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Fashioning a Rhetoric of Style: A Rhetorical Analysis of Urban Street Style Representations in New York City

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This thesis examines how urban street styles are used rhetorically within local boroughs in New York City as a form of resistance to the dominant fashion industry that dictates what is "in fashion" through media. A total of fifteen video blogs developed by *The New York Times* were analyzed, each containing a representation of one of the five boroughs of New York City: Staten Island, Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. The analysis identified themes of a rhetoric of style, consisting of primacy of text, imaginary communities, aesthetic rationales, market contexts, and stylistic homologies. These themes were then analyzed by drawing upon neo-Marxist and semiotic theoretical concepts. Findings from the analysis suggest that individuals engage in street styles as a form of anti-fashion to convey cultural ideologies, which can possibly be used to create societal change.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Each of us engages with fashion and style whether we want to or not. We might not all read *Vogue*, but we still get dressed in the morning" (Tarrant, 2012, p. 2). Throughout my life, I often perceived my interest in fashion as trivial. When I was a preteen, I would steal issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* from my mother and admire the fashion worn by the models. I knew that a majority of the articles were frivolous and most of the clothes were unaffordable, but every month I would read each new issue. Despite the unrealistic nature of the content, fashion magazines were a source of escapism after a stressful day at work and school. I would anticipate coming home to a new magazine in the mailbox, and enjoy looking at the pictures of new fashion and styles developed by popular designers. One late afternoon, after flipping through the latest issue of a fashion magazine, I noticed the incorporation of articles on "Street Style," and photos of everyday females from different locations around the United States. Rather than focusing on the front cover celebrity, pages were now being dominated with images of fashionable females on the street.

What I found interesting about these particular sections of the magazines was how each female told a personal narrative explaining her thoughts behind her personal style, and how the different urban locations portrayed distinct styles. This made me think of

how fashion can be a conscious act people use to create a personal identity within a cultural group. As I noticed this ongoing trend more frequently across different magazines, I began to wonder how the fashion industry and street style coincided with each other. Despite the idea that the capitalist fashion system is used to reinforce materialism and the upper class (Veblen, 1899), I began to wonder if the emergent popularity of street style was reflective of social shifts occurring within that area. The cultural diversity present in the location counters the idea that fashion is a form of subordination; rather, it was an expression of personal and cultural identity. I further wondered if street style could potentially be used as a rhetorical means to resist systems that can be considered hegemonic (Gramsci, 1971). Fashion displayed through street style could potentially be used as a tool to create agency, or gain cultural consciousness, and act within different social groups (Greene, 2004; Ono & Sloop, 1992; Zompetti, 1997).

Style and fashion impact people on a daily basis. Every day, people make conscious decisions of what they will wear. The action of combining individual units of clothing to formulate a whole outfit can be used as a visual statement of personal identity to send a deliberate message to the public. However, style and fashion are not mutually exclusive in a rhetorical context. Rather, the two often coincide with each other to formulate a rhetorical action that potentially used to communicate a personal and cultural identity. Style and fashion will be defined separately within this chapter, followed by an explanation of how and why they are used together in rhetorical discourse. I will also offer an explanation as to why the rhetoric of fashion should be examined in urban locations, focusing specifically on New York City. In addition, the cultural aspect of

fashion will be examined in relation to how it forms a collective identity. Lastly, the rhetoric of fashion will be analyzed as a form of social agency.

The word fashion derives from the Latin term *formare*, which means to shape, form, figure, and image; other definitions include to fabricate or to produce (Traupmen, 1966). Therefore, fashion does not only refer to something one wears, but also to something one does. Whether it is used as a noun or a verb, all of the uses of the word "fashion" refer both to an activity and to the products of that activity (Barnard, 1996). This implies that fashion is a deliberate action one uses to reinforce a message. However, the message changes in relation to the situation. When clothing conflicts with the typical fashion of a particular setting, the clothing can evolve into a rhetorical device to reflect social change (Chui-Chu, 2013).

To further understand the distinction between fashion and style, the terms can be similarly compared to the differences between folk art and fine art. Folk art is produced when members of the lower class, who are not formally trained, generate art that is typically utilitarian and decorative. Conversely, fine art is often purely aesthetic (West, 1996). In the same way, fashion can be associated as a form of fine art, including haute couture houses and prominent fashion designers who have years of fashion experience. Style, on the other hand, can be compared to a form of folk art, where the fashion community recognizes bloggers and everyday citizens' street styles as art forms.

In relation to language and rhetorical discourse, there are differences between fashion and style. While *fashion* is seen as the rhetorical act within a situation, *style* is defined separately as a unified system of signs. Brummett (2008) elaborates further by stating, "…it is useful to think of style as a language and fashion as a particular utterance

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of that language in the moment" (p. 4). This means that fashion is more about the act of producing something in the present moment, while style is "more permanent and ideal" (Brummett, 2008, p. 5). Therefore, style can serve as a way to formulate an aesthetic unity of behavior and expression (Brummett, 2008). In addition, style can be intertextual and contain multiple elements beyond one item. For example, hip-hop style may include hip-hop music, influence from celebrities, and particular fashion items. To put the definition more simply, individual acts of fashion are able to create an overall sense of style.

It is also important to note that those who are considered experts on what is fashionable recognize styles created by those who are not part of the industry. For instance, the example provided earlier of fashion magazines providing pictures of street styles means that the images provided are "fashionable." In this way, those who are part of the dominant fashion industry have the power to claim to the larger public what styles are fashionable, though those who may not have formal training in fashion may formulate their own "street style."

Fashion is often used as a way to identify or differentiate oneself within a culture. For instance, some schools in the United States have implemented uniform policies to deter gang affiliation (Rubin, 1994). The incorporation of gang colors in clothing is used to signify affiliation with a specific group as a way to differentiate individuals from a larger whole (Simmel, 1971). Conversely, uniforms and other universal clothing are used to mask differentiation of individuals within a group. This means that an individual may use fashion to signify whether they belong to a group or not, as well as maintain a personal identity. Therefore, fashion has the potential to create a dialectical tension

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between group and personal identities that stimulate change within a dominant cultural context.

Further, gang identification can be incorporated in clothing differently than the typical bandana or color coordination in an outfit. Burke (1991) investigated how clothing is used as a form of gang identification in teenagers. He found that gang members wear prescribed clothes intentionally to publicly communicate their membership to a group through the individualization of their clothing, such as embroidering initials, writing the gang's name under a bill of a hat, etc. The result of publicly affiliating with a particular group through fashion, such as a gang, can be publicly life threatening.

Prior research also focuses on how fashion is used as a form of emulation of those who are part of the higher class in society. Barnard (1996) stated that the existence of fashion is conditional upon the existence of different classes in society and upon upward movement between classes being possible and desirable. For instance, in the past, fashion was used to reinforce cultural norms and symbols to express sex differences. In eighteenth century Europe, male's dress became simpler and less extravagant in comparison to females. This was largely to emphasize their focus on work and to display their wealth through their wives (Aspers & Godart, 2013). This pertains to Veblen's (1894) theory that female's role in society was to display the economic wealth of a household. Fashion was a symbol of the leisure class and a way to further support that females were objects for display. However, females have been able to redefine sex roles through the evolution of fashion. A common example of this is when females redefine sex roles by passing as males, in order to gain more professional and economic

opportunities by appropriating particular items to increase mobility (Hermann, 1991).

Through the acceptance of less restrictive clothing, females began to symbolize their new

roles in society and alter patriarchal attitudes.

This provides an example of how fashion is used in response to a rhetorical

situation. A "rhetorical situation" is comprised of exigency, a specific audience, and

constraints (Bitzer, 1968). Exigency consists of a circumstance demanding something to

be done. In relation to fashion, a rhetorical circumstance may trigger a rejection of

fashion conformity through individualized fashion. A historical example of this is the

feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which produced new fashions that were no

longer constraining due to the political interests of women. Further, the audience is the

group of people interpreting the clothing worn in regard to social situations. Continuing

with the example, fashion that was considered taboo takes on a new meaning when a

larger group accepts them. The "constraints" are problems limiting a change in action or

thought, such as sex and social class.

The importance of individuality is a key component when discussing fashion.

This turns clothing into an action allowing an individual to express her or his

individuality and strike against conformity. In a society where particular groups are

oppressed, also known as subcultures or "co-cultures," fashion can then be used to

project an idealized identity that can lead to personal gain. According to Hebdige (1979),

subcultures are defined as subordinate groups engrained within a dominant social

structure. Subcultures express a fundamental tension between those in power and those

condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives. For instance, when a female

dresses out of character to her social role, it can lead to conflict in society. Tretheway

(1999) found that females purposefully emit signs and messages through bodily

compartment, nonverbal behaviors, and performances; thus, the body is a text to be read.

In this way, females may construct more masculine professional images to be

advantageous in a male-dominated setting as a way to gain more credibility. However,

attitudes toward this conception have changed where females no longer wish to conform

to hegemonic ideals, and now may dress in a more feminine way in the workplace. Thus,

fashion may express a common frustration within a culture (or subculture) and represent

a potential cultural change, if the audience in a rhetorical situation evaluates it positively.

This means that fashion cannot stand by itself; in order for it to be recognized, the

signifier (i.e., the garment) needs to be anchored by the signified (Aspers & Godart,

2013). In this way, fashion is comparable to language; however, fashion can only acquire

meaning through social contexts where actors produce, interpret, or use fashion (Aspers

& Godart, 2013). This suggests that fashion is merely used to reiterate the dominance of

the bourgeoisie. Rather, fashion is a social act used to form a collective identity. Through

the formulation of a collective identity, subcultures are able to formulate separate cultural

identities within a dominant cultural context.

While style may be defined as how elements of culture (e.g., language, clothing,

gestures, etc.) formulate a form of discourse, it is important to consider how urban

locations are able to create subcultures through the use of fashion. Due to this, New York

City has been specifically selected as the primary text for representations of street style.

Urban environments provide a context where the rhetoric of fashion can be used to

display class distinctions by location. For instance, the upper east side of New York City

is commonly known for its wealth, while the Bronx is known for its low socioeconomic

status and minority groups (Kopans, et al., 2005-2007). However, the rhetorical impact of fashion would not be as powerful if it were not for the formulation of an audience or "imaginary community" (Brummett, 2008, p. 122). An imaginary community naturally forms around a text from the performance of a particular style (Brummett, 2008). The development of fashion blogs and style sections of prominent newspapers creates an imaginary community in response to the fashion produced by the individual on the street. Therefore, an imaginary community may be constructed through the advent of new forms of technology. Through the visual images of styles in different locations, the identification of specific fashion may be promoted through media. However, by examining "street style" through the lens of a particular medium, this questions whether fashion can be used to resist or reinforce dominant ideology.

In this thesis, I explore the rhetoric of visual communication, specifically focusing on fashion. Further, I analyze how developments in technology are able to reinforce cultural/subcultural identities. While fashion is a tool used to empower human agency within subcultures, fashion is also used as a way to constrain and further promote class segmentation and sex constraints. Therefore, past literature on how fashion has been used as a rhetorical device is examined. An additional investigation is made into new media reinforcing or challenging how the rhetoric of fashion is used to generate social agency.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since fashion can be used as a tool to promote human agency, it is important to examine the development of fashion in capitalist societies. More specifically, fashion can be used as a way to negotiate power boundaries within social class systems in Western societies. Therefore, this chapter begins with the rhetoric of social class by focusing on Marxist theory, in addition to theoretical notions proposed by Veblen (1899). I also apply these theories to culture and expand the review into sections on the cultural implications of social class. Furthermore, I examine how visual rhetoric can be used within cultures regarding fashion.

In this chapter, I build a theoretical framework establishing how the rhetoric of fashion is used in cultural contexts. Since fashion has been predominately examined with regard to social class, it is important to evaluate the cultural implications it has on societies. In addition, this literature establishes how fashion is rhetorically used by subcultures to build agency within a society.

Social Class and Communication

Marxists argue that material conditions "interact and influence the symbols by which groups make sense of their world" (Foss, 2009, p. 212). Thus, ideologies have a material existence that is represented in various cultural artifacts, such as clothing. However,

Marxists believe that the capitalist system serves as a form of exploitation on the lower classes (proletariat) through wage labor and economic productions.

According to Marx (1933), the capitalist commodifies human labor by creating a surplus value to create profit in market contexts. This means that the bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat due to the use value and exchange value (Prodrick, 2012). Marx and Engels (1987) state, "The exchange process of commodities is the real relation that exists between them. This is a social process which is carried on by individuals independently of each other" (p. 187). Prodrick (2012) expands upon this and states, "It is thus the social relations between things that mediate between people, consequently producing the key mystification of contemporary social life. Social relations between people are displaced by (and to) something else, in this case, into relations between commodities, simultaneously creating a material veil" (p. 277). Therefore, from this perspective, material goods serve as a way to distinguish between social classes. In addition, the capitalist system creates a "material reality," where ideology is formed through these cultural artifacts. Thus, fashion and style may be used rhetorically to convey cultural ideologies, which suggest that there are a variety of cultural factors impacting the concept of social class.

Historically, social class started with a caste system based on genetic lineage (e.g., royal family vs. peasant). Other issues such as religion, race, and sex have played crucial roles in defining one's social class. Brantley et al. (2003) continue their definition of social class with the description of classism. *Classism* is defined as, "The systematic oppression of subordinated groups (people without endowed or acquired economic power, social influence, and privilege) by the dominant group (those who have access to

control the necessary resources by which other people make their living)" (Brantley et al., 2003, p.3). This shows how social class is reliant on multiple social factors within a culture. In addition, the relationship between the dominant and subordinate group is based upon the constant struggle of maintaining power.

Since social class is largely based on various factors, subordinate groups have the ability to threaten the status quo despite not having economic means. Rather, subordinate groups can resist dominant culture through ideology (Hebdige, 1979). Hebdige (1979) explains how certain social groups exert control over other subordinate groups, not through force, but by making the class system appear inevitable and justified. However, subcultures can interfere in the orderly sequence of class dynamics and serve as, "… expressive forms that express the fundamental tension between those in power and those condemned to subordinate positions and second-class lives" (p. 132). Based on these characterizations, subordinated groups struggle due to class oppression. Yet, they also possess social agency through different forms of expression.

Subordinated groups are largely muted with regard to dominant culture, but are able to resist dominant ideology through symbolic means. If subcultures are able to associate new meanings to material objects, the symbolic meanings attached to clothing may serve as a form of ideological resistance against the dominant social class in rhetorical situations. Fashion is cyclical and changes in meaning over time and may be co-opted by the market. However, when exigencies are present, style is able to contain other components (media, music, celebrities, etc.) that contribute to forms of resistance to make long-standing change.

Therefore, social class can be determined through a variety of factors that may include, but are not limited to, socioeconomic status. Many people assume social class is determined by an individual's wealth, but there are other contributing elements. Brantley et al. (2003) describes social class as the status an individual or group holds within a culture. According to Brantley et al. (2003), social class consists of the following dimensions: "(1) The hierarchy of 'Haves' (the dominant group) and 'Have nots' (the subordinate groups); (2) The systematic oppression of subordinated groups to the advantage and strengthen the dominant group; (3) The promise, myth, and dogma of individualism in American society" (Brantley et al., p. 2). Thus, within a democratic society, dominant groups maintain power through ideological control.

The Horatio Alger myth, also known as the "American Dream," is used to help the bourgeoisie maintain power. The Horatio Alger myth is the belief that opportunities abound for everyone, despite their circumstances at birth (Wernet, 2013). If the proletariat reached a greater level of consciousness about the economic disparities in the United States, then dominant groups are placed at risk of being revolted against. As such, the bourgeoisie are able to maintain their power ideologically, rather than coercive force, by embedding the values of independence and self-responsibility in cultural discourse. This pertains to Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony, which states that those in power within a society maintain their dominance through ideological means involving the implicit consent of the subordinated. According to Gramsci (1971) this leads to the concept of common sense, where members of the proletariat believe that the ideas spread by the ruling class are in the proletariat's best interest (e.g., the American dream).

In capitalist societies, the bourgeoisie are able to assert their dominance by assigning worth to material goods. Veblen (1899) argued that consumerism and displays of material goods were used to reinforce the dominance of the bourgeoisie. For instance, one way that the bourgeoisie were able to maintain power relations and display wealth was through the exploitation of females. He states, "…There is reason to believe that the institution of ownership has begun with the ownership of persons, primarily females. The incentives to acquiring such property have apparently been: (1) a propensity for dominance and coercion; (2) the utility of these persons as evidence of the prowess of their owner; (3) the utility of their services" (Veblen, 1899, p. 30). Females were therefore used as a form of commodification by displaying wealth for the bourgeoisie.

This implies that if women can be objectified as displays of conspicuous consumption, then females are a subordinated class within the bourgeoisie. Conspicuous consumption pertains to modern day class relations since material goods still serve as a form of signification of cultural characteristics. Thus, fashion and other material goods can be used as a form of subordination and differentiation within a particular social class. Veblen (1899) further notes females were used to maintain power alliances though the institution of marriage. Engels (1942) argues that marriage within the upper classes is oppressive in comparison to the proletariat class. Because marriage is used as an economic device to ensure inheritance and property rights, males and females are unable to choose their partner in order to maintain their power in society. Therefore, females were turned into economic commodities as displays of wealth.

Males have constructed an image that females are delicate creatures that should not have to do physical work. Engels (1942) also proposes that, in comparison to

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societies that are depicted as barbaric, supposed civilized societies have less respect for females. As a disguise of preserving a civilized society, societal rules have been put in place to further restrict females in society. According to Veblen (1899), the ability to afford idleness showed that those of good breeding cannot be "compassed by those whose time and energy are taken up with work" (Veblen, 1899, p. 26). By limiting females to the private sphere with little property rights, females are not able to become active, productive members of society. Thus, they are less able to become active contributors to the public sphere. In relation to clothing, to own the current style of the season was a symbol of wealth. In the late 19th century, females wore grand, ornamental clothing as a statement of their social class to distinguish them from the working class. It showed that they did not need mobility since they did not engage in manual labor. Rather, their attire was used to display that they participated in conspicuous leisure. Fashion also signified that they were ornaments and trophies of males. This has lead to the concept of women as "trophy wives" and other forms of commodification.

Veblen's (1894) theory of women's dress describes how clothing is used to display the economic wealth of the household. According to Veblen (1894), "Under the patriarchal organization of society, where the social unit is the man (with his dependents), the dress of the females was an exponent of the wealth of the man whose chattels they are" (Veblen, p. 199). He adds that the female's role is to display the strength of the unit by conspicuously consuming valuable goods. There are three primary principles in displaying wealth: a) conspicuous expensiveness, b) novelty, c) ineptitude. Conspicuous expensiveness means that the attire is not economical. Novelty addresses that the attire must be a new fashion and only worn a short period of time. Lastly, ineptitude constricts

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the wearer to minimal movement, which shows that the wearer can afford idleness and not need functional clothing (Veblen, 1894). An example of this was the foot-binding procedure that many Chinese women used as a status symbol to marry into a wealthy family (Lim, 2007). What was once seen as a class symbol is now associated as a form of female oppression. Like a change in style, particular fashions that were praised were later altered to reflect more current political attitudes.

Fashion was a symbol of the leisure class and a way to further support that females were objects to display. However, if one were to defy these societal rules, the individual may be sending a message striking against the patriarchal society if it is accepted by a subgroup. For instance, if females from the leisure class defied the rules of dress, it would be possible to redefine their role in society. Therefore, reassigning meaning to the goods that are displayed may negotiate power relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Conversely, the manufacturing and wearing of knock-off brands is a modern example of how individuals engage forms of emulation in order to make it appear they belong to a specific social class (Veblen, 1899).

Sundie et al. (2011) found that flaunting status-linked goods to potential mates is not just about displaying economic resources. Rather, males who are looking for short-term mating can use conspicuous consumption as part of a sexual signaling system. Therefore, conspicuous consumption can be used for a variety of social motives. In addition, Isaksen and Roper (2012) found that adolescents use consumption as a way to garner self-esteem. Their study found that adolescents believe that consuming the right possession at the right time is essential for social acceptance, gaining and maintaining friendships and this self-esteem. If adolescents failed to "keep up" with consumption

trends, the consequences included social exclusion, negative peer evaluation, and reduced self-esteem. Most importantly, it was found that these social consequences were more pronounced in low-income families.

