an affinity for streetwear but are representing different visual languages online. Conor Dalton, 23 years old from Amsterdam, he is working as a copywriter at Patta and visualises the classic streetwear elements. Hakan Keppler, 25 years old from Berlin, he works as a PR agent and Blogger providing insightful perspectives on that business. Lastly, David Morris Kaul, 25 years, also from Berlin, he works for the concept store NagNagNag next to having an own streetwear label. As different these interviews developed, they ultimately, had similar perspectives and messages on the streetwear culture, allowing me to clarify but also limiting my conclusions on the meaning of style. Therefore, quantitative interviews could have provided a broader perspective. As the commitment to the streetwear culture does not seem to be attractive to be directly associated with anymore.
CHAPTER 2
What does style in a postmodern subcultural context mean?

2.1 Definition of subcultural style in postmodernism

Often used in our daily jargons and only loosely defined is the term style. Nevertheless, the meaning of style is the essential part and the starting point of my analysis. The following dictionary definitions express similar notions and, also, provide a basic understanding of the context to postmodernism and subcultures. In Merriam-Webster, the word style is used in various situations. It once describes in fashion “a distinctive quality, form, or type of something” or in writing or speech, it defines “a distinctive manner of expression” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Likewise, the Collins dictionary characterises style as “the manner in which something is expressed or performed, considered as separate from its intrinsic content, meaning, etc.” which is interesting concerning the connection to subcultures (Collins Dictionary, 2019). Therefore, a certain subculture is defined as a group with its separate values, practices, and beliefs echoed in their stylistic and aesthetic ensembles. As clothes are worn on the surface of the human body, they are simultaneously transformable and express a certain style having the power to communicate individual identity, ideology, and even lifestyle (Winge, 2012).

By modifying and supplementing the surface appearance in an unconventional way, it also becomes a representation of the subculture’s visual and material culture going beyond style, since the subcultural body is explored from top to bottom with “its modifications and supplements; its movements and performances; and its explorations and rituals” (Winge, 2012).

Always aiming to distinguish itself from the grain of the mainstream culture, particularly, western European subcultures focus on the distinctive self-styling trying to avoid current trends set out by the industry and rather define their look individually within the spheres of the “do-it-yourself” aesthetics (Winge, 2012).

Moreover, mass media, especially social media platforms, are heavily influencing the dissemination of distinct subcultural styles which consequentially get adapted by mainstream fashion and styles (Winge, 2012) only complicating the intrinsic identity of the copied subculture. Of course, there are various stylistic variations within a subculture, but the direct and indirect adaption of trends by the mainstream results in an interlock of all meanings also regarding the semiology of dress. Hence leading to a circle of intertwined meanings and influences; as either “the subculture is referencing the mainstream culture, albeit subversively, and the mainstream culture is referencing the subculture” (Winge, 2012).

Baudrillard recognises that the media are heavily influencing the tastes and senses of the society because it is purely based on the standards of mass production and thus on the reproduction of signs. Consequently, the signs are only referred to be at a “free-floating stage” as they do not carry any deeper meaning anymore (Baudrillard by Muggleton, 2000). When looking at the pace of today’s fast fashion industry which aims to produce 50-100 new micro-seasons a year, the problematisation which termed as the “postmodern expansion of eclecticism” becomes apparent (Siegle, 2018). More styles than ever are available turning into an oversupply of available garments which pretends to the consumers a greater individuality. Through that, it becomes more difficult for postmodern subcultures to protrude as their signs get quickly adapted for the aesthetics, which is why they are based on conspicuous consumption. It is a way to reveal their “secret identity” and communicating hidden meanings (Hebdige, 1979). However, through the mass-consumption of fashion, the aspect of styling focusses only on the aesthetics of the wearer’s surface appearance adding temporal and material value to the garment without any other intentions (Winge, 2012). By consequence, fashion is industrialising into conformity, and the boundaries between the masses and established groups are dissolving continuously (Muggleton, 2000). The postmodern subcultural style, therefore, reflects “the commodification of the body,” wherefore garments are losing individual and cultural meanings which they used to carry before being mass produced (Winge, 2012).

Further analysis needs to focus on decoding and understanding of the outlived meanings in postmodernity, as it becomes substantial to analyse semiology and the rhetorical codes of streetwear.
2.2 Decoding and reading subcultural style

“I speak through my clothes.” - Eco, 1973

As previously mentioned, subcultures speak through their stylistic devices as their own science of appearance, which needs to be studied to understand the underlying identities, ideologies, and lifestyles. The symbolic codes used within fashion rely on “the shifting ideas of beauty, status, social standing, culture, sexuality, and gender” (Mackinney-Valentin, 2017). Today’s consumer is especially enticed by digital fashion media and print media photography, which is essential to take into account when reading the sartorial language. Media appear to be highly desirable and therefore, get exploited by brands to represent the latest styles in fashion, pushing the aspect of conspicuous consumption for the status quo in society. Fashion goes hence beyond conspicuous consumption as the media platforms offer “imagined symbolic qualities,” leading to fictitious perceptions of reality and on the self (Geczy and Karaminas, 2016).

How can these imagined symbolic qualities be understood and recognised? Also, how do these symbolic signs make sense to its subcultural members?

Perceiving fashion from a linguistic point of view, it becomes less abstract and more tangible. Fashion can, indeed, be its own language and style is used as a tool to make it more pleasant. We all learn a language when growing up, and grammar grows just natural to us. Grammar is in fashion the basic understanding of dressing. Each dressing ensemble, whether it is the traditional outfit worn at the office or a specific subcultural style, those are chosen explicitly within specific constraints and preferences (Hebdige, 1979). Just like grammar, it is chosen within a particular time and situation frame. There are hidden rules and choices which are not visible on the surface but which contain a whole range of messages. And those are passed on “through the finely graded distinctions of a number of interlocking sets” (Hebdige, 1979).

Although it seems to be paradoxical to the nature of subcultures but accordingly to Ted Polhemus and Lynn Proctor (1978) there are somewhat like guidelines used:

“The dress code of a social group prescribes limits, not absolute uniformity. To suggest that social identity is expressed in terms of stylistic identity is not to say that all members of a given group will look identical. [...] Most social groups establish only basic guidelines as to what constitutes appropriate dress, and within such a framework a certain degree of variety is permissible.” - Ted Polhemus and Lynn Proctor, 1978

The basic guidelines, here, can be understood as a slang which is made up intentionally by a specific group and “directs attention to itself; it gives itself to be read” (Hebdige, 1979). Therefore, the slang is implying a specific message which Saussure perceives as “a science of meaning under the name of semiology” (Barthes, Carter and Stafford, 2005).

2.2.1 Signifier and Signified

The approach of Roland Barthes (2006) for translating garments into a language is merely done by using subcultural relevant magazines (Jobling, 2016). For him, the magazine is somewhat like a generator which determines trends with its rhetorics as it translates fashion directly into words and images whereby the “effects of the sign” can be decoded and read as “written clothing” (le vêtement écrit) and as “image clothing” (le vêtement image). A sign within the “principle dialectic of semiology” is compromised into two essential elements: a signifier and a signified (Jobling, 2016).

A signifier stands for the physical existence of a garment, the signifier is tangible and mostly named after the material from which it is made, e.g., cotton, or the written words describing the item of clothing on paper.

A signified, then, is the cultural association or concept it evokes of the signifier (Barthes, 1973). In short, a signifier is what we see, and the signified is what it suggests. The second the signifier changes, it also changes the signified because those entities are invisible and reliant on one another.
In fashion, the example of a black leather jacket seems to be most convenient considering its historical and subcultural context. Generally, it endorses the attributes and signified of rebelliousness and coolness. However, if one changes the colour into brown, it automatically gets a different, a more casual connotation. The same is the case when someone adds a slogan which says “anarchy” on the back (figure 1) — the signified is transformed into an ideological sign of political rebellion. So, any form of text can be decoded as a sign as well which results in an even more complex signifier (Jobling, 2016).

Another issue is claimed when analysing the meaning of a sign: the functional aspect of an object. The leather jacket is worn to keep the body covered and warm, which is in Barthes terms called "sign-function" because the function always sustains a meaning. For him, the function naturally gives birth to a sign so when the garment gets produced, and it becomes an element in semiology (Barthes, 1973) which means that the leather jacket uses and carries significance at the same time. The role of consumption in terms of objects within the semiology reflects on how the consumer treat, wear, and organise the garment in daily life, referring to the grammar of dressing. As the grammar in postmodernity has become vague due to the massification of objects, more “slangs” are used and diminish the signifiers used by subcultures (Jobling, 2016). So, Barthes proposed that the rhetorical analysis of fashion signs reveal the hidden signs behind use and function, so, there is an exchange between signs and functions. When taking the example of the leather jacket again, it is keeping the wearer on the one hand warm, but at the same time, it can be an ideological sign of anarchy when adding a slogan.

