The Style Council versus City Hall

TEFLONRABBIT ARTICLE No.234

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When the semitiotics of apparel are predicated on ideology (Profanity warning)

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Over the past couple of decades there has been an marked increase in the amount of utilitarian clothing being worn by the average person in the street. From men purchasing 'workmen' trousers to do gardening in, to women purchasing hi-viz jackets to cycle in. Neither have any occupational capacity and both have delusions of responsibility.

Perception management *Society* *Clothing* *Uniforms* *Jeans*

In the article The Flotsam and Jetsam of a Toxic Tide we covered the issue of an out of control ideological pandemic that has swept (and continues to sweep) the planet. Part of this debasement of humanity relies on perceived authority. This authority is faked in various ways, from blue collar workers exhibiting inflated egotistical concepts of authoritarianism, to the rise of the con as a default mechanism. Perhaps the most conspicuous aspect of this slide into amateur hour authoritarianism is represented by the wardrobe choices of the carriers of this most virulent pandemic.

In years past the only people who would generally wear high visibility clothing were either employed by some form of municipal body or had been recently thwarted in an escape attempt from prison. Today we see an entirely different set of people sporting high visibility bibs, jackets, trousers, hats, socks, fingerless gloves, gel phone cases and even fucking hairbands. To these individuals the concept of subtlety is almost as alien as the concept of transparency. As a result, the only colour system that has not been reinterpreted in fluorescent, day glow, seizure inducing, photon bombardment is greyscale. Also known as black and white or grey, these colours have also been historically co-opted. The groom wears black, the bride wears white and the vicar wears both. For the sake of being non discriminatory, it should also be noted that non denominational celebrants can wear whatever the fuck they like. Nobody gives two shits about them or can even pronounce their job title.

In fairness, there are numerous job descriptions which have uniforms as part of the contract between worker and employer. This has always been the case and if an employer says that the employees have to wear a garish, clashing colour scheme then their choices extend to capitulating or finding a better job. However this is a choice that the employee can make with a degree of confidence based on the terms of their contract. Ultimately if the individual does not feel that their residual self

image can withstand the assault of the ensemble, they are perfectly free to seek other employment. Should they wish to endure the damage to their semiotic belief structure, they do it for the money. It is a well established exchange, in return for attendance in compliant livery, every hour spent observing the requirement equates to coin in the hand.

In direct contrast to this well established trade off, we now see a dramatic upturn in the number of people who believe that their personal choice of clothing lends some form of authority to their being. At the traffic lights in any busy town or city, regular couture catastrophes occur in the form of cyclists wearing high viz garments while waiting for the traffic to move on. The variance in cyclist apparel is highly informative. Generally speaking nobody wearing high viz ever admits to skipping the lights or cycling across the central reservation doing a wheelie. Their obsession with the perceived authority of their garments prevent them from being seen to abandon convention. Upon witnessing any other cyclists flouting the highway code, these self appointed high viz vigilantes will invariably show disapproval and possibly utter some trite soundbyte to do with such behavior being 'against the law'. It seems highly unlikely that these pedants actually live their life according to the scriptures and probably engage in just as many unconventional practices as their impatient targets. In fact, a quick perusal of Youtube on this subject produces a substantial amount of high viz wearing traffic infractions.

Beyond the vision impairing atrocity of high viz, there is also a plethora of fashion based uniforms which dominate society and fluctuate according to market forces. Often these societal uniforms carry some form of association with specific activities. Men seen in a leather jacket and jeans would be considered to be into rock music, identify with 1960's Americana, own (or aspire to own) a motorcycle or perhaps even a cabriolet. Women seen in the same garments would be considered (in some markets) as a pillion riding, bolt on accessory for men exhibiting the traits mentioned previously. However if the leather jacket is of a certain style, this precludes any form of motoring activity and places the outfit firmly in the 'casual' category. Generally speaking this mode of attire would sit well in all manner of social and commercial settings. All good and well until some self important service provider intervenes and announces some kind of premises embargo on the wearing of jeans. This has been an issue for decades and has even made it into adverts for major jeans manufacturers.

