IMAGES ON THE STREET: FASHION, PERSONAL STYLE, AND *THE SARTORIALIST*

by

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on urban modernity and subcultures, the street photography of the online site, *The Sartorialist*, is interpreted within a history of everyday style on the streets (or "streetstyle") since the mid-twentieth century. The paper argues that, as a digital archive of streetstyle, *The Sartorialist* creates a convincing portrait of the mythic notion of self-invention through fashion by tying style to a variety of elements of the real. Through a distant reading of the archive and semiotic analysis of the images, the underlying structures of meaning-making on the site are revealed. Through a condensation of Nancy's theory of the image and Benjamin's conception of the wish in the dream, I argue that *The Sartorialist* both validates and highlights the ultimate limitations of the urban project of fashion and encourages a particular way of looking at the world.

For everyone who worries that they won’t get it done

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Preface

In the world of fashion, we look to things to make up people. Our experience of other people (especially strangers) is made up through the things they wear. At the same time, people invent who they are, making themselves up, through clothes. These material objects play a significant role in our experience of others and of ourselves. Yet this fashioning of identity is complicated by fashion's problematic relationship to the body, consumption, labour, and the environment. Part of the reason fashion goes undertheorized in cultural studies is because of the problems involved in extricating the power and potential of fashion from its exploitative and oppressive elements. Though fashion persists in being more than its well-documented limitations, there is a tendency to see the movements of fashion as a weakness from which there is no strength, where any instinct towards style or fashion is a product of a false conception of reality, a focus on the imaginary to the detriment of the real. Especially given the association between the fashionable and the feminine, this attitude condescends to the project of fashion, oversimplifying in the process of brushing aside.

In this project, I strove to take fashion seriously. Reading the exciting new academic work emerging around fashion, I was encouraged by the ways people were really taking on the complications and contradictions of style and treating them as meaningful. This gave me faith that it could be done. And so I thought about the opportunities and limitations of doing this project and recognized that I needed a way to take this beautiful fluttering phenomenon of fashion and fix it for study. I turned to the online site *The Sartorialist* as a way of seeing and studying the work of fashion. The site provides beautiful images of beautiful people but, unlike the beautiful pictures of beautiful people in magazines or at fashion shows, these images felt different. I showed the site to different people in my life and kept hearing the same thing – there's

something different here, something I appreciate, something I can't quite define. In my analysis of the site, I wanted to pin down that difference because it echoed what felt to me to be the larger tension of fashion – this hard to define yet unavoidable part that rescues a project that on its face seems fraught with limitations.

The Sartorialist itself is a site at the forefront of the phenomenon of streetstyle blogs, popular sites for fashionable inspiration that have sprung up as an inevitable development of our insatiable interest in documenting our own lives, our own choices, our own tastes. Streetstyle blogs value the work of everyday fashion and make it meaningful and important, to the point that people actively search for streetstyle photographers, hoping that their sartorial choices make them worthy of the photographer's lens. But as I surveyed the site, I saw that more than simply validating particular tastes or styles, the site worked because it actively recreated a real life experience of the urban environment within a digital space. Though at first the street recedes in these photos, acting as a stage for the acting out of style, the space of the street is central to an understanding of how *The Sartorialist* both plays into existing ideas of fashion and also spotlights this supplemental, this fantastical, this imaginary extra that makes style more than merely problematic decoration.

Each photograph on the site is a moment on the street and a way of seeing a stranger. Though in our mind's eye, the picture might not be so beautifully or pristinely lit, these same moments exist in our own experience. The city provides so many opportunities to recognize the work of someone else's fashion. I don't think that this means that we always have the time or energy to notice, but rather that we interact with so many people in these kinds of fleeting moments, logging them in our minds so briefly we may not even recognize it happening. In my paper, I use *The Sartorialist* as a way of fixing these moments in time. The site presents a

collection of moments not unlike our own experience of the street – a series of unrelated moments of fashion and, more importantly, people in fashion. The moments are fleeting but they are also multiple, a constant condition of the urban environment. In this project, I zero in on a particular moment of fashionable existence, that is, the moment of the street.