### 2.2.2 From Signification to Simulation

Therefore, Baudrillard’s view on semiology is critical to mention when having a closer look at the meaning of style. As above mentioned, reality and representation become harder to distinguish in a society which represents myriads of different “slangs.” So, for him, the aspect of fashion is inseparable from consumption since it is immensely pushed by media whereby traditional forms and norms get rejected and replaced by the strive for individual distinction (Tseëlon, 2016). He describes postmodernism as “the order of simulation” because signifier and signified links become ultimately separated from the object. The signification gets thus undermined in favour for aesthetics mostly regardless of the cultural meanings which is completely “self-referential [and] marking the end of meanings” (Tseëlon, 2016). In that process, garments like the before mentioned leather jacket with a political slogan on the back once used to be worn by punks, but after a while mainstream fashion adapted the idea. Fashion has purely become a form of pleasure in a world of mass-consumption, which doctrine is not entirely real anymore. Diana Crane opposes that an “enormous variety and incongruity of styles and codes are not inherently meaningless or ambiguous:

![Figure 1: “Anarchy” Leather Jacket](image)

The issue within semiology goes beyond the definitional meaning of an object. For instance, the leather jacket can also have a sexual connotation. Proofing that the relationship between signifier and signified is defined by denotation and connotation. Therefore the analytic distinction when decoding style is made between two types of signifieds: a denotative signified and a connotative signified” (Chandler, 2017).
they are understood primarily by those who share identities and are obscure to outsiders.” For her, looser signifier and signified only evolve in a greater acceptance with “less rigid boundaries” (Tseëlôn, 2016).

Further analysis beyond the subcultural style and body, in particular, the historical relevant meanings need to be considered first as those, can be reinterpreted and further adapted into an infinite subcultural system of symbols without any rules.

### 2.2.3 Style as Visual Culture

As established before, the meaning of style goes beyond the body, and needs to be perceived as a whole culture. The subculture is more natural to grasp when exploring style on multiple levels namely through “the lens of visual culture” (Winge, 2012) where “meanings are created and contested” (Mirzoeff, 1999). The language or rather the slang of a subculture is found beneath dress and through the ensembles of musical taste, focal concerns, body modifications, and supplements. It is the collective self-image of intangible objects reflecting the identity, values, and lifestyle of the subcultural persona (Winge, 2012). Therefore, the visual culture in terms of subcultures do not only reveal the “internal coherence,” but it also distinguishes various subcultural groups from one another, for example, hypebeasts versus hipsters (Hebdige, 1979).

Mostly, it is music or a distinct language which gets directly associated with the term of visual culture. Especially, music, including concerts and videos, is, for sure, the essential part of a subculture since it connecting its members beyond style and through emotions and other experiences. Lyrics even go so far that they cohere certain feelings, aspirational lifestyles, or even ideologies through only words uniting the spirit of its members (Winge, 2012).

As crucial as music, however, are also the modifications on the subcultural body as those reveal the underlying autobiographical narratives containing very personal messages, also indicating the “values relating to aesthetics, identity, and gender” (Winge, 2012). Most body modifications reach under the skin and thus disrupt the body, which often gets recognised as truthful commitment demonstrating membership but only when these modifications are coherent to the aesthetics of the subcultural style in terms of clothing, accessories, and jewelry (Winge, 2012).

Moreover, the aspect of visual culture shows that certain types of garments get immediately connected with a particular subculture, e.g., sneakers with hypebeasts or leather jackets with punks.

### 2.3 Sub conclusion

The role and definition of style form the theoretical framework for the main research question as it is crucial for reading the following chapters of streetwear’s history as well as the connected importance of hype from a different angle. In today’s fast-paced postmodern world the meaning of style seems to become blurry and hard to grasp; however, this chapter provides the tool for reading and decoding style. By researching the term style in a postmodern context, the importance of today’s media gets underlined, seeing the immense effect which it has on contemporary subcultures. The reason for that is undoubtedly the fast dissemination of stylistic ensembles by the media. It is debatable whether a subculture of today can differentiate from the masses without getting adopted by the masses too fast. Media, especially, social media is a phenomenon on which certain groups want to visually and virtually detach themselves from the mainstream. The information flow is just-a-click away which needs to be considered when analysing the semiology and cultural influences laying beneath the surface of hypebeasts since this aspect is very different from past subcultures. Instagram serves as the ideal breeding ground for Baudrillard’s “free-floating signs” because images merely get posted for aesthetically reasons ignoring the fact that the garment might used to carry a cultural or social message. Hence, today’s fashion consumers are overwhelmed by the industry’s never-ending cycle of products leading to an appearance which rather focussed on the spectacle than concerning deeper personal narratives. However, the recent development of media, specially social media offers a greater scope of available sources and information for decoding style. To understand the stylistic ensembles of hypebeasts acting within the streetwear scene, I further going to disassemble its history and cultural influences laying the groundwork to further analysis of style as a language.
CHAPTER 3
Which stylistic and cultural influences are within streetwear’s history?

3.1 Streetwear, what is it?

The streetwear’s rapid rise is omnipresent on most of the catwalks and reflects its extreme influence on global culture, fashion, and social media since it is the hottest style hashtag on Instagram. Its seeds were planted as an underground movement around the seventies by a “loose-community of surfers, skaters, artists, graffiti artists, punks, new wave, and hip hop musicians” in DIY-aesthetics (Brundage, 2018). However, the term streetwear seems to be hard to pin down due to its versatility in style and meaning. When looking at various dictionaries, again, it seems to be that there is no clear definition of the core of streetwear. The Collins dictionary describes the term as “fashionable casual clothes” (Collins Dictionary, 2019). The word which is striking here is “casual,” but it is not descriptive nor clear. Also, the Urban dictionary which gets used by youth cultures a lot describes streetwear as “care-free” clothing style of the skateboard culture which has “gained notoriety for its urban appeal and popularisation among […] media users” (Urban Dictionary, 2019).

The definition of streetwear becomes as dynamic and changeable as its aesthetics. Even among the designers the term varies and remains unclear. For Tommy Hilfiger, streetwear has to be “a bit sporty, a bit athletic” and “it’s skate and hip-hop, but not exclusively any one of these things” (Kim, 2017). According to this description, almost every brand can reveal its identity as streetwear. So, what really defines streetwear? Bobby Kim, also known as Bobby Hundreds, has clarified on his online blog that “streetwear is about the culture” and “it is not about clothing” (Kim, 2017). He knows streetwear as a form of defiance because at its outset the customer was drawn to the movement for being irrelevant in fashion and standing outside the norm. There is no specific look attached to streetwear; it is rather determined by its independence. As the name indicates, it originates from the street, and that is what it is reflecting the “rawness” and “authenticity” (Kim, 2017). Thus, streetwear is more than a way of dressing; it is a lifestyle shaped by distinctive self-expression forming a collective identity based on urban communities which are tapping into the graffiti, hip hop, skate or surf scene. In its true essence, streetwear’s starting point is anchored in subcultural style as the real people wore it, e.g., drug dealers, b-boys or rappers who are the embodiment of street credibility and hence able to withdraw from the grain of the mainstream (DeLeon, 2018). The origin of the streetwear’s movement can be traced back to the emergence of Stüssy. The casual T-shirt with scratchy scribbles sparks more than just coolness:

“For the first time, I read the distinction between a T-shirt and an identity. Mike’s shirt was more than clothing — it was a statement.”
— Bobby Kim, 2018

Stüssys’ T-Shirt is not solely worn for its look but rather for its underlying message and signified. Inspired by this shared feeling of identity and authenticity while wearing, at first glance, just a simple T-shirt encouraged other independent brands to embrace these underlying values to a whole and own coherent visual culture. Therefore, the feeling of exclusivity and distinction provided to the wearer are the typical indicator for subcultural thinking and belonging (Kim, 2017).

However, since various other subcultures influence the looks within streetwear, it is open to question if the movement can be perceived as an original, as it took multiple elements from different cultures. On the other hand, the firm solidarity among the members speaks for itself. As a leading figure in the 21-century fashion, streetwear has become a dominant figure which defines and is defined by its fans and many high-end resellers. Those who oppose mass culture, such as streetwear during its beginning stages, are brought back into the line of the system sooner or later. As previously analysed, subcultures are characterised by using garments unintentionally like here the casual white T-shirt with a scratchy scribble.
First, perhaps streetwear seems to be revolutionary and differentiated from the norm, but becomes recognised by others and is turned into a style which people specifically strive to buy. So, with the recognition of streetwear by luxury brands like Louis Vuitton the culture has surpassed the point of mass acceptance. This phenomenon is called Bricolage and is a way for streetwear to oppose the masses by joining together separate worlds of meanings and incorporate its raw and casual style (Kreuter, n.s.).

Nevertheless, streetwear came from the street, from the working class and started as an anti-thesis to mainstream fashion. How did streetwear turn into one of the most powerful assets in the fashion industry from a once subversive subcultural movement? What are its influences?

3.2 Long live the street

Streetwear, as we know it today, started on the streets and its influences are thus highly dependent on time and place as these have different takes on the history, icons, and aesthetics. To understand the genesis of this extreme shift from the humble aesthetics to the higher echelons in fashion,

![Figure 2: "B-Boy" by Jamel Shabazz (1980) (1)](image)

the chapter starts from the beginning and will use hip hop culture as an essential reference point since streetwear is mainly a byproduct of it (Block, 2017).

The hip hop movement started in New York in the seventies from the ashes of disco and funk. Back then the urban youth created block parties in the boroughs as a consequence of nightclubs downtown being shut down due to the economic collapse, which has turned around the life in the city. Early pioneers like DJ Kool Herc, Grand Wizzard Theodore, and Grandmaster Flash mixed and looped persuasive breaks which are a technique rooted and used in Jamaican dub music (DeLeon, 2019). To get the crowd hyped two men or MC’s (Master of Ceremonies) competed with their rhymes over a microphone called clapping which later developed into rapping (DeLeon, 2018). To the rhythmic sounds a whole new style of athletically dance emerged, the so-called breakdancing with moves such as headpins, windmills or flairs. The b-boys and b-girls1 typically wore “tracksuits, and straight-legged denim over Puma sneakers or Adidas Superstars customised with fat laces. Kangol bucket hats and Cazal sunglasses were commonplace, and in the winter, it was time to whip out a shearling coat or leather blazer” (DeLeon, 2018). Back then for rappers, it was popular to wear flashy jewelry and chains.