Although this may seem surprising, Isaksen and Roper (2012) found that adolescents used fashion brands for different purposes. Low-income teenagers use expensive brands to disguise their poverty, while high-income adolescents do not feel the need to prove their social status. Rather, high-income adolescents will purchase less expensive clothing if they feel it is stylish. Therefore, for low-income adolescents fashion is used as a symbol of wealth; conversely, high-income adolescents use fashion to create a personal style. This means that fashion may serve different purposes in different social groups and socioeconomic classes as a way to project a desired image.

In addition, low-income adolescents were more eager to purchase expensive brands (Isaksen & Roper, 2012). Through the consumption of affluent brands, low-income consumers may use high-end brands as a signal for higher social status. Henry (2004) argues that this behavior is typical of low-income consumers in order to reach the desired status quo that determines the social ideal. In addition, Isaksen and Roper (2012) state, "Although high-income adolescents may also engage in symbolic consumption, the symbolism is less likely to be focused on social status because they are less likely to be insecure of their socioeconomic standing (than low-income adolescents)" (p. 121). Isaksen and Roper (2012) add that low-income adolescents' heightened susceptibility to consumer influence is likely perpetuated through peer interactions.

These studies show conspicuous consumption is used within social groups to communicate social standing within a society. Particular brands are worn and displayed

as a way to signify worth and build self-esteem. In addition, the literature suggests that conspicuous consumption is also used for sexual motives as a form of attractiveness. Therefore, commodities attain their worth through the social interaction between individuals. It is from these social interactions that material goods serve as signifiers to an individual's social class. More importantly, it is interesting to note how individuals ascribe their own personal worth (self-esteem) through the acquisition of material goods, yet displays of brands vary depending on socioeconomic class. Therefore, conspicuous consumption can signify different meanings depending on the social group.

Rhetoric of Social Class

A Marxist approach to ideology focuses on the concept of material structuralism. This means that there are structures within one's culture (e.g., hierarchy, clothing, language) regulating human behavior and structures that create meaning. In order to resist these dominant structures in society, individuals of the proletariat use a variety of rhetorical strategies to create human agency. According to Greene (2004), "Rhetorical agency describes a communicative process of inquiry and advocacy on issues of public importance" (p.188). Greene (2004) argues that rhetorical agency is an instrument, object, and medium for gathering social support. He further argues that capitalism attempts to impede, "… rhetoric's informational, instrumental, cultural, and cooperative dimensions" (Greene, 2004, p. 204). Therefore, Greene (2004) is arguing that the use of rhetorical agency is a form of communicative labor creating and challenging class structures and class forms. In addition, the governing structures of a society, such as capitalism, can be transformed, displaced, deployed and/or challenged by apparatuses through a materialist rhetoric built on the logics of articulation (Greene, 1998).

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Based on this argument, communicative labor can be used as a means to reshape perceptions of social class. If rhetorical agency is attached to the constitutive power of the labor (or the proletariat), then the communicative labor becomes political in order to resist the dominant class. Marx and Engels (1852) discuss how the polarization between social classes and diversified political interests result in a lack of agency for the proletariat. However, those who belong to the urban proletariat class have more agency than those who live in rural areas; therefore, the urban proletariat can form a collective identity. In relation to clothing, this means that fashion is a form of sustaining social stratification within the dominant capitalist system. Yet, if it is attached to a social group containing rhetorical agency, the clothing can then be used for political agency. The proletariat (or subgroups) who are part of urban contexts may be able to negotiate power boundaries through re-appropriating the meanings of material goods.

Conversely, some may debate whether fashion can conversely reinforce the proletariat identity. For example, sagging pants is often associated as a symbol of resistance against uniforms and standards of dress implemented by the bourgeoisie. However, this particular fashion has also become a style associated with the urban, African-American underclass and is often worn by rappers. According to Baxter and Marina (2008), urban youth often aspire to emulate African-American rappers since they represent material success as well resistance of the status quo. Thus, the gangster lifestyle has widespread cultural appeal for its encouragement of non-conformity and resistance. In this way, fashion is able to use a possible rhetorical situation (fashion, popularity of rap artists, gangster culture, etc.) as a way to generate *telos*, which is defined as discourse

that rearticulates knowledge to produce and incite social change (Ono & Sloop, 1992; Zompetti, 1997).

Ono and Sloop (1992) suggest that *telos* within rhetorical criticism can be used as a way to produce knowledge and produce social change within a power structure through rearticulation; the rearticulation of language serves as a way to reform the ways an audience thinks about the positions within discourse. Zompetti (1997) expands upon the concept of critical rhetoric through Gramsci's (1971) theory of hegemony and suggests that *telos* has the power to create a collective will to promote social change. "Collective will" refers to how marginalized groups are able to organize forms of resistance through the rearticulation of discourse (Zompetti, 1997). Although elites have influence over fashion, fashion is also used as a form of discourse to express the changing subjective aspirations and discontents of the public (Blumer, 1969; Davis, 1992). Through the use of *telos* and rearticulation, it may be possible for fashion to transform dominant structures.

This brings to light the contradictory nature of social class. Often, lower classes are associated with a sense of powerlessness. However, the proletariat can use rhetoric as a means to perform class identities. According to DeGenaro (2007), the working class has a variety of interpretations. To some, the working class represents unrealized material success or power. Yet, the working class is often mythologized as part of the American dream and embodies values of individuality, masculinity, and self-reliance. This shows that the working class is perceived differently in society. In some ways, the working class is depicted, as a representation of the Horatio Alger myth, while other perspectives view the working class as undesirable. Therefore, those who identify with the working class

face the paradox of being identified as a powerless group within society, yet also project valued characteristics in the United States.

Although Degenaro's (2007) central argument is that the construction of working class is through poetics, rather than rhetoric. As such, the construction of the working class as a collective identity might be used for rhetorical means. Thus, despite being associated as a disenfranchised social class, rhetorical discourse can be used to shape the perception of the working class. More specifically, fashion can be used as a signifier of the working class to symbolically ratify class relations (Blumer, 1969). In this way, fashion is used as way to express a collective mood, tastes, and choice (Davis, 1992).

However, in order for rhetorical agency to be formed, class-consciousness is necessary. From a Marxist perspective, Wilkie (1976) describes that individuals create meaning through the use of symbols. The meanings from these symbols are generated through human production and social interaction. Wilkie (1976) states, "…[W]hen the reality to which language symbols refer is one of collective human misery and its causes, then the radical consciousness emerges to be followed by revolutionary class consciousness and the upheaval that would wreck the house" (p. 237). Therefore, Wilkie (1976) concludes that Marx recommends the rhetorical use of language to raise consciousness regarding capitalist and industrial exploitation to "seize the masses" (Wilkie, 1976, p. 237).

Marx (1933; 1990) explains that the dominant class is able to subdue class consciousness by creating definitions and concepts separate from the proletariat. This means that the bourgeoisie maintain control by establishing the status quo that goes unquestioned by the proletariat. The meanings attached to the symbols become those of

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the ruling class and are portrayed as universal law, which results in a lack of class-consciousness. However, if these meanings are redefined, then it may be possible to change dominant ideology that is reinforced by the bourgeoisie.

Cloud and Gunn (2011) expand upon Marx's (1933) explanation of class consciousness. The authors describe how a Marxist approach to class consciousness is based upon a paradoxical relationship between ideology and lived experience, since the experiences of those who are part of the proletariat contradict the dominant ideology reinforced by the bourgeoisie. For instance, consumerism and conspicuous consumption may be advocated in capitalist societies, yet is not attainable for the lower class. In order to maintain this belief, the bourgeoisie create a false belief that material items are a necessity. Thus, hegemony creates a false perception that the proletariat are involved in power structures, known as "common sense" (Gramsci, 1977; Zompetti, 1997).

In addition, the basis for class-consciousness is predicated upon economic relations and forces. Therefore, the context of consciousness is the central component of a traditional, materialist critique (Cloud & Gunn, 2011). Cloud (1994) argues that ideology is formed through both language and material reality. In this way, Aune (1994) similarly explains how language is vital in the development of class-consciousness and that society's material reality is generated through rhetoric. For instance, high-fashion brands are able to generate their worth through rhetorical messaging of the fashion industry and wealthy consumers. In addition, the bourgeoisie attempts to maintain their exclusivity by continually changing fashion, which can only be maintained by those who have the economic means to do so. As a result, rhetoric is used to create a material reality of the use-value of particular products. Yet, the emerging popularity of street fashion is

worthy of exploration, since it challenges the assumption that fashion must be dictated from the bourgeoisie.

Theorists take different perspectives on the concept of ideology. Marxists tend to associate the notion of ideology with power enforced by the dominant class. In addition, Marxists argue that ideology is based upon a material notion of relations and reality. However, whether language is created or is the result of a material reality differs. Some Marxist scholars would argue true consciousness lies in recognizing the location between the dialectical tension of "true" and "false" consciousness. McGee (1980) states, "Human beings collectivity behave and think differently than humans in isolation. The collectivity is said 'to have a mind of its own' distinct from the individual qua individual…when one appears to 'think' and 'behave' collectively, therefore one has been tricked, self-deluded, or manipulated into accepting the brute existence of fantasies as 'public mind' or 'public philosophy'" (McGee, 1980, p. 2). Thus, the concept of ideology is associated with a form of "trickery" by the dominant social class.

McGee (1980) suggests that ideology is rhetorically grounded; therefore, consciousness will always be false because the question of what is "reality" is based on forms of persuasion. This largely differs from other scholars arguing that social class is based primarily on material reality (Cloud, 1994). Regardless of social class, ideology dictates social behavior, and affects political consciousness. Ideology is able to manifest itself into ideographs that are symbolic due to the shared meanings associated with them. For instance, McGee (1980) uses the example of [liberty] as an ideograph, since one cannot state a pure definition since it is culturally bound. Ideographs are high-level abstractions that represent ideological constructs in political discourse. Based on this

argument, if ideology is the rhetoric of control, then subordinate groups may be able to reshape class-consciousness through symbolic representation. Although fashion is grounded in material forms, the symbolic meanings attached to them are formed through ideology. Another example specifically related to fashion is a red bandana. The red bandana may be an ideograph of gang culture, since it contains political meanings. Thus, fashion is used aesthetically as a vehicle for ideology in certain contexts (Adorno, 1997).

Language and the use of rhetoric are able to shape social class and human agency in capitalist societies. Zompetti (2012) argues that if subordinated groups are able to reach a good sense, then protests may serve as a form of cultural awareness and ideological framing to create social change to strike against cultural hegemony. In this way, if language is able to create ideology, then language can also be used to change it. It can be concluded that the dominant social classes are an oppressive force against subordinate groups. However, if a subordinate group is able to garner rhetorical agency, then it is possible to resist dominant cultural groups.

<center>**Fashion and Culture**</center>

The fashion system is able to gain surplus and exchange value on the premise that clothing is also ornamental, rather than just functional. Although fashion has come to be perceived as a form of conspicuous consumption, it serves a functional use value. However, surplus and exchange value can possibly be generated due to the value a particular culture assigns to particular items of clothing. This is further emphasized by the value placed on particular fashion brands and those wearing them. While some argue that the fashion enterprise is used as a means to convey social class and wealth, there are many more elements to fashion than displays of material goods and emulation.

<center>23</center>

Fashion is culturally bound and functions in a way that is reliant on a collective identity. For instance, Davis (1992) refutes Simmel's (1904) and Veblen's (1899) perspectives toward dress since the authors place too much emphasis on social class differentiation as the basis of fashion motives. However, both authors recognize that clothing styles and fashion do not mean the same thing to all members of a society within a particular moment in time. This observation suggests that clothing holds symbolic meanings used to uphold class and status boundaries in society that vary depending on culture. In this way, individuals are not passive recipients of identities ascribed to us by an abstract force that is "society," although it should be acknowledged that dominant ideologies influence an individual's sense of self at different times in one's life or historical moments (Stone, 1962). Because members of a society are subject to similar conditions in life, members of a culture may share similar desires, tensions, and discontents that, regardless of the cause, seek an outlet for expression. In this sense, individual identities can be articulated as sharing a strong collective component (Klapp, 1969).

Davis (1992) also remarks upon the ambiguity of fashion within cultures. Davis (1992) states, " The very same apparel ensemble that 'said' one thing last year will 'say' something quite different today and yet another thing next year" (p.8). This means that ambiguity is a central component of fashion and the contemporary dress code of Western society (Davis, 1992). This means that there are multiple meanings that can be associated with popular fashion. In this way, fashion is polysemic, since it has the ability to produce different symbolic meanings depending on the context. The fashion system may be hegemonic in the way it dictates how items that are "in style" to promote conspicuous

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consumption. The term "hegemony" refers to the implicit consent of those among the lower class, which creates a form of common sense where power is unquestioned (Gramsci, 1977). Further, fashion can be used to perpetuate a fashion meaning reinforcing the agency of the bourgeoisie through emulation and signification of social class. However, others may use fashion to rearticulate a new meaning to fashion, therefore changing what the clothing symbolizes within the same cultural sphere. Davis (1992) states that the "fashion code" is highly context dependent and that the combination of clothing items will mean something different depending on the identity of the wearer, the occasion, the place, the company, and even something as vague as the moods of the wearers and the viewers.

The fashion code pertains to recent scholarship that focuses on fashion used in urban contexts. Gilbert (2000) argues that fashion has become globalized, whereas it formerly was localized. Despite the globalization of fashion, particular places have remained distinct within a global context. In relation to elites of fashion culture, there is a hierarchy of which fashion shows have the most influence. In the past, London fashion week struggled to compete with Paris, New York, and Milan due to its exclusion from geographic connection and influence within the fashion industry, since many prominent designers choose to showcase their designs abroad (Gilbert, 2000). Through social contacts and the globalization of financial institutions, London has been able to rise in popularity as a fashion city and gain more cultural capital. As a result, identified fashion cities have been reformed within new fashion contexts, and globalization has not reduced the distinctiveness of specific locations; instead, it can be used to rearticulate a location's social power (Gilbert, 2000).

With the advent of new technology, it is possible that street styles worn by subcultures within an urban context may become more publicized. Turner (2010) describes this phenomenon as a "demotic turn," which means that new technology has led to an increase in opportunity for ordinary people to appear in the media. This allows individuals to possibly attain cultural capital if particular groups positively respond to it. For instance, a perfume may market itself with the projected image of New York City and mythologize Fifth Avenue. Yet, this fails to make a substantial contribution to the popular understandings of the district and status of New York as a fashion city (Gilbert, 2000). Gilbert (2000) expands upon this idea and states, "Within the fashion process itself are elements that are resistant to the standardization and control of the places of consumption, or their substitution by the virtual spaces of the web" (p. 11). Consequently, the capitalist system may attempt to commodify the urban lifestyle, yet factors within urban environments are able to oppose the dominant fashion system.

Perhaps the most significant of these features is the importance of fashion as an experience rather than a disembodied and unplaced act of consumer choice and purchase. According to Gilbert (2000), "A shirt or skirt bought as a part of an expedition to the big city can have a quite different personal meaning from an identical item bought locally or over the internet" (p.10-11). This statement touches upon many important aspects of how context influences consumerism within a culture. For those who are native New Yorkers, cultural identifiers in the form of fashion may be used to differentiate themselves from those who are "outsiders." In addition, the action of purchasing an item becomes a reflection of a person's experience. More specifically, the clothing purchased that holds

personal meaning is formed as sign of the experience. Hence, the clothing item becomes an extension of the individuals themselves.

Due to the ambivalent nature of fashion, these personal meanings may not be readily apparent to the viewer. However, they serve as a mechanism, or marker, to signify personal identity. More importantly, the notion that New York City is deemed one of the fashion capitals of the world speaks to how purchasing an item from that location enhances the value of that product. This promotes how the fashion system embodies the characteristics of capitalism. Prominent members of society wear the highest fashion that is promoted through the celebrities, socialites, and designers that are prevalent in the location. This supports a dominant fashion ideology of what constitutes as haute couture and what is deemed as anti-fashion to symbolically reject popularized fashion. However, in a fashion conscious area such as New York City, subcultures use clothing to signify different types of meaning. Therefore, one can identify to what subculture an individual belongs through their use of clothing. In this way, the styles displayed by those who constitute a subculture may use fashion as a form of expression and separation from the dominant fashion system.

Urban areas are seen as contexts where fashion is born and where it evolves. Modern societies are seen as the natural place for social conventions; therefore, they are the natural location for fashion to occur (Gonzalez, 2012). Due to the various cultures and prominence of consumerism within these areas, people are able to assert identities through commodities. In addition, in urban locations, there are large class disparities. Mort (1998) introduces this concept through the definition of "topographies of taste." This terms means that there is not a static mapping of fashion areas in the city within

shopping and tour guides. Rather, different areas are seen as consumption spaces for human creativity and action (Mort, 1998).

Gilbert (2000) uses two examples from areas in London to highlight this point. First, Soho within the past twenty years has been reinvented due to the economic and political occurrences that have occurred in that context. More attention has been brought to Soho due to the fashion displayed on the streets (Butler, 2005). Gilbert states, "The new Soho is therefore not just a collection of shops from a particular segment of the fashion market, or just a metropolitan gay village, or just a centre for media-related industries. Binding these together and fueling ongoing urban change is a highly visible consumer culture, in which the interplay between dress codes and identity is central" (p.12). Thus, fashion as a performance has influence within urban contexts and is not only used by elite consumers. Fashion can be used to assert a specific cultural identity and can serve as an urban marker as a way to convey authenticity. This empowers subcultures by distinguishing themselves from the larger, global fashion markets. Further, the popularization of localized markets through globalization and technology may create greater cultural capital to areas that are unrecognized.

Gilbert (2000) further provides evidence of this through the example of the neighborhood Chelsea in London during the 1960s. Gilbert (2000) argues that Chelsea's transformation of Carnaby Street and King's Road was dependent on their roles as performative spaces that were not simply a collection of boutiques, but places where fashion was displayed, watched, imitated and transformed. Gilbert (2000) states, "While many inhabitants of these cities may be fluent in the Esperanto of high fashion, this is mixed with a local dialect of (often more affordable) street labels and locally derived

brands. Rarer local labels may lack the international recognition of designer brands but can indicate higher cultural competence" (p. 12). Therefore, within a particular subculture, clothing that is associated with a more localized brand may be more influential than wearing a recognized high-end brand.

In addition, this puts in question the belief that fashion is only seen as an emulation of the higher class. This suggests that fashion may serve a greater purpose than engaging as a consumer. Instead, clothing may be used to form a collective identity between members of a particular subculture and cultural sphere. Cultural spheres act as a public forum, or sphere, to extend an argument beyond the private needs of individuals and special communities to the interest of an entire community (Goodnight, 2012; Habermas, 1991). As a result, these areas begin to garner more human agency and reflect the economic and political changes that are occurring in that area.

In addition, urban areas are unique in the sense that they differ greatly from rural areas where there is a heavy emphasis on family, kinship or tradition. Due to this, social conventions became more relevant in societies and self-expression was valued for personal realization and identity (Gonzalez, 2012). Therefore, the concept of street style is an important component to understand how fashion is used within cultural contexts. The term "street style" can be defined as the intersection of several cultural spheres of influence: the high street, fashion magazines, and the background relationships, preferences, of the consumer and their social situation (Woodward, 2009). There are multiple binaries that exist in fashion that are reflective of values that exist within a society.

Kaiser (2012) includes the following as examples of binary oppositions within Western culture:

Fashionable (i.e., modern) dress versus "fixed" (i.e., traditional) costume; Western dress versus "the rest"; the future versus the past; time versus space; agency versus structure; masculinity versus femininity; white versus black; straight versus gay; unmarked versus marked; dressing to belong versus dressing to differentiate; mainstream consumer fashion versus alternative street style; production versus consumption (p. 2).

This means some of the most influential binaries in Western culture and urban environments. Binaries function in a way to represent the oppositional nature pertaining to different subjects. These examples of cultural binaries that exist in society show how fashion is polysemic. Within a cultural sphere, fashion may contain multiple meanings that signify the dichotomy between the hegemonic process and the forces that oppose it. Cultural binaries also function to display the duality of a subject in relation to what is dominant in society and what is subordinate.

