From Hardcore to Cottagecore

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Death of Cool

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For young people particularly teenage girls coming of age while immersing themselves into the online world. The way that images were shared on the internet got you closer to other people who were interested in the same things or visuals as you were. Giving the false sense of a community or a sort of youth tribe. In the same way that subcultural styles used to work as a sort of irl physical profile that signaled to other people what your interests were. This paper will explore the intersection of fashion style and identity and the way in which subcultural style has changed and evolved to reflect the changing cultural landscape and youth culture of today. From Hardcore to cottage-core and beyond it will attempt to highlight how youth culture exists within the limits of capitalism and mass markets and how the things that teenagers do on the internet for fun and to find a sense of identity and authenticity become co opted by cycles of consumption and are eventually sold back to them along with the false idea of authenticity and belonging.

In "Subculture: The Meaning of Style" Dick Hebdidge introduces the concept of subcultural style as a means of stylistic resistance and a way of differentiation from the dominant culture. Hebdidge traces the story of subcultures and style to marginalized groups who develop distinct aesthetics in order to visually express their difference and opposition to whatever conditions and social norms exclude them. He argues that subcultural style works as a sort of visual language that can communicate values,

beliefs and even political stances. For Hebdige This is about way more than just personal preference or fashion as "fashion" in the way that is typically used would not account for styles that are dissonant and go against the norm. In order for these styles to form there are certain signifiers that are reappropriated into the particular style and then come together to form a distinct look that helps as a sort of physical interface where people who share the same ideas can find each other just by picking up on the visual cues. With the advent of the internet and the way it has exponentially grown and become more pervasive in our lives in some cases eliminating the need for any kind of IRL interaction or community when it can all be found online. Therefore if all the signifiers and signs that would previously be outfitted in the clothes one would wear to face the outside world can just be spat across one's social media profile in small discrete ways is there a room for subcultural style anymore? Or has mass consumer culture and Social media made it pointless and obsolete in the eyes of most people. While the state of subcultures might be unclear and even maybe completely idle and pointless. According To Bennet and Kahn-Harris Subcultural style still exists in a constant state of evolution and flux that reflects the rapidly changing nature of contemporary youth culture and while it can still be a form of rebellion it more often than not gets co opted into the trend cycle and is eventually sold back to the same young people who started to create it.

At the very core of subculture was a desire to find like minded individuals to form a scene or a youth tribe. These very same ideals were translated into the online worlds where one could create a profile for themselves in which all their values, interests and

beliefs could be very explicitly stated which made it possible to find people who shared these interests with the simple tap of a finger on a keyboard or screen. This then was furthered by algorithmic possibility and the organizing of images through labels and hashtags.

Subcultural style articulates certain things very subtly in the way certain symbols are appropriated to signal that one belongs to a group. On the online world the same can be said about images and the way they are posted to articulate a persona. For instance if a profile posted an image of Lana Del Rey smoking a cigarette what might seem like a very innocent gesture is actually a very intentional way of signaling what could be seen as a rejection of the mainstream cultural aesthetics in favor of a more detached and nihilistic disposition… or simply of teenage angst. With the advent of Tumblr a mainly image sharing based social media website articulating very specific ideas about oneself through pictures became more prominent and an activity that young people, specifically young girls became extremely adept at. On tumblr certain images were circulated so often that they would become almost detached from their original context and filtered through a completely different lens. To the point where it became about almost having to reverse image search in order to figure out what was being shared but it wasn't always necessary.

Moodboarding and blogging became a popular hobby and even career for many and the better the person was at understanding these subtleties the more of a following/community would be gained based on an aesthetic niche. Where once there

was music that would bring people together and create a scene of people who enjoyed the music and values that were shared by the group. On the internet this process got somehow flipped and it became about the building of an image or aesthetic first and then subsequently the interests would come. Except they didn't even have to be real interests in the pursuit of appearing as a "sad girl" one could appear to enjoy Silvia Plath as long as it was presented aesthetically without ever actually having to read it. Or in order to be a coquette one would have to pretend to Read Nabokov's Lolita and wear frilly socks while maintaining a childlike demeanor.

One of the very first instances where a trend started on the internet and then became almost a cultural moment that had influence beyond social media sharing sites was the "sadgirl" i-d magazine described the sad girl as : Like many things on the Internet, Sad Girl became a brand and a think piece before it was a sentient cultural movement. But it's no health goth—the term describes real people with identifiable qualities. Sad Girls are young women, likely in affluent Western countries, who spend time online and embody a particular paradox: the desire to express their deepest interior feelings through an aesthetic many consider formulaic (waifish frames, cursive tattoos). **"[The Sad Girl] listens to better music than you and might spend her alone time watching French films from the '60s or angsty TV shows from the '90s."** - Alice Hines for I-d magazine online**.**

The birth of all these so-called aesthetics seemed like the youths' attempt at a sense of Authenticity during late stage capitalism where everything you like seems to be co opted by the spectacle **"The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation**

among people, mediated by images." Where the dominant culture or more specifically consumer capitalist culture uses images to control our interests and desires and shape our behaviors. This image mediation behaviors are teenage girls attempting to grasp the spectacle in some ways but inevitably becoming victims of it believing that they are suddenly watching girl interrupted and Prozac nation because they want to and not because they were told to.

And then came the COVID 19 Pandemic that pushed youths all over the world into the confinement of their rooms where the lack of a youth tribe was heightened by actual physical confinement. Young people were turning to social media apps like tik tok to find a sense of belonging in fleeting trends and fads. And the spectacle started to majorly pervade the inner space of the inside of teenagers bedroom. The spectacle and it's That took the idea of image making meaning further into real stylistic aesthetic niches. The connection back to subcultural style became even more evident when these sort of internet aesthetic tribes started to be named and people started taking their aesthetic niches and turning them into "cores" A suffix that literally comes from "hardcore" a very real subculture and hardcore subculture. This generated major media attention from mainstream media as well as a million bedroom cultural critics.

Media was rushing to catch up with the rapid churning of these styles and trends. It became a race to see who would be able to spot them, catch them and name them first. Publications like i-d magazine and dazed formerly known as dazed and confused being one of the many publications where these sort of stylistic dialogues were regurgitated. Contrary to the former model where these very same magazines were part of creating

the culture it seemed like now they always caught things while they were already on their way out struggling to keep up the pace and tripping up in the process.

Then these cores started by teenagers and mostly teenage girls then started to become widespread and reached almost every corner of the internet making people really mad or confused or aggravated. And even worse they started to become real trends that then got sold back to the girls who were just having fun online. Reaching the same kind of arch that many subcultures have gone through until they are merely a passing memory in old people's minds. There wasn't a "youth panic" but adults were taking notice.

In conclusion Images on the internet have and will continue to be remixed reused and recontextualized in many ways and young girls know this the best to the point where they are able to create specific visual languages that then become trends and then gets adopted by the cycles of consumption and are eventually sold back to them along with a false idea of authenticity that was never really there in the first place.

Trends have always existed and have always been about co-opting the styles that young people are wearing and fashion is constantly in search of the new fresh style cannibalizing on whatever …. But the internet has aggravated this to the point where trends start to become self referential and are no longer about just style but also identity in a society that profits from homogeneity. And where the spectacle creates an illusion

of choice that makes people eternal consumers searching for authenticity on the internet becomes an impossible pursuit in an attention economy. Maybe the internet trends labeled as aesthetics or cores on the internet are the spectacles way of imitating youth tribes and a sort of simulation of subcultures. Or it's just young girls experimenting with identity and finding themselves through style and the curation of images and online personas.

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