Even as I narrowed my project to this moment, to this one space of existence where the dream of fashion could come true, I recognized and tried to make clear the way in which the site uses the real to make the fashionable self a text that is completely readable, a particular kind of *fashionable* real without the complications of effort, money or a fully realized human personality. It is in this way that the site sells us fashion without selling us clothes. However, in the selling of the dream of fashion, *The Sartorialist* also sells the reality of people. The people on the site are defined in terms of a particular and fashionable real but the medium of the digital archive provides the time to see the personal in the style, to see what Nancy calls the artistic image. In my application of Nancy's theoretical framework (and eventually Benjamin's both limited and hopeful conception of the kernel of life within the dead commodity), I wanted to show the duality of this moment in the site. The site creates the real but it also fixes the real, fixes the potential of fashion and lets us look at it, think about it, consider what it means. This validates the project of personal style rather than simply the business of fashion.

However, whether or not you find that convincing depends on your receptiveness to Scott Schuman's particular idea of style in the world, his fascinations and his assumptions. We see the world on the site through his eyes, eyes and tastes which are culturally constructed just like our own. Just like the fashion world in which he is immersed, his site privileges the young and the beautiful. Schuman does not examine his own preferences on his site and when he is asked to by readers, he is often defensive about the politics behind his own taste. The emphasis on

Schuman's own taste and style limited by his culturally situated preferences is a limitation of the site, but also one way the site works. *The Sartorialist* presents one person's point of view out on the street. The role of subjective experience in fashionable appreciation is something I wanted to highlight in this work, to show that the personal in personal style is not just about the practice of constructing ourselves through clothes but also a process of seeing others, connecting with others based on what catches our eye, what sticks in our head half a block down the street. Choosing to see is a powerful act and it is one that *The Sartorialist* privileges.

While I was working on this paper, I spent some time in Europe. Walking around the streets of Berlin, I found myself confronted with the reality of my own ideas. As a tourist in a strange city, we're more open to looking and seeing, more willing to wander and notice small differences or interesting details. The limits of language and situation can preclude getting to know people personally but wandering through the streets of a strange city, seeing people in clothes, I felt like I got to know them a little as perhaps, even given the limitations of a traveller's backpack, they got to know me. I believe that this is meaningful and that through *The Sartorialist*, this gesture is valued and encouraged.

Introduction

There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
- T.S. Eliot

Walking around the city, the world of other people's worlds becomes available in each split second glimpse of the shoes and the trench coat racing down the stairs to the subway or the clattering of high heels against the sewer grate. In the large cities of the modern world, our relationship with those who surround us on the streets and sidewalks is based largely on our conceptions of their aesthetic; not because we don't care to know more (although maybe we don't), but because in the city, strangers coexist in this impersonal way, making up the background of each other's lives without engaging with each other. We experience strangers behind the veil of their public persona, personae which are largely made up of things we can ascertain in an instant. On the street, "dress could act as display *or* mask - or both. The reverse side to the world of display, whether bold or surreptitious, on the street, was the retreat into privacy" (Wilson 155-6). We put on a costume to venture out into the street, a costume which both tells people some of who we are and hides its fullness.

A body constructed in clothes, like a building constructed along the skyline, is limited in many ways. And though it is limited by use, necessity, likeness, tropes, history, and cultural norms, still people continue to treat clothing as more than just a rote rearranging of existing ideas, standards, and practices. Clothing remains "uncomfortably significant instead of reassuringly natural or practical" (Hollander 105). Often times, however, the practice of self-construction goes unnoticed by our friends and neighbours who might notice that we look nice or that we are wearing something new, but who have too much other information to see the small changes in our clothes as significant to the larger narrative of who we are. Fashion has never been able to

change who we are, contrary to the claims made in magazines and *Gap* commercials. Yet often times we shop and dress to go out in to the world as if it can.