In this way, these binaries contrast the hegemonic views of the fashion process in relation to other forms. For instance, mainstream consumer fashion versus alternative street style represents a fashion binary. However, within this binary, it is presenting separate purposes of how fashion may be used without mentioning how an individual may not fall into either category. An example of this may be an individual who mixes high-end brands with clothes purchased at a thrift shop. Therefore, viewing fashion with an either/or mentality is problematic since it fails to take into account how fashion creates overlapping realities and contradictions (Kaiser, 2013). This functions similarly with

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other binaries, such as sex, race, national identity, sexuality, and other facets of individual identity. Therefore, fashion can be used as a tool to enable a group or individual to deconstruct these cultural binaries in order to expose the different ways power is formed within a culture. Kaiser (2013) mentions how power is not constructed in simplistic forms of either/or, but that there are multiple opportunities for power to be yielded within these binaries that can be displayed in more subtle, subversive ways.

In this way, style and fashion may be able to create liminal identities within cultures. Liminal identities are defined as, "a state of in-between-ness and ambiguity, as it applies to identity reconstruction of people" (Beech, 2011, p. 285). Liminal identities are often produced due to the interaction between power structures and individuals, as well as the "interplay between an individual's 'self-identity' (their own notion of who they are) and their 'social identity' (the notion of that person in external discourses, institutions, and culture)" (Beech, 2011, p. 285). Thus, this can lead to dialectical tension as individual's internalization, or "self-identity" may conflict with his or her "social identity" that is enforced by power structures, and may try to create their own unique, personal identity through their style.

Kaiser (2013) introduces the concept of articulation as it pertains to fashion discourse. Articulation is defined as, ".... a complex blending of physiological and symbolic processes. In many ways, this kind of spoken articulation becomes a metaphor for having a voice or a sense of agency through everyday looks or fashioning of the body. Individuals mix and match different elements to formulate temporary expression about who they are, or more accurately, are becoming" (p.5). In addition, articulation is formed through interpretive communities when ideologies cohere around forms of discourse to

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create an area of intersection that generate meaning (Hall, 1986). Regarding a rhetoric of style, this largely pertains to how imaginary communities are produced in response to ideologies projected through primary texts.

Further, this notion of articulation is similar to Laclau and Mouffe's (1997) description of articulation in the Gramscian sense of how hegemony operates within signification systems and represent rhetorical, or political, struggle. Hence, fashion becomes a form of discourse within a culture as way to create agency. This pertains to Greene's (2004) description of rhetorical agency since fashion is a communicative tool that is used to possibly gather social cooperation. Fashion can possibly create social cooperation by creating homologies, which are formal linkages of signs (Brummett, 2008). If this occurs, ideologies can articulated to imaginary communities to unite individuals. Kaiser (2012) explains the correlation between fashion and culture as both change and continuity. In this way, fashion is change within continuity, whereas cultures show practices that emphasize continuity within change. Therefore, this shows how contradictory concepts work together to formulate meanings about collective groups.

Visual Rhetoric

Images are interpreted through the analysis of unintended, intended and suggested meanings. Saussure developed a tool to analyze signs through the process of images as a signifier, and meaning as a sign. Peirce further developed this model whereby the image is a signifier, the object or the referent is the signified, and the thought is the interpretant (Moriarty & Sayre, 2005; Peirce, 1991). Peirce (1991) created a system of signification that created stages in meaning formation. For instance, the first stage of signification may be associating a piece of fabric with clothing. The second stage of the signification may

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be attributing a style to that clothing (i.e., hip-hop style). Through the use of signs and their associated meanings, visual images can be used to make sense of the world and cultures that surround us.According to Evans and Hall (1999), visual culture is an important element of analysis since symbolic, classificatory, and, in short, meaning-making practices are at the heart of all cultural production and consumption. More importantly, semiotics compares the use of images to a language itself. Hill (2004) adds that in relation to visual rhetoric, "Visual representation gives way to visual rhetoric through subjectivity, voice, and contingency" (p. 22). With regards to culture, visual rhetoric is tied to how shared values and assumptions influence viewer's responses to mass-produced images.

Since fashion is not a static symbol, the meaning behind particular fashion items changes over time. Therefore, the meaning behind signs has started to reflect different attitudes in Western society's culture. Owyong (2005) states that the social construction of reality and power relations is, "most insidious when it involves subtle, understated messages that seep into people's consciousness without their realization" (p. 191). Articles of clothing that are deemed fashionable to one may not be to another. Hence, what is deemed as "fashion" varies based on the interpretation of the clothing and the message that is perceived by the viewer. The wearer may not always pre-determine their fashion choices with a particular goal; however, his or her articles of clothing will contain different messages regardless of the intentions, motivations, and levels of awareness (Owyong, 2005). Thus, what the clothing item signifies to a viewer is dependent on multiple cultural factors.

For instance, jeans have evolved from a practical work garment to a fashion statement. In the 1950s, celebrities popularized jeans in movies, and the middle class began to wear them as a fashion item; however, the working class avoided wearing them since they were a reminder of "their poor roots" (Craik 1994, p. 194). Therefore, a functional piece of clothing was transformed into fashion item worn by the higher classes (Owyong, 2005). Further, jeans are made from denim fabric, yet the item of clothing is perceived differently if a logo from a high-profile brand is attached to it. Thus, the same item of clothing can signify different meanings and convey a different message of status. In addition, jeans have become a standardized form of clothing, yet they become contemporary when they exhibit the current fashion of the time (fading, cuts, holes, etc.). In this way, fashion becomes a form of communication that rearticulates the meaning of a particular garment.

Fashion as Communication

Fashion is a multifaceted concept that is difficult to address. Many criticize the study of fashion due to its ambivalence and ambiguity; however, these weaknesses are also fashion's strengths. Through the use of metaphor and symbolism, clothes are able to serve different purposes depending on the context of the situation. In this way, fashion can have multiple meanings that can be interpreted differently by a variety of audiences. In order to better explain fashion as a communicative tool, it is important to define clearly what differentiates fashion from other concepts, such as style and fads. Entwistle (2000) states:

> "Fashion" is a general term which can be used to refer to any kind of systemic changes in social life, in architecture or even academia; the 'fashion system' as it

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pertains to dress refers to a particular set of arrangements for the production and

distribution of clothing…, a special and unique system for the production and

consumption of dress that was born out of historical and technological

developments. (p. 45)

This pertains to how fashion evolves with cultural events that occur within society. Thus,

fashion serves as representations of advancements in society that signify the resulting

social change that transpires. This means that the fashion process has evolved with

historical and technological developments. In this way, the fashion process refers to how

and why style changes, and how particular fashion come to be accepted within a society.

New technology has allowed fashion discourse to evolve beyond dominant fashion

magazines, shows, and celebrities. Instead, the fashion process now entails fashion blogs

and videos that display street styles. As such, emerging fashion leaders that have created

an audience through the Internet can potentially dismantle the "top-down" fashion

process.

   An important component of the definition of fashion is the notion that it

represents a type of change within a society through the alteration of the relationship

between the sign and the signified (Davis, 1992). Therefore, fashion is the alteration in

the code of visual conventions. Style, however, has slightly different implications.

Blended with aesthetics, style can be defined as, "The ways in which actions, objects,

events, gestures, and commodities, as well as the properties of language, are used to

create aesthetically charged rhetorical outcomes in the self and others" (Brummett, 2008,

p.3). In contrast to fashion, style remains more permanent and represents sustained

cultural systems, while fashion signifies the changes that occur in a present moment

(Brummett, 2008; Davis, 1992). Tulloch (2010) states that style is also a form of agency, since it is the construction of self through the assemblage of garments, accessories, and beauty regimes. Thus, commodities can be used to formulate discourse through the expression of identity. However, I would argue that style also includes social elements in order to generate meaning behind these commodities. Finally, a fad is a trend that occurs at a specific moment in time, yet it is not part of an aesthetic standard; fads are popular for a short period of time then disappear (Gonzalez & Bovone, 2012). Fads are unique, because unlike other trends, they do not reappear in the fashion cycle. Trends, on the other hand, can be reiterated in market contexts and commodified, which then circulates the style to larger audiences.

Barthes (1983) examines how fashion serves as a form of written language within fashion magazines. In his argument, Barthes (1983) provides a structural analysis and asserts that, similarly to language, fashion is an institution that contains an abstract set of constraints. Speech is, "…the momentary part of this institution which the individual extracts and actualizes for purposes of communication; language issues from the mass of spoken words, and yet all speech is itself drawn from language; in history this is a dialectic between the structure and the event, and in communication theory between the code and message" (Barthes, 1983, p. 18).

Barthes (1983) argues that fashion is part of a rhetorical system since it has a system of codes that consist of the sign, the signified, and the signifier. Specifically regarding fashion, the sign is the physical fashion garment that is able to change into a meaningful object, the signifier naturally has no inherent form of value until the garment becomes emblematic through stages of signification, and the signified which can

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arguably be the market contexts or fashion system (Barthes, 1983; Peirce, 1991). For instance, Barthes (1983) explains the idea of image clothing, where the author of the magazine describes the image of what is deemed a fashionable object. The description of the image from the magazine is in reference to the object of "real clothing." In this way, Barthes (1983) describes how the signification of clothing through various outlets, not limited to magazines, creates a concept of fashion.

In relation to how fashion is an ideological structure similar to language, it is worth examining how meanings are reassigned when individuals alter the linguistic patterns of clothing. For instance, individuals who intentionally wear clashing patterns, mismatched socks, or wear tennis shoes with a suit are rearticulating the meanings associated with typical patterns of dress. These are all examples of a trope where stylistic errors are calculated and not inadvertent (Davis, 1992; Kaiser, 2012). Therefore, at the textual level, code violations strengthen the hierarchical principle structuring the code's symbolic legitimacy, since the violations are made in response to a suggested "rule." Rhetorically, however, the use of these tropes is used to suggest alternate meanings by the rhetor.

The fashion system is dependent upon a variety of different elements that include inspiration, imitation, and institutionalization. The fashion system is comprised of both a fashion cycle and process. A fashion cycle is the time period from the introduction of a fashion to its addition by a successive fashion, while the fashion process is the complex set of influences, interactions, exchanges, adjustments, and accommodations among persons, organizations and institutions that incite the cycle from its start to its demise (Davis, 1992). The average fashion cycle is more constrained by aesthetic conventions,

publicity practices, and merchandising requirements. However, there are some revolutions, such as the lifting of hemlines or females wearing pants, that would arguably draw more on inspiration than on the other factors (Davis, 1992). According to Sproles (1985) the fashion process is expanded into a six-stage process: invention and introduction; fashion leadership; increasing social visibility; conformity within and across social groups; social saturation; and decline and obsolescence.

The fashion process begins with the invention of particular a fashion. It is hard to determine why particular styles become popular while others do not and how ideas are generated. Some state that it begins with the designers, while others believe that is also the press, reporters, critics, celebrities and other fashion leaders (Davis, 1992). According to Green (1985), it is important to be plugged into the underground of cities and that fashion is created through the various arts that reflect the time period. A successful introduction of a particular fashion is reliant upon the fashion house in addition to the designer. The most influence often lies in haute couture and ready-to-wear market.

After the inspiration and introduction, fashion leadership occurs with those who influence and accept the new fashion. In the past, this was primarily the aristocracy, but it has now evolved to include *avant-garde* (i.e., stylistically adventuresome, luxury dressed) and real-life (i.e., "everyday" middle-and upper-middle-class fashion conscious females) (Donovon, 1983). However, others argue that fashion leadership no longer exists in a top-down fashion, but instead should be thought of in a horizontal way. From this perspective, it may be possible that there may be different pockets of leadership in different areas. In this way, sub-fashions that are developed may influence larger, dominant fashion (Davis, 1992).

The last phase of the fashion cycle is increasing the social visibility of the new fashion. This is done through the garment manufacturers' showrooms between the interaction of the buyer and sales person. After this step, fashion enters the waning stage. This occurs when the fashion worn have become viewed as "old-fashioned" (Davis, 1992). As such, new technologies may affect when a fashion's prominence diminishes since new fashion is created can become popularized through the Internet and other venues.

There are four primary approaches to fashion. The simplest definition is that fashion is a form of material culture related to bodily decoration. In this way, fashion is the use of consumer objects and choice to communicate one's perception of one's place in society. This is largely supported by Veblen's (1899) theory of dress, and Simmel's (1904) argument that clothing is primarily used to signify social standing. A second definition of fashion focuses on semiotics and how fashion serves as a signifier. From this perspective, fashion is a form of expression that is similar to language. Recognizable styles constitute a group of codes and norms that are continually being modified. Most of the time, this process is minor and unnoticeable, but has the ability to strongly impact society. For instance, blue jeans have changed in meaning over time while the man's suit has a more stable meaning.

Another approach to fashion focuses on how fashion is part of a capitalist system that is managed by business organizations in which fashion is created, communicated, and distributed (Craik, 2012). This approach represents a Marxist ideology of fashion, where clothing is disseminated from the bourgeoisie and emulated by the proletariat. Within Western society, this approach is not limited to business organizations and is also

proliferated through celebrity culture. Finally, fashion is studied as a form of social differentiation, the expression of aspirations for social mobility and the resolution of anxieties regarding social identity (Craik, 2012). Based on this perspective, fashion is a device used to shape personal and social identities. Hence, fashion is a way to negotiate power boundaries within a culture.

Fashion has been used as a communicative tool since the development of modern civilization. The existence of fashion is conditional upon the existence of different classes in society and upon upward movement between classes that are perceived as possible and desirable (Barnard, 1996). Fashionable clothing is used in Western capitalist societies to affirm both membership of various social and cultural groups, and individual identity (Wilson, 1992). In non-Western societies, there is a large emphasis on wearing traditional dress, also known as "fixed fashion" (Barnard, 1996). This sense of tradition suppresses the need for individuality, which is emphasized in capitalist societies (Barnard, 1996). Blumer (1969) states that fashion arose as a form of class differentiation. The elite class tries to mark itself apart by observable emblems and insignia, such as distinctive forms of dress. However, members of lower classes adopt these insignia as a means of satisfying their desire to be part of the superior status. Therefore, the elite class loses their superior identity, and new fashions are developed to maintain the elite's status (Blumer, 1969). This represents how the proletariat seeks to emulate the bourgeoisie as an attempt to disguise their lower social standing. As a result, fashion is used to reinforce conspicuous consumption and signify to others that they belong to the leisure class (Veblen, 1899).

Barnard (1996), Blumer (1969), and Veblen's (1899) theories towards fashion take a Marxist perspective towards fashion by creating opposition between the haves and

have-nots as a result of industrialization. According to Marx (1933), factory workers tended to experience a lack of agency due to the exploitation of labor by the bourgeoisie. It has been argued that fashion then emulates what individuals aspire to be. Therefore, there is a belief that a social ladder exists in society and one can improve their social standing. I believe that fashion extends far beyond the "top down" approach to understanding the meaning behind fashion. Due to polysemy, fashion is multi-dimensional and open to a wide array of interpretations. In addition, it has been shown that fashion can instead emerge from a bottom-up development. This means that inspiration for new style-fashion-dress emerges from the innovative styles created – for example -- by ethnic minority cultures, the gay community, or working class youth subcultures (Kaiser, 2012). Therefore, the fashion industry copies ideas from street style that become commodities through production, which results in subcultures creating a new fashion as a form of differentiation.

By looking at these four different perspectives towards fashion as a form of communication, it is worthwhile to examine how they work together to create agency within a culture. For instance, it can be acknowledged that the fashion system is part of a "top down" capitalist machine that exploits workers and is dependent on the proletariat for production. In this way, fashion is formed as a structure to maintain the power of the bourgeoisie. However, if fashion is formed through a series of codes (similar to language), then the proletariat may be able to disable the structural language of fashion, which can result in a dismantling of the dominant fashion system. Thus, street style may rhetorically be used to create agency within subcultures.

Rhetoric of Fashion

In order to further understand fashion as a communicative tool, it is important to examine how the use of tropes and nuances in the structure of fashion are used rhetorically. In addition, to address the concept of fashion, it is important to define what constitutes "anti-fashion" and its implications in Western society. Anti-fashion serves as a symbolic device of opposition, rejection, studied neglect, parody, satire, etc., in relation to what is *in* fashion (Davis, 1992). Dating back to early European history, anti-fashion has functioned as a way to dissent, protest, ridicule, and outrage (Davis, 1992). Examples of this include: The milkmaid-attired court ladies in Marie Antoinette's *bergerie*, the bedecked *Incroyables* and *Merdvielleuses* of post-revolutionary France, the London dandies of Brummel's time, and the attire of those who belong to the "political left" (Davis, 1992). Other examples that come to mind are when females wear androgynous clothing as a way to reject feminine norms and the Hippie movement in the 1960s-1970s (Welters, 2008). These symbolic gestures, as a form of counter-establishment by subgroups, serve to deflect what would otherwise lead to more violent and destabilizing forms of political confrontation (Blumer, 1969; Gusfield, 1963). As such, instead of the political revolution that Marx theorized, fashion can be politically charged.

For instance, Amelia Bloomer in the mid-1850s sparked a major reform with the creation of women's bloomers. This allowed women to wear fashionable clothing that was no longer constricting, which was the norm for middle-class females at the time. The reformers were able to alter the fashionable attire for females by using the contemporary rhetoric of sex roles at the time. The reformers stated that wearing bloomers helps females become healthier, better mothers (Foote, 1989). Other examples include the

feminist movement and androgynous clothing. Another form of anti-fashion is conservative skepticism. Davis (1992) states that conservative skepticism occurs when individuals resist the rhetoric of the fashion industry to encourage a new style. Those that partake in this form of anti-fashion are not unfashionable, yet they are resistant to new forms of fashion if they feel it is not reflective of their personal identity. For instance, the act of bra burning can be used as an example of anti-fashion since the bra symbolizes the constraints females face in society.

One of the most common purposes of anti-fashion is to differentiate minority cultures from the dominant culture within a society. In this way, minority groups are communicating a sense of pride in response to the negative attitudes held by those in power. Thus, clothing is a domination and constraint tool, but it may also become a rebellion or subversion tool (Wilson, 2003). Lastly, countercultures move beyond the adopted minority entities and dress for a distinctive identity that distances themselves from culturally dominant groups (Davis, 1992). Clarke (1976) examined how forms of discourse (such as fashion) have been subverted and extended by the subcultural *bricoleur*. A subcultural *bricoleur* can be defined as when an object and meaning create signs within a culture, and these signs are then assembled into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the *bricoleur* is located within a different position of the discourse, using the same signs, a new form of discourse is created.

An example of discourse that is formed through a subcultural *bricoleur* is the punk movement. Hebdige (1979) states:

> The punks self-consciously mirrored the 'pre-categorical realities' of bourgeois
> society—inequality, powerlessness, alienation---this was only possible because

punk style had made a decisive break not only with the parent culture but with its own location in experience. This break was both inscribed and re-enacted in the signifying practices embodied in punk style. The punk ensembles, for instance, did not so much magically resolve experienced contradictions as represent the experience of contradiction itself in the form of visual puns (bondage, the ripped t-shirt, etc. Thus while it is true that the symbolic objects in punk style (the safety pins, the pogo, the ECT hairstyles) were made to form a 'unity' with the group's relations, situations, experience, this unity was at once 'ruptural' and 'expressive', or more precisely it expressed itself through rupture. (p. 122)

In this way, the fashion used by those who identify with the punk subculture is a form of signification to represent their "break" with dominant culture. Therefore, the stylistic devices used, such as visual puns and symbolic objects are used to rhetorically convey displeasure within a subculture. In addition, for the punk movement to be empowered, a unified system of signs is created among a collective group. Through the unification of signs and formation of a culturally specific fashion discourse, subcultures that may originally lack agency may be able to use fashion as form of expression in order to voice their discontent with dominant culture.

Youth groups within Western society are an example of another subculture that creates distinctive fashion as a way to assert personal identity and rebel against dominant culture. According to Gonzales and Bovone (2012), social acceptance and relatedness to others are important variables that influence the development of an adolescent's personal identity. Fashion plays an important role in identity development since it used as a way to connect and belong to a social group. In this way, consumerism and fashion objects

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become a way to gain acceptance and build self-esteem. However, not all adolescents strive for conformity within the dominant social group. Rather, some adolescents may be trying to form their own identity separate from their parents or peers, which may be reflected in their fashion choices. As Hebdige (1979) addresses, when there is a rupture in culture, this provides an exigency for rhetorical discourse to occur. Therefore, depending on the context of a situation, fashion can be used as way to resist the dominant cultural ideology.

