‘The suited man’: Homogenous global body dress or heterogeneous style statements?

Keywords: suit / ‘new man’ / the zoot / black style / dandy / working-class lad style / homoeroticism

Abstract

According to Berger (1980) class and status can be decoded by reading the connotations of a suit in photographs. This opens the possibility of reading other key significations represented through the photographic lens of men’s formal dress in advertising and editorial images. Over the last decade academic writers have revisited key notions of the construction of the contemporary male identity through studying sexuality and fashion (Hollander; 1997; Nixon; 1996; Mort, 1996; Edwards, 1997 and Jobling; 2006). Ethnicity has been investigated through black style (Tulloch, 1992, Breward; 2003; Ross 2007) Building on this scholarship an archival and content analysis methodology was used to select key suit advertisements and editorial photographs from the last 25 years. These readings cover class, status, ethnicity and sexuality and are discussed using visual culture and discourse analysis. The aim is to assess if the wearing of the suit is still considered a homogenous formal means of dressing the body that is universally acceptable, or an important heterogeneous expression of self and identity. The readings provide an insight for stylists, advertising photographers and fashion marketers in effectively communicating to segmented target consumer audiences.

Introduction

The impetus for this study was the rereading of Berger’s essay on the ‘Suit and the Photograph.’ (1980, pp 424-431) In this text he analyses two photographs of working-class farming peasants wearing suits; expounding the importance of the cut, style and quality in the reading of class and status. Berger writes that the suit was designed in Europe as a professional ruling class costume and idealised purely sedentary power. It was for the gentleman who did not need to worry about freedom for vigorous working action. He notes that the photographs show the peasant’s suits as poor quality, loose and ill-fitting the complete antithesis of tailored clothes cut to enhance the perfect male body form. It is concluded that these photographs accentuate the class difference and low status of these working-men, by counter-pointing the suit’s origins as a men’s uniform for business. More recently Spencer writes that “The suit still rules absolutely as

what a man must wear to be taken seriously in society…while outside of bohemian circles a man is still not considered fully dressed without a tie." (1992: 40) According to Wilson fashion is acknowledged as a requiring a complex multi-disciplined form of study, (cf. Wilson, 2003) she also writes that 'Fashion resembles photography. Both are liminal forms, on the threshold between art and non-art. Both are industrially produced, yet deeply individual:' (Ibid 2003, foreward) The statement dovetails with the complexity of reading a photograph as Clarkes writes:

> "Whenever we look at a photographic image we engage in a series of complex readings… That reading…involves a series of problematic, ambiguous, and often contradictory meanings and relationships between the reader and the image. The photograph achieves meaning through what has been called a 'photographic discourse': a language of codes which involves its own grammar and syntax." (1997, pp 27)

Therefore it is considered a valid contribution to fashion studies to 'read' representations of the male identity through images of the contemporary suit.

Methodological discussion

A qualitative methodology visually charting the sartorial differences of men's business dress in the printed media was chosen to frame a sociological, phenomenological enquiry with an emphasis on meaning, language and reflection. (Hackley, 2003 pp 113) The fashion spreads, which include the British editions of style magazines Vogue, Face and ID, plus trade journals Menswear and Draper's Record are all taken from archives spanning 1980-2007 using a preset 'content analysis' framework of viewing 4 issues per year in line with the fashion seasons. The number of times a specific suit style is represented in visual form was documented from an advertising and editorial perspective "…in accordance with 'the ideals of quantification and natural science methodology'". (Rose, 2003 pp 54) The styles that were most frequently visually presented were documented and the most representative suit style advertisements or editorial magazine spreads were (where relevant) compared with historic fashion images or texts for a fuller reading of the aesthetic and cultural styles. The photographs are discussed in a postmodern perspective, which Calefato (1997, pp 82) refers to as full of 'knowing' and 'worldliness' (Calefato, 1997 pp 82) in the signification of different ideological styles and meanings. An interpretive reading of the male models, apparel and mise en scene utilised in

the photographs is ‘reflexively’ considered. Relevant Barthes-style analysis is applied to the textiles, colours, patterns and sartorial details of the suit images. Although Barthes famously discounted ‘real clothing’ as inappropriate for semiological analysis, (1990: 148-150) he attempted to construct a scientifically based language code specifically for fashion photographs. The reading of fashion through the photographic image is acknowledged as needing a complex form of cultural and semiotic analysis. The discourse therefore includes seminal writers on ethnicity, race and class such as Stuart Hall, Ted Polhemus, Dick Hebdige and Carol Tulloch.