On the street or in our bedrooms, fashion is one means by which the myth of self-invention takes hold. A well-tailored suit or a high pair of heels has the power to transform the individual into a different person, a stronger person, a pulled together visual image that suggests the pulled together individual beneath. The aesthetic acts as a shield, as a performance, as a costume, as a slick surface. When you put something on that feels good, you feel like a different person, a better version of yourself. For a moment or two, clothing - that mess of signs, complementary and conflicting, avoiding obvious translation - swallows your body whole. Eventually, however, it spits you back out, because this mythic quality of fashion has never really existed in the real world. In the worlds in which we live and work every day, where our mask has endless opportunities to slip off or harden into a limiting boundary, this fantastical quality of fashion fades into the background. What we wear becomes an interesting detail within the larger tangible and culturally constructed realities of who we are to the people that see us every day and know us well.

On the street, however, this mythic quality of fashion *can* exist. The fantasy is made real through our limited interaction with it. Because our experience of other people is limited, the clothes they wear and how they wear them makes up more of the total information available to us. The ephemeral gets fixed in our imagination and often times, there is no further interaction to confirm or deny, no "time and place immediately available for eating the pudding that the proof can be found in" (Goffman 2). On the streets of cities, surrounded by strangers, our agency over our own identities increases and for a short period of time, the fantasy of fashion becomes real. Through the camera and the internet, these fantasies and realities of fashion intersect and are

made visible in streetstyle blogs which freeze this process in space and time. These blogs recreate the moment of sartorial appreciation on the street, collecting the photographic evidence in a digital archive. As one of the most popular streetstyle blogs, photographer Scott Schuman's *The Sartorialist* (http://thesartorialist.blogspot.com) recreates and supports this myth of self-invention through fashion in two ways: through the creation of a fashionable "real" and the privileging of successful image-making. On *The Sartorialist*, the hopeful potential that exists in that single moment on the street is frozen within the frame. What Schuman captures is not a window to a whole person; it's just style (and good genes). Yet by documenting the fantasy of fashion alongside elements of the real and by cataloguing mainstream Western style while also recognizing creative personal style, *The Sartorialist* reinforces the mythical idea that we can fully inhabit a fashionable image as a real identity.

This is a dream built on capitalism and embedded in our cultural narratives of consumption. The idea that another lifestyle or reality is only a new car or new house or new pair of shoes away keeps the malls full and the car dealerships busy. Yet this capitalist dream carries within it a real human desire, a wish for self-actualization caught up in and mutated by capitalism. The real wish within the fantastical dream, which Walter Benjamin felt as he walked around the Paris Arcades, is just as real today. For Benjamin, this wish was for a classless society, a utopia, he writes in his unfinished *Arcades Project,* which has "left its trace in a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions" (Benjamin "Arcades" 4-5). Susan Buck-Morss, elucidating Benjamin's unfinished ideas, writes that these material objects which held both a wish and a dream "were to reveal the truth of modernity, at once redemptively, as the expression of utopian longing, and critically, as the failure to fulfil that longing" (Buck-Morss 316). The wish to be unbound from the existing structures that define and limit is still

relevant today. Self-definition is the wish that helps propel us into malls and our overflowing closets are a reminder that the wish becomes more of a dream in reality. Through the privileging of cultural messages of self-creation coupled with a focus on markers of the real, *The Sartorialist* re-convinces tired consumers that the project of self-definition through fashion is worthwhile.

Further, however, *The Sartorialist* celebrates the space between the wish and the dream through the image. Jean Luc Nancy defines the image as that which carries with it *the distinct*, a presence which makes a visual more than just flat decoration. The image relies on this extra separation, "the obviousness of the distinct...There is an *image* only when there is this obviousness: otherwise, there is decoration or illustration, that is, the support of signification" (Nancy 12). The image is not just something to look at, a pretty picture on the wall, but rather something with which we can commune through a separate and distinct *presence*. This distinct presence moves through the artist to the spectator through the art. The spectator relates to the artist through the distinct image which "throws in [her] face an intimacy that reaches [her] in the midst of intimacy - through sight, through hearing, or through the very meaning of words" (Nancy 4). This intimacy is a product of the artistic creation and the image we create on our own bodies is a creative product of our imagination, closer to us than any painting or photograph. Though we can't transform ourselves through a new pair of jeans, we can use those jeans to express something of who we are, to project our interior world out into the public space of the street. Clothing can be more than simply ornament or decoration – it can reveal pieces of who we are to the rest of world.