Another social movement that involved fashion is the grunge movement. As noted earlier within the literature, I would argue the grunge movement started as a style that was mainly centered on grunge music. However, as the musical artists became more influential and popular, the grunge style was placed into market contexts as a way for companies to make money and became a fashion statement; thus, a subculture was able to become a culture (Marin, 1992). The grunge movement is characterized by flannel shirts and army boots (Marin, 1992). However, the grunge movement is characteristically different from the punk movement, since it is "not about making a statement" (Marin, 1992, pp. 15). Instead, companies identify trends that are occurring locally and popularize the trends through new forms of media to help them spread on a mass scale. These social movements are then commodified; yet, if the market has the power to circulate messages, it can be argued that messages can be articulated into the public and are able to create new meaning that may have not originally been intended by the wearer. In this way, the style is transformed and becomes engrained in meaning based on the response from the signified.

These social movements provide instances of how subcultures as a way to break away from dominate culture. However, anti-fashion can also consist of clothing that seeks to conform individuals into a group identity. An example of this is when Mao Zedong, the former Chairman of the Communist Party of China, restricted fashion in the country. Instead, uniforms formally known as the "Mao Suit" were put in place to represent Zedong's resistance to capitalist ideology. Thus, anti-fashion was politically used as an equalizer for the class system and to create a form of stronger identification of Chinese culture (*Newsweek*, 2010). In this way, fashion was used as a political tool for China to maintain power. Yet, Chinese citizens found ways to differentiate themselves by adding patches, scarves, or bleaching their clothes (*Newsweek*, 2010). These minor examples of resistance display how individuals create styles to convey ideology.

From this literature, it is hard to deny the impact that fashion has throughout the world. In addition, fashion has multiple meanings depending on the context of the situation. While prior research has largely focused on the social aspects of fashion and how it aids in identity formation, extensive research has not been done regarding fashion as a communicative device. More specifically, a rhetoric of style provides a contemporary form of methodology that allows a critic to examine the cultural impact style has through new forms of media. In this thesis, I will argue that fashion can be used as a way to alter the dominant class structures in society by altering the codes of discourse through the use of street style. Fashion is not only a form of emulation and a reflection of the discontents of social groups, but also can be used as a device to create rhetorical discourse. In order to support this claim, I will analyze videos from the *New York Times* portraying certain styles as communicative devices to generate a form of

cultural discourse. Thus, fashion is a tool used by human agents to create agency within a dominant culture.

Summary

This chapter examined how the rhetoric of fashion is used to renegotiate power boundaries within different social classes. This was further examined in relation to how social class implicates culture. More specifically, visual rhetoric was analyzed regarding fashion within subcultures. Based on this research, the rhetoric of fashion can be used as a way for subcultures to gain agency within a dominant culture. Since fashion can take on various meanings depending on the context, it is a rhetorical means that can be used by virtually any cultural group in a capitalist society.

In addition, the review of the relevant literature revealed that there is little research on how fashion is used as a communicative tool to garner rhetorical agency. Past research largely focused on the sociological aspects of fashion and cultural implications. Thus, instead of focusing on fashion as a form of class differentiation and commodification, existing research is limited to examinations of how fashion can be used to promote social change. Within this thesis, I expand upon this research regarding how fashion creates a rhetoric of style within different cultural spheres. From this, I believe that subcultures can rearticulate a new form of fashion discourse to create agency through a proposed rhetoric of style.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Based on the review of relevant literature, it can be argued that fashion can be used as a form of rhetorical discourse. More specifically, past research supports how fashion is used by subcultures as a way to create rhetorical agency through the signification of style and fashion. To further examine this idea, Brummett's (2008) methodology of a critical rhetoric of style will be used. This consists of five components: primacy of text, imaginary communities, market communities, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic homologies. Since the rhetoric of style is predicated upon semiotics, Peirce's (1991) theoretical perspective on semiotics will also be addressed. In addition, I will utilize a neo-Marxist framework focusing on the concepts of Engels (1942), Marx (1933; 1937; 1987; 1990), Veblen (1894; 1899), and Zompetti (1997; 2012) to help interpret the rhetoric of style.

This chapter will begin with a description of the method of rhetoric of style and Peirce's (1991) theory of signs. Details will then be provided regarding the specific text for the analysis, and how the theoretical framework will be applied to the texts. I will also describe the process of how I will determine emergent themes. Lastly, I will discuss how emergent themes will serve as a structure for the remainder of the criticism.

What is Rhetoric?

The method used for this analysis is Brummett's (2008) proposed theoretical

framework for a critical rhetoric of style. In order to proceed further in the description of

the methodology, it is important to define rhetoric in the context of this analysis. One of

the most general definitions of rhetoric is that it is the way one constructs persuasive

messages. Rhetoric is prevalent in both verbal and some nonverbal communication, but

relies heavily on the audience's interpretation of the message. Critical rhetoric can be

defined as, "A perspective of rhetoric that…seeks to unmask or demystify the discourse

of power…[so that we can understand the] possibilities for change the integration invites

or inhibits and what intervention strategies may be considered appropriate to effect social

change" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). An important aspect of rhetorical communication is

the rhetorician's ability to analyze how the audience will interpret the message, and what

is the most effective way to persuade that group. Therefore, rhetoric is largely dependent

on the audience, context, and culture (Keith & Lundberg, 2008).

This brings into question whether the message needs to be intentional in order to

be rhetorical. An interesting aspect about the nature of rhetoric is that it is based largely

on the interpretation of the recipient. However, I will argue that fashion is purposefully

used in rhetorical situations as a way to identify and differentiate with cultural groups,

but the audience may interpret a particular action as more meaningful than originally

intended based on the situation (Brummett, 2011; Sellnow, 2014). In addition to the

importance of the rhetorical situation, identification between the rhetorician and the

receiver is vital; the audience is a key component of rhetorical messages (Bitzer, 1968;

Burke, 1969). The audience may determine what medium is used and how the message is

conveyed. Thus, the medium may not be decided by the rhetorician and may be largely dependent on the response from the public.

Further, rhetoric is dependent upon the use of symbols (Burke, 1969). Whether it is part of a language or an item of clothing, symbols are formed through shared meanings within a group. This is when culture becomes an important element in rhetorical messaging, since the meanings can be interpreted differently based on the receivers' past experiences and associations. The formulation of a shared meaning is what turns the rhetorical messaging into a possible collective action. The definition of rhetoric and how it is used may differ; however, I find that rhetoric is an effective tool to initiate social change within cultures. Most importantly, one needs to be aware of the nature of rhetoric in order to resist dominate groups in a society; rhetoric is used with the purpose to promote change or initiate action (Del Gandio, 2008).

Description of the Text

The text that will be used for analysis is a series of fifteen videos selected from *The New York Times* (NYT) video series entitled, "Intersection: Where Culture Meets Style." *The New York Times* style editor Simone Oliver started the web series on May 8, 2012, and new posts were made every other Tuesday appearing in the "Fashion and Style" section of the online version of the newspaper. The videos included in the series run about two-minutes in length and focus on selected individuals who are perceived as fashionable and representational of each of the five boroughs within New York City. While Manhattan and other areas of the city have been popularized in media, the series was largely formed in response to the lack of representation of New Yorkers from the various pockets of the city (Oliver, 2012). The blog also expands upon *The New York*

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Times weekly "On the Street" column developed by Bill Cunningham's section, which highlights street style in print. Thus, this particular blog includes new forms of technology by adding both audio-visual features to the styles displayed.

I selected fifteen videos to analyze for the purpose of this rhetorical analysis. The primary viewers of the selected videos most likely are those who subscribe to or follow *The New York Times*. However, the videos are available for free, and can be accessed by anyone online and *The New York Times* was reported to have 1, 865, 318 subscribers (Haughney, 2013). The actual amount of viewers of the blog series is not publicized on the site, but there is a sharing mechanism to allow viewers to post to their social media accounts. Based on this, it is hard to determine the specific viewership of the videos and measure how viral the videos have become. Online Fashion Editors Simone Oliver and Johanna Nikas created the blog to highlight the local areas of New York City.   Fifteen videos were selected in order to gain a sufficient amount of representation from the five boroughs of New York City: Manhattan, Staten Island, Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. Each of the videos represents a part of one of the five boroughs; therefore, each of the major areas of New York City is shown. Each borough of New York City is characterized by different socioeconomic status and contains a local history. In order to fully understand the style of each area, it is important to describe the demographics of each borough briefly to provide some further background for understanding the rhetorical situation (Bitzer, 1969). Manhattan is the wealthiest borough, with most individuals making over $200,000 annually. Queens and Staten Island are mainly middle-class and contain a normal distribution of income levels. Brooklyn and the Bronx are mostly middle to low income families (Kopans, et al., 2005-2007). Conclusions from the

compilation of data conducted from students at New York University suggest that Staten Island is the least diverse of the boroughs, containing an overwhelming amount of Irish and Italian Americans. Manhattan is the most ethnically diverse borough, with the largest racial groups consisting of Americans, English, Germans, Irish, Italians, and Russians. The Bronx and Brooklyn largely consist of West Indians (Kopans, et al, 2005-2007).

I also decided to include two videos focusing on New York fashion week as a comparison to the street style fashion within these neighborhoods. These two extra videos also allow us to contrast the perspectives and motives between individuals on the street with those of dominant fashion leaders. In addition, fashion week is a significant event highlighting the prominence of the domestic fashion scene of New York to a global audience. As such, the videos then serve as a way to promote localized street styles to potential international audiences through the advent of new technology. The analysis of the videos of street style versus fashion shows will also highlight the differences between street style and high fashion.

Fifteen videos were selected for analysis, since I want to examine how individuals who compose the various subcultures of New York City utilize fashion as a cultural marker. I hope to examine further how subcultures within the city are able to create a form of rhetorical discourse through the formation of stylistic homologies. In order to make an assessment of stylistic homologies, there needs to be various representations of subcultures to compare how different social groups use style and fashion. If more videos were selected for analysis, this may be problematic since the blog begins to include global street style and street styles from other urban areas. For the purpose of this analysis, then, New York City is the primary focus since it is deemed the

fashion capital of the United States (Gilbert, 2000). New York City also includes various

subcultures differentiated by nationality, socioeconomic class, sex, etc.

To date, there are a total of fifty videos that are included within the blog series;

however, as the series progressed, there started to be more of an international focus

through the inclusion of global street styles. Since the purpose of this thesis is to examine

the rhetorical discourse found in New York City and its boroughs, I did not find these

videos suited for the study and chose each video based on whether it was representational

of each of the five boroughs of New York City. This narrowed the selection of videos to

around thirty, but I found that there seemed to be a large focus on videos from the

Brooklyn and Bronx boroughs. I did not want to select too many videos of each borough

in order to avoid other subcultures from being overshadowed. For instance, I did not want

the analysis to only focus on Brooklyn and mute individuals from Staten Island.

Therefore, there are no more than three videos from each borough in addition to selected

videos focusing on fashion week.

Neo-Marxism and Fashion

Since this study is theoretically grounded with neo-Marxist concepts, it is

important to define the key terms that will be used throughout the analysis. Four

important terms are commodities, commodification, commodity fetishism, and

hegemony. A commodity is defined as an, "external object, a thing which through its

qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind" that produces use-value (Marx, 1990,

p. 125). Use-value is the usefulness of a commodity in exchange for the labor that was

put into the production of the commodity (Marx, 1990). Commodification is when the

public and private realms are based solely on monetary value; therefore, all societal

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relations are reduced to economic means. Commodity fetishism occurs when power is given to material objects and replaces use or exchange value (Marx, 1990). This means that commodities are placed with an intrinsic value due to the social interactions between people who perceive commodities as valuable. Therefore, the subjective value ascribed to a commodity is turned into an objective value, since it results in changes in the market. Lastly, the notion of hegemony means that those in power within a society maintain their dominance through ideological means involving the implicit consent of the subordinated (Gramsci, 1971). Each of these terms will be used with the theoretical framework in the analysis to supplement the discussion on how fashion is used within market contexts.

Rhetoric of Style

To analyze this idea further, Brummett's (2008) methodology for a critical rhetoric of style will be used. As previously mentioned, this includes five components: primacy of text, imaginary communities, market communities, aesthetic rationales, and stylist homologies. It is important to note that the rhetoric of style is predicated upon Peirce's (1991) semiotic model, which states that an image is a *representamen*, or the sign denoting the object, the object or the referent is the signified, and the meaning behind the thought is the interpretent. The study of semiotics dates back to (460-377 B.C.) when the founder of Western science, Hippocrates, used the term to describe the inner state or conditions of patients. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) defined the sign in three dimensions: a) The physical part of the sign itself; b) the referent to which it calls attention; c) its evocation of a meaning (Sebeok, 2001).

Semiotics did not become popular until Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American Philosopher Charles S. Peirce sought to understand the structures in the

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sensory, emotional, and intellectual composition of the human body and the human psyche (Sebeok, 2001). There are two branches of semiotics: synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic is the study of signs at any given time (typically the present), while diachronic is the study of how signs change in meaning over time (Sebeok, 2001). For the analysis, both approaches will be incorporated as a way to analyze the history of fashion and how the meaning of particular fashions change, depending on the context.

The differentiation of signs is known as paradigmatic structure, which is, "The relation of whereby some minimal feature in a sign is sufficient to keep it differentiated from all other signs of the same kind" (Sebeok, 2001, p. 7). Syntagmatic structure is when signs are constructed in a definable sequence or combination (Sebeok, 2001). The combination of signs leads to the formation of texts, which are the "weaving together" of signs (Sebeok, 2001). The structures of signs are able to constitute codes that are held together by paradigmatic and sytagmatic relations.

The process of signification is the relation between the *representamen* and the object. To build upon the process of signification, Brummett (2008) proposed a critical rhetorical methodology of style. The rhetoric of style takes a critical approach since it seeks to influence a potential audience to possibly generate political actions (Brummett, 2008). This is largely accomplished since fashion can be used as a visual representation of discontent or changing aspirations within a cultural group (Blumer, 1969; Davis, 1992). Therefore, this analysis will take a critical approach to the analysis of how style and fashion exhibit rhetorical strategies. This begins with the description of primacy of text. The primacy of texts means people create texts to say who they are and to call out to others. Brummett (2008) states that texts become the portal through which real life

dimensions of life are accessed, and it is through shared texts, such as film, television and the Internet, that people find common ground. Brummett (2008) expands on this and defines "nodal" texts, which are texts developing into larger, more complex, texts. In the rhetoric of style, texts are continuous nodal displays and readings of daily life that are reflected in media and formed by other groups and people.

An imaginary community is the premise that the audience is not a strong precondition for rhetoric; rather, the sign or fashion is able to produce rhetoric through the production of an audience, publics, and communities who are attached to the text through their internalization of images (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Brummett (2008) states:

> An imaginary community coheres around a text, the textual being primary, and does so without the conscious intention of anyone for that to happen…Today's popular media generally are the sites where publics are created: Television popular newspapers, magazines, and photography, the popular media of the modern period, are the public domain, the place where and the means by which the public is created and has its being. (p. 122)

In relation to this specific analysis, fashion *is* the text, while the community that surrounds it is the imaginary community. Within the web series of specific street styles in New York City, an imaginary community is created since the people featured are an image of that text. According to Carey's (1989) ritual model of communication, primary texts are interpreted when nothing new may have been learned, but an individuals' view of the world is "portrayed and confirmed" (p. 20). Thus, fashion and style can be

analyzed to better understand a culture in a historical moment in time to gain knowledge about a culture (Carey, 1989).

Market contexts refer to how material goods are part of a symbolic system. This serves a rhetorical purpose since goods have meanings for people in a global economy, largely because these goods are commodities that have entered a market system (Brummett, 2008). Thus, imaginary communities exist within market contexts. Brummett (2008) argues that politics, culture, and economic form are an inseparable dynamic. He describes how the market is used as a way to internationally spread sign systems in order to create a broader understanding of commodities. Further, each individual reenacts a part of the rhetoric of style as a recreation of the style projected in market contexts by reappropriating its meaning (Brummett, 2008). Therefore, Brummett (2008) is proposing that local cultural differences may re-appropriate the meaning of a unified sign system, but not enough to drastically alter the code of shared meanings. Thus, street styles are just extensions of particular styles advertised in the market, which is then recreated by imaginary communities for political purposes.

In this way, I argue that fashion is a unified sign system containing a shared code of meanings. In addition, I will defend that the appropriation of signs by particular imaginary communities serves as an interpretive lens for political purposes. However, I want to assert that, if clothing is reincorporated into the market system, this is not a form of disempowerment, and the political use of fashion does not always result in the oppression of the dominant fashion system. Instead, it is possible that through appropriation of meaning, localized fashion may create new forms of discourse through the formation of imaginary communities. This is largely due to the use of new forms of

media, where particular fashions displayed on the street can be produced separate from market institutions. I believe there is less dependence on dominant structures due to new media, which provide everyday citizens the ability to communicate their style on a mass scale, reaching broader audiences.

Aesthetic rationale refers to how the reasons and motivations behind the rhetoric of style are aesthetically motivated, due to Western culture. This is grounded in the primacy of aesthetic forms of expression and how this affects the aesthetic criteria for judgments and decisions. Brummet (2008) describes how the design aesthetic found in the ideologies of freedom, truth, and pleasure are used for the purpose of selling products, which fits into the market context of style.

Lastly, these components lead to the formation of stylistic homologies. A homology is any formal resemblance across different texts, actions, objects, and other orders of experience; homologies are central to unifying a style of discourse (Brummett, 2008). Therefore, a "style" is a sense of a formal link across texts as a formal system of signification. Stylistic homologies create a link between texts as a formal system of representation to convey ideologies. Due to cultural binaries, a culture's ideological system is not monolithic, but is composed of conflicting class interests (Brummett, 2008). As stated in the review of literature, cultural binaries are representations of the duality of a subject in relation to what is dominant in society and what is subordinate (i.e., street style vs. mainstream fashion, straight vs. gay, etc.).

An example of a stylistic homology is rap artist Kanye West's new fashion line including t-shirts and other products. The t-shirts contain images of the confederate flag with a skull and the statement, "I ain't comin' down" and images of a skeleton wearing

the confederate flag (Wilson, 2013). According to Blumm (2013), West explained the design choice by stating:

> React how you want…You know the confederate flag has represented slavery in a way—that's my abstract take on what I know about it. So I made the song 'New Slaves.' So I took the confederate flag and made it my flag. It's my flag. Now what are you going to do? (para. 5).

These t-shirts display the primacy of the text, create an imaginary community through media and a public figure, rely on aesthetics, and are reiterated into the market context. Thus, the t-shirt embodies a stylistic homology since the text is able to generate a new form of discourse that may re-appropriate the meaning of the confederate flag through the unification of signs and the response of the audience. The response of the audience is critical in the making the clothing artifact rhetorical since it is able to facilitate possible political actions; in this way, clothing is used as a rhetorical device.

Different stylistic performances speak to different ideologies through the strategic combinations of signs. These displays of homologies are formulated through signs that contain ideological importance. The homologies of the critical rhetoric of style are an enactment of rhetoric. For instance, a given style is reliant on triangulating the plausible meanings generated by the signs and the homological cohesion or incongruity of the styles displayed (Brummett, 2008). Therefore, the critic must examine how the fashions displayed create a unified form of discourse, or if localized fashions break from traditional discourse to appropriate new meaning to particular styles.

Procedure for Analysis

To analyze the information presented in the videos, I will include the title of the video, the incorporation of visual images at the beginning of the video prior to the video's interview, and the outfit/interview with the wearers. Brummett's (2008) methodology of a rhetoric of style will be used to analyze how the street styles of boroughs in New York City are rhetorically used by identifying specific themes within the methodology. For instance, if celebrities are influential to individuals in the Bronx, this may contribute to the primacy of text, market contexts, and stylistic homologies. The criteria for the code of data is based on the description provided above regarding different components constituting a category; however, it should be mentioned that each category might supplement one another. After analyzing how each video may pertain to the different categories, or themes, I will then analyze the video series as a whole to determine how these different elements constitute a rhetoric of style. Therefore, this rhetorical criticism will examine how the themes proposed by Brummett (2008) emerge and lead to the formation of a stylistic homology through primacy of text, imaginary communities, aesthetic rationales, and market contexts.