The early stages of hip hop around the eighties were marked through a sporty look and brands like Adidas, Nike, Reebok, Puma or LeCoq Sportif. Unlike other subcultural movements at that time, hip hop fully embodied dressing up as an internal part and was seen as a competition especially among rappers (DeLeon, 2018). Initially, it was the drug dealers who served as a style icon and not the rappers since those actually had the money to afford the high-end gear. One particular man made himself a name at that time: Dapper Dan. He used luxury fabrics from brands such as Gucci, MCM or Louis Vuitton and designed “street-ready silhouettes like tracksuits, bomber jackets, and puffy shouldered coats,” which were worn by “hip hop’s most prolific figures” (DeLeon, 2018).

Around the same time on the West coast, Shawn Stüssy, who is often credited as the initiator of the entire streetwear movement, started his clothing brand around the skate and surf culture. Besides shaping high-quality surfboards, he was in need of another source of income.

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1 B-boys and b-girls is the term used to describe the dancers of breakdancing
Hence, he produced printed T-shirts or caps with his scribbled name and graphics which were remarkable for their colorful punk, new wave, and reggae influences.

Japan is the next market which popularised streetwear in the nineties. After leading “Nowhere,” a small shop selling and importing streetwear labels such as Underground or Sk8ting, Nigo, the founder, came to realise that he wanted to start his own brand. Thus, A Bathing Ape or in short Bape was born. It was due to the link to Japan’s Indie hip hop scene which has brought the brand its international recognition and success. The brand focusses on “relaxed, American-style sportswear, such as chinos and camouflage jackets, as well as logo t-shirts and sneakers” (Bain, 2018).

At the same time only in New York, Stüssy’s brand got sold at a shop called Union which was run by James Jebbia who also opened Stüssy’s first flagship store on Prince Street (DeLeon, 2015). In 1994, Jebbia decided to step away from Stüssy to start his own brand called Supreme and opened the brand’s first store close to Lafayette Street. Before Supreme moved to Lafayette Street, there was only Keith Haring’s "Pop Shop" giving life to the street; otherwise, it had a “quiet, neglected feel” which was perfect for skating. Also, Jebbia was drawn to the skate culture because for him “it was less commercial” and “it had more edge” (Wilson, 2017). Inspired by that, he initially created T-shirts only but soon after realising that his customers mixed Carhartt with Louis Vuitton, he designed a good quality cotton hoodie for which his customers were willing to pay a little more. With the success of the hoodies, Jebbia expanded the brands range to fitted caps and also started clothing and skateboard deck collaborations with artists (Ofiaza, 2017). Jebbia perceives his clothing as music and carries this open-mindedness further into his designs (Sullivan, 2017).

Like Dapper Dan, the designs of Supreme replicated the logo of Louis Vuitton for which Jebbia initially got filed a lawsuit (Grant, DeLeon, Johnson, 2013). Here again, the pursuit of dressing up in the streetwear community is apparent because at that point smaller labels borrowed from the esteem of luxury brands. The hype around logos started and became an integral part of the wearer’s identity (Harris, 2018). One can say, that specific brand logos represent certain subcultural groups like Stussy or Supreme stands for streetwear.

Figure 3: Stüssy Tribe wearing varsity jackets by David Dobson (1990)
3.3 Streetwear today

Streetwear’s history started without the Internet, but with its entry, it changed the culture immensely and can be perceived as an important “turning point” for its exclusivity (Niedzwiecka, 2014). Forums like Reddit, Grailed or Hypebeast popped up, on which the community started to exchange “information on seizing, releases, availabilities” and served as gigantic megaphones (Brundage, 2018). Before the Internet, however, limited editions had to be physically hunted down in stores and information about releases were only accessible when living in a metropolis or reading specific print publications. As an active community, members were typically helping one another, even selling or trading for little to no markup on pricing (Brundage, 2018). The substantial impact of those blogs has disrupted the nature of the culture as informations are easily accessible and brought to the surface of the masses. The extreme niche market has been dissolved by the social exposure of the community (Pathak, 2016) and streetwear’s exclusivity is now less about knowledge or access (Kim, 2017).

Not only have these online blogs and forums changed consumer behaviour. Also, they have raised the interest of brands especially within high-end segment. The reason for that is that blogs like Highsnobiety, Hypebeast or Grailed work as an intersection of the culture, as an intersection of music and fashion, and luxury and street providing culturally relevant knowledge (Bain, 2018). As those online platforms steadily grew, the high-end brands around them seem to be following and slowly closing the gap between them and streetwear (Morency, 2017). After realising that “drops” of limited products acquire an entirely new customer base with high revenues, these brands started to adapt cultural-relevant elements into their designs to become a part of the streetwear’s dress code (Bain, 2018).

Yet again, there are brands which get distinctively connected with a specific subculture like Fred Perry with Skinheads or Stüssy with streetwear as the brand’s history is deeply anchored in the culture and becomes immediately acknowledged as an official dress code and therefore as a signified (Lanik, 2009).
Thus, fashion designers like Alessandro Michele for Gucci or Kim Jones for Dior drew on the creativity found within streetwear for their latest fashion lines, trying to establish an authentic dress code as a viable high-end streetwear brand. Only in turn for the dedicated consumer base within the culture.

By the dizzying pace of drop announcement posts by Highsnobiety or Hypebeast, high-end brands such as Gucci or Dior started feeling the need to trade content as opposed to advertising abstracting the independent attitude of streetwear. Consequently, streetwear has become extremely capitalised and has undergone a significant shift from underground towards high-end which is further disconnecting streetwear from its subcultural context (Brundage, 2018). Luxury brands of today exploit the symbolic representations, distinct aesthetics, and history of streetwear and risking that people buy products for its stylish appeal and social status (Macedo, 2015, Bagwell and Bernheim, 1996). Virgil Abloh, the founder of the high-end streetwear brand Off-White and, recently, the artistic director of menswear for Louis Vuitton, has compared the evolution of streetwear into the luxury segment with Saint Laurent showing black models on the runway for the first time.

With regards to today's standards, there was “some ignorance” in the way he presented his collection, but he set a milestone by his “willingness to tap into other cultures perspectives” (Brundage, 2018).

Returning to Dick Hebdige’s statement that as soon as subculture’s signifier “is translated into commodities and made generally available, they become ‘frozen’” (Hebdige, 1979, p. 96). Thus, streetwear has become “codified” by the mainstream and can be no longer perceived as a sign of subcultural relevance but its immense presence is inviolable for being simultaneously on the streets, on the catwalk, and social media. The barriers between streetwear and luxury fashion completely broke as Balenciaga sneakers are now as expensive as limited-edition sneakers from Nike. David Fischer from Highsnobiety describes that as complete freedom (Bain, 2018). However, freedom is not independence. Virgil Abloh, the patron saint of streetwear, has the theory of the tourist and purist which might guard the culture against the capitalists by determining who creates the culture and how (Drew, 2018):

“I’m trying to make provocative things for the purist, but I’m also trying to engage demographic within high art, high fashion to bring them along. That’s my way of democratising things that are largely kept under lock for those that are privileged enough to know and to be part of”
- Virgil Abloh, 2017

Figure 5: The Supreme Skateboard decks which have caused a cease and desist order in 2000
After determination of the meaning of style in a media-driven landscape of postmodernism, this chapter provided the development of streetwear in terms of style, culture and relevance in today’s society in chronological order.

As postmodern subcultural style aims to express the underlying values of its wearer, for streetwear this underlying value has always been its independence within the hip hop music and skate scene. Bobby Hundreds has put in a nutshell by saying that streetwear “is not about clothing, it is about the culture”. This aspect gets clearly reflected by its members, especially, during the beginning stages. The latest developments within the history of the culture have shown that today’s media landscape caused the major turning point. From once an underground movement embodied by its rawness through its realness got changed entirely with the emergence of the Internet into mass combat exploited by the luxury segment. The transition, though, almost made seamlessly providing the ideal tool for further style analysis with the aid of cultural relevant platforms of Highsnobiety and Hypebeast.

These online blogs are said to be the mirror of the streetwear culture, although they publish paid-content, the scene still draws reference to them. Through them, streetwear’s aesthetics may now be more comprehensible knowing its roots and history.

Albeit the fact, that streetwear’s customers and the reasons behind wearing specific brands have changed, this chapter instead focussed on the brand development than on the follower itself. With the virtual shift of streetwear in mind, one crucial aspect which got facilitated by the Internet also needs to be further analysed: The phenomenon of hype. From a sociological point of view, it seems inevitable to examine hype in terms of the subcultural feeling of belonging and the struggle of exclusivity.
CHAPTER 4

What are the dimensions of Hype in relation to the style and the identity of the wearer?

4.1 Definition of Hype

Unlike the previous chapters, the term of hype is clearly defined, though, the word itself mirrors the complexity of a phenomenon which is deeply anchored in the streetwear culture by redefining the intrinsic value of a garment for the wearer, as well as for the brand.