Nancy realized, however, that we can't share who we are with the world if there the world is not there to notice. The spectator had to be open to the experience; cultivating the eye to appreciate art required active participation, an active will to see. The importance of actively

seeing was also taken up by Charles Baudelaire who wrote about the urban figure of the *flâneur*, who was, “the painter of the passing moment and of all suggestions of eternity that it contains” (Baudelaire 5). The flâneur saw beauty on the dirty streets as other people walked by without noticing. He captured that beauty, romanticized it through his art, and let other people see the world as he did and perhaps eventually see the beauty in it themselves without having to use him as an intercessor.

Following in this tradition, Scott Schuman encourages a way of seeing through his activity as a modern day flâneur, seeing distinction in people and capturing his experience of their creative construction on digital film. Schuman himself defines a *sartorialist* as “a gentleman that has developed a style that helps express his personality” (Schuman “Focus”). Though his scope has widened out to include female *sartorialistes* (as he calls them in the early days of his site), the focus on Schuman's own vision of stylish images remains. Through the site, he invites the viewer to come along and experience the power of style. The photographs that result from this modern day flânerie present a different kind of fashion image, a fashion image which moves the focus off of the individual garments and onto both the individual embodying the fashion and the appreciating eye behind the camera. This way of seeing people in clothes foregrounds the work of fashion, foregrounds the dressed body as a constructed image - constructed, not from scratch, not without limits, not in a vacuum, but out of the materials of the world taking into account the varied meanings and associations of bodies in the world.

Against the backdrop of the impersonal interpersonal environment of the fashionable city, the people photographed on *The Sartorialist* act as stand-ins for our own hopeful belief in the mythical power of fashion - the power to be agents of our own creation. Benjamin's conception of the wish/dream, the kernel of authentic wish within the ultimately futile dream of the

commodity, inevitably plays out in the relationship between the individual and fashion. Yet on the street, where Scott Schuman shoots his photographs, that wish can be made real, however briefly. Our recognition of and appreciation for style on the street is a function of what Nancy calls the distinction of the image - the supplemental, the intimate, the untouchable element that exists in our communion with the successful artistic image. Schuman, following in the tradition of Baudelaire's flâneur, spotlights the work, energy, and eventual product of personal style. By tracing the mythic power of fashion on the site through Benjamin and Nancy's theoretical concepts and linking it to a semiotic analysis of images from the website, I will argue that *The Sartorialist* plays a unique role in supporting the project of fashion and recognizing its significance within the anxiety and power of the urban experience of the street.

In her classic essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, Laura Mulvey quotes a famous aphorism which argues that trying to deconstruct beauty destroys it (implying that we should not look too closely at pretty things, because if we do, we will not like what we see). This is indicative of the way a lot of intellectual people have treated fashion, as something superficial that will dissolve upon further investigation. Yet this examination of *The Sartorialist* will add to the growing body of work in fashion theory which rescues fashion from the theoretical ghetto. The project of style is a serious and meaningful feature of modern life. By deconstructing the practices of *The Sartorialist*, I critique the fashionable image while still retaining the beauty and importance of style as individual creation.

Chapter One: Understanding the Streets

Part One: In the City, On the Streets

Cities provide very particular places for the display of fashion and personal style. Photography can take an individual and freeze them into a beautiful image, but the urban environment can perform the same function in real time, on the street, in places where all the disrupting information inherent in a human life is hidden away. The streets and buildings that make up the city provide spaces for all varieties of people to exist in close proximity but be all but completely unaware of the content of each other's lives. For De Certeau:

> the identity furnished by [the city] is all the more symbolic (named) because, in spite of the inequality of its citizens' positions and profits, there is only a pullation of passers-by, a network of residences temporarily appropriated by pedestrian traffic, a shuffling among pretenses of the proper, a universe of rented space haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places. (103)

The city itself exists, in part, as a mythic space, a romantic notion built on top of the giant structures of iron and cement that border the streets and dot the skyline of the metropolis. The city, like the country, is a space we imbue with meaning. Like the bright and idyllic field dotted with shepherds in the pastoral poetry, the city too is romanticized as a place of excitement and potential.