Ethnicity and the Black male dress aesthetics

Historical analysis of African-American and Hispanic suit styles, which were frequently presented by the media as simultaneously threatening and ‘contained’ within a constructed representation of ‘humour’ or the ‘feminisation’ of black men. (Powell, 2001; pp 222) Such styles therefore involve discussion of the collective writings of many cultural studies authors. As Jobling writes quoting Homi Bhabha ‘mimicry’ is one of the effective strategies employed by colonial powers.

(2006; pp 155) Black males are often stereotyped as “the Classic Dandy” a form of feminizing and de-powering of the male (Powell, 2001 pp 217-239) highlighting the dichotomy that they are also credited with challenging the status quo in dress which is perceived as the threat of ‘other’ (Tulloch 1992: 84-85). These colonial strategies for containing the black man can be combined as in Powell’s writings on ‘Dandy Jim’ who is represented as both a figure of fun and a feminised male by his choice of dress style (2001, pp 220).The black males attention to grooming and fashion detail related to the dandy-style may be ascribed as a form of black cultural performance, a heterogeneous response to “racial oppression” (McMillan, 2003, pp 403).

The most simultaneously feared and venerated of all suit styles was the Zoot. The origin can be traced back to the American War Productions Board who restricted the use of cloth for suit-making, thus encouraging most white males to purchase suits with narrower legs and shorter jackets. This triggered the counter-oppositional over-generous ‘Zoot’ suit created and influenced by Black-Americans jazz musicians - the most famous being Cab Calloway (Lloyd Boston, 1998; pp 31 and Polhemus, 1997 pp 18-19). This exaggerated style was made with luxurious fabric, big shoulders, a long jacket and high-waisted trousers with wide cuffs, often worn with braces and a wide colourful tie. Later, accessories included the Fedora hat and gold watch chain

originating from the American-Mexican adoption of the Zoot as a badge of 'outsider' fashion. The message signified conspicuous consumption by the underprivileged American-African/Mexican and was considered dangerous and subversive. The American authorities understood this and tried to suppress the style, at least in the white communities. (McDowell, 1997 pp116) Polhemus considers 'The zoot suit was a… subcultural gesture that refused to concede to the manners of subservience,' he also describes this style as emblematic of breaking free from standard masculine stereotypical appearance and attitudes. (Polhemus, 1997; pp 18)

In England the Zoot was less extravagant and luxurious more in keeping with the working-class post-war spiv suit, but still translated as being subversive (McDowell, 1997 pp117). The English subcultural reading of the black Zoot style was further problematised by West Indian male migration during this period. As Levy (2004) illustrates in her novel Small Island, many migrants, invited as British citizens from the colonies came to the UK in the 1950s and 60s and developed their own cultural interpretation of English style and identity. Stuart Hall goes further and claims that West Indian migrants have literally "styled their way into British culture" (quoted after Gates 2000: 171). Style is a mode of confrontation and the Zoot signified black counterculture, however when a more sanitised version is worn by Caucasian male 'wanna be's' the connotations are more about being cool, different and ahead of the herd as the following spreads illustrate.