When looking up the word in the Collins dictionary, it gets described as the usage “of a lot of publicity and advertising to make people interested in something such as a product” (Collins dictionary, 2019) and the synonym of hype is publicity or promotion. Also, the youth culture is certain about it, and the urban dictionary elegantly describes it as:

“A fad. A clever marketing strategy which a product is advertised as the thing everyone must have, to the point where people begin to feel they need to consume it” - Urban Dictionary, 2019

And that is a fact in the fad. In recent years and with the immense success of streetwear the word got recalled a dozen times and proves that hype is a fundamental form of consumption (Dolfsma, 2004). Not only of consumption but companies also start to focus financially more on marketing instead of product development (Paget, 2017). Before concentrating on the consumer side of hype, the relation to streetwear needs to be clarified first.

4.2 Drop it like its hot

It is no coincidence that the emergence of the drop is chronologically concurrent with the rise of streetwear. The concept of the drop is the leading marketing strategy of streetwear, and as learned before, hype is synonymous with promotion. A drop is the spontaneous release of a new streetwear item but only in allegedly limited quantities leading to a sort of mass hysteria. Shawn Stüssy was the actual initiator of advertising limited products after recognising that it is the generator for urgency in demand (DeVera, 2016). Now, the entire fashion industry is adapting its supply chain to imitate the drop-model guided by no other brand than Supreme which is mastering the art of the notorious Thursday-11am-drops portrayed by long queues around the block of Lafayette Street (Flower, 2018). Thursday is the day on which the latest merchandise of Supreme becomes available and is mostly sold out within minutes depending on the temptation of the release. The suitcase collaboration with Rimowa was out of stock within 16 seconds despite announcing it only three days ahead by merely posting a picture of the product on social media. The roots of the drop entrenched offline around a physical shop, the popularity, however, got fuelled by the era of the Internet and smartphones (Eisenbrand and Peterson, 2018). The content on the Internet is full of details on drop announcements and the latest releases promoted by platforms such as Highsnobiety or social media titans like Instagram or Twitter. A drop generally has an event character which organically incites the interaction on the social media feeds with images of the just-snatched-products pushing at the same time the rate at which the products get in the store (Flower, 2018).

However, the specially developed apps such as Frenzy, Nike's SNKRS or Adidas's Confirmed are saving some hypebeasts queuing up in line by shopping the new merchandise via smartphone but thus wholly missing out the experience of the drop. A contradiction in itself since drops are based on the experience and excitement while waiting in line. The app Frenzy has stated that with the app the “friction” gets reduced which is actually the essential part of the drop.
A drop is built and dependent on “spontaneity and undersupply” increasing the desirability and demand for certain products (Pham, 2017). By breaking the fundamental law of economics, Supreme maintains the subcultures value of authenticity by keeping its inventory low and releasing only a limited amount of products (Kulkarni, 2019). Further, Supreme decided not to charge premium prices for its cult-like-demanded merchandise leading ultimately to more brand equity (Pham, 2017). Yet, as we learned previously, a drop is nothing more than a brilliant marketing strategy of Supreme and other streetwear brands. The created illusions of limited products are just the model of the currently widely used distribution method of just-in-time production which gets mastered by Fast Fashion companies like Zara or H&M (Van Elven, 2018). Fast Fashion grew out of the insatiable demand and premise for steady product deliveries, the instant gratification and novelty leading ultimately to today’s technological supply chain advancements which are based on the strategy of vertical integration. With a highly adaptable supply chain, garments are produced faster while continually being able to react to shifting trends. Thus, Fast Fashion companies can drop new items at least twice each week. The real difference to streetwear companies is that they do not advertise it as a drop (Flower, 2018).

The phenomenon of the drop unveils the illusion companies create to satisfy the instilled needs of consumers providing a glimpse into the future of the commodity.

By dropping limited products, streetwear companies immersing into the culture by creating a hype around a product, turning the purchase into an event and detaching the product from its utilitarian function.

The Supreme effect is the ultimate business model for brands of today. The brand still proves on various levels that it abides by the streetwear cultures values. Despite the success, the brand remains to sell its merchandise for affordable prices leaving a margin for the hyper-inflated turnovers on the secondary market. The secondary market is closely affiliated with the drop market and often underestimated as the resale platforms such as Grailed or StockX generating “the speculative value that drives primary sales” and “prices” (Flower, 2018). The resale platforms have flourished the hype to the products but also generated sufficient revenue for the customers who bought directly from the brand. Arianna Maya explained to Dry Clean Out that these transactions apply “fictitious value in the absence of any real changes in the way things are produced allow[ing] for [the] secondary market to indirectly pay people, so that they can keep consuming” (Flower, 2018). So, the drop does not necessarily create a “trickle-down” in terms of production since a streetwear item can be perceived as an investment which quickly cashes out. Instead, the exclusive product runs are threatening the alchemy of streetwear as the “artificial scarcity” of products is generating an “artificial value” turning items into a proxy for money (Flower, 2018).
4.3 Desire to belong

Hype’s success is reliant on the community within streetwear as well as it is based on the relationship of community and identity (Flower, 2018). As previously analysed: subcultures speak through their surface appearance expressed by clothing, style and jewelry communicating their identities, ideologies and lifestyles. The act of dressing, and telling narratives through self-styling and branding marks group membership and conversely creating individuality. Fashion understood within the context of group behaviour is defined by the ambivalence between signalling membership of a group and trying to differentiate from one another by expressing individuality (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). The interplay of the ambivalence mentioned above is the driver of fashion and trends. By its DNA, streetwear’s individuality derives from its exclusivity and limited runs. In this manner, the culture’s followers are capable of standing apart from one another by wearing rare items showing cultural knowledge as well as belonging.

Other members quickly recognise these cultural signifiers by also being deeply embedded into streetwear knowing about brand drops and releases.

The culture’s integral part of fully embracing consumption and dressing up in turn for an original style is realised through the act of explicitly seeking out for specific items instead of just buying randomly at a high-street shop (Flower, 2018). Through that, streetwear, in terms of fashion, fundamentally behaves on a constant movement based on differentiation (Johnson, Tomtore and Eicher, 2003) which stems from Thorstein Veblen theory of “trickle-down” published in his book The Theory of the Leisure Class. The theory refers to the imitation of the upper classes by the lower classes in order to acquire the sought-after higher social rang (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). So, the limited and exclusive product runs are representing what Veblen has termed “Veblen goods” as those are pricey and highly-desired due to their scarcity.
However, with the greater casualisation of fashion promoted by streetwear, the culture’s signifiers like sneaker, hoodies, or caps got legitimated by the broader society. Despite abiding traditional markers of taste, class or access, streetwear has managed to enter the echelons of the luxury market referring back to Dick Hebdige’s commodified signifiers, which become “frozen” when entering the broader economy, here the luxury segment, and transforming streetwear into a status symbol (Hebdige, 1978). The supply and demand model showed in figure 9, displays that an increase in supply leads to a decrease in demand attributing to Veblen’s idea that exclusivity makes goods profitable and more desired (Pangrekar, 2018). Therefore, the model proves that in postmodern times, which are shaped by the concept of a drop, streetwear has become a symbol of conspicuous consumption.

The culture’s supply and demand model correlates with the doctrines of the classic model which assumes that an increase in supply leads automatically to an increase in demand (Pangrekar, 2018).

The second streetwear got defined by the exclusivity of luxury brands, it has turned simultaneously into the signified of that particular industry. So, by wearing streetwear items, the person is transformed into Veblen’s description of the “upper class,” and according to him, the process of consumption is performed as a competitive demonstration of the achieved social status (Veblen, 1899). Therefore, the consumption of streetwear represents a social-cultural phenomenon that provides definite meanings within fashion (Skivko, 2018). Consequently, hypebeasts are willing to consume any streetwear item to indicate belonging or even to obtain the prestigious social status.

Research and scholars by Andrew B. Trigg in 2001 have suggested that Veblen’s theory is outdated. For him, the “trickle-down” theory appeals only to the luxury goods and overlooks the general public because fashion and class can also derive from lower social classes (Skivko, 2018). Exemplifying a counterpart to the theory and an example of streetwear’s establishment phase in 1988: Stüssy designed for his close friend circle a series of International Stüssy Tribe varsity jackets (s. Figure 3). Due to its rarity, the varsity jackets got signified as the crowning glory which got only possessed by the high society of streetwear’s underground scene. Here, the lower class consciously dissociates itself from the ruling fashion and society (Macedo, 2015).

Nonetheless, Veblen’s theory conveys an impression of the hierarchy within social media landscape, and especially Instagram which gets widely used as a display for conspicuous consumption. Many of these highly-respected people on those platforms are celebrities, artists or bloggers. Wrangler has determined that “the developments in celebrity culture, in particular, the suggestion that there is an unprecedented audience fascination with the private life(style) of the celebrity. Consequently, the celebrity lifestyle performs a minor role in conveying the ‘meaning’ associated with material goods” (Warner, 2014). Although celebrities and bloggers are trying to cross the bridge of being unattainable by sharing their life extensively online, followers still aspire their creativity and lifestyle. Also, since streetwear’s roots are within hip hop, the followers are more likely to identify with a brand that gives them a sense of identity and belonging by placing products on cultural relevant profiles like that from a rapper (Pangrekar, 2018). According to Nico Amarca, writer on Highsnobiety, the rappers Travis Scott and Asap Rocky are the two most prominent tastemakers within hip hop and even questioned whether Travis Scott is the “New Fashion King.” As learned in chapter three, rappers integral lifestyle has long been about boasting glamour, fame, and being better dressed than the others (Amarca, 2017). Now, through the granted respect of the rap and fashion communities, artists like Travis Schott have been explicitly placed in the fashion community to be marketed to a specific audience that devotes close attention to the various artist’s collaboration only to wear the same drop. Donna Rachelson explains in an interview, “people love that kind of hype. They love the fact that they can be one of the few ‘exclusives’ who get a product; it elevates a person’s social status. [...] People who own a pair feel important, special and part of an exclusive tribe” (Destiny Connect, 2015).
It indicates that hype which is endorsed by a celebrity conveys both subcultural capital\(^2\) as well as social capital\(^3\).