The number of people milling about is one exciting attraction of the city - Who will you meet? What will you see? - and one of its most immediately noticeable features. Unlike life in the country where faces are familiar, in the city, strangers surround us. The stranger is an organic part of the metropolitan experience, according to Georg Simmel who defined a stranger as

someone who is:

> close to us insofar as we feel between him and ourselves similarities of nationality or social position, of occupation or of general human nature. He is far from us insofar as these similarities extend beyond him and us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people. (“Stranger” 147)

Though we will never know each other's names, we spend hours before and behind each other in line for coffee, in too-close physical proximity on streetcars and subway trains, jostled on busy street corners on Saturday afternoons. The exterior world of the city is filled with people we do not know. In Weber's seminal essay on “The City”, he defined the city not solely by geographical space or population but as “a settlement of closely spaced dwellings which form a colony so extensive that the reciprocal personal acquaintance of the inhabitants, elsewhere characteristic of the neighbourhood, is lacking” (Weber 65). The urban space, by this definition, is predicated on this simultaneous closeness and strangeness. Our proximity to a large volume of strangers makes these cohabitants both intimate to our lives and unknown entities. The city breeds anonymity; because city dwellers lack the community and personal ties that knit together smaller communities, they might walk past each other every day without learning any more about their neighbour than the details of their *Canada Goose* winter jacket.

This strange closeness found in the city has several meaningful effects on the individual. One benefit of this urban anonymity is the way it lets people create and exist independently without fear of censure from the smaller community. Simmel believed that city dwellers inevitably ended up with a *blasé attitude*, “an indifference toward the distinction between things” in order to cope with the mental stress of the constant change and disruption happening outside their doorstep (“Metropolis” 327). It is this attitude, he would argue, that allows a city dweller to

walk past a homeless person on their daily walk to work without even registering their presence. The city creates people who fail to notice each other, according to Simmel, and this lack of personal connection is the source of that familiar urban feeling of “being alone even though we are surrounded by people” (Hubbard 20). Walking through the city, we can become mere background of other people's lives.

However, this is not the whole story of the city. What for Simmel was indifference can also be understood as a mutual acceptance and tolerance. Though the city can be a lonely place, it can also be a place of discovery. For Simmel, the city was a place of forced alienation, an economic necessity which changed people from emotional beings to cold, rational observers (“Metropolis” 325). He believed that constant change and difference mutated the human condition, unaware of how much difference would become part of all of our worlds through the definition of global, national and personal structures of identification. As it turns out, however, difference does not have to be alienating. Cities provide opportunities for work but they also provide opportunities for mutual coexistence and community. Urban anonymity “[promotes] individualism, free-thinking and civility, with the city creating the possibilities for meetings and mismeetings that would spark creativity” (Hubbard 20). Together in the city, people are interconnected through the very possibility and difference that Simmel saw as a destructive disruption. Filled with mysterious strangers, the city understands mutual oddness and, to a degree, embraces it. The closeness of strangers creates a crowd of (usually) respectful spectators to our lives before whom we can safely experiment in our own creation.

The power and the insecurity that results from this urban anonymity feeds into the development of fashion and personal style. Because we are often alone in the city, clothing provides a way to feel like we are engaging with those around us. Clothes provide an immediate

visual reference for who we are (or who we wish to be) by creating a text that can be read, even in the crush of the urban crowd. Clothing provides a way to reach out and connect without a personal acquaintance, without developing a friendship. At the same time, the city provides space for experimentation and play. We can share space through style, claim space for our identity through fashion and signal our membership in a tribe of our own choosing. Clothes provide building blocks of a sartorial language used to speak among strangers; in the city, the street provides a key backdrop for this interaction.