Zoots for all

'Street Sharp,' Premier Trends fashion spread, appeared in the Face (June 1992) shot in moody noir style, the inset image is of two typical Spivs lurking suspiciously outside an up-market architectural façade. The main image shows two men, one in a 3 piece suit with Fedora-style zoot hat pulled over one eye the other seated with his jacket off playing cards, gambling for money. The Spiv look is enhanced by the wide loudly patterned tie and broad braces on high-waisted trousers. The setting is in an empty Soho-style restaurant and the atmosphere created is tense. An earlier 1983 Face spread shows the black designer Charlie Allen modeling one of his 'classic' wide-trouser suits. The left hand page portrays Neil Jordon the writer-director in a long jacket with two-toned baggy trousers seated on a stair well in London. Both photographs show young talented men wearing versions of a Zoot to highlight their subversive stance on fashion and culture. More recently the designer Jill Sander's menswear is styled in ID (Feb.06) on a tall white model wearing a loud check Zoot jacket with skinny jeans. The left hand page shows the same model in a large check suit with high-waisted trousers worn with brothel

creeper shoes, creating a postmodern ‘bricolage’ of the ‘Zoot’ with the ‘Ted’ and feminized slim-cut suit.

Moving to the American-African/Mexican version of the original Zoot, a pastiche Face spread ‘Brothers in Yarn’ (Feb.1989) shows the models from a Hispanic ethnic background. The right-hand spread shows one brother with a kiss-curl hairstyle gazing sultrily, but with direct eye contact to the camera. He wears a white shirt with oversized collar and an untied silk patterned bow-tie with braces and a belt on high-waist zoot style trousers. (Ross, 2006) The look is confident and defiant. Jobling utilizes Dyer’s scholarship of the male pin-up to discuss the importance of the male gaze in fashion photography ‘…his look must connote self-assurance and confidence…in line with dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity.’ (Jobling, 2006; pp 151)
The second spread shows his brother on the right-hand page with a Cab Calloway hair-style, over-sized jacket and beautiful styled floral-patterned waistcoat and silk kerchief, similar to Entwistles description of the Regency Dandy, Beau Brummell. (2000; pp160-161) Here the ‘Zootie’ is feminised with Dandy accessories but the mood is dangerous and subversive in keeping with the cultural origins. Here it is worth returning to Polhemus’ analysis of the Zoot being emblematic of breaking free from standard masculine stereotypes in appearance and attitudes. (1997; pp 18) Another version of the Zoot is represented by the Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto who’s loose fitting traditional Japanese cut is fused with the western Zoot signification. An ID (Jan 2006) spread epitomises this; shot against a car dump and an urban back street staircase. Both gestures and gazes are reminiscent of the American-Mexican Zootie, with a touch of Elvis Presley thrown in to signify white American trash. (Ross, 2006) Large fashion companies, stylists, photographers and fashion editors whose job it is to promote and communicate new trends often use class and culture (Lewis, 2003 p 176) to try to reverse the obviousness of capitalism. These have in the past included ‘Grunge’, ‘Heroin Chic’ and ‘The White-trash Trailer Park’ aesthetic but now also contains references to ‘The Black Dandy’ and Player Chic’ the flamboyant style of pimps and street hustlers. (Powell, 2003 pp 230) The suits in these photographs all conotate individual identities within the parameters of formalized business apparel. However, they do not rigidly follow the contours of the male form in order to emphasis broad shoulders, slim waist and the long limbs of the classic English gentleman’s suit. Instead the men regardless of ethnicity portray a looser, more casual street style favoured by Black-Americans and Hispanics, the countercultural Zoot.

Images of Afro-centric design aesthetics

One other suit trend recognizable from the archive style magazines is the vogue for a return to 'African Cool' roots, which utilizes African textiles, prints and designs. This is epitomised by the couture tailor Oswald Boateng whose fusion of African design with traditional tailoring was promoted through his spring/summer 2002 Tribal Traditionalism collection using vivid colourways, embroidered shirts and beaded belts inspired by his own Anglo-Ghanian heritage of African prints. (Beazley, 2002; pp 42-43) Vogue October 07 (pp 95) editorial photograph shows Duro Olowu from Lagos, brought up in Nigeria in his Portobello Road boutique wearing an earth-coloured double-striped suit with trainers and an African batiq-print t-shirt. The wall-paper has a graphic-style mono African repeat pattern that is based on the symbolic design worn by warriors before battle the code meaning "I am brave and fearless." (Relph, 2007; pp 5) The foreground illustrates other typical African textile design swatches of 'Bokolanfini-style' mud coloured stripes on the flooring. (Ibid pp 4) Olowu's pose is casual, relaxed and proud almost to the extent of being defiant of western aesthetic styles.