With the passing of the years, various styles and fashions circulate among the population. The 2006 film 'The Devil wears Prada' includes a scene where Meryl Streep's character explains to her recent acolyte (Anne Hathaway) how she came to be wearing a blue cardigan. The dialog charts the progress of the decision making processes from the designer, through to the high street vendor and eventually the bargain basement. Eventually the coup de gras is applied and Anne Hathaway's character is essentially shot down in flames with a crushing blow to her ego. She thought she had chosen a quirky discounted garment to prove how discerning she is. Meryl Streep's character assures her that the decision was not hers and that this cardigan was chosen for her by professional analysts who predicted her purchase. It's an intriguing scene in that it goes to some efforts to explain exactly how fashion houses and retailers program the population. Anyone choosing a garment in a clothes shop believes that they are exerting some form of personal choice which reflects their individuality and appreciation of the aesthetic. Most people believe that they personally have a sophisticated concept of style and as such the fashion industry makes billions from their vanity. The reality is really very different. Everyone has been exposed to numerous ensembles as they mix with others in society. Furthermore they have undoubtedly been influenced by a great deal of advertising. Perhaps the most compelling influences are those seen in social settings. In a somewhat contradictory non verbal form of 'word of mouth' advertising, an individual may influence others through the wearing of specific recent designs. Especially among women, seeing other women appearing well dressed in a previously unseen style, has a direct impact on their self image and will encourage them to absorb the ensemble into their own style.

While all this is very interesting from a societal perspective, what TEFLONRABBIT is concerned with is the co-opting of various garments in society by (that's right) the clandestine community. As usual, anything which may support disparity is considered to be a viable platform for gain. The vast array of possible combinations of garments provide a phenomenally diverse and infinitely exploitable landscape with which to deploy signals.

During the 1990's the Stussy brand came to prominence, offering a range of garments including an iconic logo emblazoned on bomber jackets and caps. The logo is a highly stylised handwritten signature and was generally embroidery rather than decal. Many people were influenced into purchasing Stussy products and the caps became a default for snap on fashionistas everywhere. After a few months of the Stussy logo being seen in bars, nightclubs and on the street, it became known that the logo could be read in a different way. The style of the signature meant that reading downward from left to right revealed the words "I am gay". While some men instantly threw off their caps, flexed their Latissimus dorsi muscles and reaffirmed their heterosexuality, others did not. Many of them were of the opinion that this was simply some form of ghastly esoteric

insurgency by the gay mafia and should not be given credence.

With time, the Stussy brand faded from the forefront of popular consciousness, jackets were donated to charity shops and caps were relegated to the cupboard in the attic. For the muscle flexers, the concept of having being hoodwinked into wearing a garment which indicated a same sex preference stuck for ever. This highly deceptive scenario had a long lasting and arguably counter productive effect. If the logo had been designed as a secret signal between homosexuals, the question arises as to what was the purpose. As mentioned in previous articles, this was the late 1990's not the dark ages. The idea that same sex relationships were taboo during this time is preposterous and in reality anyone espousing intolerance was openly contradicted. The last decade of the 20th century is synonymous with the creation of the 'metrosexual man'. The so called '90's man' was not encumbered by the hard line propaganda of the 1950's and was comfortable using hair conditioner, applying shaving balm as opposed to aftershave and even wearing pedal pushers, trainers and ... no fucking socks. To be clear, the 90's man profile was not actually gay, more that they signaled their lack of homophobia in order to increase their chances of having sex with so called 'faghags' (women who have gay friends).