The mechanisms of hype initiated by streetwear brands have impacted the whole industry by establishing distinct rituals of consumption intensified by drops which have created a feeling of culture through sharing experiences. Therefore is the drop the driver of hype mobilising not only the desire of a certain social status but also the desire to belong.

### 4.4 From a “want” to a “need”

When walking through the streets, looking around and having a closer look at the surrounding people — streetwear will catch your eye. It is the momentum of our time, and it is reflecting the spirit of the youth culture. The following paragraph delves into the phenomenon of hype which is shaping the senses of the current purveyors of hype. Now, that the entire fashion industry is trying to echo the Supreme effect by dropping exclusive products which involve mostly strategic brand collaborations has come defining today’s conspicuous consumption. Returning to Dick Hebdige statement, once again, that subcultures represent “cultures of conspicuous consumption” and marked through “distinctive rituals of consumption” (Hebdige, 1978) which illustrates the connection to streetwear more and more. Despite the illusive aspect shadowing the drop promoted by the strategies of hype, it clearly marks the consumption pattern of hypebeasts. However, the seemingly one-chance-to-buy mania is not only a symptom of consumerism (Banks, 2015). As Sigmund Freud discovered that conscious and unconscious thoughts and motivations are behind decisions of human actions and are as well impacting the unconscious beyond the enticing drops (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). Streetwear’s hype is based on one of the most logical human principles: the harder an item is to get, the more it is desired and turned into a “need”.

Abraham Maslow opposed the fundamental psychological theories of human motivation with the never-ending human needs which require to be met in a specific order: physiological, safety, love and esteem needs. These needs are arranged in the form of a pyramid implying that necessities like food, shelter or security must be fulfilled first, while others, less vital come afterward (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). If one of the needs is gratified, or rather satisfied, the person is then free to move to the following emerging step of achievement. From a marketing perspective regards fashion-behaviour, the level of esteem needs becomes particularly interesting as it focusses on the representation of the self by displaying the achievements visually to receive acknowledgment for it. In respect to fashion, the best means of expressing those achievements visually is by conspicuous consumption. In this sense fashion behaviour typically comes to play when basic needs are satisfied. Only one level emerges above the esteem needs which is the end stone of Maslow’s pyramid and the “highest form of achievement for human potential” (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). It refers to those who feel not completely satisfied and who are thirsty for the further fulfilment of self-actualisation including “endeavours in academics in forms of creativity, such as writing or music” (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). Here again, conspicuous consumption is used as a means of expression but beyond as a crowning personal achievement. As streetwear’s range is produced limited, followers try distinctively to stand out from the masses and to look for ways to dress uniquely. Therefore, streetwear allows its followers to express their creativity with the aid of clothes (DeVera, 2016).

With this identification of needs, marketers are able to intervene with appropriate products within the levels of Maslovian needs. On that basis, a marketing model called VALS(tm), established segmenting specific consumer types based on their demographic attributes, values, and lifestyles for marketing, advertising and product development functions. Figure 10 is categorised into eight primary consumer groups which are then subdivided into more defined groups which represent a more significant market share (VALS Framework, 2002). Theories have proven that groups at the top are generally consuming more compared to the ones at the bottom (Lynch and Strauss, 2007). The driving motivators of the groups are either labeled as ideals, achievement or self-expression. As previously ascertained, drops are shared as an experience which in turn fits perfectly to the customer segment of self-expression and the group of experiencers. The experiencers are described as trendsetting, impulsive and variety seeking matching with the characteristics of a hypebeast (VALS Framework, 2002).

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\(^2\) Subcultural capital “confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder. In many ways it affects the standing of the young like its adult equivalent. Subcultural capital can be objectified or embodied. [...] So subcultural capital is objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts [...]” (Thornton, 1995)

\(^3\) Social capital explains the “power of fame” and “stems from you know and not what you know” which can confer status (Thornton, 1995)
Waiting hours in line, talking to other like-minded streetwear fanatics, anticipating the new hyped drop which is probably even a highly expected collaboration until finally holding the sought-after piece in hand like a trophy. The intrinsic value of a streetwear garment gets defined through an experience attaching automatically a moment of retrospect which is what the youth culture of today is about: committing yourself to the cause to feel both individual and part of a group. Nowadays it is waiting in a line for hype streetwear and not for event tickets anymore. The commitment of today is dedicated for a piece of clothing which is not easy to get in just any shop in the world; you need to wait in line (mostly for hours), or navigate the secondary market, to gain it strategically online. Thus, the hype is a phenomenon incarnated by a strong desire for an object.

The development of the secondary market is particularly important as the hype shifts the price into the luxury segment. Thus, it attributes artificial value to an object which gets measured by its popularity. Hence, the numbered value determined by the secondary market constitutes the parameter the hype and product itself were successful or not. Thereby it creates a status symbol which gets further dictated by brand and subcultural ambassadors representing it on Social Media. As fashion is driven by imitation, streetwear followers wish to adopt the style, and it becomes vastly spread throughout a social group upgrading the individuals social status. Also vice versa, the hype also can evoke individuality by being marked as exclusive. The paradox of hype and streetwear thus becomes clear: The longing for individuality and for being the leader ultimately leads to others emulating their peer’s behaviour representing conformity (follower). It is beyond the dimensions of individualism and collectiveness that defines the relation of hype in the context of style.

Further research in the form of interviews with hypebeasts needs to clarify the reasoning behind purchasing streetwear items as it defines the value beyond the price tag. An important indicator for the meaning of style as streetwear’s intrinsic value is determined by price but also by the experience.
CHAPTER 5
What is the meaning of style in a postmodern hypebeast culture?

5.1 Appearance and the self

This chapter is analysing whether or not the style of today’s streetwear consumer is the result of the wearers own identity or the byproduct of hype initiated by brands. As previously examined in chapter two that in postmodernism clothing can be read as “open texts” and therefore able to adapt different meanings (Barker and Beezer, 1992). However, these meanings are dependent on the wearer since those have their own tastes in combining clothing which is anchored in the nature of subculture by turning mundane objects into an own symbol (Hebdige, 1979). Moreover, the recognition of a hypebeast within the streetwear culture as both widespread and individualistic is achieved through body modification by wearing a particular style that allows one both to fit in and stand out within the group. Thus, the consumer behaviour of streetwear is characterised for the hedonistic search for novelty also in terms of experience (Muggleton, 2000).

Throughout the history of streetwear, the aspect of bragging or rather extremely embracing a specific style has been a significant part of the culture predominantly seen on rappers or drug dealers who in turn serve as an inspiration for others (DeLeon, 2013). With exaggeration or subversion, the original purpose of a garment is translated into a conspicuous message. The consumers of streetwear who are mostly called hypebeasts are defined by their ambitious affiliation to get hands on the latest drop on the market. Ever since the Internet has risen above streetwear inflated by Social Media, the aspect of “embracing a certain style” has become predominantly the sole purpose within the community the last six to seven years. Thus, the world wide web has become an echo chamber of constant self-expression leading to a trend of mass-individualisation and narcissism (Wallace, 2017). With regards to the streetwear’s consumer identity, the visual development of the “beast’s” appearance is shown in chronological order in figure 11 from the point where streetwear has turned into a Hashtag on Social Media and became increasingly influenced by luxury brands. Jian Deleon, Editorial Director at Highsnobiety, has examined the evolution of the hypebeast for Complex which is one of the biggest streetwear platforms next to Highsnobiety and Hypebeast. When looking at the illustrations, the style of each era mirrors the typology of each influential brand and product (DeLeon, 2013). No look is like the other, and it appears that the hypebeast pulls with each look a new visual identity and thus embracing transience with style and consumption. After DeLeon’s statement is the hypebeast following trends almost blind-folded indicating the theory of Jameson (1991, 2003) that postmodern subcultures foreground the “spectacle” over narrative as the result of their “depthlessness”. Capitalism is thereby turning streetwear into the commodity form from which the hypebeast constructs its own identity and wears its “stylistic masks” (Muggleton, 2000). The view on streetwear consumption is defined pejoratively against what is perceived to be the active hypebeast consumer.

The view on streetwear consumption is defined pejoratively against what is perceived to be the active hypebeast consumer. With streetwear entering the mainstream and luxury segment, the style has turned simultaneously into the uniform of youth culture (Kim, 2017), it is easy to understand how it might be consumed passively.

