

DAYNA TORTORICI

## YOU KNOW IT WHEN YOU SEE IT

**W**HAT IS THE “hipster feminine,” and why are attempts to define it so unsatisfying? Reach for names, and you wind up with artists — claiming as icons of hipsterism those accomplished women of this and past generations who appeal to hipster taste: in painting, Elizabeth Peyton; on film, Chloe Sevigny; in music Karen O., Kathleen Hanna, and Kim Gordon, representing the '00s, '90s, and '80s, respectively. There's Deanna Templeton, Beth Ditto, Joanna Newsom, Björk; even crowd-pleasers Zoëy Deschanel, Diablo Cody, and MIA. But you can't in earnest call these women hipsters, save in wanting to knock their particular achievements. Their honest roots lie elsewhere — so they don't quite fit the bill.

Almost by definition, real hipsters are *not* artists. They're curators and critics, re-mixers and designers,

the copywriters and “prosumers” who trail in the artists' wake. At best, it seems, they're art students: aspiring cultural savants who collect the names and slogans of past avant-gardes to hoard or brandish conspicuously, like capital.

Or — in the case of many women — like *clothes*. It's telling that once adopted or sanctioned by hipster taste, those would-be exemplars of the hipster feminine are not praised for their art, but repurposed as style icons: Chloe Sevigny for Opening Ceremony, Chan Marshall (a.k.a. Cat Power) for Chanel. Karen O. of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs has contributed as much to culture with her haircut as her music — a hairdresser in Los Angeles once told me that “the Karen” was briefly a mid-aughts answer to “the Rachel” — and Enjoy-your-style.com now celebrates Kathleen Hanna of the riot grrrl band Bikini Kill for outfits that were “fun, even sexy” — words unlikely to please the composer of “Suck My Left One” and “Resist Psychic Death.” Even Jenny Holzer has a line for Keds: a set of monochrome canvas high-tops that plead, in sans-serif all-caps emblazoned across the heels, “PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT” — \$75 from Bloomingdales.

It points to an unsatisfying partial-truth: that the female hipster's privileged knowledge is not subcultural, intellectual, or even pseudo-intellectual, but the familiar “female” knowledge of how to look. Knowing when side bangs have given way to short

bangs or when lace-up dress shoes have usurped casual slip-ons doesn't work within a power structure to push against its walls. If anything, it fortifies that structure from the inside, providing it the braces and supports — exclusivity, envy, aspiration — that sustain the fashion industry.

If women disappeared in the conversation that sought to articulate male hipsters — the one that noticed men dressing differently, adopting funny style markers like tight pants and cardigans that signified a shift in identity — it's likely because the people having that conversation saw (and maybe see) no novelty in women dressing to fit a culture. The reduction of female artists to "it girls" only seemed to confirm the sense that clothing *was* women's true culture, their familiar domain. This line of thinking saw the phrase "hipster female" as a redundant banality, and the women who walked arm-in-arm with Williamsburg's hipster men merely variations on fashionable, non-hipster women. It assumed, in other words, that a "true" hipster female didn't exist: if hipsters were fashion victims, then all women were hipsters, and therefore none were.

This of course isn't true — we all know hipster women, and non-hipster women. For both sexes, hipsterism is mostly a play of surfaces, a game of outward signification (a hipster is someone who looks like a hipster; "I know it when I see it," as Justice Stewart

said of obscene pictures); but whereas the hipster male could be pinned down by a set of simple cues, the hipster female receded into a network of complex signifiers — and so those of us looking for hipster women in sartorial details were looking in the wrong places. Ultimately, it seems to me that the physical appearance of the female hipster mattered less to her definition than the *presentation* of that appearance, and the media she chose for that self-presentation.

I'd argue that for the hipster female of 2004 onward — the one that emerged when I started paying attention — those media were party photography and self-photography, the two amateur forms most championed by the hipster. At the height of her fame, authenticity, desirability, specificity, inventiveness — her "roundness" as a character — the female hipster existed before the camera, photogenic and photographed; and so it was here, through the lens, that the hipster feminine came into definition. She may have remained a muse and a subject, flattened and available for exploitation. But if so, she was a muse for herself, and for other women.

**T**RACE THE ORIGINS of the hipster photographic aesthetic evinced by party- and self-photography, and all roads lead back to the Polaroid. In the work of the decade's most noted hipster photographers — Terry Richardson, Juergen Teller,

Dov Charney, the late Dash Snow — need it be said all men? — even those photographs shot on digital or traditional film clung to the Polaroid's visual vocabulary: over-exposed flash, a risqué amount of flesh, a thin palette of muted ambers and blues. For its characters the hipster aesthetic took pale, slender-thighed women with tousled hair and smoky eye makeup — models plucked from the Polaroid casting-call portrait — and prop men who, if dressed at all, dressed for the medium: athletic socks, white tees, tight-fitting pants, and mustaches, as if stepping into the Polaroid frame meant stepping into the styles of the '70s.

The Polaroid SX-70 was released in 1972, the only mass camera before the digital that could do what the new technology does: render photographs that were both instant and private. The years in which digital cameras were becoming cheaper, more accessible, and good enough to compete with film led up to the Polaroid Corporation's bankruptcy in 2001, and its ultimate discontinuation of instant film in 2008. There were plenty of new things you could do with the digital medium's differences (Photoshop distortion not the least of them), but for hipsters, tying the new, cheap, and soon-to-be ubiquitous medium to a rare and dying form was preferable. With its roots in basement porn, modeling headshots, and crime scene photography (Polaroid integral film required no additional processing; the image couldn't be tampered

with or enhanced), the look of the older stock seemed to imbue all subjects with a sexy authenticity. It spoke to the hipster moods of irony and nostalgia, the hipster fetishes of obsolete media and tactile souvenirs. But best of all, it offered paradoxical claims to a lo-fi rawness and the possibility of self-construction — that ability to watch one's own image appear on film, and then adjust, and shoot again — for which digital media had whet the appetite. Even amateurs could stage "spontaneity" in two dimensions, looking as one had when passively, unfakeably "captured" by the camera.

And then there was Andy Warhol, that illegitimate father of hipsterdom. Warhol all but disappeared at parties "unless he was taking pictures with his Polaroid camera," as fellow photographer Burt Glinn recalled; and for all the talk today of his post-modernism, Warhol's photos and films were works of obsessive authenticity. Each Polaroid and screen test suggested the presence of a real person on the other side of the camera, alive at a unique moment and manifesting herself for a merely recording lens. Transvestites, starlets, addicts, socialites, hustlers — they turned gruesome rarity into glamour. *Life was like this*, Warhol's camera declared, and after him the Polaroid seemed inextricable from such claims. Riding on Warhol's legacy, Polaroid-wielding aesthetes of later decades sought similar intimacy and glamour in

the New York club scene. And thus, in 2004, hipster party photography was born.