Brummett's (2008) methodology for the rhetoric of style will be applied to the text by identifying the themes described above. To identify the primacy of a text, I will specifically look for whether the videos connect to the textual world. This means that I will analyze the narratives provided by the wearers, as well as the clothing they are wearing, in association with how fashion serves as a basis for identity and community. Further, this will be analyzed in relation to new media (such as a video web series). In this way, I will be searching for how the videos feature nodal texts and exhibit

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convergence of signs to triangulate meaning. Additionally, I will look for floating signs (or floating signifiers), which are signs retaining some meaning from original objects, but are no longer directly connected to them; thus, the meanings associated have changed (Brummett, 2008; Laclau, 1994). From this, I hope to examine how the shift in meanings constructed by texts may result in turning signs (street style fashion) into commodities.

The development of imaginary communities will be examined regarding whether technology has affected the facilitation of discourse. To analyze how technology affects discourse, I will specifically look at how communities cohere around particular styles, nodal texts, and representations of subjects. Further, I hope to see how the creation of communities and subjects by texts communicates or "calls forth" the motivations, actions, and values by specific communities. This will largely be assessed through the discourse of the wearer that serves as a narrative for the decisions behind their clothing. For aesthetic rationales, I will observe whether the videos display a culture that is aesthetically grounded. This means I will assess whether aesthetics are the basis for decisions, judgments, identity and social organizations (Adorno, 1997).

Market contexts will be analyzed regarding the shift of signs and images to commodities. In addition, I will analyze how the shift in signs and images to commodities displays a struggle between social classes. Within this portion of the analysis, the utilization of a neo-Marxist lens is crucial to explain how fashion is a form of commoditization for monetary gain. Further, I will look at how fashion is used within each culture in everyday life, and how communities and identities are grounded in commodities. In this way, fashion and style are able to generate a global rhetorical system through the uses of goods as languages and systems of signs. Conversely, if a global

rhetorical system is not formulated, it will be further analyzed as to how localized street styles may signify coherence within specific communities/subcultures.

After the analysis of each of these components, stylistic homologies will be examined regarding how particular styles create a unified system of meaning. I will explore whether the styles exhibit coherence and how the wide range of texts throughout New York City exhibits either similar or different meanings or assemblage of signs. Further, it will be investigated whether coherence is formed around communities and subjects through fashion and style. The analysis of stylistic homologies will be the central component to the thesis, since all other components of the rhetoric of style lead to the formulation of stylistic homologies.

Although it can be argued that the videos are edited by *The New York Times,* and therefore, may be selected representations of those who belong to particular boroughs, I believe that this is one of the few video blogs offering ample elements to be analyzed regarding the rhetoric of style. For instance, the videos contain unique titles, incorporate screen shots of the architecture and people walking around the area, and personal narratives behind some of individuals' outfits. The videos allow outsiders from the area to learn more about local areas within New York City, as well hear impromptu descriptions from people who have lived in the area for a number of years. Further, the videos focus on particular items of clothing and ask the wearers to explain their style choices and the environment of that particular borough. One individual may not be able to speak for a general population, but as someone living in that area, the selected "fashionable" individual may serve as a voice for that subculture. This text is also particularly unique since it shows a dominant institution seeking the opinions and

expertise of individuals on the street toward style and fashion. I believe this shows a shift in how dominant fashion institutions (such as magazines, newspapers, celebrities, etc.) are not dictating dominant fashions, and represent a possible shift in power. In this way, fashion may create rhetorical agency within these particular subcultures.

Summary

To further support the proposed thesis, the web series "Intersection: Where Culture Meets Style" developed by *The New York Times* will be analyzed. This web series distinguishes different cultural groups within New York City through their use of street style. To examine this text, Brummett's (2008) framework will be used as a methodological approach in addition to selected neo-Marxist theoretical concepts.

The analysis of this criticism will be organized by looking at the selected videos as a whole. The sections of the analysis will be separated through Brummett's (2008) components of the rhetoric of style and classified by emergent themes. The themes will be categorized as primacy of text, imaginary communities, aesthetic rationales, and market contexts. The last section will focus on how these elements form a stylistic homology and will investigate whether there is a unified style throughout the different areas of New York City or whether subcultures form their own discourse as a way to differentiate themselves from dominant forms of fashion and create rhetorical agency through localized street styles.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

With the methodology proposed by Brummett (2008) regarding a rhetoric of style,

this chapter will focus on the analysis of the following components: primacy of text,

imaginary communities, market communities, aesthetic rationales, and stylistic

homologies. I will attempt to identify these themes in fifteen videos from *The New York*

Times video series, "Intersection: Where Culture Meets Style." I will seek to classify

characteristics of each theme as detailed in the previous chapter for the selected videos.

Through this process, these characteristics will be analyzed to conclude whether

representations of New York City street style are formed to create a rhetoric of style.

The chapter will be organized beginning with a discussion about the primacy of

text, imaginary communities, market communities, and aesthetic rationales. After these

components have been analyzed within the selected videos, I will discover whether they

are able to form a stylistic homology. A stylistic homology refers to any formal

resemblance across different texts, actions, objects, and other orders of experience.

Specifically regarding fashion, a stylistic homology may refer to how a "style" is a

formal link across texts as a form of signification. As described in the introduction, style

contains many elements that may be present in a culture (i.e., celebrities, musical

references), while fashion is typically one item. In this way, style functions similarly to

language by constraining particular fashions within a style based on a system of codes. In addition, the reader should be aware that the theoretical elements within this analysis might reflect back on each other, where an earlier point may correspond with a later point or vice versa (Brummett, 2008). If a stylistic homology is identified, potential impacts and uses of rhetoric of style will later be discussed.

Primacy of Text

Primacy of text investigates how signs converge to create a text and how they connect to a larger context. Brummett (2008) recognizes how texts in traditional rhetoric often are created in response to a preexisting, real circumstance. However, new technology has created new types of exigencies, where people respond to representations of texts, rather than through a direct experience (Bitzer, 1969; Brummett, 2008). A text is thus acknowledged when it creates a mutual understanding between individuals within a community through its shared meaning and provides a lens into the identities, communities, and values of a particular culture (Brummett, 2008). Meaning is then generated through the formulation of an imaginary community, or how a community responds to a text. The primary focus of this section aims to discuss the convergence of signs and intertextuality, the relationship between texts, of artifacts within the selected videos as a way to provide insight into the local cultures of New York City and create a foundational understanding of an imaginary community (Brummett, 2008).

The styles exhibited by the interviewees of *The New York Times* represent an example of a syntagmatic sign structure, since the individual pieces of clothing are constructed in a definable sequence or in a unique combination to convey a personal narrative (Sebeok, 2001). In addition to the configured outfits by the individual, the

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culture of a particular location seemingly influences the style that is produced. For instance, Ellen Schneider from the Upper West Side in Manhattan addresses how she has lived in numerous locations of New York City; yet, she loves the Upper West side for its homogenous style. She states:

> I always went with style, but now at this age I have to really concentrate. I can't even buy the things I want to buy, because I don't feel it looks appropriate. I don't want to turn around and kinda look silly…I've lived in ten different areas of New York City. So I've been uptown, downtown, every part of town. But I have to say, I love the Upper West Side. People on the Upper West Side is like, you know, you go to Connecticut and everyone is dressed the same way, it's preppy, it's terrific. You know, if they're going granola, they're going all the way. (Nikas & Oliver, 2012)

Schneider (2012) discusses how style on the Upper West Side is more classic and uniform in comparison to other areas in New York City. She also touches upon how appropriate fashion and styles change with age. She believes she cannot buy desired fashion items because of the conventional standards in the area. Themes throughout this particular video are age and beauty standards. This may suggest that she may now identify with the location of the Upper West Side in contrast to other locations since it reflects her own attitudes and feelings towards style. In other words, the culture and style of the borough allow her to fit in rather than standout. In this way, the fashion she exhibits is a nodal text within the video since the clothing is able to connect to the larger environment. The identities and values reflected through the primary texts in the area also correspond with the stated attitudes towards fashion and style in the Upper West Side.

On the surface, the Upper West Side culture is mainly comprised of academics and affluent groups of individuals in their thirties and is home to Ivy League Universities, such as Columbia University (Jackson, 1995). Since the 1980s, the area has been characterized by "yuppies and their accompanying incomes" (Waxman, 2014). Podhoretez (2010), a native New Yorker who was born and raised in the Upper West Side, describes it as populated with conservatives and their "homogenous radicalism" and states that the neighborhood is described as "unfashionable" (p. 6). He also adds, "Even 50 years ago, its lefitism was a lived-in leftism, a legacy leftism, dull and humorless and orthodox, inherited from parents and grandparents and already growing threadbare around the elbows like an old tweed jacket whose patches were themselves worn out from use" (Podhoretez, 2010, p. 7). While race divisions are common in multiple neighborhoods in New York City, class divisions are also historically significant between the middle-class and lower class within the Upper West Side, due to the urban sprawl in the late 1960s and 1970s (Podhoretz, 2010).

The rhetoric within this video suggests that texts function as a way to construct identities and social affiliations. Further, primary texts display, "the values, motivations, allegiances, identities, communities, and intentions of a textual culture" (Brummett, 2008, p.118). The inferences made by the critic's interpretation of primary texts regarding culture are through the recognition of the convergence of signs and the successful "chaining out" of texts (Brummett, 2008, p. 119). The rhetoric contained within Schneider's narrative exemplifies how, with age, her personal identification with the Upper West Side has formed. In addition, Schneider is able to create a rhetorical response through her clothing to exhibit the larger cultural values of the neighborhood,

which she identifies as "granola" and "uniform" in contrast to other boroughs of New York City. The visual images of her all-black clothing with simple gold accessories also align with the concept of a homogenous style, since there is little differentiation within her clothing.

This description also suggests that there is a level of cultural awareness through her acknowledgement of age-appropriate beauty and dress standards. Thus, this displays a mode of consciousness behind her style of dress and recognition that style distinguishes individuals within specific locations. Fashion is also used as a form of external signification as a form of objectification for those who are not part of a community (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For instance, the Upper West side is universally acknowledged as a distinct part of New York City through the texts that are produced. The texts that are generated within a particular community are able to develop cultural expectations. Examples of texts distinguishing the Upper West Side from other areas within New York City are the institutions, such as Columbia University and The Museum of Natural History. In addition, the "granola" fashion and style within the area also differentiates the area from other areas, such as the Bronx, where celebrity style is strongly influential. Thus, Schneider may be externally signifying to those who are not part of the Upper West Side community that she belongs to a particular culture through her clothing, since the style is potentially different from the other boroughs. This is further enhanced through digital blogging and *The New York Times* video series, which solidifies the Upper West Side as a distinct culture.

While Schneider embraces the uniform style of the area, she uses her hair as an extension of her clothing as a way to differentiate herself from her surroundings. In this

way, her hair is used to develop her personal style since it extends beyond simple artifacts of clothing. She adds, "I had gone through my life having long black hair and everyone always talked about it. And then when I decided to go natural, people went crazy. They were like, 'Oh, you're aging yourself,' and I said, 'I don't really care, I'm a naturalist'" (Nikas & Oliverc, 2012). Age appears to be Schneider's primary concern; she seems to maintain her natural hair as way to avoid being perceived as *trying* to be young. This concept also aligns with the idea that clothing, or other elements of style, contain symbolic meanings used to uphold class and status boundaries in societies that vary depending on culture (Davis, 1992; Simmel, 1994; Veblen, 1899). The culture and environment of which Schneider is a part dictates that there are appropriate standards of dress for females depending on their age. Therefore, her attitude towards age, as represented by her hair, represents a self-constructed image of resistance towards conventional beauty standards that she wishes to portray to the public.

The suggestion that there is a standard code of dress for one who belongs to a particular age group proposes a potential form of status. Age is a concept that is not only addressed by Schneider, but also a man named Danard Talton who is interviewed in the Queens borough. Talton states, "Growing up, it was the baggy, hood look. So, as I got older, and had my chance to really tour for real to Europe I got a chance to see how the men out there dressed and I got fascinated on how older men dress with their tailored suits and just simple. Simple, but it still just has a statement. That's what I love about it" (Nikas & Oliverd, 2012). In this way, the fashions worn by older individuals are intended to be "simple" and "classic." For someone who is younger, like Talton, simplicity in dress is used to convey a different personal identity separate from his peers who may

embrace the "hood" look. This further suggests that those who are young are able to wear styles that are associated with an older age group; yet, older age groups cannot do the same. This reinforces Brummett's (2008) statement that often people are aware of the styles of others to gain socially advantageous information about one's class, sexuality, and so forth.

Within Talton's interview there is jargon containing connotative meanings and serves as floating signifiers. For instance, Talton expands in his interview that popular items that distinguish the "hood" look are Air Jordans and baggy jeans. It is interesting to note that those interviewed who belong to the boroughs associated with lower socioeconomic status reject the "hood" look. Although, it is possible the highlighted interviews of those within these locations are due to the editing of *The New York Times*. In another interview, Bronx resident Gifty Safro states:

> Since this is the Bronx, people do keep up or try to keep up with fashion, you will
> see a lot of Jordans. Coming from a single parent household my father was not
> going to get me no Jordans. It's like, that's not going to happen. I love the classic
> look. It can never go out of style with a classy look. You don't have to worry
> about the next Jordans or the next Louis Vuitton bag. (Nikas & Oliver, 2012b)

Safro describes how people try to keep up with fashion, and uses the example of Jordans as a way to be fashionable. Thus, "Jordans," which were originally produced as basketball shoes, have evolved in meaning based on the cultural context where they are worn, and are now a representation of the "hood" style.

Within the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn boroughs there appears to be an emphasis on brands and celebrities as a way to be current with particular fashions. As

noted above, Safro mentioned prominent fashion labels that have been branded as haute couture clothing lines. The styles and brands that are worn prominently by celebrities are influential in these cultural contexts. For instance, Chaveli Gil, who was born and raised in the Bronx, explains how musical artists, such as Nicki Minaj, Lady Gaga and Rihanna, inspire her style. Within this particular video, others who are interviewed mention Kim Kardashian and Chris Brown as style inspirations. In this way, it appears that the style of a particular borough is complex and contains multiple elements beyond clothing items. Pop culture, celebrities, and musical influences all connect to the fashions that are worn by the individuals. The intertextuality of media, celebrities, and clothing exhibit how different texts may influence and correspond with one another. These elements all conglomerate to form a particular style for the cultures in these neighborhoods.

The desire to emulate haute couture exemplifies the concept of conspicuous consumption as a way for the upper class to maintain their power and status within capitalist societies, since it is difficult for those who belong to the lower class to consume expensive commodities (Veblen, 1899). Thus, it appears that those who belong to the boroughs of Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx are more influenced by pop culture and media than other areas. This, then, separates geographical influence on fashion since these celebrities may not be from these areas themselves. But, this observation shows how these texts provide further understanding of the values within these different locations. As stated in the review of literature, it was found that individuals from low-income areas are more likely to purchase expensive brands and flaunt their items in comparison to those who are more affluent (Isakson & Roper, 2012). This further parallels Isakson and Roper's (2012) conclusions that low-income individuals use

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expensive brands to disguise their poverty, while high-income individuals do not feel the need to prove their social status.

Yet, as Safron and Talton mention, some individuals differentiate themselves from their geographical cultures by striving for so-called "classic" dress. The definition of "classic dress" cannot be universally applied to each area. A classic style may imply Chanel suits and Birkin bags in the Upper East Side, while in the Bronx a classic style is wearing simple, brand-less clothing (Nikas & Oliver, 2012b; Nikas & Oliver, 2012f). In both descriptions, a classic style is regarded as uninfluenced by trends or fads, and is thus a relatively permanent style. Therefore, those who are not trendy are rejecting the notion of conspicuous consumption by refusing to "keep up" with particular fashion trends. Building upon this thought, it may be an overstatement to argue that classic style is a rejection of consumerism and commodification, since one is still purchasing material items, and a "classic style" may reference aristocratic styles (Blumer, 1969). However, the interviews highlight how certain individuals resist the dominant fashion system through the choice of wearing brand-less clothing. Thus, there is a contradictory element to style since specific brands are often used to flaunt material wealth and social status as a form of differentiation among other groups, yet brand-less clothing can perform the same purpose depending on the context.

Another example of this is depicted in an interview with Ariel Weekes from Brooklyn. Weekes is shown wearing a white tee, cuffed medium-washed jeans, and a navy baseball hat. He describes Harlem as indefinable and states, "There's no place like Harlem 'cause of its indigenous soul, and it's authentic, it's organic. People here are here because they love it. And they do things 'cause its what they are, who they are. And it

goes on from generation to generation, although some are more eccentric" (Nikas &

Oliver, 2012a). While Weekes claims that many of his clothing choices are not based on

the premise of making a fashion statement, he does emphasize the way he distinguishes

himself from others in the neighborhood.

In one scene, a flash of his cuffed jeans is shown. Weekes then states, "The cuff is

kinda an ode to my uncle. That is probably one of the only things I do, the style thing.

Like, it kinda separates myself from the other white tees, which are plentiful and I love it,

so it gives me something to call my own" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). Within this specific

video, the term "white tee" evolves into a primary text since it becomes a symbol of the

larger Harlem community. The white tees are seen as a unifying symbol that unites the

male members of the community. Yet, the individual still attempts to individualize

himself through the style of his jeans. Thus, Weekes is using this specific type of t-shirt

to communicate how he belongs to an exclusive neighborhood or group, while

simultaneously exhibiting his individuality through the style of his jeans. This also

conveys a form of conservative skepticism, where an individual will resist the rhetoric of

a particular fashion to encourage a new style (Davis, 1992).

White tees can be purchased in bulk and, in other communities, may not be

perceived as a source of pride due to the low socioeconomic status they may suggest.

What is interesting about this specific interview is the concept of particular items of

clothing as representations of a larger culture. For instance, Weekes mentions, "We wear

Timberlands and now it's becoming something bigger. You know, it's what we have"

(Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). Timberlands are often associated with the "hood" look and have

been popularized in media with hip-hop and rap artists. However, it is imperative to note

that iconic fashion items have to rise in popularity organically with the right style, attitude, and look (Hellqvist, 2013). The Timberland shoe is a nodal text, evolving from their utilitarian function for blue-collar workers to protect their feet to fashion items worn by prominent musical artists. Thus, Timberlands are an example of a "bottom-up" fashion occurring in specific urban communities that are rearticulated in market contexts.

In the Staten Island borough of New York, the perception of the "Jersey Shore" is a popular style of the area. The description provided by the individuals interviewed by Nikas, et al., (2012) exhibits both a floating signifier and nodal text. The connotative meanings associated with the "Jersey Shore" largely derive from the reality television show *Jersey Shore* released by MTV in 2009, which follows six Italian-Americans from the Tri-State area (www.imdb.com). In this way, labeling the "Jersey Shore" style references not only a geographic location, but also alludes to the lifestyle conveyed on the television show. In addition, the style of the area is largely associated with the clothing label Ed Hardy, which was created by tattoo artist Don Ed Hardy who licensed the distribution of his designs for clothing to Christian Audigier (Hamlin, 2006)

As described by Val Pacuku, "I used to work the stock market and they used to tease me all the time because of *Jersey Shore* and, yeah, you'll find many people out here similar, like similarly dressed, but they're not all like that. 'Jersey Shore' style is Ed Hardy all the way, with the graffiti, and I'm not bashin' it, but just every day with the skimpy little tops and skirts, no, it's just not style to me" (Nikas, et al., 2012). Hence, the Ed Hardy brand has become a nodal text that extends beyond its original advertising. This suggests that texts have the ability to shift in meaning based on the larger contexts in which they are exhibited. Additionally, the meaning behind the "Jersey Shore" location

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has shifted from a popular vacation spot to a specific style and lifestyle that involves Ed Hardy, heavy drinking, and casual dating; thus, the "Jersey Shore" location has shifted into a floating signifier of a particular way of life. The television show also provides stereotypical representations of Italian Americans, and is, thus, associated with Italian culture. In addition, individuals from Staten Island may reject particular brands in order to avoid the stereotypes and group associations of that culture.