It is considered among contemporary couture historians that the Hipster craze of the 21st century was (and still is) a direct backlash against the metrosexuality of the 90's man. Apparently the rest of the female heterosexual market were sick of sharing their conditioner, didn't appreciate men having more beauty products than they did and wanted a return to conventional values. Next thing anyone knew there was a massive upswing in the number of men going around dressed as Captain Haddock. The male hipster stereotype is essentially a mix of the 1800's Klondyke sailor and a 1960's yacht owner. With a beard that would frighten the Taliban, a double breasted Crombie jacket and slip on deck shoes, the contemporary Hipster male is apparently more 'manly' from a female perspective than the ponytail sporting, exfoliating, desert boot wearing 90's equivalent. Men from the bygone era of the 70's and 80's perceived both the 1990's metrosexuals and the 21st century hipsters to both represent repressed or closet homosexuals. The evidence in support of this pejorative attitude is considerable. The hipster male is generally of two profiles. There is the snap on, flannel shirt, bearded Hipster who is about as practical as a blancmange and there is the pickling, woodworking, fixie bike riding Hipster. While the latter subscribes to somewhat more conventional male stereotypes, they have still been molded by the image requirements handed down to them by female and gay male designers of the early 21st century.

Fortunately not all men have subscribed to the contemporary oximoron of obscure uniformity. Just as in the world of female fashion there is the concept of timeless classics. The absence of colour provides a safety network of monochromatic choices which have withstood the vagaries of time and granted salvation to numerous indecisive dressers. There are also a series of colour combinations which have always been considered as complimentary. With discernment, the individual can learn to combine various garments to create some form of window to their personality. Once again, this is an area which has been ruthlessly co-opted by numerous agendas since people started scraping animal hides to make kilts.

In the 1980's the UK heavy metal industry fostered a hybrid between traditional rocker outfits and the co-opted Ska scene footwear. Originally, the late 1970's skinheads were not bigoted BNP supporters and were instead white men who identified with Reggae, Dub and Ska music. The pre-skinhead culture was known as 'Two Tone' and included many white men with shaved heads wearing Mod jackets and Doctor Marten boots. These men and women were vigorously opposed to racist mentalities and spent time socialising with people of all races. The integration was most prominent with the Caribbean population most listened almost exclusively to to Ska music. Musical acts such as Bad Manners and Madness carried the Ska influence through into what became known as the skinhead movement. In stark contrast, there was also a skinhead faction who were profoundly against socialising with any ethnic minorities. They were synonymous with the National Front which morphed into the British National Party. Telling the two apart could often be difficult and this lead to a great number of violent confrontations in urban clashes between knife wielding gangs.

Dr.
Marten
AIR CUSHION

Toward the mid to late 1980's the heavy metal aficionados started cropping their traditionally long rocker hair and wearing Doctor Martens with their denim cutoff waistcoats. This 'tribe' listened to artists such as AC/DC, Iron Maiden, The Scorpions, WhiteSnake and eventually Metallica. As young journeymen of the hard rock scene, they employed the number of lace holes in their Doctor Martens to denote status. To have the standard eight holes in their boots (which absolutely had to be black) barely admitted them to the fraternity. A bare minimum of ten holes was required to be taken seriously as a true rocker. At the end of this semiotic adventure was the eventual graduation to the ultimate pinnacle of success represented by not twelve or thirteen, but *fourteen* holer Doc Martens. Had the Dr. Marten company made hundred hole leather waders, they would no doubt have been incorporated into the obscure graduation scheme. In reality Doc Martens weren't (and still aren't) necessarily the most versatile of footwear. Beyond ten holes, the leather tends to fracture around the ankle. This leads to a consistent degradation in line with the age of the boot. Then there's the much vaunted and trademarked 'Air cushion sole' which is indeed more comfortable for civil servants pounding the beat, but soon gets punctured when pogo dancing around the impromptu mosh pit of the local discotheque.

Within the restrictions of this tribal attire was a further division. The colour of the laces and even the lacing style was considered to be a signalling method. If the owner of their proscribed footwear wore cross threaded laces, they would be disregarded as ignorant and incapable. Once they had learned to do straight bar lacing, the colour of the laces became relevant. If they wore yellow laces, then they were a proper rocker. If the laces were white, then they were a proper nazi. If they were particularly perverse and wore red boots, then they had better not wear red laces with them or the future of western civilisation would surely be threatened.