**T**HAT YEAR, celebrity photographer Jeremy Kost found “inspiration in the eclectic and gritty characters of New York’s famed underground East Village and Lower East Side,” and began snapping real Polaroids of hipsters and the “fashion elite” to scan and display on his website, RoidRage.com (tagline: “Where Life Becomes Art”). Also in 2004, Mark Hunter, a Los Angeles-based party photographer known by his online handle “The Cobra Snake,” started to capture a younger set of raucous, bicoastal hipsters for his own website, PolaroidScene.com. (Hunter later renamed the site “The Cobra Snake” after receiving several letters from Polaroid’s legal department, which claimed his photos of wasted, underfed rich kids and tattooed scenesters were tarnishing the brand. “[They said] they would sue my ass if I didn’t stop using the name,” Hunter told an interviewer for the self-described taste-making site TheBrilliance.com. “The good thing is now I’m better off. People would always say, ‘Hey, that’s not a Polaroid camera.’”)

Last, and perhaps most famous of the Polaroid-inspired hipster photo blogs, was LastNightsParty.com (also 2004), brainchild of the Canadian musician Merlin Bronques, who claimed in his artist bio, “Photography is more rock and roll than rock and roll is.”

Bronques was infamous for donning a glossy wig and sunglasses at night (a Halloween costume-cum-Warhol homage, as Melena Ryzik noted in a 2005 *New York Times* article), and for coaxing salacious poses out of attractive, inebriated women at high-profile New York parties. Like Kost and Hunter, Bronques photographed celebrities, socialites, twentysomethings, and the new “gritty characters,” self-conscious performers who populated the social demimonde — drag queens, porn stars, and burlesque performers.

Most of the events captured by all three photobloggers were corporate brand-sponsored after-parties held at major venues — a launch party for Sony PlayStation; another for the British clothing company Ben Sherman; another for Patrón tequila. But for Bronques and Hunter, occasional photos of a friend’s birthday party or a day trip to a “hip” neighborhood offered more offbeat illustrations of how hipsters spent their time. The girls always looked good, if a little dead in the eyes. Not everyone was a famous person, but everybody looked like one.

While neither Bronques nor Hunter ever shot Polaroids (both used, and still use digital cameras), Last Night’s Party and The Cobra Snake themselves retained something of the Polaroid’s evidentiary power. As early as 2005 both sites were being cited as hipster notaries: grace these virtual pages and you were “officially” a hipster (went the logic), and upon that

principle further claims of identification or disavowal could be built. Carles, the mystery blogger behind the pop-sociology website HipsterRunoff.com, once denied (and confirmed) a certain level of hipsterdom, stating: "I have only been on cobrasnake 2 times + last nights party 1 time." A little differently, the web-trawling bros who documented their study of "The Game" on the seduction forum RooshV.com settled a debate over whether "hipster chicks" were "hot" enough to warrant their use of mind-control techniques by agreeing to look at photos on Last Night's Party. (The verdict: hipster women could "be hot — really hot," but exacted hidden costs: "I don't feel like sitting around talking about The Arcade Fire and Andy Warhol all night.")

The seducers were right to point to these sites for their hipster definition, since from them emerged an image of the female hipster that was remarkably stable and distinct — varied as the women who embodied it doubtless were beyond the camera's field of view. The hipster female was thin, and often had bangs; she wore red lipstick and horn-rimmed glasses, leather jackets and second-hand dresses. But more consistent than her outfits were her poses: placed before the camera she stared right into it — either disaffected, or deer-in-headlights — or, tilting her chin down to one shoulder, mustered a thoughtful pout or puckered lip. Then sometimes she got up on a table, took off her pants, stuck out her tongue, or downed a 40 while

collapsing into a crowd of revelers. Mostly, though, she just stared, unsmiling, looking seductive, or bored.

From these postures emerged intimations of a personality. Dozens upon dozens of party photos testified to the essential "chillness" of the hipster female — whether that meant "chill" with smoking American Spirits on a stoop with Vincent Gallo, or "chill" with taking off her shirt for strangers. (Toplessness remains a major trope on Last Night's Party, as essential, in a way, as it is to *Girls Gone Wild*.) Hipster women could also be, as one Gothamist blogger put it to Bronques in an interview, "hot/interesting" — but never hot/interesting at the expense of being chill. Mark Hunter once said his favorite girls were "girls who sit on the floor, who have a relaxed attitude about things," and that his favorite photographs were "pictures of skinny girls who sit on the floor." And so these were the photos his audience saw: pictures of hundreds of chill, skinny girls, sitting on the floor.

**H**UNTER'S IDEAL of hipster chillness was perhaps best embodied by Cory Kennedy, his one-time girlfriend, intern, and muse, who was perhaps the most iconic hipster female to be born of aughts-era party photography. Kennedy was Hunter's Edie Sedgwick, an effortlessly photogenic teenager whom he met, as he recounted in a *LA Times Magazine* feature, at a Blood Brothers concert at the El Ray when

she was only 15. As he began to take her to parties and feature her in his photos, Kennedy became famous for being famous, especially among the computer-bound suburban girls who loved her simply for looking the way she did: pale and skinny with tangled brown hair, poky elbows, bruised knees, and waxy, hooded eyes. She wore tattered black tights and chunky jewelry up her arms, would sit down on any floor and do goofy, childish things, like play with her food or stick out her candy-stained tongue while those around her rubbed traces of coke from their nostrils and tried to look sexy. Whenever Hunter posted pictures of Kennedy on *The Cobra Snake*, web traffic spiked. Mostly, Hunter told the *LA Times*' Shawn Hubler, "from fashion community sites."

So Kennedy, too, became a style icon, not only in the US but also in places like Holland and Argentina. She inspired legions of young women around the world to try out their self-photography in her image, and they did — displaying their results on social profiles, LiveJournals, and personal blogs. On dating sites like Nerve.com and in eBay vintage "stores" — where entrepreneurial ladies modeled and sold the fashions proffered by hipster photo blogs with searchable titles like \*\*\*VINTAGE HIPSTER INDIE BOHO FLORAL-PRINT ROMPER CORY KENNEDY!!!!\*\*\* — self-photography became a way to privately test out oneself-as-hipster,

to hide under bangs and sit, in tattered tights, on the pavements of one's own neighborhood.

At the peak of Cory-mania in 2006 or 2007, self-photography was already a familiar cultural practice, as essential to the construction of an online persona as a list of one's favorite movies, books, or people. And so the hipster female's self-construction dovetailed with the existing habits of the mainstream, where people were already in the middle of figuring out how to package and present themselves for others. The internet, after all, was not for hipsters alone.