In the city, a particular fashion of the streets developed at the intersection of street culture and youth culture. These two intertwined cultures created a glamour and excitement around the activities and costumes of the street. Though fashion as we know it (with trend cycles and changing silhouettes) has existed since the fourteenth century, the idea of a youth culture with separate clothing from the adult culture did not explode until the 1960s (Lipovetsky 18). In the 1960s, countercultural teenagers rejected the conventions to which their parents subscribed and began experimenting. Teenagers had more time and energy to spend cultivating their own particular style than their working parents and found role models for rebellion in the Beatniks, Elvis, and eventually the hippies (Steele 41). The media focus on the styles and attitudes of the teenagers during the late 1960s put a spotlight on their dress as meaningful to a movement. The clothes were not just clothes but markers of a particular world view; the style of the time was heavily linked to politics and the way a person dressed told the world where their affiliations lie. These links were not without tension, however. Within the culture, flower power and:

> traditional working-class garments, like blue jeans, also became associated with the aptly named 'counterculture', yet there was also hostility between the orthodox Left and the hippies, who seemed to leftists to be overly involved with cultural issues and bourgeois

individualism. Traditional roles were questioned: male, as well as female, hippies wore flowers in their long hair, as a way of redefining 'he-man' masculinity in terms of peace and love. Blue jeans and T-shirts were, at least superficially, unisex garments. Yet the hippy movement was hardly feminist, and unisex clothing failed to obscure the sexually dimorphic bodies of men and women. Long hair on men symbolized their rebellion against social conformity and sexual restraint, but only outsiders professed to believe that 'You can't tell the men from the women'. (Steele 72)

Though the clothes were associated with a particular politics, they were also a way of looking cool and being part of a larger movement. The romantic notion that clothes can both set a person apart and join them with a community is an enduring and appealing one, especially for teenagers searching for identity. As would later be repeated with the punks and the skaters (and perhaps within most subcultural groups with both political and aesthetic markers), the clothing became a way of subscribing to a particular ethos in the least politically committed way. The clothing was associated with the mythology of the movement (rather than the gritty realities of the politics) and for many people, that was enough.

Youth culture and street culture are inextricably linked because the streets, the sidewalks, the storefronts provide the space for youth culture to display itself. Barred legally and monetarily from entering bars and restaurants, these outside spaces become the primary spaces for display. Seeking to see and be seen, kids migrate to these spaces and make a public display through their loitering. And these furtively smoking teenagers are not the first to use the street as their runway. The streets have acted as a display space for people of all ages since great cities emerged through the Industrial Revolution and subsequent urbanization of the 19th century (Rubinstein 216). Rather than being spread out on farms or in smaller tight knit villages, people were living boxed

in with strangers in the big city. In a town where everyone knows everyone, socializing regularly occurs in the privacy of people's homes. In these new cities, moving outside the home into public places was crucial to getting to know other people. In a world full of first impressions, clothing provided a way to express and impress yourself upon your neighbours, showing off both who you were and what you had (Goffman 2). In an environment where community had to be formed anew, clothes provided one avenue towards participation and engagement with fellow city dwellers.

The streets of major cities like London and Paris, then as in now, provide ample opportunities for the performance of fashion:

> In the public spaces of nineteenth-century Victorian society, men and women seized centre stage in ritualistic performances as fashionable and respectable citizens. Opportunities for public display flourished in the urban environment: the parks, boulevards, transportation systems, shopping emporiums, and entertainment venues of the world's industrialized cities. (Denny 34)

The streets of these bustling metropolitan centers provided a new way for those that could afford it to show off their finery to a world of presumed admirers. At the same time, the streets were a place to go to witness other people's displays. Importantly, however, Ted Polhemus makes a distinction between the promenades of wealthy Parisian courtesans at the turn of the century and the experiences of the streets as it exists today. He writes:

> though the promenade might have marked a critical moment in the shift from inside to outside, it shouldn’t by any means be confused with hanging out. To promenade is to hob-nob with those on the up and up. Hanging out, on the other hand, is best done in the company of those from the wrong side of the tracks. Some *low life* is essential. That, and

youth: *juvenile delinquents*. In this sense, The Street is a dead end – the place to go when you aren't old enough or rich enough to get in somewhere. (Polhemus 7)