The actual point of these uniforms in society is in no way obvious. It appears to have roots in what could only be described as archaic fascism applied through the medium of semiotic compartmentalisation. It also preys on one of the most fundamental flaws of the human psyche, that being vanity.

Far from being a unique phenomena in the elaborate mind of homo sapien sapien, a concept of the aesthetic applied to the self is seen in multiple examples in the animal world. From pigeons preening and strutting to the highly organised 'gardens' created by several types of octopus and the ornate structures woven by bower birds. The function of these expressions in the animal kingdom is primarily utilitarian. Basically they need to attract a mate and make sure that they stick around long enough to fulfill an instinctual requirement for procreation. Beyond that, these animals have no practical use for the ornate structures they create. In direct contrast, humanity is plagued by an *illness* which categorically states that not only should these structures have many other purposes but that their function should be as elaborate as possible. Instead of using natural products to create an appropriate shelter, humans create an industry of management and attach it to every single aspect of creating the shelter. Not satisfied with that, we are also subject to massive co-opting in the instinctual process of promoting lineage. From the initial pairing of the mates using dating sites and arranged marriages, to the management of successive shelters throughout the pairing. Banks offer lower rates of interest for 'first time buyers' and estate agents target pensioners with schemes to 'free the value' of their homes. No other species exhibits such a massive commitment to obsessive micro-management.

The question ultimately becomes one of how long things have been like this for the human race. On the face of things it would seem that people have lived in a very similar way for thousands of years. Agrarian cultures conforming to traditional values right up until they learned how to apply fossil fuel to the natural limitations of how many crops could be grown on the land. The idea that things have always been the way they are now, is so far from accurate that it's almost impossible to reconcile. Comparing a photograph of 1930's Eastern European farm workers to a painting of French farm workers from a millennia ago and the distinction is not very clear. Their clothes are broadly the same. The men wear shirts which are normally some shade of white with dark trousers and boots. They may sport a waistcoat or a hat, but for the most part the uniform is ubiquitous. In a similar way most of the women wear dresses with sleeves and feature a traditional range of colours in their bonnets and accessories. The similarity in these modes of attire can be quite surprising in terms of anthropology. The Berber people of North Africa have a female traditional attire which looks to be highly similar to that worn by Macedonian women and other remnants of the Thracian world. Comparing the uniform of an 18th century UK Marine to that of the Isadores of the Mamuthones festival indicates that these uniforms have been across multiple cultures and civilisations for a very, very long time.

Many would write these similarities off as coincidence. There are after all, only so many colours that humans could derive from their natural habitat. With climatic differences, there are restrictions in terms of which crops can be grown and which animals can be domesticated. However, these points can also be used as a counter to the argument. By definition these restrictions would also lead to a greater variance between the semiotics of cultural attire. If a community of homesteaders can only grow a scraping of shrubs on the hillside, they will be limited to wearing clothes woven from the wool of some hardy goats. Their neighbours several hundred miles away may have a different climate that facilitates growing fields of flax and as such are adorned with the finest of linen robes. Consequently for these cultures to use similar patterns and colour schemes, there must be something else other than available resources influencing their choices. When some of these cultures were thousands of miles apart and apparently had zero contact, for these patterns to be repeated implies something much more

ubiquitous than anyone would care to admit.