But if the female hipster of four or five years ago once set herself apart with self-portraits that subscribed to the hipster aesthetic — blinding flash, dead-on stare, off-kilter angle, or Cory Kennedy outfit — today she's among the majority. This past June, the *New York Times* ran an article in Fashion & Style offering tips for self-photography (now a more widespread phenomenon, argued writer David Colman, thanks to technology like the self-facing iPhone camera) with the assistance of DJ/hipster photographer Rachel Chandler. The accompanying slideshow of Chandler's self-portraits, entitled "This Years Model: Me," spells out the canon of hipster self-photography in terms so explicit it's jarring.

Captioning a white-bordered photo of herself reclining in Ray-Bans and a bikini beside an empty Polaroid cartridge, Chandler says: "If you are going to

go to all the trouble of using a real Polaroid instead of mocking it up with Photoshop you should definitely put some proof in the picture." Beside her flash-lit glamour shot under some bougainvillea, in the next slide, the *Times* narrates: "Many people try to deal with a cheap flash by turning it down or off, but Ms. Chandler points out that turning it up is a good option. It blows out wrinkles and gives the photo a modern look, especially with a little over-the-top vamping."

**I**T WAS ONLY after Roid Rage, The Cobra Snake, Last Night's Party, and Cory Kennedy — and after the self-photography that aped hipster aesthetics and proliferated on social networking sites — that I began to see hipsters at my own high school, in Los Angeles. And only after them did I begin to see skinny jeans, horn-rimmed glasses, vintage dresses and beat-up flannel shirts displayed with unthinkable price tags, not in Jet Rag or Aardvarks or the other "vintage" haunts, but in the floodlit windows of Beverly Hills boutiques — far from the burgeoning hipster enclaves of Silverlake and Echo Park. It was as if the hipster feminine had finally been distilled and packaged by so many photographs, and logically ascended to high-end women's fashion — only to trickle down again, through Urban Outfitters, Forever 21, and Target.

The more time that passes, and the more photographs of hipsters that pop up on blogs like "Look

At This Fucking Hipster" and user-generated fashion websites like Lookbook.nu — where girls (and boys) model and photograph hip outfits for other users to "like" and rank — the more it seems that the hipster female born in 2004 was purely the invention of photography, filtering down to us who at the time were still 15. As is true of many fantasies involving women, photography was the only place where the hipster ideal of a child-bodied beauty having an outrageous good time, flitting pensively through industrial wastelands or "ironically" playing on a history of sexual subjugation by posing naked for a clothing company could actually exist.

Perhaps better this life, performed for the camera, than the one young women were actually living: clocking hours at some underwhelming marketing or retail job, skipping meals to afford (and fit into) overpriced vintage clothes, meeting guys in noise/indie/art-rock bands who turned out to be feckless losers. Maybe moving back in with one's parents, or — if one was lucky — making some art and getting some attention. Where Warhol's photographs laid claim to a certain reality, the hipster female's party- and self-photography professed a willful artifice. *Life isn't like this*, the photos seemed to say. *But can't a girl dream?* Of the party scene, Kennedy told the *LA Times*, "It came off more wild than it was."

MARK GREIF

136

## EPITAPH FOR THE WHITE HIPSTER

**A**T THE START OF the great blackout of August 14, 2003, radio announcers on every battery-powered transistor in every knot of bystanders in New York City recalled with apprehension the looting that had appalled the nation during the blackout of 1977. Darkness was falling again upon the metropolis — now a post-Disney wonderland which had parlayed the white return and gentrification of the 1990s, plus the harsh policing of “Giuliani Times” and chief cop William Bratton, into a money boom that persisted, with falling crime rates and still-rising real estate valuations, even after the disaster of September 11, 2001. Had the stumbling-block arrived at last? Fourteen hours later, after the sun rose over intact shops, authorities were jubilant. The neighborhoods of Crown Heights and Bushwick, where the

worst trouble transpired a quarter-century earlier, had stayed calm. No looting had occurred. Or almost no looting, certainly not enough to matter to anyone, not in Manhattan — really just one set of incidents that newspapers bothered to record, and *that* was just something that happened to some Lower East Side hipsters.

The chief venue was a store called Alife, pronounced “A-Life,” as if bestowing a superior grade on your existence. It called itself a brand- and design-consultancy, but was known primarily as an unaffordable sneaker store, selling limited edition Nikes or customized Chuck Taylors, improbably expensive — up to \$800, at the high end — amidst peculiar decor: trick bikes, motocross jackets, astroturf, graffiti paints. From the day it opened on Orchard Street, an anomaly on the block, it made me uncomfortable to see, in much the way that conservatives who speak of “white culture” make me uncomfortable. After successes, it added a hidden exclusive club, decorated like a Savile Row tailor’s, to vend sneakers to patrons unintimidated by the absence of a phone number, a Tiffany’s-style buzzer, a signless barred steel door, and “members only” stationary. Alife entered a neighborhood that was Puerto Rican, black, and Jewish, on the street traditionally known for bargain leather-goods and clothes — but from 1999 onward it became the western pillar of a swiftly-growing enclave of new people whom I never



heard called anything other than “hipsters,” carved out from Orchard via Rivington (where the sneaker “club” opened), east to Clinton, where a celebrated, unaffordable restaurant had opened (59 Clinton Fresh Food),\* also serving wealthy patrons who arrived by cabs or town cars and looked bemused when they stepped onto the sidewalk.

A little before 11 pm on the first night of the 2003 blackout, thieves broke open a side trash-area door of the Alife club and a significant crowd began looting the stock. The owner arrived and hit shadowy people with a flashlight to disperse them; the mob struck back with 40 oz. bottles. This is, of course, a sneaker neighborhood. What Alife had pioneered was the up-pricing, super-branding, and remarketing of products more or less on sale right around the corner at the famous discount sneaker shops on Delancey, like Jimmy Jazz and Richie’s, serving a mostly black and Latino clientele — but Alife addressed a non-local or tourist market, trading on the novelty of an impoverished location still within the confines of Manhattan. No trouble was recorded at Jimmy Jazz or Richie’s; a brick was thrown through the window of the Delancey Foot Locker, and another Foot

\* Wylie Dufresne, not yet a Food Network celebrity, apparently opened his restaurant here because he had grown up in the neighborhood — a not infrequent reason for the first “pioneers” to merchandise an area to which rich people didn’t previously travel.

Locker was burglarized in Brooklyn. At rich white people’s sneaker destinations throughout the hipster archipelago in the Lower East Side, however — Alife’s imitators: Nort on Eldridge, Classickicks on Elizabeth across the northern border at Houston, even one shop called Prohibit, as far west as the part of Little Italy rich brokers had recently renamed “Nolita” — attacks, attempts, and thefts were reported, the only notable crimes of the period of darkness.