To explore the traditional tailoring style of both the African-American and the Black-British tailors needs the understanding that many West Indians have the capability of designing and making their own clothes. Tulloch observes that the finished self-designed garment was an important expression of an individual's heterogeneous image *and* their homogenous collective black identity (Tulloch 1999: 112-114). The 1991 collection of black male fashion images published in I-D and Face makes it clear that the blurring of street style with Savile Row tailoring has developed into a "coherent sartorial or social identity and offers the notion of 'difference' as a positive engine for cultural expression" (Breward 2003: 126). This contextualizes the 1990's style magazine shots by Jason Evans of Edward Enninful, which are now considered iconic photographs of the decade. At the time they were taken Edward was just a model and not the self-made stylist and famous fashion editor of today. This iconic image represents black British aesthetics and is now available as a limited edition print at the Tate Modern, London. The photograph shows Edward wearing a fully fitted English-Gentleman's suit jacket worn with matching cropped trousers that could have been used for hunting and fishing activities in the 18^{th}-19^{th} century. However he re-appropriates and subverts the origins by sporting a black polo-neck and large gold medallion with an African bead bracelet. The neck-jewellery has contemporary connotations of rap and hip-hop but this style can be traced back to African tribal roots that dictated the status and identity of the individual. 'The Afro-centric look which became prominent late in the eighties reflected rap's renewed determination to assert black cultural

identity and roots.' (Polemus, 1997 pp 107-108) This black African aesthetic included eclectic mixes of postmodern bricolage, which blended traditional African fabrics and loose comfortable black styles with designer suit brands, trainers and heavy gold jewelry. (Ibid 107-108) This is best summarized by Storey writing on Hebdige (1979) "('bricolage') by which youth subcultures appropriate for their own purposes and meanings the commodities commercially provided. Products are combined or transformed…to produce oppositional meanings." (Story; 1993; pp 121) He cites relevant suit examples, which include Teddy Boys wearing Savile Row Edwardian jackets. So despite the aristocratic reading of the suit style, the accessories are Afro-centric and the background location is firmly lower-middle-working class with an unkempt grass lawn, loose brick-work and sand-rendered house walls. His facial expression and pose is defiant and full of attitude which parallels a beautiful old mono street photograph of a young Harlem dandy wearing a tailored jacket, tie and hat with plus fours. He is captured on film roller-skating in the main road of a New York down-town street. Like Edward, although nothing is known of the actual date, location or identity of this boy he is the epitome of black sartorial street style of the period (Boston, 1998; pp 42-43). Here Hall's discourse is a useful analogy for deconstructing the photograph, he writes, quoting Kobena Mercer, that the language of (black) migrants – and I suggest to extend this to the 'language of fashion' – manages to "decentralise, destabilise and 'carnivalise' the linguistic domination of 'English'", i.e. the performance of 'English' traditional styles" (Hall 1994: 402). The following two spreads directly contrast with the above notion and establish the social-cultural differences that can be read into suit styles.

Images of Aristocratic English styles

The Dandy is represented in advertising and editorial pages as either from the aristocratic heritage of Brummell's Savile Row's elite tailoring or from a more flamboyant colourful notion of the artiste and modern socialite Oscar Wilde. 'Baudelaire remodeled the dandy as a modern hero, a political, spiritual and social revolutionary.' (Breward in Cicolini, 2005; pp 10-11) A Gieves advert illustrates this by featuring a young man standing in the fields wearing a version of this English riding jacket, while holding a sword and sporting horse-riding style boots. The connotation is of an officer and a gentleman befitting the Savile Row address. The suit jacket is well cut to the male form but worn open exposing a striped business shirt with a cravat of the same material tied in place of a conventional tie. Hardie Amies considered the repository of all knowledge on English dress identified the key features of a gentleman's English suit as originating from the tight-fitting riding jacket. (1994, pp 43) This image clearly connotes the heritage of the aristocratic dandy but updated for city business rather than just indulging in