In this way, texts are malleable and can be altered by a possible rhetor within a particular environment. Within a rhetoric of style, it is difficult for a rhetor to know his or her potential audience, since the rhetoric is based on the development of an imaginary community in response to the text; thus, unlike traditional rhetorical methodologies, the *ethos* of an individual may not be a strong rhetorical element. While it is undeniable that celebrities and other fashion leaders influence fashion trends, styles also organically form through shared meanings of texts, such as the white tee and Timberlands. In this way, *ethos* is not developed through one's credibility as a fashion expert, but rather through the display of cultural competence of local styles. Therefore, an individual may not even realize they are creating a style to the larger public.

Street style is often associated with authenticity and individualization, rather than fashion consciousness. However, as evidenced in the narratives within Williamsburg, Brooklyn, there is the implication that people spend an exorbitant amount of money, "to look like [they're] not wearing stuff that costs a lot of money" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013a). Within this particular interview, a young woman describes the style in Williamsburg as, "…super trendy and maybe even looking a little like Urban Outfitters even at times, but I think you do find a lot of people who kind of just have stuff going on. Or they really take

a lot of time to look fun. I think it's cool that no one takes it too seriously" (Nikas &

Oliver, 2013a). The connotation of the Urban Outfitter brand is often associated with the

hipster style, which can be defined as individuals from the upper-middle class who are

interested in objects that contain a "working-class aura" (Perry, 2013). However, to those

who may originally be from the area, the attempt on the part of the upper-middle class to

be portray a more hip style is not embraced. Aviles states:

> Like, I used to cut school and like go thrift shopping…I was born and raised in
>
> Brooklyn so I've seen it change a lot and this neighborhood, Williamsburg
>
> particularly, there's a lot of people who look like they have paid a lot of money
>
> for what they're wearing and I kinda [deep breathe] tells you how the
>
> neighborhood is sorta shifting…Brooklyn is sorta changing immensely. Like,
>
> growing up, people would wear like whatever, like Filas, like I wanted Nike
>
> high tops, and you know like my low-rise Baby Phat jeans or whatever. But
>
> now, I feel like there are a lot of boutiques and a lot of money. (Nikas & Oliver,
>
> 2013a)

As described by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), signification can be used as a form of

empowerment and individuality to generate agency within a group. Applied to fashion,

this means that fashion is used to create a form of collective unity within specific

locations through the process of signification. Within their descriptions, the interviewees

explain that their personal style is not about a fashion statement, but rather an assertion of

their individuality. Thus, fashion is rhetorically used to exhibit particular characteristics

of a culture. For instance, in an interview with a young female from Washington Heights,

Brooklyn, the super hero Storm from *X-men* is referenced as a style influence due to her

embodiment of a "superwoman," which is a signifier of strength; thus, the female decided to dye her hair an extremely light blonde hair color as a way of mimicking the character Storm.

In addition, Zachary Gale from Astoria, Queens, embraces the punk movement, wearing a Trucker hat, a band t-shirt, and brown Doc Martens. These different fashion objects are largely associated with counter-culture and part of the punk style. According to Gale, "Punk style appeals to me cause it's very honest. It's very true, because it's…you do it yourself…you don't buy things because they've got a name brand on it. Or, you know, because people tell you it's cool, it's just, it's kinda dirty, and raunchy…it's very…it's pure" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012e). This description of punk style discusses how certain styles are formed organically, further supporting the idea of a "bottom-up" fashion system. In addition, the signification of Gale's clothing items (texts) creates a homology for a particular style, since they are associated with a particular community. However, the clothing staples of punk style (such as Doc Martens, band t-shirts, and Trucker hats) are still part of market contexts that are commodified and reproduced in the capitalist system, which later will be discussed in the analysis.

This section describes how primary texts are formed and provides insights into the subcultures of New York City. The concepts of nodal texts and floating signifiers explain how communities may respond to particular texts to create a rhetorical response; thus, media platforms create exigencies where rhetoric can occur through representations of texts (Brummett, 2008). Therefore, primary texts function as a way to draw references from the interpretants' past experiences and associations with a particular symbol (e.g., brands, celebrities, superheroes) to generate shared meanings between those within a

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community. The rhetorical responses from primary texts are, thus, the basis for the development of an imaginary community.

Imaginary Communities

The premise of imaginary communities is comparable to Hall's (1986) conceptualization of the articulation model, which states that meaning is generated through *interpretive communities*. The theory of articulation explains how ideological elements "cohere within discourse" to create an intersection, or articulation, of "social position, social practices, and social texts" (Hall, 1986, p. 53; Moffitt, 1993, p. 234). Within the selected texts of the video series, "Intersection: Where Culture Meets Style," meaning is generated through the intersecting elements of the text, receiver's social position, culture, and the receiver's current lived experiences (Moffitt, 1993). Therefore, ideology is articulated through the many cultural identities an individual may have and exhibit (e.g., gender, nationality, social class).

Moffitt (1993) expands on Hall's articulation model and states, "Recognition of each subject's multiple identities and of the important role that fantasy plays in managing discursive desire are also consistent with the model's view that many individual, textual, and social factors come together to articulate certain unique meanings to each receiver of a media text" (p. 236). An example of this is when Brandon Johnson from the Bronx, also known from his rap name as "Drama B," connects to hip-hop style and states, "The reason I'm wearing my sweatpants rolled up is cause I saw Chris Brown, he's wearing one leg up and so I decided to just try it too" (Osipova & Nikas, 2013). In this way, his career as an aspiring rap artist and his idols are reflected through his style and contributes to the culture of the borough. Through the process of internalization, his clothing

exemplifies his own interpretation of Chris Brown's style as an objective event that becomes meaningful to him, which is displayed through his style (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

As mentioned before, the rhetoric within a style largely occurs when an imaginary community is formed in response to the rhetoric that is produced. Pertaining to a rhetoric of style, an audience is created when a group of individuals identify with a particular style and attribute meanings to it. When a style resonates with a community, the fashion is then calling forth to an audience to recognize a community. For instance, in the example of Ariel Weekes from Brooklyn, his narrative regarding the Harlem community separates the Harlem culture from others that exist within New York City. He creates a distinction within his community by stating, "People buy white tees by the pack. I wear white tees because they're hot, it's not really a fashion thing. You can get a tee at the Bodega" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). The idea of an authentic and original style is further shown through his previous quote that, "Harlem is set apart by other boroughs or other sub-boroughs in that I don't really know how to define it" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013a).

As described by Weekes, the Harlem community coheres around the material item of a white tee. The reference to particular locations (e.g., Bodega, or Spanish supermarket) and style references (e.g., white tees, Timberlands), suggest that these artifacts serve as identifiers to differentiate the Harlem sub-borough from other areas within New York City, which contradicts his earlier statement that Harlem is indefinable. This is where separating a community based on style becomes complex, since boroughs are then commodified. To those who belong to the community, these objects are part of their culture. Yet, to those who are watching the video series, these communities are

given an identity by "an abstract force that is 'society'," and perpetuate a dominant ideology (Stone, 1962). In this way, the street style produced by individuals, such as Weekes, becomes larger than originally anticipated. As discussed in the previous section, the viewer's of these blog posts may never physically encounter an individual from any of the boroughs being analyzed within this thesis. Therefore, the audience is imagined, since the one who wears a particular style cannot fully anticipate the response from those who access the online posts.

The online video posts of this particular blog on street style are representations of a particular moment in time. Moffitt (1993) describes these particular images and narratives as, "historical moments in which cultural forces, textual features, and social pressures on the individual receiver all intersect and articulate meaning to the receiver" (p. 234). Within a historical moment in time, a dominant ideology may influence an individual's sense of self at different times in one's life or historical moments (Stone, 1962). Thus, this shows how an individual's sense of style may evolve over time based on cultural factors, past experiences, and societal influences. Yet, these styles that are deemed as "in fashion" may reappear at a later moment in time, and contain different meanings based on the context in which the fashion appears. In this way, the rhetorical impact of fashion and style are formed through historical exigencies.

For instance, Talton from the borough of Queens, states, "Queens style, I noticed the women are more into the make-up. You know, they like to have their hair done, you see a lot of blondes out here in Queens…and the guys out here, you know, you have guys who like [comfortable, yet simple], then some who have the hood-wear like the Jordans" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012d). As noted earlier, this changed when Talton traveled abroad and

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took note of European styles. Thus, Europeans may not have anticipated that their style would resonate with a tourist from New York City. This shows how style is able to trickle to other cultures that may not have been intended, but has a delayed cultural impact on a community. In this way, style is able to transcend cultural boundaries, or rules, that a community must follow a syntagmatic sign structure that aligns with the dominant ideology assigned by the generalized other (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In a way, the use of new media, such as blog posts, can be used as a way to concretize a style to the public and popularize local street styles. Viewers may then internalize a particular style and identify with a particular geographic location by the values espoused through the primary texts.

As shown through Talton's personal experience and Weekes' description of differentiation, their forms of individualization are resistant to the assigned styles of an area based on their own personal experiences. For instance, the hegemonic style within an area may be the "hood" or "Jersey Shore" style, yet others may dress differently to resist the symbolic demands of that community (Brummett, 2008). As the style within that borough is rearticulated to the public through the video series, the dominant ideology regarding borough's fashion may change through the response of the public. Thus, the individuals' personal styles have a larger impact on how local styles are interpreted due to the chaining out process of fashion.

In order to better understand how the boroughs create an imaginary community, or make sense of a particular style, it is important to understand how communities are part of a dialectical process of objective and subjective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). An objective reality in relation to a rhetoric of style can be interpreted as how a

local style is portrayed to the larger public, while the subjective reality is how an individual internalizes a style; thus, the interconnection of style, the individual, and social identity conceptualize an imaginary community (Brummett, 2008). Between these three factors, an individual begins to identify with a particular group. Gifty Safro, from the Bronx, states, "Coming from the African background of Ghana, we are known for prints, stripes, and colors. I always have to stand out. Not so much for attention, but diversity. I have lived here for about fifteen years. I believe that this block teaches you about diversity, especially like the different type of that they are" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012b). This characterization exemplifies how Safro's past experience in Ghana influences her style in addition to the cultural influences of her neighborhood. These two areas of her life then affect her style, which then generates an audience through her unique sense of style.

Another example of how an individual may internalize a style based on its signified values is Zachary Gale from Astoria, Queens. In his interview, he describes how he identifies with the punk culture because of its "honest" and "true" qualities. He believes that punk style exemplifies these values since he is "very DIY [Do it Yourself]" and does not have a steady income (Nikas & Oliver, 2012e). In this way, Gale believes that his style is relatively out of the market context since he creates his own clothing and shops at thrift stores; he is also opposed to brands (Nikas & Oliver, 2012e). Gale's identification with punk style influences his perception of positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Those who are typically associated with the lower class are often stigmatized; yet, style may be able to establish a positive self-concept. According to social identity theory, members of a low status group who perceive class boundaries as impermeable will engage in creative activities to increase their positive distinctiveness.

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Specifically regarding class boundaries, members of the out-group may change the espoused values in order to find new ways to compare to the in-group without changing the objective resources of the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

A fundamentally important factor regarding imaginary communities for a rhetoric of style is how cultural factors affect the interpretation of primary texts. As mentioned earlier, punk style, social status, and past experiences may all lead to an individual's personal interpretation of a style. In addition to this, the geographic location may influence whether a style resonates with an individual. Gifty Safro mentioned that the diversity of the area influenced her style. Conversely, Rebecca Bergen from the Upper East Side in New York City mentions how the architecture of the area are sources of her inspiration. She states:

> I live on the Upper East Side, I was born and raised here. I like how the stereotypical Upper East Side ladies can dress, you know, like with their Birkin bags and Chanel suits. But that's not really my style. I bring kinda like my personal interpretation of that… I love vintage…I like old-fashioned things, so definitely the architecture, the old, the pre-war buildings. I love that, they're beautiful. I always love how fashion references the past. (Nikas & Oliver, 2012f)

Thus, through the narratives provided in the video blog series, it is possible that popular stereotypes regarding these geographic locations may be challenged. By offering a rationalization for their personal style, it is made evident that primary texts are interpreted differently based on one's culture. The imaginary communities formed around a primary text often resist the stereotype of the particular area to project a separate individual identity, while still identifying with the culture of the area. For instance, Bergen (Nikas &

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Oliver, 2012f) describes her "personal interpretation" of Upper East Side style, which involves a vintage take on fashion. In this way, the projected stereotypical styles of an area (e.g., Birkin bags, Chanel suits) may create a material reality that individuals resist through their personal style (e.g. street style). Thus, the material objects (fashion and style) are aesthetic forms of resistance toward hegemonic ideologies within a society (Chui-Chu, 2013; Gramsci, 1971).

Within each video examined there is evidence of the formation of imaginary communities, since many personal styles are developed through the response of primary texts and the acknowledgement of the objective reality of each borough's style. Ellen Shneider of the Upper West Side notes how the borough is perceived to society as "granola" and "preppy," which she then internalizes as part of her own personal style (Nikas & Oliver, 2012c). Conversely, Val Pacuku from Staten Island acknowledges the "Jersey Shore" stereotype of the area and resists the dominant style and cultural associations that are contained within it. The connection between the internal and objective realities involves socialization processes that affect the individual's interpretation of their objective environment (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

This concept further shows how styles may change through socialization as individuals of a particular area may engage in socialization processes that alter their interpretation of their objective reality. In addition, this exemplifies how style can be part of the socialization process and facilitate change within an area. If an individual starts displaying a style that is not part of the standard dress, then others within the area may respond to the new style either positively or negatively. Thus, an imaginary community may form in response to a particular style that resonated with her or him. For instance,

Danard Talton from Queens, stated how his style evolved from the "hood" style to a simpler look after being influenced from European styles (Nikas & Oliver, 2012d). This demonstrates how socialization processes created a response that then became part of Queens' style.

Internalization predicates the response to a style and also influences the formation of imaginary communities. In a video that takes place in the West Village, the increasing popularity of men's style is discussed as a new trend within the area. Kai Shaw states, "I just recently read an article where boyfriends are the new stylists for their girlfriends…I completely agree cause men are changing fashion…You never know what you're going to get with men's, it's more about reinventing yourself…now, especially in New York, [men] are setting the pace for the way people dress" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012g). Shaw makes the argument that while females have been reinventing themselves and viewed as knowledgeable about new fashion trends, males are setting the style for how people dress in New York (Nikas & Oliver, 2012g). In relation to male's fashion, this explains how particular styles may spread within a community over time. Further, whether males are perceived as knowledgeable about fashion may vary in other locations, and whether this knowledge may be viewed as acceptable may vary since some may perceive a fashionable male as a threat to masculinity.

The claimed rise of male fashion and their influence on style represents a community that was formed over time and successfully chained out. This may not have been a planned or a conscious act, but the styles used were able to form a collective identity. Therefore, it can be argued that the community evaluated a change of male dress positively in the West Village, and the performance of a particular style creates a

community around it. A collective identity can be formed through the response to a particular fashion between subcultures and cultural spheres. Cultural spheres act as a public forum to extend an argument beyond the private needs of individuals to the interest of an entire community (Goodnight, 2012; Habermas, 1991). These cultural spheres are emphasized through media, which are able to produce and generate discourse (Goodnight, 2012). This means that a shared positive evaluation of males as fashion leaders within a community may suggest a form of resistance to the hegemonic ideology that only females can and should be stylish and fashion conscious.

Another example of this is provided by Justin Fulton from Brooklyn, who states, "I definitely think it's harder for a guy to walk into like any store and have a lot of options, but I think it's about not being afraid to wear like a woman's piece of clothing or something unisex. It's all about how you pull it off and how you feel in it. So, if you're a guy and you want to wear a skirt, and you look good in it, go ahead" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013b). This further emphasizes how males are resisting the hegemonic forces that claim males need to follow a particular standard of dress. In this way, men are utilizing fashion similarly to their female predecessors as a way to equalize sex relations (Blumer, 1969). Fulton is also portraying a form of positive distinctiveness, since he is using fashion to creatively alter the values assigned to the particular attributes of a group. Since, in some ways, because men have limited fashion choices, they may be able to create new forms of style that create a positive identity for the fashion-conscious male through the re-articulation of female's fashion.

Style is able to produce a rhetorical response through the development of imaginary communities. Imaginary communities act as an effect of discourse and are

facilitated by new forms of technology. This specific study examines how local street styles are displayed on a global level through fashion blogs. In addition, imaginary communities cohere around primary texts and are representative of each borough's values and media influences. In addition, the representations of street style within the various boroughs of New York City exhibit how some individuals are able to resist hegemony through aesthetically grounded, material objects.

Market Contexts

Rhetoric contained within market contexts refers to the creation of a rhetorical system that spreads sign systems and their meanings on a global scale as commodities (Brummett, 2008). Brummett (2008) describes how imaginary communities thrive in market contexts, since "the realm of ideas and fantasy has now been commodified and integrated into a totalizing capitalist system, which is driven by consumption" (Stratton, 2001). An individual is able to appropriate meaning to the text (clothing item) for political purposes through the formation of imaginary communities, which will then be reincorporated into the market. An example of this is how males in certain locations are wearing female's clothing, and how this is becoming an accepted style. If this style is circulated through the formation of imaginary communities, then male skirts may be developed and distributed into the fashion market. Thus, the concept of market contexts refers to how certain styles and fashion are created and adopted by a community, then redistributed through the dominant fashion system.

While some may remark on how this creates a globalized system that leads to "cultural mass production," the impact of how an individual internalizes a particular fashion or style and performs it within imaginary communities should not be ignored

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(Brummett, 2008, p. 125). Brummett (2008) states that fashion and style are recreations of a textual node that can be re-appropriated for political purposes in imaginary communities and reinstated into the market. As mentioned previously, the commodification of the styles does not necessarily mean that individuals are disempowered in capitalist societies. Rather, commodities (specifically, style and fashion) contain symbolic meanings that can generate imaginary communities on a mass scale.

In the Brooklyn borough of Harlem, white tees are seen as male fashion staples of the area. According to Ariel Weekes, "As a culture in Harlem, cold hard dickies are being worn. That's what we do. We wear Timberlands and now it's becoming something bigger. You know it's what we have. We work in them and we also just chill in them. It's like the old soul they've always had, where they kinda make things and make do with what they have. People buy white tees by the pack" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). As mentioned in the primacy of text section, white tees unify members of the community and become representational of the in-group within the Harlem community. Thus, white tees, Timberlands, and Dickies are commodities that are grounded in symbolic meaning that can be redistributed in market contexts; however, these items may not be emblematic in other areas. This observation may suggest that white tees are symbolic only in the local area where imaginary communities are created.

Weekes also mentions that their style represents the lifestyle of members of the Harlem community. He describes how white tees are universally used to work in and to "just chill" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). White tees are thus ascribed a connotation of the Harlem community, which formulates the imaginary community. Through market

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contexts, white tees may become more popular on a global scale if the style resonates with other imaginary communities. As he also notes above, Timberlands have "become something bigger" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). In this way, street styles become part of the dominant fashion system and are able to be redistributed on a mass scale. Without a market context, these items probably would not have been able to grow into a larger representation of a community. This example also provides an instance of commodity fetishism, which occurs when power is given to material objects, rather than the labor that produced the commodity (Marx, 1990). Commodity fetishism is displayed since the intrinsic value of the item is applied to the commodity, rather than the individuals of the community.

The use of video fashion blogs containing narratives of the style of the area further assigns meaning to commodities as a way to establish a community. In the Bronx and Queens, Air Jordans are often associated with the "hood" style and include attributed values associated with the style. For instance, Gifty Safro from the Bronx states, "It's the Bronx, people do keep up or try to keep up with fashion, you will see a lot of Jordans…I love the classic look. It can never go out of style with a classy look. You don't have to worry about the next Jordans or the next Louis Vuitton bag" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012b). The Air Jordan shoes are stated as popular items within the Bronx and Queens, along with Nike shoes (Nikes & Oliver, 2012). In this way, areas with lower socioeconomic status characterize specific brands. In addition, those who follow a particular style that require active consumerism to stay on trend and maintain their status of being fashionable.