**M**Y SENSE AT THE time was that the neighborhood had taken a kind of revenge, pathetic as it was — and all the more shameful, since two of the broken bottles at Alife led to stitches. It was the only revenge, however, or gesture of rejection, I ever knew the neighborhood to take. And how much rejection can there really be, in trying to grab by force the unattainable goods on the other side of glittering windows?

My vantage was unusual, biased in two different directions but well-suited to amateur sociology. My father’s family had been living in apartments near Willett Street, on the east side of the neighborhood, continuously since the turn of the century. My grandmother and father had been spinning stories of those streets for me since I was a kid — overwriting the visible neighborhood, a mix of tenements, workers co-ops, and public housing, with specifics of what had been there formerly. So I was attached to the patterns

of settlement. Through the period of the changes taking place on the opposite side of Delancey from my grandmother's apartment, I visited a few times a year for stays occasionally as long as a month. I gawked in the box of streets that made the epicenter for the new culture, bounded by Houston to the North, Delancey (later Grand, after the expansion) on the South, Clinton to the East, and Orchard (later Allen) to the West. I went there first at an age when I still desperately cared what "the young people" were up to — and nearly all the people I saw were then older than me. I read hipster catalogs and fliers, visited their stores, chatted, and took notes.\*

A word on the "old neighborhood" bias: when I was a child visiting in the '70s and '80s, I got used to those streets as my grandmother and father experienced them, because of the way "the street" experienced us — as poor Jews, basically Orthodox, among poor Puerto Ricans and poor blacks. It was a flatter

\* Though I've tried out rival definitions for "hipster" elsewhere, this article uses the term without qualification, to build up the word's meaning in historical context. Even where this usage seems different from the reader's own, it may, in the end, become compatible.

The question remains of how the name arose. I'm certain I knew to call the new migrants "hipsters" from the first time I explained to my family the changes happening north of Delancey in the late 1990s and before hearing anyone else use the word. If true, this means it was possible to read the term off of hipsters' appearance and behavior. "Hipster" referred, in part, to an air of knowing about exclusive things before anyone else — that they acted, as people said then (and

distribution, where my family was taken for granted and was embedded. It excited me unduly, and at the same time I found it relaxing, a relief, to escape where I actually came from — I know such emotions are suspect. My father, who had classed our family up by going to college and moving to white-collar jobs, saw me as naïve to like rudeness, dirt, and especially public housing, which since 1965 had been an affront to the family not only for the racial and religious confrontations it brought but because it leveled the tenement in which my grandfather was born.

To enter the hipsterized area to the north in 1999 was to be treated again as what I was in the Boston suburbs where I actually came from, namely, an entitled white person among entitled whites. Our class likes to call itself middle-class, as everybody in America does — but as I kept arguing to my no-longer-working-class father, we were *rich* just to live in Newton. The income distribution nationwide at that time

do still), "hipper than thou." But I think it also must mean that circa 1999 their look was still continuous with the short-lived neo-Beat or '50s-nostalgic hip moment (with goatees, soul patches, fedoras, and *Swingers*-style duds) that the *Baffler* relentlessly documented and attacked as a marketing ploy through the 1990s. You can find the record of it in their anthology *Commodify Your Dissent* (1997). To summarize the derivation: I think the very earliest new hipsters may have looked enough like the old hipsters of dim mid-century memory to call up the name, reinforced by complaints about hip snobbery that were ubiquitous during the decade (cf. the August 8, 1994 *Time* cover).

showed a median family income of about \$50,000 (it has stayed at that level, too, in the decade 1999–2009). On the Lower East Side, it was \$28,000, with about 30% of families below the poverty line. The hipster whites were like me. It takes a very strong-minded person not to enjoy the restoration of privilege, and I happily went to Rivington Street to read in a new cafe, where, it should also be said, everybody was noticeably better looking than in Boston. At the same time, it would have taken a blind person not to see, as the bars and boutiques proliferated, and friends I knew from college told me they were coming to rent in the neighborhood, that the non-chain stores my grandmother had always depended on (Ratner's the kosher dairy restaurant, Friedman's where she bought clothes) continued to disappear, vanishing along with the Puerto Rican *cocina frita* stop on the corner of Clinton and the other stores affordable to my grandmother's Orthodox Jewish neighbors or the residents of the low-income Samuel Gompers Houses facing her building.

I'd never been so close to a neighborhood "in transition." But I also hadn't seen a transition quite like this. I knew bohemia. It was very clear to me that the hipster neighborhood was not a bohemian neighborhood; it wasn't artists. Artists were occasionally there — drinking coffee — but they were unusually thin on the ground. Instead of doing art, people

everywhere were "doing" products. They displayed overpriced guitars, overpriced painted-upon sneakers, lots of overpriced foods, and a huge quantity of overpriced clothes. These products were often displayed amidst the decor and signifiers of art galleries or designer's hidden ateliers, but artistic *production* and artists' folkways were gone. I kept walking into stores that I thought were thrift shops or Goodwill, which turned out to be curated or repurposed stores for vintage clothes priced higher than the brand new dress shirts I got twice a year at Filene's. Priced high enough, in fact, that it suggested I was in the presence of a much higher social class than mine, which was surprising because people lacked other clear markers of wealth. (Later I understood that the class that kept up appearances at street level might be funded by credit card debt and living paycheck-to-paycheck.)

Another crucial thing: hipster youth also wasn't punk, crunchy, DIY, rockabilly, ska, mod, or hardcore, which meant it wasn't in line with youth subculture as I knew it everywhere else. If the twin strands of US youth oppositional subculture run through punk and DIY on one side, and an environmental, anti-authoritarian tradition of stoners and jam bands and dreadlocks and vegans and, basically, hippies on the other side, and both these lines have cross-pollinated endlessly — all of it was missing. Then there were the offenses against taste that those other subcultures

would never have undertaken, which made me *wish* somebody would put a rock through these windows. Traditionally the Jewish streets in the neighborhood had sold discount garments, hosiery, haberdashery, wholesale cloth, trimmings. Hipster boutiques liked to keep the old, now ironic signage with Jewish names — as hipster restaurants kept signage from replaced Puerto Rican and Dominican restaurants in Spanish. I found this obscurely enraging, like setting up a lemonade stand on someone's grave. Worse, hipsters developed a trend of not putting names on their restaurants or bars at all, giving everything an exclusive and unwelcoming aspect; as if an average passerby was not invited to come in and have a beer.