sporting leisure activities. The suit quality, form and cut signify his status and class – the complete antithesis of the peasant workers in Berger's paper. (1980, pp 424-431) The second image is from the British Menswear trade magazine and shows a young man in an Edwardian style brown striped frock coat and matching trousers, with cream satin waistcoat and long pointed cuffs protruding from the jacket. The collar is long and contemporary as is the tie but his hair, general posture and facial expression signifies a confident man from a privileged public school background. His personality and general demeanor can be paralleled with the designer and television presenter of interior make over shows Laurence Lewelyn-Bowyn who comes from a similar class background but fits the more flamboyant bohemian style of dress befitting his occupation. Here the Englishman is aware of his heritage and the dress performance conotates the Imperialist class-structured societal background of the flamboyant Dandy.

The working-class lad suit style

Berger argued that the working-class peasants looked undesirable in their suits but the 21st century has made the working-class slim-lad style popular for many strata's of society. It is argued that the trend towards a slim-cut suit can be traced to the mod culture of the 1960's and certainly many of the pop stars of the past 40 years have worn a version of this shape. Pop star Marc Bolan considered that 'The Mod was mentally a very homosexual thing, though not in the physical sense.' (Jobling, 2006 pp 1144) The slim cut (or '0-size') style signifies a younger more popular culture cut and examples include The Libertines and now The Baby Shambles. The '0' size fashion originates from the USA and translates as a UK size 4 dress size, when size 6-8 is generally stocked as the smallest in most fashion stores. This skinny look is directly linked with music, drugs and popular culture and has now been adopted as fashion by young men, who look like boys or young girls in androgynous skinny suit styles. This '0' size style in men's wear would translate as a UK 34" chest and 24" waist (or smaller) and is perpetuated by male models and pop stars in the fashion media. (GQstyle.com 02/01/2008 pp 1) The media also report a culture of being cool by association of not eating properly and drug taking which has encouraged this heroin chic look for men. An editorial spread appeared in the Face (Feb 1996) titled 'Hey Hey! It's the Junkies' shows the stars of 'Trainspotting' suited and booted with an inset film clip of the drug paraphernalia of their lifestyle. The suits are all '0' sized worn with white unbuttoned collars and thin ties. Ewan McGregor wears a gold earring generally not accepted as business attire. (Ross, 2006) An advertisement for Ben Sherman mimics this, two men and a girl shot against a black-painted wall, the middle model is wearing a '0' size black suit with white shirt undone at the collar and very thin tie. The attitude and pose is a fusion of

the editorial style press coverage of pop celebrities. Hugo Boss has a double page spread (Face, March 1996) that features the same model four times. He is wearing a '0' size dogs-tooth suit against a curtain backdrop that signifies photo-booths and the Andy Warhol notion of '3-mins of fame' is read in association with the fashion advertisement. A Miu Mui spread (Face, Sept 2002) has repeat images of the same model in various poses wearing a '0' size black jacket, skinny-ribbed top and trousers that accentuates the thinness of his male body. (Ross, 2006) Sociological notions of body discourse are useful here. Corrigan (1997 pp152-154) discussed the fact that in order to sell commodities such as clothes 'the body must be seen as something that floats about the world signifying things about the status of its 'owner'…' He then cites Foucault as seeing the body as an effect of discourses and how the body is disciplined for the purposes of advertisements. He continues by discussing Marcel Mauss on the representation of the body in Hollywood film, which affirms the fashion spread marketing strategy that is inherent in '0' size styling 'The body, indeed, becomes living evidence of the care (or lack of it) lavished upon it: we judge at a glance if someone has or has not maintained their body through the 'proper' diet, fitness practices…' (Corrigan,1997; pp 157).