The interviewee’s specifically asked for this research have made different statements concerning streetwear and their relation to style. Conor Dalton (figure 12), 23 years old, who even works as a copywriter for Patta says:

“I think to follow street style is even a bit dangerous. You are always chasing, you are not really doing anything for you because you are just looking around what other people do”
— Conor Dalton, 2019

Although, streetwear is not only purchased over “wholesale”, the hype conception of a limited drop does not change the perception of uniformity.
Figure 11: The Evolution of the Hypebeast, by Alessandro Pane (2018)
Also, the plurality of available styles of the allegedly limited drops is leading to a decreasing commitment to the streetwear culture as all interviewees are neglecting to have the slightest connection to the term. However, the visual appearance shows the opposite. David Morris Kaul (figure 13), 25 years old, sets his focus on rather underground streetwear brands such as Boris Bidjan Saberi. This particular brand has its roots in urban, bourgeois aesthetics but can still be perceived as streetwear only that it is known among a selective audience within the global culture.

“I'm not so much into street style. Mostly because there is so much hype over it and for me that is really mindless, you know?”
— Conor Dalton, 2019

“The general hype around drops of new “grail” items like supreme shirts or sneakers etc. never gave me anything though”
— David Morris Kaul, 2019

The result is an emphasis on individual-diversity which gets realised through transformed DIY-aesthetics.

“Everything is quite easy as I do not want to look like really expensive. I just throw it together. It is like natural”
— Conor Dalton, 2019

“I’m trying to boil down various types of aesthetics to find my key elements in the whole visual concept but I cannot always be effortless”
— David Morris Kaul, 2019

“Next to [streetwear], I’m showing my interest in vintage, unisex, and “support your locals.” […] For me the aspect of vintage is very important […] which carries a very personal message”
— Hakan Keppler, 2019

The DIY-attitude of trying to individualise the self is quite paradoxical because streetwear is constructed around that principle (Abloh, 2018) and hyped as “limited.” It appears that the term “do-it-yourself” has to be detached from the brand and be entirely self-made to gain significant value for individual diversity. Especially for Hakan Keppler (figure 15), who is 26 years old and works as blogger next to his job as a PR agent always combines vintage with streetwear items as the outfit becomes, in this way, more personal.

The trend of creating complex appearances through self-conscious styling is particularly evident in Paul Willis’s (1998) study of the “grounded aesthetics” and “symbolic creativity” of youth culture. The results of the study have shown that “young people do not just buy passively or uncritically.”
Instead, mass-market styles get appropriated and recontextualized by transforming the meaning of the bought goods, or even create new meanings by combining elements in a specific way (Muggleton, 2000). Thus, the hypebeast is deemed into having a fragmented identity as the result of trying to build an individual, ephemeral style (Jameson, 1991). In relation to the context of the Internet and Social Media, the fragmentation of identity by taking on multiple has lead to the confusion of reality and simulation (Baudrillard, 1983).

"It would be for sure a bit naive to think that [my inspiration] did not come from Social Media"
— Conor Dalton, 2019

"Despite ignoring self proclaimed influencer, it would be wrong to claim that I am not influenced by anybody"
— David Morris Kaul, 2019

When thinking of today’s Instagram feeds, print fashion magazines like 032c, or the online paradigm Highsnobiery: it appears that the reality is swept under the infinite amount of images and self-referencing signs. The impact of the imagery from media and social media dictates the identity of hypebeasts, hence the inspiration to dress a certain way or wear a certain brand which was probably worn by a celebrity or influencer (Ullah, 2016). Subsequently, this seemingly self-created reality provides the means to a simulation that lives of these (empty) images as analysed in chapter two and four (Baudrillard, 1983; Tseëlon, 2010).

Instagram is the primary example of living in an era of hyper-reality as it is the medium for cultural content which perfectly stages the lifestyle and persona of conspicuous consumption. The hypebeast’s posts are carefully curated, edited and represented with the fitting hashtags to gain an even larger audience showing the perfect, happy life. However, what often appears to be a spontaneous outfit, like figure 15 is showing a post on Instagram of Hakan wearing a shirt of Björn Borg, a Swedish sports fashion brand. The tags on the image, however, indicate that it is sponsored content. During the interview, he further confirmed it.

"Personally, I do not like to rely on Social Media especially because it kind of cuts out the meta-level"
— David Morris Kaul, 2019

The seemingly free choices of stylistic devices are influenced by brands to showcase their products, as those send the garments for free to the bloggers and artists. Another example is the Instagram account of Miquela Sousa a Brazilian-American fashion influencer seen in figure 16 and better known as Lil Miquela.

5.2 Hyperfragmentation of Hype(r)beasts

The rise of the Internet not only turned around the streetwear culture, but it also affected the perception of the self of hypebeasts. Generally, the media landscape has established as a lean and efficient content machine built for the pace of today’s feeds. While the study of Willis from 1990 stems from an influential era of television, he documented how the youth culture was using media to keep up with the latest fashion trends, is with regards to the vast spread of imagery through the Internet even more applicable today (Muggleton, 2000).

Figure 14: Virgil Abloh in a Tie-Die-Merchandise shirt of Travis Scott by Richard Anderson (2018)
Perhaps today’s media have established the scenario where style is not connected to any underlying sense of the self anymore. Per contra, the interviewees seem to have much more fluid identities:

“However, when I’m getting sick seeing stuff on other people then I’m doing something else like wearing baggy trousers”
— Conor Dalton, 2019

“Generally, I have many facets I want to show”
— Hakan Keppler, 2019

Whether being associated with certain style groups or subcultures] “With many of them, but that is not directly related to the way I dress because I do not like to limit myself with being associated with just one subculture and dressing in that way”
— David Morris Kaul, 2019

Here, change can be understood as an essential attribute of authenticity, as well as recognised as a partial transformation and not as a sudden shift in the whole identity.
Streetwear has the ability to reach a broad audience across borders, languages, and timezones, which got undoubtedly initiated through the possibilities within the Internet, is not necessarily only encompassing an “astral empire of signs” but rather through the “ever-fragmenting fashions an electric blend of cross-cultural commodities” (McLuhanian by Muggleton, 2000). In particular, the concept of bricolage can be used to explain how subcultural styles are constructed abundantly within an era of mass production and social media intensifying creative appropriation and representation. Bricolage is de facto a French word meaning roughly “do-it-yourself” and yet again referencing one of the hallmarks of streetwear. The word refers to a garment which gets combined and assembled into a new subcultural context (Hebdige, 1978). Thus the “stolen sign becomes a second-order signifier of a new signification” (Kreutter, n.s.), or in other words, the stolen sign is reformed into new purposes and meanings.

Consequently, signs become free-floating and irrevocably separated from the original subcultural context (Hebdige, 1979). Through media and especially social media, hypebeasts obtain ideas about individual styles but are most likely not aware of, nor care about the ideologies to which the garments originally refers (Kaiser et al. by Muggleton, 2000). The ever-shifting cultural signs and the simulation inspired by a myriad of sources are leading to a state in which the meaning of style is unable to stabilise (Muggleton, 2000). What faces us now is Baudrillard’s theory of “the end of meaning” leading to the aestheticization of fashion and eliminating the underlying narratives of subcultural styles (Tseëlon, 2016). Therefore the narrative meaning gets associated with temporality.

Today’s looks are mostly nostalgic mementos of past decades as the elements, and even garments are similar to the designs seen in the past.

Figure 17 (inspired by Alessandro Pane): Leo Mandella @gullyguyleo on Instagram wearing an outfit of Pastiches s. next figures:
Figure 18: RUN DMC wearing similar bucket hat; Figure 19: Puff Daddy wearing a fur coat in "Big Homie" (2014); Figure 20: Monogram trousers with fabrics of Louis Vuitton and MCM tailored by Dapper Dan (1990); Figure 21: Similar soccer jersey seen in streetwear (2016)
It describes Jameson’s world of pastiche in which designers are using already existing elements but only adding their own message to it (Jameson, 1991). Hence, hypebeasts are basically left to imitate already existing styles of prior seasons representing nothing more than the pop images of cultural stereotypes. The meaning becomes “unstable, contradictory and constantly changing” (Kawamura, 2016). This negative effect leaves two options for streetwear’s fanatics: either the styles and designs “feed off each other in a cannibalistic orgy of cross-fertilization [...] or [hypebeasts] indulge in the stylistic revivalism” (Muggelton, 2000). Either hypebeasts tend to keep copying the outfits as seen on Instagram, Highsnobiety, or other relevant sources. Or they will sooner or later understand the importance of style and their identity creating new meanings and a battle for the possession of a sign.

When scrolling through Social Media, the typical hypebeast will pop up after a few clicks, and when having a closer look at the representation of the self, it becomes evident that the stylistic ensemble is made of pastiches (s. figures 17 - 21). The social image contorted into abstract doppelgängers restrained by the irrationality of streetwear fashions also possessed by the creed of conspicuous consumption. As previously analysed, the hyperreal representation of the self, the obsession of the perfect surface appearance is noticeable for merely excessive and vanity reasons. The secondary market is exploding with resales of garments which either got bought for investment reasons or because the particular garment has been posted on Social Media and be seen already.

For the sake of novelty and representation, the circle of consumption gets fed by the insatiable hunger for recognition. So, the intrinsic value of a hyped streetwear item happens to be defined by likes on Social Media. There is insanity for representation, and the Hypebeast is only the byproduct of external factors implicated by the hype of brands and other individuals. As Hebdige claimed: “media representations provide the ideological framework within which subcultures can represent themselves, shaping as well as limiting what they can say...” (Barker and Beezer, 1992). Yet, in these hyper-real terms of representations, the hypebeasts serves for purely aesthetic codes of styles which have been dislocated from their original origin.

The particular references that once guided the streetwear culture in their stylistic options like skateboarding or hip hop music are apparently no longer the main reasons behind outfits.