This subculture was pro-consumer, pro-consumption, amoral, pro-lifestyle. It credentialed itself as resistant because its pleasures were supposedly violent and transgressive (I knew this from *Vice* magazine, a free fashion-boutique publication) and also what was then foolishly called “politically incorrect,” such that the hipster's primary means of self-authentication were white hetero masculinity, gross high school pranks, and, primarily, pornography. What pretentious erotica had been to '60s liberals, pretentious porn was to '00s hipsters. Oh, and tattoos! Everybody claimed to have a background in punk/skateboarding/graffiti to justify why they were now in retail sportswear and marketing. Drugs were authenticating, too,

but drugs of course are the one thing that almost every American youth subculture loves, from hipsters to jocks, not excluding gamers and wenches at the Renaissance Fair. The big publication of the early hipster moment was called *Vice* precisely because that was the hipster shtick, to lump consumer and Gothic into the same category of transgression: We will show you how to buy pleasures which some liberal prude of our fantasies considers immoral; thus our publication will be a chance for naughty boys to have their own *Redbook* and look at one another in fashion spreads. Its most famous department was a Dos and Don'ts. If the hipster then spent \$1000 on clothes, or a painted skateboard, or Johnny Walker Blue Label — it seemed like rebellion.

Friends told me to visit Williamsburg, Brooklyn, which was the true center of hipster development at that time, and maybe more bohemian-friendly. I made two treks there on foot across the Williamsburg Bridge around 1999–2000, passing through the not-yet-changed southlands to reach Bedford Avenue. I found Bedford incredibly unnerving, a zombie-village of people like me, more conspicuous where the buildings are so much smaller and sparser than in Manhattan. It was as if the hipsters had taken over Gopher Prairie.

**A**BOVE ALL, THE THING I chafed at, mentally, was that the hipsters manifested in these neighborhoods not like a subculture, but like an *ethnicity*. It's hard to explain. Their structure of behavior, what one can only call their "clannishness," plus the Lower East Side's hands-off treatment of the new hipsters — as individual blocks and then whole streets "turned" — seemed like consequences of new ethnic arrival. The hipsters' secrecy contributed, too. If they didn't label their stores in Yiddish or Spanish, they telegraphed their distinction by a kind of rich-people's invisible ink. Hipsters had no obvious exchange with the groups around them, entirely unlike the way artists I had seen elsewhere liked to join into neighborhoods of racial others — whether to integrate or "slum," exploit or make nice. I learned to give directions in a new way to people near my grandmother's house, looking for Chinatown: "First you go through the Puerto Rican part, then the hipster part, then the Jewish part, and *then* it's Chinatown."

The markers of hipster ethnicity were straightforward. They were coded "suburban white." In those key early years, the hipster aesthetic drew from 1970s suburbia (the decade, importantly, that had turned its back on both the city and the counterculture '60s, as well as the decade in which these hipsters had been kids) and 1970s amateur porn (the secret rebellion supposedly going on underneath the suburbs). Bars

dug up white Americana, as at the pioneering Welcome to the Johnsons (1999) on Rivington Street — its conceit was that you were drinking in a family's 1970s middle-American living room. "Trucker hats," the gimme caps distributed as freebies at auto shows and worn throughout the country, occasionally worn through the punk years as signs of downward-mobility or just the towns bands came from, were newly discovered for fashion. (One landed on Paris Hilton's head.) Belt-buckles got Southern and big. "Wifebeaters" — the same athletic tank top undershirts worn by Puerto Ricans and Dominicans on nearby streets, but not with that name — became chic. The open secret of the equally famous "ironic" T-shirts, printed with mottos from community pig roasts, church softball leagues, and Midwestern car dealerships, was that these shirts often came from people's own childhood bureaus, especially among the middle-class young people who had moved to New York from Tennessee, Colorado, or Wisconsin (by way of college) to tend bar on the Lower East Side while trying out art or work. The rich were buying these shirts for \$30 down the street, and you already had them in your closet for free. Thus middle-class whites helped to re-import a white "opposite" culture to city living, "ironically," with an equivocal meaning. As did the Fruit of the Loom undershirts when they represented a fantasy about one's own tough white-ethnic grandfather, in

the suburbs after white flight, his simulated pissed-off ethos now brought back to the city.

What did this early hipster aesthetic mean? I was stunned when I read the conclusions drawn by John Leland in his massive history, *Hip*, in 2004. “[T]here’s a broader, more interesting context for the emergence of Caucasian kitsch,” he wrote (broader, that is, than continuity with the long history of ’40s and ’50s hipsters) because, Leland explained, it came along with “the most diverse, multicultural, middle-class, and ethnic-marketed generation in American history,” when “one in five Americans is now either an immigrant or has a foreign-born parent”:

In this spirit, the trucker hat and other post-hip accessories play with the meaning of whiteness in a multicultural world. They make white visible. Without the black/white dichotomy to anchor it, and without numerical dominance to give it weight, whiteness is up for grabs. Especially in cities that are now ‘majority-minority,’ or less than half non-Hispanic white, whiteness is no longer the baseline, something taken for granted; it’s something to be explored, turned sideways, debated for its currency. . . . Caucasian kitsch—which includes redneck rock, wife-beater tank tops, homey Little League t-shirts, corn dogs, drag racing, demolition derby and *Vice* magazine—packages whiteness as a fashion commodity that can be

donned or doffed according to one’s dating needs. Post-hip treats whiteness the way fashion and entertainment have historically treated blackness. It swaths white identity not in race pride but in quotation marks. Whiteness doesn’t define you, you define it—and you don’t have to be white to wear it.

This feels to me like America as known to someone who doesn’t leave the house. “[Y]ou don’t have to be white to wear it?” That was true, but just about everyone I ever saw wearing these accessories on the Lower East Side was Caucasian, with the exception of a few Asian hipsters. Many of the latter, however, were actually from Asia. They were the ultra-rich young of Japan and Korea buying hipster brands. The few African-Americans I saw outfitted in Caucasian kitsch were mostly either celebrities on TV or models in clothing catalogs.