Conversely, those who engage in particular styles that do not require keeping up with current fashion does not mean that their style is not commodified and redistributed in market contexts. For instance, Zachary Gale from Queens, states that he does not follow brands and shops primarily in thrift stores. He also describes how he identifies with the punk style, which is described as wearing band t-shirts, trucker hats, and Doc Martens. This shows how commodities can contain different intrinsic values and are able to ground a particular group through the meanings of goods.

This concept is further exemplified in Staten Island when Val Pacuku describes the Ed Hardy brand as part of the Jersey Shore culture. While it can be argued that *Jersey Shore* has been able to generate a global style that is recognized by other communities, each individual has personal experiences and attribute different meanings to commodities that may not be known to those outside the area. For instance, the *Jersey Shore* television show is on a medium allowing mass distribution to diverse audiences that contains a limited portrayal of people from the Tri-State area. Yet, for those who are from the area, the style may resonate with them differently and members of the community may resist the characterizations from the show. Pacuku rejects the style associated with "Jersey Shore" and instead follows the style of celebrities Kim Kardashian and Victoria Beckham (Nikas, et al., 2012). Celebrities are strong influences on particular styles, particularly in Staten Island, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. In this way, those who identify with a celebrity assign meaning to the styles and brands their favorite celebrities wear. Thus, celebrities create imaginary communities through their branding and are able to generate goods that are put into the market, where fans can purchase their items.

The fashion system relies on capitalist market contexts in order to reiterate trends in fashion and to circulate the style to audiences. Josh Crowe from Greenpoint, Brooklyn, describes a silk, Hawaiian shirt he was wearing and states, "I was at a wedding, and I was like in 10th grade, maybe, it a was a luau theme and I remember my grandma bought me this and I was so upset about it 'cause I thought it wasn't cool at all. It just sat in the closet, waiting for silk to come back in, and silk's big now. So, it's always kinda cool to have a shirt that's in-style, goes out of style, and comes back in style, like three times, while you still own it" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013b). It is important to acknowledge that I am not arguing every commodity within a community contains an intrinsic value. Nor, does this one statement by an individual mean that every person within the area walks around in a Hawaiian shirt.

What this section aims to show is how individuals in certain areas identify with commodities. Within each area, there are different material items that resonate with the community that signify a particular style (e.g., hood style, punk style, "Jersey Shore" style). In this way, styles contain a deeper meaning and have the ability to display a higher cultural competence by being familiar with style of the area. For instance, Crowe expands on his observations and states, "The style in Greenpoint is definitely a younger crowd, than a lot of places you see. So, you tend to have people pushing it further than they would in other places. I mean, if my grandpa rolled through here, he would definitely be doing a lot of double-takes" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013b). This may not resonate with individuals, such as Ellen Schneider, who identifies with the Upper West Side's "granola" and "preppy" style. In this way, aesthetics are the basis for identity and social

organization, since commodities act as, "signs that signal subjectivity and social connection become signs that operate within the market" (Brummett, 2008, p. 145).

While these styles are consumed through a global fashion system, each area contains a local style where particular brands and goods are valued. Another example of this is mentioned by Yani Avilas from Williamsburg, Brooklyn, where she describes how the style of the area has evolved from wearing Filas, Nike high-tops, and Baby Phat jeans to people wearing expensive clothes that " looks like you're not wearing lots of money" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012). This shows how commodities serve a different function in each area, since individuals from the Bronx like to flaunt the brands they wear, and people from Brooklyn attempt to disguise them (Nikas & Oliver, 2013a). Commodities have the ability to be symbolic and contain meaning, which in turn, help solidify a community. Further, individuals use commodities as a way to express their personal identity and positively differentiate themselves from others.

Notably, those who were interviewed during New York Fashion Week also commented on unisex clothing and mixing gendered clothing to create a unique style. Preetma Singh, the Associate Market Editor for *Marie Claire* magazine, stated, "I bought these shorts, like men's shorts, and I love a big, baggy short. It's like my new love. The top is Dries Van Noten womens and the shorts are Dries Van Noten mens" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). This statement correlates to Justin Crowe from Brooklyn's comment that men should be able to wear female clothing if it looks good, as well as Kai Shaw from Greenwich Village who commented that "boyfriends are the new stylists for their girlfriends" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012g). It is possible that permeability of sex is reflected within market contexts, thus communicating an ideology of freedom and individuality

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separate from societal rules. In addition, this reduces the power of cultural binaries and contains the possibility of a third group being formed. Within a cultural sphere, fashion may contain multiple meanings that signify the hegemonic process and the forces that oppose it. Cultural binaries also function to display the duality of a subject in relation to what is dominant in society and what is subordinate. For instance, an example of a cultural binary may be male vs. female cultural binaries. Within this example of gendered fashion, it is possible that power is displayed through these binaries and the re-appropriating of these particular items diminish the power of gendered clothing that substantiate gender rules.

Market contexts create an environment where commodities are spread to the masses and are able to generate symbolic meaning. Commodities are not only objects disempowering the proletariat, but are also able to create a material reality that is able to express particular areas' ideology towards fashion and consumerism. Since fashion items are sometimes representative of cultural binaries, style can also be used to rearticulate these binaries and use fashion as a way to gather social cooperation.

Aesthetic Rationales

Aesthetics are able to influence people to connect to a text (Brummett, 2008). Brummett (2008) argues that we will live in an age that is dominated by aesthetics, and that "reasons, motives, and so forth are activated aesthetically" (p. 127). Thus, arguments are made through rhetorical appeals of aesthetics, style, and feelings within a rhetoric of style (Brummett, 2008). Brummett (2008) states that a dimension of aesthetic rationale is pleasure, which is used as a rationalization for hyper-consumption. Style may also contain "narrative values," including narrative coherence, character development, conflict

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and resolution (Fisher, 1984). Narrative coherence refers to whether characters act reliably and if the narrative is consistent (Fisher, 1984). Character development is the process of creating a character's background, appearance, and personality. Conflict and resolution refers to the conflict that may occur within the narrative and how the conflicts are solved. In this way, texts are able to contain stories about people through style and fashion, as displayed by the personal narratives provided by those documented within the video series. Style may become rhetorical in nature when an individual dresses inconsistently within a given area, and the impression created by the style succeeds or fails relative to the incoherence of the story based on the wearers' desired effect (Brummett, 2008). Further, narrative strategies can be employed rhetorically for political purposes (Butler, 1999). Common narrative strategies that are used rhetorically within fashion are parody and satire. For instance, satire is a narrative form that can be used to display anti-fashion by trivializing styles that are considered in fashion (Davis, 1992). An example of this may be how Ed Hardy clothing is often mocked due to its association with the *Jersey Shore*.

Specifically regarding fashion, aesthetics solidifies fashion as separate from the utility function of clothing. The theoretical concept of conspicuous consumption, where material wealth is displayed through clothing, would cease to exist without an aesthetic standard that deems ornamental clothing as ideal (Veblen, 1899). Historically, those who were in charge of the fashion system created the aesthetic standard to be followed in society and marked what designs were considered "in fashion." However, this theoretical assumption has largely shifted based on the narrative provided in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Yani Aviles describes how people in the area spend, "a lot of money to look

like [they]'re not wearing stuff that costs a lot of money" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013a). Thus, in this example it appears that individuals within the area are no longer trying to conspicuously convey their wealth. This may suggest that displaying wealth carries a negative connotation in some areas where other values are espoused. Or, it may imply that style functions differently depending on the context. For instance, in the Upper East Side, Rebecca Burgen commented on how "Birkin bags" and "Chanel suits" as descriptors of the style of dress in the area, yet she internalizes style differently and opts for a more vintage style that is influenced by the historic architecture of the area and old films (Nikas & Oliver, 2012f).

Similar to art, style has the ability to serve as a vehicle for ideology through homologies, which create a formal link across texts (Adorno et al., 1977; Brummett, 2008). Ideologies are expressed within style depending on how signs are configured together and whether the meanings of signs are able to cohere around the texts (Brummett, 2008). Thus, ideology is displayed through stylistic homologies to form an objective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Style is comparable to the idea of folk art, since style is an artistic expression that may later be recognized and circulated in the dominant fashion system by someone who is knowledgeable in fashion (West, 1996). Therefore, style can be categorized as folk art, since individuals create and construct utilitarian objects that convey meanings and cultural values (West, 1996). For instance, the editor of the style section of *The New York Times* selects people who display street styles that are recognized as fashionable, which are then circulated into market contexts.

Street styles may be aesthetically appealing to imaginary communities through individuals' internalization of particular items. This is largely conveyed in minority

cultures communicating pride in response to stigmatization, and dress for a distinctive identity distancing themselves from culturally dominant groups (Davis, 1991). The concept of aesthetics is largely driven by the idea of individuals who experience artistic forms through the primacies of texts (e.g., fashion items) to generate an interpretive community. Styles are considered unfashionable when they convey an aesthetic standard that is considered authentic and organic, and rejects mainstream fashion. In many ways, the portrayals shown within each area display a form of anti-fashion; however, what is considered anti-fashion is dependent on the area. Within areas such as Harlem where white tees are popular, white tees visually convey a sense of pride and identification with the area. This creates a narrative grounded on a local aesthetic standard that may not be typically labeled as fashion-forward by the dominant fashion industry and larger audiences, and is, thus, anti-fashion. Yet, within the Harlem borough, white tees represent the style of the area. In this way, individuals who display street styles are using anti-fashion as a rhetorical mechanism to counter the dominant systems in society and create a local, collective identity.

A common example of anti-fashion is the punk and grunge movement. Zachary Gale from Astoria, Queens describes how he follows the punk movement primarily because of its "authenticity" and "honesty" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012e). Thus, the style conveys a particular ideology that is displayed creatively through his style of clothing. His rejection of brands and lack of conspicuous consumption are purposefully used to reject hegemonic systems that promote capitalist ideologies. In this way, style is rhetorically used to convey resistance through market contexts. This suggests that, although the dominant structure may not be drastically altered, communities are using

style as a way to resist hegemonic control by changing an aesthetic standard of dress by the "cultural industry" (Adorno, 1977).

A further example of this is the concept of implicit norms of gendered dress. As described in the previous section, gendered clothing is changing; from the interviews in videos, it is implied that men wear women's clothing and vice versa. This form of style is another form of anti-fashion as a way to reject the mainstream. However, this calls into question whether individuals who engage in anti-fashion carry as much agency when the style is regulated into market contexts, and becomes part of mainstream culture. I think this further substantiates the political agenda of individuals who choose to wear what they want, regardless of society's codes of dress. Instead, by being put into market contexts, style has the ability to spread imaginary communities' attitudes that are reflected in aesthetic forms to generate social change. As noted in the review of literature, *telos* can be used to produce knowledge and social change within a power structure through rearticulation and can also be used to create a collective will (Ono & Sloop, 1992; Zompetti, 1997). Through the use of *telos* and rearticulation, it may be possible for fashion to transform dominant structures. In this way, *telos* is engaged by changing the ideology of something that is considered odd into an accepted norm in a culture. Thus, styles that evolve into a fashion may be able to create social change, such as gender equality.

Styles are accepted in communities if they are regarded as aesthetically pleasing, and it is apparent that within each borough examined, there is an aesthetic standard that is used to judge the style of the area. In Staten Island, there is an assumed style associated with the *Jersey Shore* television show, which Val Pacuku believes is not fashionable and

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does not constitute a style. She describes how "skimpy little tops and skirts" do not convey truth behind a culture. In this way, clothing used as a form of artistic expression needs to contain a form of authenticity in order for individuals to internalize the style. Thus, commodities contain meaning based on aesthetic bases for identity and social organization (Brummett, 2008). Style becomes a basis for identity since an individual must internalize a piece of art (fashion) in relation to an objective reality (Adorno, 1977). In this way, the internalization of a particular piece of art, or clothing, helps the individual understand the culture around them, and how they relate to that particular culture. In addition, if the accepted, mainstream fashion of the area is the "Jersey Shore" style then Pacuku is engaging in a form of anti-fashion within the area, but her style may be considered fashionable in other area.

Aesthetic theory examines how beauty and truth are conveyed in art forms. One of the arguments that Adorno (1977) makes regarding aesthetic theory is that due to globalization and technology, there is a "cultural industry" since media have created a false world or "universal blindness" to natural beauty. Related to style and fashion, it is arguable that the local, individualized styles of an area are considered authentic pieces of art since they are organic. An example of this would be Ariel Weekes from Harlem, Brooklyn who states, "A bracelet from Ghana, that kinda represents my family, I wrap it around five times, and there's five of us in my family" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). This may be considered a subjective, aesthetic expression that is individually experienced by the subject (the wearer). Yet, through the "megaphone effect" the style may become popularized and recognized by fashion communities (Turner, 2010). In this way, aesthetic appeals are what drive the formation of imaginary communities.

In Greenpoint, Brooklyn, it is interesting to observe how forms of artistic expression other than clothing form a distinct style. Jaidee Valentine describes the difference between her and her boyfriend's tattoos and states, "All of his tattoos are like small collections of like different stories of his life line, whereas I feel like mine are more like art pieces, they usually don't mean anything, they visually look good. I think like, ever since started collecting tattoos, I care a little bit less about fashion, because I feel like my sleeves are my ink, sticks to me" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013b). The street style within this area is composed of art forms separate from the fashion system. Thus, the idea of using one's body as an expression of art is a way to convey a style that is not turned into a commodity. However, from the descriptions of the individuals within this area and the title of the blog post ("Inked at Greenpoint"), having a tattoo is considered fashionable instead of anti-fashion within that specific context.

Street style and fashion blogs have been able to create audiences through aesthetic appeals of truth and beauty. This may suggest there is a shift in dominant ideology regarding material goods and conspicuous consumption. While elaborate forms of fashion were formerly praised and valued within Western society, street styles may now be more aesthetically appealing since they are perceived as authentic. From the narratives provided in the video series, it appears the editors of *The New York Times* selected street styles of each borough that conveyed an element of individuality and anti-fashion. The rhetorical use of clothing is dependent on the context, since a style that conveys anti-fashion may be considered fashionable in another borough based on the area's aesthetic appeals.

Stylistic Homologies

A homology is defined as, "a formal resemblance across different texts, actions, objects, and other orders of experience" (Brummett, 2008, p. 131). Specifically regarding street style and fashion, a stylistic homology refers to the recognition of formal properties of a distinct style. For example, an individual may recognize a particular fashion as the style of Kim Kardashian due to the convergence of nodal texts and the individual's previous knowledge and experiences with the celebrity's fashion choices. The concept of a homology is essential since it helps one understand how social life is organized and unifies a style as a coherent form of discourse (Brummett, 2008; 2009). In some ways, the concept of a stylistic homology is analogous to objectification. Similarly, objectification can be socially created through homologies to form recognized institutions and roles; thus, objectification refers to the outward displays of the individuals' internalization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

Before beginning the analysis of stylistic homologies within the selected texts, I feel it is important to describe the difference between a rhetorical homology and an analogy. Analogies refer to functional similarities between objects from a different origin, which also may contain similes and metaphors. Conversely, homologies create a link between texts as a formal system of representation (Brummett, 2008). Brummett (2008) further relates a homology to ideology as to how and whether the meanings of signs come together. Thus, an ideology of a particular borough may be conveyed homologically.

The formation of stylistic homologies are nuanced and sophisticated, since areas may contain multiple stylistic performances that speak to conflicting ideologies through

the diverse combinations of signs that appear to substantiate or challenge cultural binaries (e.g., fashion vs. anti-fashion, fashion vs. street style). These stylistic signs generally converge to create a range of possible meanings within a cultural context that each sign has (e.g., Air Jordans, Timberlands) and the formation of a homology (e.g., Bronx style), which binds the style together (Brummett, 2008). However, the performance of a certain style may be purposefully incongruent to violate the possible meanings and homology of a particular area. For instance, the displays of anti-fashion within particular boroughs are used as code violations to identify or separate themselves from a particular group through aesthetics.

A significant observation made regarding a rhetoric of style and the formation of stylistic homologies was how each selected interviewee engaged in some form of declared anti-fashion. While the styles they employed were not deemed as anti-fashion for the particular borough of which they were from, each individual reflected on how their personal style was separate from the portrayals of the style within the area. Examples of this include Gifty Safro from the Bronx stating that she follows a "classy" style since it "can never not be in style," and Ariel Weekes from Brooklyn who states, " I wear white tees because they're hot, it's not really a fashion thing" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012a). Further examples include Val Pacuku from Staten Island who declared that the "Jersey Shore" fashion of the area does not constitute a style, and Zachary Gale from Queens follows punk style due to its authenticity and rejection of brands.

Each of these examples depicts how there is an acknowledgement of a dominant fashion either within that borough or in other areas that each individual attempts to defy. This does not mean that each street style is fiercely political, but it is noteworthy that

anti-fashion may be used as a form of cultural resistance to enforce a positive distinctive identity from dominant groups. With anti-fashion, fashion is not completely rejected as a whole, but rather used strategically to convey an individual's unique personal identity within a group identity. Further, individuals within a community use other forms of style as a way to reject dominant market contexts to assert their individual identity, such as the style of their hair or body art. As mentioned above, a homology can be referred to as a form of objectification to socially create a reality of certain areas within New York City.

By examining stylistic homologies present within each area, it is clear that there is a dialectical tension regarding whether street style is considered hegemonic or counter-hegemonic (i.e., forms of resistance). Within specific contexts, particular fashion and street styles can be hegemonic or counter-hegemonic depending on the audience. The cultural binaries within each area may shift depending on the dominant and subordinate social group. For instance, in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and West Village, Manhattan, male kilts are accepted (e.g., dominant), while, in the Bronx, this style may be perceived negatively (i.e., subordinate) based on each cultural area's ideology. In this way, style contains multiple texts that affect how binaries are homologically conveyed in each area either as a form of resistance or hegemony.

For example, the borough of Queens is associated with punk style as seen through the titles of the video blog entries ("A Love for Punk in Astoria" and "Smart Comfort on Jamaica Ave.") and the highlighted interview with Zachary Gale and Gifty Safro. Within the video, "A Love for Punk in Astoria," Queens is linked to the punk style through the title, and the linkage of images to the personal narrative contained within the video to create a homology and legitimizes a particular form of social organization (Berger &

Luckmann, 1966). For instance, Doc Martens and Trucker hats become signs that are able to create a formal link to imaginary communities as signifiers of the punk style. These signs gain further meaning through Gale's personal narrative describing how the punk style is "pure" due to its absence of brands (Nikas & Oliver, 2012e). Thus, the Queens style is characterized through the connection of the texts, the blog entry, and aesthetic appeals of "truth and beauty," as a way to depict this particular individual's ideology toward fashion through a stylistic homology.

Conversely, Danard Talton, who is also from Queens, describes how he used to follow the "hood" look and that the women are "into the make-up, you know, they like to have their hair done. You see a lot of blondes out here in Queens, you know" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012d). However, he self-describes how his style has evolved with age to a more simple look. Thus, this does not align with the previous video describing punk style as characteristic of Queens; yet, both videos contain a narrative that resists the dominant fashion that is popular in the area.

Stylistic homologies are further nuanced within local areas based on subcultures that are present within the area. This may suggest that the proposed idea of distinct stylistic homologies for each borough may have been an oversimplification. For instance, it is noted in the primacy of text section that age plays a role in the formation of style in the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This implies that there are sub-styles as well as co-cultures within each borough. This may show how style is used to not only refute cultural binaries, but to create a liminal identity to resist an individual's "social-identity" that is ascribed to them by the culture they belong to; thus, liminal identities are able to generate sub-cultures (Beech, 2011). The traditional style of Manhattan does seem to contain

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distinct styles that may be able to formulate homologies. For instance, Ellen Schneider describes how she follows "age-appropriate dress" and "simple, vintage clothing." This is also described as the style in the Upper East Side when Rebecca Bergen describes her "vintage interpretation of style" (Nikas & Oliver, 2012f). The styles described in Manhattan are further described as "tailored," "sophisticated," "classic," and "lux."