Increasingly there appears to be an attempt to place greater value in uniformity than in previous generations. In the 1990's it was not uncommon for people in the street to instantly look at the feet of the person approaching them. This was during a time when the rise of designer trainers was regularly commented on in news papers and on television. In the preceding decades, people had obviously worn sports shoes as casual footwear but there was far less emphasis on advertising and price point stigma. The status attached to varying brands and designs would literally mean the difference between someone chatting to you in a bar and them cutting you dead. When exposed to robust interrogation, this disparity between opinions based on otherwise quite similar attire, appears to be quite disproportionate. Today the market for sports shoes vastly outpaces the market for any form of conventional shoes. This massive diluting of the sportswear market has lead to a reduction in the status attached to any particular brand. It would be easy to interpret this as people becoming less obsessed with appearances and the subsequent association with material success. However that would be completely incorrect. Far from being less vane, people are now obsessing over their PR image as much, if not more than their personal appearance. The fixation with social media has rendered the users as a race of dopamine addicted zombies, eagerly checking their accounts for likes and mentions. There exists an entire social strata of women using purpose built platforms to engage their audience with provocative nudity or 'lifestyle' content. While this has been applauded as giving women independent streams of income, it has also faced some harsh criticism. Memes have appeared featuring OnlyFans models with captions alluding to their chances of ever getting married being reduced to zero. Fortunately, there are enough conscientious male critics to throw such mealy mouthed cuck memery, straight under the bus.

The Elizabethan era is well known for the well to do in society being heavily invested in wardrobe. The concept of 'changing for dinner' seems to have been critically important during this time. In fact the average society gentleman or lady would potentially wear several different ensembles during a single day. The morning may include a formal attire for appointments with a possible change before luncheon to take part in some form of recreational activity. Another change before dinner may facilitate other activities such as using transport or social engagements. More formal attire for dining in the evening with the possible use of a smoking jacket after dinner.

The majority of this wardrobe conveyor belt could be written off as the requirements of a society which had yet to enjoy the boon of automated washing machines. However the Elizabethans were people inhabiting an age before the dominance of science in the cultural landscape. Prior to the two great mechanised world wars of the 20th century, the human race was less dominated by the opinions of engineers, alchemists and apothecaries. The concepts applied to the mysteries of our environment were of a much more esoteric and abstract nature than the material reductionist philosophies espoused today. This meant that for a certain social strata, the concept of not wanting to change for dinner was as uncivilised to them as it would be for us to climb onto the table and defecate in the salad bowl. As far as they were concerned, maintaining their time obsessive wardrobe machinations was an important part of what held the very fabric of their society together.

Today changing for dinner would generally be reserved for the most aristocratic of society. However it still exists in the form of people wearing evening attire when they attend restaurants or go out for the night. The first nightclub in Britain to gain a round the clock entertainment license was equipped with an expansive cloakroom where customers clothes were kept on hangers. Upon entering they would be given a freshly laundered tracksuit to wear so as to preserve their own clothes and when they left, there were showering facilities available. With the premises management deciding which colours the tracksuits were, the possibility of social engineering was difficult to ignore.

The aforementioned denim stigma would be another example of seemingly abstract belief structures being enforced within the aesthetic personality of society. Any nightclubber will be familiar with the phrase "*no jeans or trainers*" being trotted out to deny them ingress. The thinking being that many clubbers will spend inordinate amounts of money in the pursuit of style and they don't want some casual member of the public ruining the ambience with their affordable trousers. This is however generally only a premises or promoter specific mandate. Anyone being refused entry for wearing sportswear or jeans will generally be given information as to premises nearby who will negotiate with wardrobe terrorists. Often these other premises and club nights will cater specifically to people wearing jeans and if the customer shows up in a suit, they will be refused entry. The refusal being based on the inversely proportionate oversight made by the overdressed interloper.

Once again delving into the behavioural science underpinning today's sociological landscape, we see that the application of reason, pragmatism or rationale is conspicuously absent. Instead there seems to exist a bizarre form of cult wardrobe fetishism. An ever shifting *phenomenon* that exists at a semiotic level across the entirety of the human experience. The only groups seen to resist the fluctuations in the phenomenon are considered to be fundamentalists. Like their European farming ancestors in the 15th century, the Amish people of North America have maintained the exact same traditional attire throughout. Likewise there are cultures across Africa and the middle east who still adhere to the traditional attires worn centuries ago. The one thing these cultures have in common is a substantial value placed in the practicing of organised religion.

As the human race experiences a major paradigm shift, the shifting sands of style and fashion appear to represent a critical factor in the directions we are taking. A man in the street holding an umbrella on a sunny day certainly looks like a mental patient, but are his choices as random as they seem?