**T**HE DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT that concerns me more was the return of rich whites to big cities in the ’90s and ’00s and, with it, the suburbanization of poverty. When you think of the post-World War II decades, you think of suburbanization, “urban renewal,” and “white flight,” and its consequent defunding of the inner city. A common explanation for the looting and violence in 1977 in New York, indeed, is the fact that in 1975 the city had nearly

gone bankrupt and economic opportunity and social services had been stretched too thin in the neighborhoods that rioted. The reverse phenomenon in our own times — after decades in which upward mobility for the middle classes, including the black and minority middle classes, had looked like it meant heading out to the suburbs — is that capital flowed back into the center, especially the finance capital of neoliberal upward redistribution and the 1990s and 2000s Wall Street bubbles. Little people were pushed outward to suburban housing, then hit particularly by the collapse of the real-estate-lending bubble that had generated the huge finance profits (with no penalty for the financiers; the US government bailed them out). The somewhat astonishing fact, for those who've watched the “rebirth” of the cities or their representations on TV, is that US poverty has been *rising* since 2000, according to US government statistics. The total number of the impoverished in suburbs now surpasses the numbers in the cities those suburbs serve, as well as housing the majority of the nation's poor overall.\*

Especially in global cities (New York, Paris, Mumbai, London, Beijing), districts which previously

---

\* This development was widely reported in 2010, but the turning point seems actually to have occurred slightly earlier in the decade. See Elizabeth Kneebone and Emily Garr, *The Suburbanization of Poverty: Trends in Metropolitan America, 2000 to 2008* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2010).

had historically not ever been of interest to the rich — because on the periphery of the city center (Lower East Side), or on the leading edges of the boroughs or commuting districts (Williamsburg, Dumbo), where these places were needed to house waves of servants, workers, clerks, small tradespeople, and immigrants — came into focus as sites for capital, valued as new leisure, entertainment, and to a lesser extent residential zones for the rich (wherever “luxury condos” could be installed and small dwellings broken into much larger spaces). Industrial and proletarian architectural detail, not accidentally, came to seem superbly charming, with the collusion of intellectuals sympathetic to and nostalgic for a working class. Whenever the richest didn't displace the poorer classes personally, too, they pushed what the sociologist Jean-Pierre Garnier terms the “inferior fringes of the intellectual petite bourgeoisie” out to poor neighborhoods — publicists and media hacks, teachers and professors, social workers, writers, all overeducated and with a psychic investment in hipness to compensate for their inferior real capital. This middling class of the educated classes accomplished the displacement of the working classes whose tenement façades they could lovingly restore.

The uncanny thing about the early-period white hipsters is that symbolically, in their clothes, styles, and music and attitudes, they seemed to announce that

whiteness was flowing back in. Unconsciously, they wore what they were in structural terms — because for reasons mysterious to the participants, those things suddenly seemed cool. And by taking up the markers or feeling of a white ethnicity, they made it feel natural to engage in a subcultural separation, or de-integration, rather than bohemian integration, as they colonized neighborhoods that were, in one way or another, really ethnic — even when the people they put pressure on, as in the northern reaches of Williamsburg, were Polish.

**I**N AN EARLIER contribution, I mentioned what I think is the best anatomization of post-World War II hipsters, a 1948 article about black hipsters by Anatole Broyard.\* The article is occasionally cited by historians but not widely enough known. Broyard saw hipster style, consciousness, and even snobbery, as the creation of a fictitious, independent base of power to rival white domination. The black hipster made pretense of a special superior truth that no one else could equal even had he possessed the same facts or abstract knowledge — an *a priori* knowledge comparable to the positive knowledge that whites held. You can see how this whole mood could attach itself to be-bop in the '40s, which was a true art and skill that was too fast,

\* See "Positions," in this volume.

too complex, and too subcultural for whites yet to steal (as whites had taken over "hot" jazz and then big band and swing, while originators of those musical forms couldn't even perform as equals in many Jim Crow-era venues). Even the black hipster's now-forgotten early style cues seemed to evince a power to drag white knowledge into blackness, to see the white world, as it were, darkly. Recounted Broyard: "[The hipster] affected a white streak, made with powder, in his hair. This was the outer sign of a significant, prophetic mutation. And he always wore dark glasses, because normal light offended his eyes." Yet Broyard, a high-cultural re-appropriator or demander of white knowledge, on the model of Ralph Ellison, despaired of the power of style cues alone. If outsiders couldn't understand the black hipster, Broyard saw clearly enough, they would just move in to entrap and exhibit him: "He was bought and placed in the zoo," Broyard declared flatly. The only solution was true Promethean theft, stealing back the culture from whites that, in fact, African-Americans had helped create.

Of course, by 1957 Norman Mailer could publish his embarrassing declaration in "The White Negro" of the white hipster freeing himself from white squareness by Negro sexiness, spontaneity, naturalness, etc. Enough has been written about that odd essay not to expend more words on it here. What I've never seen noted anywhere is the extended letter to the



editor that ran in *Partisan Review*, protesting Broyard's article from the point of view of a white hipster, three months after the article appeared in 1948. This letter-writer claims that Broyard is a joykill to be so serious and over-intellectual about a phenomenon that's basically for kicks, and is already a hipster scene for whites, who come to the jazz clubs and join in the knowing fun. This is true co-optation: to make every development "white" from the first, and to insist that everything is style and style is meaningless. "You find many hip studs, a great many Jewish boys again," he says. "The white streak [in African-American hair] is a purely theatrical gesture and is matched up by the blue side-hair of various blond hipsters."\*

Whenever a phenomenon like the hipster is read for meaning, someone will deny it that meaning — the white letter-writer to *Partisan Review*, and some hostile readers, I imagine, of this essay. Those who do are often the ones who have an *investment* in these actions not meaning anything — because evacuation of meaning allows one to pursue the course without scrutiny or self-reflection. If I read in too much significance to the white hipster moment of trucker hats, Pabst Blue Ribbon, and belt buckles, I do expect objections of this kind — that it's a question of over-reading,

---

\* I've wondered if it could be a joke, connected to the odd signature, "Miles Templar." But it would have to a very, very sarcastic and unusual joke on the white hipsters, not hinted at by other extra-textual cues.

not documentation. That's why it seems worth raising again the tasteless but factual issue of the connection between elements at the core of the 1999–2003 hipster moment and right-wing attitudes.

It was the *New York Times* that finally reported in 2003 the persistent connection of *Vice* magazine, and particularly its most voluble editor, Gavin McInnes, to unlikeable attitudes about race. The magazine had always made hostile jokes and used epithets about feminists and gays. Vanessa Grigoriadas for the *Times* dug into the reality of the attitudes, and concluded that they were real. She quoted McInnes: "I love being white and I think it's something to be very proud of. . . . I don't want our culture diluted. We need to close the borders now and let everyone assimilate to a Western, white, English-speaking way of life."

Grigoriadas then pointed out to readers an essay McInnes had published earlier that year in Pat Buchanan's *American Conservative* on how *Vice* was helping to confirm young people in the turn away from '60s liberal follies. Was this a prank? But it followed an even odder article *Vice* had published on their own ethos, which they called "The New Conservatives," combining it with a fashion spread no different from any other in the magazine. Whatever was true of *Vice's* attitudes, you can feel their essential confusion and error in an interview from the previous year's *New York Press* with two of *Vice's* three editors,

McInnes and Suroosh Alvi, that seems more or less sincere:

[Interviewer:] *Vice's* approach to homosexuality and race isn't traditionally punk rock.