A photograph appearing in Fashion Now 2 of the Japanese designer Mihara Yasuhiro features a thin girl standing while a fragile male model sits in a chair at the foot of a grubby stairwell. He wears '0' size trousers, which are baggy on his skinny frame, accentuated by long white shoes. The top half shows a white shirt with narrow tie. His hair is long and unkempt his face pallid and wan. The reading is a reverse of conventional male/female roles as he sits while the girl stands, signifying frailty and a body in need of care. (Ross, 2006) This popularizing of a male feminized form, or androgynous look brings the discussion to the 'new man' phenomena constructed by the fashion media.

Homoeroticism and the Heterosexual 'new man'

Up to the 1980's fashion photography connotated masculinity in an exclusive heterosexual way, but photographers such as Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts produced homo-erotic work for advertising this appeared in British publications of the Face, Arena and ID, which was perpetuated as a metrosexual editorial style as well as the commercial marketing of global fashion brands. (Jobling, 2006 pp 144) The advent of the 'new man,' which many writers explain as a marketing descriptor or publicity hype to target the 18-35 year old male white-collar worker who was more interested in appearance and looking fashionable in their business attire. (Edwards; pp 74 Mort, 1996 pp 122-123; Nixon; 1996 pp 35 and Jobling, 2006 pp 144) This

according to Jobling covered ‘different masculine typologies, from style leaders…to caring, sharing partner or father figure.’ (2006, pp 145) This evolved in many cases to images of feminized, androgynous and even homo-erotic representations in fashion advertising. Using stylists such as Ray Petri and Simon Foxton this shift in masculinity was communicated through mainstream style media. ‘Men have been depicted unashamedly as narcissists, preening and showing off their well-honed bodies’ (Jobling, 2006; pp 144) or as previously discussed ‘frail androgynous’ male frames. The discussion of the last three advertisements of men in suits all draw on cultural and semiotic readings of class, ethnicity, race and sexuality in order to update Berger’s seminal essay on the ‘suit and the photograph’. (1980) The Rockport advertisement for Reebok entitled ‘I’m comfortable being a man’ (1998) shows an African-American man in a tight-fitting tweed suit, worn with formal collar and tie and heavy brogue-style shoes for comfort rather than style. He holds a long walking-stick placed erotically between his parted legs and stares straight at the camera/audience with an assertive strong expression. The stick has polysemous connotations starting with the homo-erotic fantasy of black men having larger penises than Caucasians. This is actually more attributable to the Freudian and Lacanian notion of the power of a phallus that is perpetuated through African art and culture. As Jobling writes quoting Kobena Mercer “‘the fantasy of the big black willy – that black male sexuality is not only ‘different’, but somehow ‘more’ – is a fantasy that many people, black and white, men and women, gay and straight, continue to cling on to’ (Jobling, 2006 pp 153-154). The second textual reading comes from the stick perceived as powerful because of the African historic associations of a Staff, Yoruba weapon or Knobkerrie that have ceremonial and symbolic counterparts and is still preserved for rituals by chiefs and their societies. (Smith, 1967; pp 87) The third reading comes from the Black-American past of black man as minstrel or song and dance entertainer epitomized by the late Sammy Davis Junior. Powell’s documentation of an anonymous photo entitled ‘Struttin his Onions’ illustrates the Staff covered in animal print but held by a white gloved black Dandy wearing a European fashioned-suit, the spectacle recorded in 1927 was that of ‘absurd, and therefore hilarious.’ (Powell, 2003 pp 218-9) The difference in this 1998 image is that the black man’s suit connotates power, sexuality and a style aesthetic to be admired and emulated. The clearly constructed homo-erotic power of this heavily styled and posed Rockport shot is the fashion photographer’s phallic fantasy that has now become mainstream eye-candy for all viewers.