Today the street has been democratized and, walking through the downtown of a major city, one is as likely to find a homeless person sleeping as a fashionable person trying to get where they're going. Certainly, some of this is mitigated by the kind of streets one traverses but no matter the area of town, the street (unlike places found indoors, behind locked doors or gates) is always open. Hanging out on an urban street at all hours of the night implies a certain fearlessness regarding the kind of people and situations one might meet there. Though "practical necessity may make The Street a last resort for some, it is precisely this quality which makes it so seductive for many who could be elsewhere" (Polhemus 7). Out on the street, the protective shield of the interior space is removed and anything could happen. Anyone could show up. This dangerous quality of the real world that exists on the street acts as part of its fascination.

The streets then can be understood as a place where things happen - a place to adventure, a place to see and be seen, a place to witness the scene. The cool kids hung out in the streets, cool kids who were noticed by photographers and journalists, especially around music scenes (as seen in Polhemus, Hebdige) and the term "streetstyle" was coined to describe fashion that emerged from different populist movements on the street. Streetstyle has traditionally been theorized as one element of larger subcultural movements having to do with local fashion or politics (Steele 149). The street was the background for these developing subcultures "in the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups - the teddy boys and mods and rockers, the skinheads and the punks - who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized; treated at different times as threats to public order and as harmless buffoons" (Hebdige 2). The fashion was thought to be part of the politics, whether it was attached to a general anti-authority message, a

feminist politics, or a nationalist manifesto, because it was part of belonging to the group. The fashions of these subcultural groups acted as “a form of stigmata, tokens of a self-imposed exile” (Hebdige 2). The fashion was part of the rebel yell of the movement.

Part Two: Style on the Streets

Rather than trickling down from large corporate fashion houses, streetstyle is fashion which begins on the street and bubbles up (Polhemus 8). It reverses the direction of power and creative energy - instead of buying into a corporation's idea of fashion, streetstyle was supposed to be about creating style of your own. It started with urban kids in the clubs and on the streets creating fashion out of whatever materials were available to them. Though streetstyle did not start out with something to sell, the fashions of the street caught the attention of creative people in the fashion world. As a result, street fashion has dictated many major fashion trends which go from the street to the runway before eventually finding their way back to the masses. The grunge movement of the early 1990s began on the streets before being recognized and produced for the fashion elite by designers like Marc Jacobs at *Perry Ellis*. Editors of prominent fashion magazines like *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* encouraged readers to wear “street fashion that mixes rough-and-tumble work clothes with waifish thrift-shop finery” (Steele 145). Though grunge failed to sell well at the top of the market, the high end remake of grunge was indicative of a larger movement where streetstyle acted as inspiration for top designers, upending the traditional top down system of fashion creation. Of course, once it made its way back to the streets, streetstyle was devoid of most of its initial politics and often cost significantly more than it did for the kids who created their “authentic” punk, grunge, or skater looks from the cheap materials available to them at discount stores and thrift shops. Though initially subcultural styles issue

"symbolic challenges" to the existing norms and conventions of the day, they eventually and "inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones" (Hebdige 96). Subcultural styles go on after being incorporated into mall culture, but they become incorporated in the trend cycle, much to the disgust of the old guard.

The movement of subcultural style from the subversive to the mainstream echoes Frederic Jameson's understanding of the movement of culture from modernist to postmodernist. Modernist art was considered subversive to Victorian ideas of politeness and civility (Jameson 124). Yet as modernist ideas became accepted and integrated into mainstream academic teaching, they lost their subversion. For people that grew up with Joyce and Picasso taught in university classrooms, or with punks and skaters walking down high school hallways, the notion that these things were really subversive and dangerously outside of the mainstream faded away. The notion a shaved head or a Mohawk or a safety pinned jacket meant that a person was somehow different, more authentic than the mainstream has lost its lustre as these original tokens of political movements have become commodified as fashion for everyone, not just the politically minded. As trust-fund punks party next to homeless punks at shows for punk rock bands packaged by corporate labels, the clothes have become emptied of much of their original meaning.