GM: The punk rock-ness of that is just plain honesty. We seem really racist and homophobic because we hang around with fags and niggers so much. It just becomes part of our vernacular.

SA: Also, in '94, when these magazines were coming out, the political correctness in North America was overwhelming. Especially in the academic settings we'd just come out of. So we were reacting against that.

GM: I think we got pissed off only after we wrote what came naturally to us and it offended people. We were determined to leave it in. It was just the way we talked. It's surprising how brainwashed by hippies most of our generation is. Pro-love, pro-diversity, pro-tolerance—that's the hippies' bag. You want to hear people talk about niggers, try hanging around with black people. They are harsh. You want to hear anti-Semitism, go hang around with some Jews. You should hear Suroosh talk about fucking Pakis. It's ear-burning. I'd argue that racists like the KKK don't really have anything to say about niggers and fags because they don't know any. They don't go, "I am so sick of fucking drag queens. They are so self-indulgent. Fashion this, fashion that. Can't you talk about politics for one second, you fuck-

ing transsexual?" They don't know. We're in the thick of it.

You see the mistake: being "in the thick of" industries tolerant of gays and Jews doesn't justify you thinking of them as fags and greedy Jew bastards. Only later in the interview does the line appear for which McInnes was ultimately criticized—when asked how *Vice* could bear keeping their offices in Williamsburg where there were so many post-collegiate wannabes, he replied: "Well, at least they're not fucking niggers or Puerto Ricans. At least they're white." I find it vaguely plausible, as McInnes protested to the gossip website Gawker.com, that aspects of each of these episodes were jokes and publicity stunts, and particularly that he wanted to scandalize the *New York Times*, which he counted on Gawker to hate along with him.

The thing about jokes, though, is that they do let you see where people's minds characteristically go, what it is they play with, when they reach the borders of social familiarity. For Norman Mailer, a self-proclaimed sexual ideologue and a leftist of varying types (sometimes a radical, sometimes a "left conservative" opposed to over-hygienic technocracy, but a man always alive to democracy of an essentially sensual, corporeal, Whitmanian kind), any effort at scandal took his mind toward miscegenation. He wanted, at least, to exalt something other than himself, combine,

and disaffiliate from the whiteness he was bored by.\* If Mailer was foolish when he wrote "The White Negro" — and he implied a decade later in *The Armies of the Night* that his black friends had told him, after the essay, that he was a fool — at least he was a fool who clumsily championed the violation of racial and class boundaries. In contrast, something in the "white hipster" imagination moved inexorably toward justifying rich whites in not having to be anything but white. Hipsters rationalized white colonization and separation by unconsciously forming an ethnicity for themselves (not connected, either, to the national-linguistic European ethnicities that lie behind Swedish Day or St. Patrick's Day or the Feast of San Gennaro). Hipsters worked this magic to keep themselves from feeling compromised, where compromise would have meant being obligated or connected to anyone among whom they might settle, Puerto Ricans or blacks or Jews or Poles or just people without money.

---

\* Mailer was also Jewish, at a time when being Jewish did not make one fully white, and yet he had experienced a class rise, from ghetto Brooklyn to Harvard to old-boy literary life, which was unusual and just newly becoming available to Jews. In his mature career, he went out of his way to embrace the obscene and the "vital." Mailer thus offers an interesting test case for the contradictory class and racial positions available from mid-century to the present, and he, too, happens to have been viewing much of it from the (then predominantly Jewish) Lower East Side — he lived on Pitt Street in 1952.

I KNOW THAT THIS EARLY hipster culture, in its aspect of an aggressive fetishization of whiteness, ceased to exist. You could feel it coming to an end in 2003 — the sneaker-shop looting is a convenient symbol, but it really felt more like a loss of creative energy on the Lower East Side than a reaction from neighbors, like a tire draining of air. Hipsters clearly persisted and regrouped, though, with different markers and habits, in similar neighborhoods, and then in wider circles mediated by television and the internet.

The trouble is, I personally don't really know what hipsters 2004–2009 were like. The reason for my ignorance is aging. I mean: I got old. I turned 30, which seems as good a marker as any for a kind of electrified fence, running through the life-course, which can keep you out of subculture. Thirty is the age above which the '60s suggested nobody should be trusted. I did keep walking the same streets of the Lower East Side, and I could identify hipsters. I just couldn't see them with the same level of detail, nor did I understand the new fashions.

The reason isn't hard to guess, though it's not flattering for me. It must have been that I, like other people my age, was losing the compensatory benefits that an investment in hipsterism confers. If I didn't gain from knowing the codes, it's natural I would cease to see them or invest in understanding them.

Think about the ages at which subculture begins and ends for people. The essence of subculture is distinction. It can give a positive profile to unavoidable experiences of difference; you may join subculture when you are philosophically or ideologically out of step with the mainstream, or in some way handicapped in the dominant mainstream social competition. One easily understands why such forms of distinction take hold in high school, from ages fourteen to eighteen, and are valuable there. Your deficit becomes advantageous, if for nothing else than as a grounds for group solidarity. The loser who failed to make the football team becomes a skater; the nerd becomes a gamer; the leftist becomes a punk. In all sorts of frightening total institutions ruled by arbitrary authority, inmates will form groups for mutual defense and esteem, and then engage in inter-group rivalry and hierarchy. They persist to a greater or lesser extent in college depending on the specific structures of each institution.\*

At age 22, however, when ambitious post-collegians travel to central metropolises, subculture can

---

\* Students at smaller institutions of higher education are more likely to reflect, already, a single coherent class stratum (in background or aspiration) attached to a high social status with shared goals, and thus to experience slighter differentiation by subcultures. Larger institutions with wider class spread will encourage more persistent subcultures, except where the task of sub-grouping is taken up by an organized mainstream structure like the Greek system.

take on a new role. Many experience a sudden *declassing* in cities relative to college and even high school. The young graduate comes from a high status position but is suddenly without income and has no place in a city indifferent to college hierarchies. He or she still possesses enormous reserves of what Pierre Bourdieu termed *cultural capital*, waiting to be activated — a degree, the training of the university for learning tiny distinctions and histories, for the discovery and navigation of cultural codes — but he or she has temporarily lost the *real* capital and background dominance belonging to his class. Certain kinds of subculture allow cultural capital to be re-mobilized among peers and then within the fabric of the “poorer” city, to gain distinction and resist declassing.