The second advertisement for Moschino also connotates homoerotic fantasy but the fantasy refers to the Hispanic/Latino look. This black and white tightly cropped portrait shot shows a

man that has more than a passing resemblance to Rudolph Valentino in hair-style, pose and smoldering eroticism. This comes mainly from his dark features and direct piercing eye contact with the camera. The suit worn is classic in style and dress with a white shirt and silk patterned tie. However the subversion of the European business suit comes with the model's accessories of huge gold gypsy style ear-rings. This signifies ambiguous polysemous readings of the femininized male, a mimicry of the Latin ethnic origins and a symbolic homo-erotic reading, all can be considered significations of differing 'otherness'. The similar 1920's shot of Valentino from a fanzine website shows the same ambiguous sexual prowess he possessed over all his cinema viewers.

The third spread is from Kenzo (Face, March 1996) has images of blue cotton flowers on the left and on the right are two young aristocratic Dandies smiling contentedly at the camera. Although the flowers could be read as just a symbol of nature anchored by the copy-line, they also can be signified as having feminine associations. Both the models have confident facial expressions and pose with their hands in their pockets, a stance that the public school Eton used to discourage as it had fueled the myths of homosexuality often associated with boarding schools of young upper-class males. A review of Fraser's book on Eton (2006) in the Guardian stated 'Etonians appear arrogant…closet homosexuals…or at the very least, as Alan Bennett puts it, "exotic creatures"…'(education.guardian.co.uk/publicschools 02/01/2008 pp 2). Homo-erotic fantasies can be stimulated by these two young Adonis-like males as they look at the viewer. Their suits are made of well-cut linen and cotton in baby blue colour-ways, worn with contrasting and matching waistcoats and for a more casual styled look T-shirt and open-necked shirt. But the dapperness of the apparel and posture clearly signifies their English upper-class Dandy-heritage.

Conclusions on 'The suit and the photograph' in a Postmodern context

Since Berger's essay in the 1980's the well-cut suit is no longer the limited provenance of just the privileged English aristocrat or flamboyant dandy and does not solely signify a European ruling-class business uniform involving sedentary power. The suit can be considered a self-expression of the individual's style, personality, ethnicity and even sexuality rather than a homogenous business uniform. According to Jobling there is a definite 'blurring of distinct straight and gay identities that dressing up in uniform engenders…' (2006, pp 150) As Britain and America become more multi-cultural the Black aesthetic and Hispanic/Latino suit styles are not considered threatening or a sign of under-privileged working-class minorities by the white

male consumer but rather exotic and exciting. In fact the Spiv or urban mobster suit style has become embedded in British culture through film, music and television and is just another genre to be ‘bricolaged’ by the style press in a ‘worldly’ way that is then reinterpreted by a knowing postmodern fashion consumer. Calefato’s article on the language of fashion provides relevant insights by discussing the postmodern concept of ‘bricolage’ as a sense of style that could originally have been considered as “social crimes”. This relates to the black dandy or Hispanic spiv as the reading of the code of ostentation signified ‘distinctive features which “denaturalizes” discourse’, thus revealing its new semiotic status. (1997, pp 83)

The British dandy suit style is open to interpretations from all nationalities and demographic classifications. The tight-fitting jacket and trousers originating from the riding apparel of the English gent has now re-appropriated itself via the Mod into a slim-cut working-class lad suit popularized by the pop star drug-culture that re-enforces this style.

If class was the main reading of Berger’s essay, ethnicity, race and sexuality can also be decoded from fashion photographs. Fashion is a definite mode of confrontation but now the suit and accessories present opportunities to move away from a homogenous uniform to express ones ‘self’ image. Since the 1980’s men’s or unisex UK style magazines may have become the new communication vehicle for menswear fashion advertising and editorial coverage but these media institutions are also reflections of the shift in societies more accepting attitudes to demographic status changes, multiculturalism and sexual tolerance. However the acceptance of style differentiation is also critical to renewing consumer interest and selling more suits. The style differences identified through this study can help develop marketing strategies and fashion advertising that is representative of a more democratically fashioned society not just the privileged high-end consumers, supporting the conclusion that a suit can be a heterogeneous style statement.

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