Through the inevitable loss of these references, the hypebeast lives “in an aesthetic hallucination of reality” (Baudrillard by Muggleton, 2000). The hypebeast has turned into a “simulcrum”, a copy without an original. By wearing hyped pieces which might used to be a sign before, the hypebeast is consciously or unconsciously inscribing visual signs upon their bodies whereby the initial subcultural meaning gets refused only for the sake of the spectacle on Social Media.
As individuals, we have different attitudes, tastes, and personalities, but some strive for more individuality than others, notably, in times in which the self gets defined through virtual likes and the longing for differentiation and recognition. By researching the meaning of style in a hypebeast culture, I intended to shed light on a postmodern subculture, and how today’s identities, values, and ideologies are expressed on the surface of the human body. The meaning of style in today’s fast-paced world becomes as transient as the time itself.

By speaking out, what we think of ourselves when wearing particular clothes, fashion can be understood as a language, by dressing, we learn our own grammar, and by the act of subcultural self-styling, we speak our own slangs. As the catwalk of today is not the street anymore, styles get conspicuous represented on Media and Social Media. The speed of only-a-click-away society has lead to faster dissemination of stylistic ensembles, which got proven in the analysis of streetwear’s history and the tremendous change for the culture with the emergence of the Internet. The multifaceted subculture of streetwear emphasised a multitude of stylistic and cultural notions. With the industry’s rapacious eyes now glued to the culture, it evolved into intangible combat which values such as authenticity and independence have been abandoned for an enraged economy of consolidated power driven by hypes and drops. The manipulation of the selves gets so far that brands change consumer’s rational instincts into irrational mind’s by turning Supreme hoodies into a subjective need. The drill of waiting for the sought-after, seemingly limited item only to fulfil the urge of belonging by bestowing symbolic value to a garment in the effort to the experience of a drop and expressing the underlying meaning of the self. The once called subculture of streetwear has turned into a signifier of economic growth itself.

The act of imitating is deeply anchored into our society and especially the main driver for creative expression in terms of identity, and especially in fashion. Streetwear is a paradoxical experience as the urge for representing individuality gets overshadowed by the pace of today’s Social Media feeds and followers adopting specific designs in the speed of wireless connections worldwide whereby the conspicuous message gets translated into a statute quo.

Hence, streetwear expresses both individualism as well as blistering standardisation: From leader to follower. The streetwear uniform, the material subjechthood of hypebeasts, controls the practice of consumerism as wasteful massification. Despite limited drops and the plurality of limited styles, the Instagram feeds, however, appear mostly in uniformity. Subcultural signs and symbols have replaced meaning and thus, reality. Reality gets replaced by simulation in the hyper-real virtual world in an echo-chamber of self-referential posts.

As learned from my interviewees, it seems to be impossible to absolve Instagram as an influential source, although not trying to with all possible means as the postmodern consumer strives for the ultimate individuality whereby underlying signs and roots get rejected for the ultimate outfit. By speaking to them, I realised that their appearance is an extension of, even part of their persona, however, none has revealed other underlying signs which possibly could represent significance or eras within the history of streetwear. Whether or not, their visual language comes from the inside which can be perceived as a marker of authenticity and genuineness. It seems to be that the spoken language has become the weakest tool of communication (Kaul, 2019) in today’s possibilities of visual expression and myriads of images shown on Instagram.

Even if streetwear is the apotheosis of today’s consumer culture, it detaches the aspect of reality. However, the interviewees have shown through an expressive concept of identity, that membership is defined by a self-authentic visual expression which is even possible in a hyper-real slash hyper-fragmented society within the spheres of Social Media.

Perhaps, the streetwear culture is not what it used to be, but that seems to be the law of nature, what grows changes with time:

“Changes in fashion reflect the dullness of nervous impulses; the more nervous the age, the more rapidly its fashion change, simply because the desire for differentiation, one of the most important elements of all fashion, goes hand in hand with the weakening of nervous energy”
— Georg Simmel by Peter McNeil, 2016
Figure 22: Virgil Abloh in collaboration with Kaleidoscope magazine at Spazio Maiocchi (2018)
Terminology

This word description will help to avoid discrepancies of comprehension while reading the thesis:

**Hypebeast**

A hypebeast is a slang term for a specific type of consumer within the streetwear culture who is wearing the latest items released on the market of hyped brands. The hypebeast is usually attributed to affluent youngsters but actually does not have a fixed age or demographics (Beltran, 2018). Nor does the expensiveness of streetwear items be of any interest as those are perceived as a form of investment which eventually pays off (Flower, 2018). Like many other slang terms, it is used in different ways, but mostly it has a derogatory attachment as through the rise of the Internet spoiled kids have used it to brag about their latest possession on Social Media (Lyons, 2018). In fact, hypebeast nowadays are keen on curating their Instagram profile "by projecting a certain lifestyle, [and] counting the likes from every OOTD post" (Beltran, 2018).

Interviews

The interview questions are constructed after the hypothesis that the conception of the streetwear culture as both widespread and individualistic is achieved through the material and cultural practice of wearing an individual style that allows one both to fit in and stand out within the group. The following questions examining the individual’s involvement in and around streetwear whether there is a deeper meaning in form of ideologies or distinctive lifestyle behind the surface appearance. Also, the questions are considering the ambivalence individuality and uniformity of today’s consumer. The answers aim to clarify the position of my interviewee’s within that sphere and hopefully reveal the relation of the surroundings, influences, and their style, especially in terms of Social Media whereby they probably disclose the extent of subcultural involvement within the culture.

The participants which are selected on their Instagram appearance, on which all show an affinity for streetwear but are representing different visual languages online. Conor Dalton, 23 years old from Amsterdam, he is working as a copywriter at Patta, and visualises the classic streetwear elements. Hakan Keppler, 25 years old from Berlin, he works as a PR agent and Blogger providing insightful perspectives on that business. Lastly, David Morris Kaul, 25 years, also from Berlin, he works for the concept store NagNagNag next to having an own label.
#1 Interview

David Morris Kaul, 25 years old, Berlin, label owner and designer

FS: When people ask you: what do you? What do you tell them?
DMK: It depends on who is asking, because in general socialising is not one of my main interests. If there is, however, a connection established and I'm sure that the other person really wants to know what I’m doing, I will tell them that I’m a Fashion Designer.

FS: From your personal perspective how important are brands nowadays? And is there a brand you favour at the moment?
DMK: When I first got into fashion around 2008, brands were essential to me, but that was more because I wanted to convey an image of myself predetermined by the brands rather than actually being myself.

At the moment, I’m not really focussed on brands anymore that I do not have a personal connection with. My current favourite “known“ brand boils down to only Carol Christian Poell, however, my favourite “underground” brands are Sickmind which is basically a polish artist painting old garments, and Ruben C. Vogt, a close friend who just released his first collection “how to speak poetry”. He is focused on perfecting the art of pattern making.

FS: By speaking of underground brands, would you say that you are associated with a certain style group / subculture?
DMK: With many of them, but that is not directly related to the way I dress because I do not like to limit myself with being associated with just one subculture and dressing in that way. I generally do not feel the need to belong to or be included in a certain crowd.
FS: But do you think of yourself identifying with a certain type of group of people or whatever because of the way you dress?
DMK: No. There are different influences in the way I dress coming from certain groups of people, but mixing these inspirations to form my own identity is essential in choosing my type of garments.

FS: Okay, it sounds like that there is a certain degree of creativity in the way you look? Do you put a lot of effort into it?
DMK: Yes, I’m trying to boil down various types of aesthetics to find my key elements in the whole visual concept but I cannot always be effortless. I see my own style almost as a testing ground for new concepts for my brand.

FS: Are you trying to convey a message/narrative in the way you dress?
DMK: Yes, basically it comes down to conveying a part of my personality before even talking, which helps to attract only particular types or characters of people. Genuinely, I think language is one of the weakest tools of communication, that really comes at the end of a social interaction. So, for me clothing, mannerisms, gestures and general nonverbal expression are far more important.

FS: What do you think, how does Social Media effecting the way people dress and basically communicate their identity?
DMK: It provides a broader range of direct inspiration which means actual pictures of worn clothing. Personally, I do not like to rely on Social Media especially because it kind of cuts out the meta-level. For others who are not designing “themselves”, however, I think it is a convenient tool to expand taste levels. On the other hand, it also makes trends far more short-lived because of the constant exposure.

FS: Okay, but imagine you are at a drop of a hyped streetwear brand. What will you do?
DMK: Despite ignoring self proclaimed influencer, it would be wrong to claim that I am not influenced by anybody. Of course, my influences are mostly on a personal level not definable, but sometimes a friend of mine just comes up with some new designers or garments that I really like in which case I’m thankful for and happy about. The general hype around drops of new „grail“ items like supreme shirts or sneakers etc. never gave me anything though.

FS: One last question: How do you value a garment, also as a designer?
DMK: How do I value a garment? I value a garment with a certain degree of personal attachment and the story that belongs to it. Also, I prefer my clothes to look slightly worn out, and telling a story like that which is only recognisable when you have a closer look. That is why brand new items often come along soulless to me.

#2 Interview
Hakan Keppler, 25 years old, Berlin, PR agent and blogger

FS: When people ask you: Who are you? What do you tell them?
HK: Next to working as a PR agent, I’m blogging in my leisure time, which is perfect because I have found a subject for myself within that sphere. Genuinely, I have always questioned the fashion scene [in Berlin] as it does not really comply with my open-minded and sincere personality. With blogging, however, I have established myself a voice to be heart without losing my inner self.