Hence the meaning of the (not literally true) assumption that “all hipsters are rich”: the truth it speaks to is the knowledge that, income-poor though they may be temporarily, young people who choose and can afford to pursue this form of status competition often have, at the least, been recipients of significant educational investment (leading to the college degree) and are likely to have possessed some safety from their previous, parental class status (a reliably middle-class backstop). Soon enough they are likely to ascend out of the poorer, low-rent neighborhoods in which they temporarily live. As for those ambitious people who move to the city from lower-middle-class

backgrounds, the hipster mode equally provides worthwhile distinction in a cultural effort at classing up; you blend in and gain a new taste of future superiority. Superiority over other classes than your peers, too: you may be tending bar, but if you are tending bar in hip clothes and you're in a band at night, you'll always possess higher status in *culture* (if not in income) than the bond-trader losers ordering vodka tonics in button-downs.

The significance of age 30? A large percentage of those urban post-collegians, interning at some non-profit at 22 or 23 (or still planning to produce art or literature), by their experience of loss of status learn the superior economic rationality of trying to recover their earlier class positions by reentering conventional white collar work. Thus every micro-generation will be surprised by the number of its members who have been secretly preparing law-school applications while making fun of rich people who wear suits. Once these peers have a law degree and enter a firm — or, say, more generally, once many postgraduates have risen a bit, over five or eight years, within other chosen professions with middle- or upper-class remuneration (maybe they worked at these jobs all along, but dressed modishly) — they will have gained the means to compete and exploit the benefits of the metropolis on traditional grounds of income and class dominance. They take up more expensive and higher-class mainstream

cultural distinctions (European-made cars, four-star restaurants, home mortgages). They fall out of subculture and fall upward into the mainstream.

When I look, in my blind way, at the hipsters of 2004–2009, a few things do stand out. The return of music — and a particular pattern of significance in the hipster music — crops up. I've said that early "white hipsters" were painfully unmusical, but the bands they did create pastiched previous white rock. This included bands like the White Stripes and The Strokes.\* The music that hipsters listen to post-2004 seems to have a different mood, and here are the names of some significant bands: Grizzly Bear, Panda Bear, Deerhunter, Fleet Foxes, Department of Eagles, Wolf Parade, Band of Horses, and, behind and above them, Animal Collective. I watch their videos and enjoy a

---

\* One is tempted to say: The *White Stripes!* Jack "White!" This aesthetic of Classic Rock-friendly blues was being produced in indie circles at the same time by a band calling itself The Black Keys, and both were pleasing in the way good cross-racial pastiche is agreeable when the original will never return again (cf. Winehouse, Amy). The moralistic question, as always, is whether the outcome of that racial crossover is cooperation or annexation. I prefer the former. (Thus I feel better about Amy Winehouse and her mostly black American or black English collaborators than about Jack White.) Also, imitating the "difference principle" in John Rawls's theory of distributive justice, we might ask whether the crossover pastiche benefits black musicians and music first, by producing renewed access to the culture of the dominant, before it benefits additional white pasticheurs. But such questions are notoriously difficult to judge and many find them offensive.

certain atmosphere of pleasant orgy, with traces of psychedelia; hear animal sounds, and lovely Beach Boys harmonies; see unlocalizable rural redoubts, on wild beaches and in forests, in a loving, spacious, and manageable nature. And so many of the bands seem to dress up in masks or plush animal suits.

This would have been just a blip of pop culture — but then, in dress, post-2004, one saw flannel return, both for men and women; women took up cowboy boots, then dark-green rubber Wellingtons, like country squires off to visit the stables and the gamekeeper. Scarves proliferated unnecessarily, somehow conjuring a cold woodland night (if wool) or a desert encampment (the keffiyeh). Then scarves were worn as bandanas, as when Mary-Kate Olsen sported one, like a cannibal Pocahontas, starved enough to eat your arm. Hunting jackets in red-and-black check came back briefly.

It thus looks from the outside, both in music and in style, as if the post-2004 hipster turn has included an embrace of animal primitivism. Maybe also, in other clues, a kind of technological reduction. The youngest subcultures seem to know that the internet is convenient and also that the internet is a nuisance. In defiance of those graduates of the earlier hipster generation who, aging, retooled themselves as messianic internet-fetishistic prophets and publicists (“it’ll change everything!”), children born as the ’80s

advanced seem to have seen their birthright in perspective. The ability to take the internet for granted, with its now complete penetration of life, led to compensatory reductions elsewhere. The most advanced hipster youth suddenly even deprived their bikes of *gears*. As CDs declined, LP records gained sales for the first time in two decades — seemingly purchased by the same kids who had 3,000 downloaded songs on their hard drives. The fixed-gear bike now ranks as the most visible urban marker of hip besides the skinny jean, and not the least of its satisfactions is its simple mechanism, and repairing it.

We’ll have to wait and see whether the animals and fixies represent the spirit of a way out of a world of endless consumption and waste, resource depletion, environmental disaster, and the idiocy of internet messianism. Those we disparage as hipsters may represent just the least conscious, most consumerist tip of subcultures that may have richer philosophies and folkways — I hope so. I wish I knew the history of how Williamsburg after 2004, which felt like it had degenerated into a land of yuppie ex-hipsters having babies, got re-peopled with new 23- and 24-year-old bike-fixing hipsters who, to their credit, partly exiled the mombots and old, tattooed dads to the quieter precincts of Brooklyn Heights, Clinton Hill, or Park Slope.

What happened to the Lower East Side, meanwhile, I can attest: bigger capital moved in. The core hipster area very quickly entered capitalism's replica phase, in the pattern of postmodern development whereby originals are destroyed or priced out of an area beloved for its authenticity, so that mainstream pastiches can be installed with wider appeal, higher prices, and greater profitability. Thus, once kosher Ratner's closed in 2002 after nearly a century in business, the restaurant producer Keith McNally installed Schiller's (2003) one block north, replicating the look of an imaginary antique establishment from the neighborhood, but serving nachos. Coinciding with this was the arrival of high-rises and luxury residences: the out-of-place Blue building (2006), then the gigantic and numbing Hotel on Rivington (2005; beds for \$820 per night) and Ludlow luxury apartment complex (2008). This was the phase of classic destructive gentrification, coming after hipster colonization. The hipster-coded kids I talk to now in cafes on the Lower East Side inform me they commute in from Bushwick or Bed-Stuy, to visit or jerk coffee in "their favorite place" that still reminds them of what they thought New York was going to be like when they arrived.

My hope is that amidst whatever sources of energy outside him- or herself the hipster no doubt continues to draw upon and advance, the self-satisfaction with whiteness, at least, will have somehow

diminished — even if the Other whose blood hipsters suck isn't a trucker, but an imagined wild animal or an off-the-grid monkeywrenching hermit. If this consumerist culture of the hipster does survive and change, in the hopeful age of Obama, then even if it's still buying something, maybe it will buy something better.