In Manhattan, it appears that classic, tailored styles are the norm; yet, individuals personalize their style by adding a pop of culture or adding a print design. From these descriptions, there is an acknowledgement of formal fashion rules, and individuals engage in minor forms of differentiation from the accepted style. This is further substantiated from the titles of the videos within the area, which are "Dandies in the West Village," "Evolved Justice on the Upper West Side," "Uptown's Sharp Style," and "Keeping Cool on Wall Street." Notably, this area is also characterized by its high socioeconomic and education status (Kopans, et al., 2005-2007). Thus, this may suggest that there are fewer exigencies within this area to convey styles that contain anti-fashion that are meant to combat hegemonic ideologies.

In the Bronx, a video blog entry is entitled, "Celebrity-Inspired Fashion in the Bronx" (Osipova & Nikas, 2012). The title is supported by interviews in the video with Brandon Johnson ("Drama B") and Cheveli Gil. Both of them describe their style as strongly influenced by celebrities, such as Chris Brown, Kim Kardashian, and Rihanna (Osipova & Nikas, 2012). Johnson explains how his tattoo of his musical name "Drama B" is part of his style, and is an aesthetic form to convey his identity as a rapper. Thus, the video contains a primacy of text by referencing other primary texts (celebrities) that resonate with larger audiences (imaginary communities). This creates an aesthetic

standard that is grounded in popularized styles, specifically in the music industry. Thus, the style in this area conveys high levels of intertextuality. From these connections, the stylistic homology depicts an ideology that values media influences and celebrity culture.

However, Gifty Safro describes a "classic" style within the other video located within the Bronx (Nikas & Oliver, 2012b). Safro identifies with the style since it does not require being trendy or "keeping up" with the latest fashion. The images within the video show her wearing a knee-length skirt with ballet flats, and she openly rejects popular brands, such as Air Jordans and Louis Voitton. Despite others within the area who have "celebrity-inspired" fashion, Safro is displaying a form of anti-fashion by not engaging in conspicuous consumption, thus displaying a conflicting ideology within the neighborhood (Veblen, 1899). Even within the video, "Celebrity Inspired Fashion in the Bronx," other interviews that were included expressed individual expressions of style. For instance, Lydia Vicarrondo states, "The style in the Bronx is it can be anything…I bought this jacket from a thrift shop for five dollars, I ripped it with a pair of scissors to style it up" (Osipova & Nikas, 2013). This statement can be connected to the punk style described in Queens, since punk style is often associated with brand-less, personally altered clothing. While this may not link the two videos to form a distinct, local stylistic homology, this conclusion does help substantiate that street style largely involves the rejection of the hegemonic fashion system based the other interviews included from the other boroughs.

The Staten Island borough only had one featured video within the video blog series, so it is difficult to conclude if homologies are present within the community. Based on the single video provided, "A Trendy Rep," Val Pacuku mainly compares her

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style to the dominant fashion popularized by the *Jersey Shore* television show (www.imdb.com). Although this may not be able to be further substantiated, I believe there is a stylistic homology present within the community. There are various primary texts due to the popularity of the television show, such as Ed Hardy and characters within the show that are from the community. In addition, these styles are largely popularized and are able to form imaginary communities through the dissemination of texts through various media like television and the Internet. Further, the aesthetic standards are largely formed through market contexts. For instance, a particular fashion may resonate with an individual from a neighborhood, since they identify with a particular character from the show. In this way, the television character helps support a particular aesthetic standard. Thus, a stylistic homology is formed that creates an objectification of reality that is used to make generalizations about the community, which Pacuku rejects.

Similar to the Bronx and Queens, individuals who are part of the Brooklyn borough engage in conscious acts of anti-fashion to convey an identity separate from the dominant fashion system. As described in previous sections, Ariel Weekes believes that white tees are not part of a fashion, but rather are functional items of clothing. He believes that Timberlands and Dickies represent a lifestyle where people live and work in their clothes. He also describes how the area is "authentic" and "organic." This description is different from other videos that describe Brooklyn, specifically in Williamsburg. Within the video "L Train Inspiration," the neighborhood is described as a "very young, very trendy" community (Nikas & Oliver, 2013a). Yani Aviles further explains the neighborhood as a place that used to be where "people would wear like whatever, like Filas, like I wanted my like high tops, and, you know, like my low-rise

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Baby Phat jeans or whatever. But now, I feel like there are a lot of boutiques and a lot of money, a lot of money to look like you're not wearing stuff that costs a lot of money" (Nikas & Oliver, 2013a). This may suggest that the dominant ideology within the neighborhood may be what Weekes has described as "authentic" and "organic," and thus those who are not originally from the neighborhood may be trying to identify with others from the community by wearing clothes that look like they are inexpensive.

In the other two videos that describe Brooklyn street style ("Inked at Greenpoint" and "Superhero as Style of Mine,") the ideologies conveyed homologically align with the observation that a majority of street styles depicted are examples of anti-fashion. For instance, "Inked at Greenpoint" largely focuses on how body art and tattoos are extensions of personal style, which weakens the power of the dominant fashion system since individuals are paying less attention to trends and fads (Nikas, 2012; Nikas & Oliver, 2013b). Further, within the video, "Superhero as Style of Mine," individuals express how characters within comic books and other forms of media influence their personal style, because they internalize the characters from imaginary communities. For instance, one girl states, "I was watching X-Men one day and was looking at Storm and I was like, I need to be that. I need to be a superwoman, with this color, so I tried to go as light as I could" (Nikas, 2012). While these style inspirations are part of market contexts, they are separate from the dominant fashion system dictated by high-profile designers, celebrities, and magazine editors. Instead, street style is largely a personal interpretation of one's social reality expressed in aesthetic forms. Within each of these boroughs, and sub-boroughs, there are characterizations that speak to the ideologies and values of that specific community. Through the construction of stylistic homologies, liminal identities

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are formed within these different communities and revealed (Plump & Geist-Martin, 2013). Therefore, analyzing stylistic homologies serves as a lens into particular environments and reveals the hidden structures within hegemonic systems.

Although the stylistic homologies of each of the boroughs has been described, I thought it would be important to analyze how street style compares to the fashion displayed during New York Fashion Week, which takes place in Manhattan. New York Fashion Week is recognized globally, and classifies New York City as the fashion capital of the United States (Gilbert, 2000). Thus, Fashion week is perceived as extremely influential in predicting trends and fads that will circulate within market contexts. The narratives provided during these videos (simply labeled "New York Fashion Week Begins" and "Fashion Week: Milk Studios") largely comment on designers they are wearing, and current trends such as leather and color blocking (Nikas & Cott, 2012). Particularly, in both videos, many of the interviewees were fashion editors who commented on their love for "pattern-on-pattern" designs (Nikas & Cott, 2012). Thus, the stylistic inspirations appear to be different comparatively to the street styles conveyed in some of the other boroughs.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that individuals from all boroughs within New York City engage in a form of anti-fashion. More specifically, street style itself can be largely categorized as a popularized form of anti-fashion that may not be limited to particular styles, such as punk or grunge. A significant observation from analyzing the parts of a rhetoric of style is how homologies are formed as links between various elements, which is then able to create a response from the larger public. In addition, it may be possible that through the rearticulation of particular street styles, social norms can

be challenged (e.g., gendered fashion) to alter objective realities through the reorganization of group roles and legitimizations (Berger & Luckmann, 2012). In addition, it would be an overgeneralization to state that each area has a distinct stylistic homology, since there are many co-cultures and sub-boroughs that exist within urban environments due to the large amounts of diversity; although, there are forms of resistance that are formed to defy common stereotypes (especially in areas of low socio-economic status).

Summary

In this analysis, a rhetoric of style was examined by identifying primacy of texts, the formation of imaginary communities, market contexts, and aesthetic rationales. After analyzing each component, stylistic homologies were investigated with the boroughs of New York City. Primary texts contain symbolic meanings that attract an imaginary community. In this way, primary texts (fashion and style) are able to stimulate a response from the larger public. Once an imaginary community is formulated, these texts are iterated into market contexts and commodified; however, as mentioned in this analysis, material items often contain symbolic meaning and are able to ground imaginary communities through aesthetic rationales. These components all create a formal link across signifying systems to generate stylistic homologies.

The observations made regarding a rhetoric of style supports that each of these components are largely interdependent and work together to form stylistic homologies. Stylistic homologies are able to construct social realities and reveal local ideologies through material items. Through the narratives, titles of the videos, and visual images

within the video, the objectification of specific areas are often resisted by individuals

through the use of street style as a form of anti-fashion in specific contexts.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The concluding section of this thesis will summarize the observations found throughout the analysis regarding a rhetoric of style, as well as any limitations that were found. From these findings, ideas for further research will be examined. After conducting the analysis portion of this thesis, I feel a rhetoric of style can be substantiated as a critical method of rhetorical analysis. More specifically, a rhetoric of style proposes a critical framework for the study of fashion in everyday, urban contexts.

A rhetoric of style is a significant form of rhetorical criticism seeing as it provides insight into how individuals make judgments about an individual's place of origin and social class primarily on language, dress, and nonverbal behavior (Brummett, 2008). This substantiates that fashion does not solely serve a utilitarian purpose. Rather, it offers individuals the opportunity to construct and perform a specific identity to align or separate themselves from particular groups. Thus, the construction of a particular image is rhetorical by purposefully configuring signs to convey a message to audiences. As stated by Brummett (2008), style largely shapes the formation of culture and can serve as a construct to understand how culture and commodification intersect with each other. In addition, a rhetoric of style is arguably a contemporary form of rhetorical criticism that can be used to analyze new media forms and their cultural impact.

Prior research in fashion largely focuses on how clothing is used to support capitalist ideologies and commodify individuals; however, the popularization of street styles may develop agency, and be used as a form of *telos* to generate new social norms. As mentioned in the analysis, there is a possibility that commodities grounded in symbolic meaning may be put into market contexts to generate cultural consciousness and collective action. For instance, males wearing kilts is not typically associated as a cultural norm in the United States, but it may become a more accepted form of male dress; thus, this turns rhetorical messaging into a form of collective action since imaginary communities may engage in the style. The analysis from this study suggests that fashion is used rhetorically in specific cultural contexts through the use of anti-fashion (e.g., street style). Thus, clothing can be used as a form of resistance toward dominant structures in society through the construction of stylistic homologies that are used to express individual's personal identities.

A key finding from the analysis is how media impact the primacy of texts. A rhetoric of style considers how rhetoric is formed through various forms of media, rather than from direct experience. Thus, rhetoric can be produced without the rhetor being conscious of their actions to formulate a response from publics. An additional observation made regarding this methodology, is that the *ethos* of the rhetor may not be as important in comparison to other rhetorical methodologies, since the rhetorical response is based on the development of an imaginary community in response to the text. The development of imaginary communities can largely be associated with Hall's (1986) description of *interpretive communities*, since ideology is expressed through the meanings generated through the intersection of texts, individuals, and social factors.

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Consequently, a rhetoric of style can be used to further substantiate this topic through the identified components of primary texts, aesthetics, market contexts, and homologies.

Further, the conceptualization of homologies is used to convey how texts relate to each other to help create a system of social organization. Each borough has a dominant objectification of style, yet street style is used to create a form of positive distinctiveness from the dominant culture. In this way, individuals who belong to co-cultures engage in forms of anti-fashion (e.g., street style) to generate a rhetorical response through the establishment of imaginary communities. Thus, forms of resistance against hegemonic structures can be conveyed through commodities that contain symbolic meanings in rhetorical situations (Bitzer, 1968).

Primary texts are used to construct social identity and social affiliation as a way to display a community's values and motivations. Due to technology and forms of new media, texts are able to externalize cultures to imaginary communities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Yet, individuals may internalize texts differently depending on how he or she interprets fashion and style. What I found interesting about analyzing each of these videos regarding imaginary communities is how the selected individuals are resistant to being stereotyped through particular brands. Within the Bronx and Brooklyn, each of the individuals mentioned that they were not followers of the "hood style" and didn't wear "Jordans." Further supporting this concept, Rebecca Bergen from the Upper East Side states that she is unaffected towards the typical style of "Chanel suits." Thus, while each of these individual's aesthetically have different styles, they each reject the dominant fashion of the area. This observation suggests individuals engage in anti-fashion as a

form of resistance towards the dominant trends in the area in order to assert a personal identity.

Within a rhetoric of style, aesthetic appeals are used as a vehicle to communicate cultural ideologies of local areas within New York City. Thus, aesthetics are able to help commodities disseminate meaning to different audiences. When these components are linked together through a stylistic homology, the style forms an objectification of a social reality that facilitates social change. This analysis can be theoretically applied to the gender roles. In more than one video from multiple locations within New York City, individuals commented on how male's fashion is changing and that males should be able to wear female clothing. In this way, social norms are being defied and, when articulated into market contexts, may be able to generate social change. This further substantiates that clothing is not only used as forms of emulation and conspicuous consumption, but rather it is also a way to express the ideology of particular groups.

Building upon the concept of conspicuous consumption, I think the rising popularity of street style undermines previous fashion research that focuses on fashion as a form of oppression from the bourgeoisie (Veblen, 1899). Arguably, fashion is still used to maintain class boundaries and maintain the power of the upper class, but perhaps more attention should be given to how everyday street style is able to convey cultural ideology. In the past, many fashion studies have focused on fashion as it relates to the "extraordinary, *avante-garde*, and the unusual" rather than analyzing how fashion reflects the present (Buckley & Clark, 2012, p. 20). Buckley and Clark (2012) address how, "This perception of the everyday is hard to locate, difficult to know, and outside traditional realms of knowledge demands an alternative approach with a subject such as fashion

because of the need to counteract fashions distinct, superior, specialized, structured activities" (p. 22). Thus, there is a lack of a methodology to account for how fashion can be rearticulated and shaped as forms of resistance against the dominant fashion system through stylistic homologies. In addition, this observation concretizes the pervasiveness of street style. By limiting the study of fashion as primarily on the extraordinary and *avant-garde*, then it is possible that researchers are missing important insights to how groups redefine styles to shape their personal and group identity.

The growing popularity of fashion blogging also puts into question the power dynamics within the fashion industry. Fashion print publications used to be the dominant voice in determining what is "in fashion," but have been forced to incorporate new standards of dress to maintain their audience; hence, why the street style depictions in magazines have been increasing in popularity. In this way, fashion print publications may have to adapt to the increasing intertextual nature of fashion. By containing depictions of street styles within fashion print publications, is street style subordinated or are these publications including modes of resistance that undermine their messaging?

While this thesis supports further research for a rhetoric of style and the use of fashion as a rhetorical tool, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of this study. While the main purpose of this rhetorical analysis is to examine how street style is used as a form of resistance, the blog is featured from the popular newspaper, *The New York Times*. Thus, it can be argued that this is not representative of the fashion blogging community, since it is part of the dominant style industry in comparison to other outlets. In addition, it cannot be assumed the singular interviews analyzed within each area are representative of an entire population. Therefore, there is a risk that these areas are

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oversimplified and stereotyped by the editors of the style blog. More importantly, there also may be content that was edited out of the videos that have not been displayed to the public.

Fashion and style are also subject to change, which makes it difficult to examine as a form of resistance; fashion is constantly evolving and may convey different meanings depending on the context. While the temporal nature of fashion may implicate forms of resistance, street styles often are not as subject to change since they largely do not take part in fads or trends. Traditionally, fashion was considered hegemonic, since individuals complied to the dominant ideology that to be considered "in-style," one must keep up with fashion trends. In addition, there is a dialectical tension between the concepts of fashion and style. Whether style functions as a form of hegemony or resistance is largely context dependent, and in specific circumstances, can serve different purposes.

However, the popularity and use of street style resists the theoretical implications that fashion is used to uphold class boundaries, since individuals are refusing to conspicuously consume or emulate the upper class. I think a vital part of street style is that it often includes clothing items that are gathered over time to create an individual homology. For instance, Ellen Schneider from the Upper West Side discussed how her wardrobe has been built upon throughout her life (Nikas & Oliver, 2012c). Thus, this may complicate the dichotomy between individual forms of expression and the formation of a distinct, cultural group identity.

The temporality of fashion does undermine the effectiveness or possibility of a long-standing form of collective resistance. Similar to the meaning of words within

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language, the meaning behind a particular item of clothing is at risk of being co-opted into market contexts and, thus, losing its power. In this way, fashion is at risk of changing more easily and quickly than language. However, I believe that in specific situations, fashion can be an effective rhetorical device when exigencies are present (Bitzer, 1966). For those who are part of a social movement, the use of clothing can contain a shift in meaning to enhance awareness given an individual's past experiences, the style, and social identity. An example of this is how gray hooded sweatshirts became part of the social movement protesting the trial of George Zimmerman who was responsible for the death of Trayvon Martin. This sparked nation-wide events where people wore gray hooded sweatshirts to protest against the proceedings and rulings of the trial, and to bring awareness to the ongoing racial conflicts in society (Ehrlich, 2013; Grenoble, 2013).

Another criticism of a rhetoric of style is that a majority of the criteria for evaluating the different components are highly subjective. As noted in the aesthetics section of the analysis, style is comparable to art in many ways, since individuals may have different interpretations of homologies. Thus, it may be difficult to claim that homologies equate a form of collective action. Further, there are cultural distinctions in areas that cannot be categorized simply into geographic locations. Within each borough there are co-cultures within them that create sub-genres of style. In this way, it is difficult to state that there is a specific homology that is constructed in the area due to cultural identities. Therefore, the interpretations of homologies are reliant on the context of the environments and the viewers' interpretation of the performed style.

Regarding the methodology of a rhetoric of style, there are important applications and an expressed need for a form of rhetoric that can examine expressed styles in society.

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Yet, I do not believe that for future research, a rhetoric of style necessarily needs to be applied in a specified order. As noted at the beginning of the analysis, many concepts interrelated and coincide with one another to formulate a homology. In this way, styles may be analyzed first by recognizing homologies and breaking the constructed homologies into the various components.

For future research, I believe a rhetoric of style should be applied to fashion blogs as a way to examine how everyday people, not labeled "fashion leaders," interpret street styles. In addition, since these videos are from outsiders looking into a culture, it would be interesting to see how individuals from each of these areas respond to media portrayals. What I found fascinating from the analysis was how fashion was used differently in various contexts. I noticed that there was less differentiation and personalization in affluent areas, which made me wonder if there were fewer exigencies for differentiation. Or, within less affluent areas, I wonder if the cause of differentiation and personalization was to generate more agency through the performance of styles? Thus, people from different socioeconomic backgrounds may utilize fashion for political purposes. Further, many fashion studies focus on urban contexts as places where styles organically emerge. To further understand a rhetoric of style and subcultures, I think it would be worthy of study to examine fashion and style in less urbanized areas, since there may be less change. Additionally, the application of fashion and hegemonic processes in relation to children may be interesting to examine, pertaining to how personal identity is constructed by parents.

Overall, I believe this thesis lends new information to the theoretical concepts of conspicuous consumption, fashion, and culture. Prior research regarding social class and

fashion has largely focused on how fashion is a capitalist structure that oppresses the proletariat as they try to "keep up" with expensive standards of dress. However, this analysis suggests that the lower class may use fashion as a form of resistance and empowerment to create positive distinctiveness within or between groups. Further, the concept of fashion has been largely limited to the "extraordinary and *avant-garde*" with a lack of emphasis on how everyday street style is able to express cultural ideologies (Buckley & Clark, 2012, p. 20). Thus, "ordinary" clothing can reveal liminal identities and values through the use of primary texts. The formation of styles through homologies is complex, and cannot be isolated to singular cultures. Rather, cultural styles are complex and contain multiple elements that go beyond clothing items, which makes a rhetoric of style sophisticated and nuanced.

The conclusions made throughout this analysis suggest that a rhetoric of style can be further supported with neo-Marxism concepts. The theoretical notions of conspicuous consumption, hegemony, and commodification are able to further develop how fashion and style are used as forms of dominance and resistance. Further, these terms expand the application of a rhetoric of style as a way to analyze contemporary situations and new media, specifically within market contexts. In addition, style can be used to generate "good sense" and escape common sense raising awareness about social issues through style and fashion (Zompetti, 1997). In this way, fashion and style can be used to create alternative social attitudes to create societal change. Despite the shortcomings mentioned regarding this thesis, it cannot be debated that fashion inherently contains meanings and is able to differentiate and identify with various social groups. Thus, a rhetoric of style is

able to explain how people perceive and interpret commodities as a way to generate

social meaning.

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