FS: That is really respectable, because you see so many bloggers which sell their soul for collaborations..
HK: And that is precisely what I do not want to do, and brands start to understand and even respect that which gives me the freedom to approach brands on my own.
FS: Cool, which brands were amongst your latest collaborations?
HK: It depends because I want to be that selective that I only work with brands I believe in, e.g. the collaboration with Björn Bork and the artist Robyn. For once, I adore the artist and what she embodies and on the other side, the brand which is producing sustainable pieces with cool designs and high-quality fabrics. And that is what I believe in.

FS: What do you think of streetwear? I mean to a certain degree your account is visualising that aspect..
HK: Generally, I have many facets I want to show, but my focus is mainly on streetwear influenced by trends. Next to that, I’m showing my interest in vintage, unisex, and “support your locals.” Also, I cannot exempt myself from high brands [Supreme, Gucci, Prada, etc.]

Even I wonder how other bloggers are able to afford that lifestyle, and it is just an illusion because these people eventually turn into the brands and losing their mind.

FS: It also could be that a lot of garments are afforded by selling the pieces, after the picture is already taken, on the secondary market. Are you also active on these reselling platforms?
HK: I have sold some pieces I got sponsored, yes, but I have that rule that I want to keep the stuff for myself a longer period before reselling them. I mean these garments basically just come from the hanger and I want to wear them as they are to a certain degree a present. It is somehow a deal between the brand and me, which I respect. If I come to the point of reselling, I would never sell them for more money or whatever.

Frankly speaking now: I just turned 25 years old, and I cannot afford these brands from head to toe. This is also not the style I’m embodying, not at all.
FS: [...] Are you trying to convey a message/narrative in the way you dress?
HK: Absolute. For me the aspect of vintage is very important, which I’m always including into my styles plus clothing from my grandparents which carries a very personal message.

FS: Okay, taking the example of a Supreme hoodie and an item from your grandparents, where is the value difference for you?
HK: There is, on the one hand, the character of a brand which I embrace like a particular design, and I want to afford that garment from my savings or earnings. However, I would never go to that particular store of a more exclusive streetwear brand and just randomly buy an item. I just cannot afford it, and I just do not want to do it, it is just not me.

My mum gave me the Louis Vuitton belt bag as a present which she bought from her first waitress payment back in the days. And this value is not definable. That is why the value proposition is always different and dependent on history. I would never buy an item only to show off. I want to combine different items to show my character, to show how to style high end with other brands like H&M. If items match, why not combine them?

FS: [...] That is true. Let us speak about Social Media a bit more. What is the effect of social media on the way you dress and on the way people dress in general, what do you think?
HK: Genuinely speaking: I realised if my looks are more masculine and match with the stereotypical image of a man, I receive more likes for an image compared to looks which are rather unique and androgynous. I do not really mind, and that is most likely why my follower circle is comparatively small as I do not even count as a Micro-Influencer. I can proudly say that I worked my way through the scene in Berlin because I do not deliver the content brands etc. expect from me as a Blogger.

FS: So, would you say that Social Media has an effect on people in the way they dress?
HK: For sure, as the affinity for high-end brands and the flawless appearance on Social Media is growing continuously and the impact on the followers themselves even more.

FS: I mean you are into streetwear; would you say that you are associated with a certain style group or even a subculture?
HK: Definitely. Each city, each friend group, or even a particular scene, is taking a massive influence on your style because you have your very own idols directly in front of you. Also, you cannot say that fashion is just fashion; fashion is also art and music. For me personally, the metropolis London is very inspiring, especially during the 80s with the androgynous scene and glam rock but I only interpret it in a modern way as vintage is not just vintage. So, I do not only wear my Balenciaga sneaker exclusively, I combine it with casual suit trousers. I always aim to bring myself into my styles while referring back to past decades.

FS: Coming to my final question: Have you ever bought an item directly at a drop?
HBF: Yes, I have, but I did not buy it myself. My former boss, actually, was wholly immersed into streetwear and in particular Supreme. He followed the website and the drop for me to buy that rare piece. Usually, I wait until these items come just naturally to me and I would not hype it into my hands. Otherwise, I know, I would ruin myself, and that is not my intention.
Figure 25: Hakan Keppler's Instagram representation as a blogger @hakanberryfinn (2019)
#3 Interview

Conor Dalton, 23 years old, Amsterdam, copywriter at Patta

**FS:** When people ask you: what do you do? What do you tell them?
**CD:** At the moment, I’m just copy writing at Patta and do product descriptions but I’m hoping to get more involved into the production and designing. I’m trying to do a little bit of everything.

**FS:** Do you think of yourself identifying with a certain type of group of people or whatever because of the way you dress?
**CD:** Yes, I would actually — underground scheme, I think. There is a café in Amsterdam I’m going to a lot lately and the people who are hanging around at that place is the type of people I want to be associated with. I just recently realised that I would really like to associate myself with a certain type of people.

**FS:** What kind of people are that? Can you describe them?
**CD:** These are people who make a conscious decision about their appearance, people who care about what they look like.

**FS:** Ok, would you say that they are dressed in a specific style direction? And would you associate with that direction?
**CD:** No. I would not go that far to associate myself with a particular direction, subculture or anything.

**FS:** Really? I mean you work for Patta, a company which is deeply immersed in the streetwear culture and represents a particular style.
**CD:** I’m not so much into street style. Mostly because there is so much hype over it and for me that is really mindless, you know? I would not associate myself with that. I think to follow street style is even a bit dangerous. You are always chasing, you are not really doing anything for you because you are just looking around what other people do.

**FS:** So, have you ever waited in line at a drop to get hands on the latest drop?
**CD:** No. I mean if you are able to get it [streetwear item], you either have a lot of money or a lot of connections. However, it is possible to get things without standing in line these days quite easily but I’m not sure if I want to be seen as that. The Internet has made things easier. It democratized the whole scene. There is so much money going around and the people who are standing in line are mostly getting paid for it. Maybe that is why to better not get involved into it. Especially as the luxury industry entered the culture. [...]

**FS:** Is there a degree of creativity about the way you look? I mean do you put a lot of thought and effort into it?
**CD:** I definitely think about it a lot and put effort into it on a personal level. However, I do not spend a lot of money on my looks. Everything is quite easy as I do not want to look like really expensive. I just throw it together. It is like natural, you know?

**FS:** Cool. So, when you say that you do not spend a lot of money on your clothes, do you get it sponsored by Patta, or do you go thrifting a lot?
**CD:** Yes, I get a lot of things of Patta for free, then I do a lot of vintage shopping or going to flea markets. I do not really buy anything else actually.

**FS:** Okay. Do you specifically hunting down an item when you go shopping?
**CD:** It depends. Last year, for example, when I went to vintage shops I was really looking for baggy trousers. In that sense, I was specifically looking for something like ski pants. I had an idea.
FS: Where do you get the idea from? Where does your inspiration come from?
CD: It would be for sure a bit naive to think that it did not come from Social Media. Genuinely, I also think that it is a feeling you have sometimes. There are people who want to look good in an easy way and that is being safe. However, when I'm getting sick seeing stuff on other people then I'm doing something else like wearing baggy trousers.

FS: Do you think it is harder to be original nowadays because of Social Media?
CD: It probably blurs the lines of originality. You have people who can easily copy, or people getting paid to wear something cool. I think the sponsorship you can easily recognise whether it is original or not. It is similar here [Patta] for collaborations. When we are trying to persuade the brands that we want to work with and why they should do it. It has to be natural. [...]

FS: How important are brands to you? Do you have a favourite brand?
CD: Not really. I do not have a favourite brand or anything. I think it is nice to align with brands, to like other brands and to respect what they do. There is no brand really that is good because they do a lot of bad things. I do not really follow a brand like that a lot.

FS: So, there is no brand you can identify with?
CD: No, brands are too money-driven nowadays, they are just doing trends to satisfy the consumers and betray themselves.
**FS:** Can you name an example?

**CD:** Gucci doing street style although it is a traditional fashion house. It is kind of a nouveau riche feel. I mean for one luxury brand, I have always seem to like is Prada which is quite on point. Although they follow trends, they are not loosing their identity. If I would have more money, for sure, I would buy more Prada. Then, I would mix it with Patta and stuff life that.

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**FS:** Are you trying to convey a message/narrative in the way you dress?

**CD:** Yeh, I think so, but mostly to express myself. When you look at me, you already can judge how my character is, what my interest are.. Well, there are even people who think I’m actually arrogant, but that is not what I’m going for, you know? That is what happens when you try wearing certain clothes which is a complete misconception.

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**FS:** Do you think that you appear unapproachable to other people because of your style?

**CD:** Yes, I have heard that a lot but then people start talking and disapprove quickly again. Maybe that is also because people are scared to talk and take it as an excuse or something.

For myself, I do not know. i just want to show that I’m into fashion, that hip hop is my type of music. For vintage, it is always important to look back a bit and to understand where trends come from. So, I always have some vintage in because it is a chance to show some flavour.

If I would be arrogant as some people think, I would wear more expensive brands.

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**FS:** I mean streetwear slipped into the perception of luxury as the prices on the secondary market has risen sky-high and get associated as some kind of status symbol.

**CD:** Yes that could also be a reason why people think I’m arrogant because I’m wearing Patta and stuff.
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