Yet the term streetstyle, at least in its original incarnation, was built on the assumption that these styles born on the street were clearly separate, set apart from the practices of both average people and those who were particularly fashionable. In this divided model, style that plays within the bounds of normative structures is treated as if it were a fairly empty recitation of the mainstream norms of the day. Dick Hebdige, in his seminal discussion of subcultural style, sees "normal" dressing as containing "a whole range of messages which are transmitted through

the finely graded distinctions of a number of interlocking sets – class and status, self-image and attractiveness, etc" (Hebdige 101). While both subcultural dressing and normal dressing are fraught with transmissions of meaning, Hebdige distinguishes between what is definitively streetstyle and what is not. He argues that *legitimate* subcultural streetstyle is "*obviously* fabricated" and that those dressed in these subcultural styles "*display* their own codes" (Hebdige 101). In other words, for Hebdige, streetstyle denaturalizes fashion from both the individual and location (where streetstyle would disrupt normal expectations for appropriateness in person and in place) and consciously talks back to existing norms through fashion. All other style on the streets can then be understood and defined in opposition to this definition or as what legitimate streetstyle *is not* - as that which appears natural and appropriate within existing normative codes of dress.

But these distinctions are actually fairly arbitrary, especially for the outside observer. As trend cycles have sped up and subcultural and mainstream styles have overlapped, we have become more accustomed to seeing different fashion styles mixed together on the individual, in mall stores, and in magazine editorials. As a result, all fashion has become more transparent. A person's fashion may be appropriate (and thus, square) but it is never natural. Elisabeth Wilson notes:

> Today, the way in which such fashions have been satirized has undermined the very notion that there is any longer a dominant mode of dress. This is what journalists mean, presumably, when they talk of fashion anarchy: that 'classic chic' no longer exists. Something else, however, exists in its place: parodies of chic, the camping up of style... we have all become so sophisticated about performance that we slyly recognize the attempted sleight of hand that aimed to suggest the absence of effort or impression

creation. No longer do *any* fashions seem normal or 'natural'. (“Adorned in Dreams” 173)

As we become more critical and knowledgeable about the fantasies and realities of display, we see the space between different styles that people put on and the actual person beneath the styles. We are less often tricked by the glamour of fashion because we know what it means to put on a suit, what it costs to buy those shoes. We are aware of the work and so we see the clothes that might once have been thought natural as a conscious display.

One way we might conceptualize the result of this heightened fashion awareness is through Frederic Jameson's understanding of the move from modernism (where style is a reflection of a real individual truth) to postmodernism (where style is empty decoration) as a product of a cultural shift starting in the 1950s (Jameson 113). For Jameson, the style of postmodernism is based on two intertwined notions of pastiche and schizophrenia. Unlike parody which mimicked other styles with laughter and a wink, knowing that the object of parody is real while the parody itself is an act, pastiche rejects the notion of the real and instead merely recalls objects of the past as empty images (Jameson 114). The death of the subject means rejecting the notion of a stable individual beneath the clothing as a myth or a relic and seeing style in the postmodern moment is just empty decoration, devoid of originality, “left to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (Jameson 115). Jameson argues that part of the reason we have moved from modernism to postmodernism is because we have run out of things to invent (115). Because we are no longer creating new styles but instead just continually drawing on already existing styles, we are stuck saying what has already been said, already been a part of the mainstream. Our style is emptied of political content (and thus is pastiche) and untethered from space in time (and thus is schizophrenic).

Yet both of these either/or distinctions - either natural or actively and disruptively

conscious, either empty decoration or a reflection of a complete and stable subject - neglect the meaningful work done in the space in the middle between these two poles of activity. Subcultural movements foregrounded the potential of clothes to express intense feelings about one's space in time. These groups encouraged an understanding of clothing as the construction blocks of self-presentation by imbuing clothes with clear and definable meanings, understanding a garment as a physical token, as Hebdige wrote, of a meaningful state of mind (Hebdige 2). Though the streetstyle found on *The Sartorialist* is not connected to a particular political movement, it still treats clothing as meaningful and expressive. Clothes can signal membership in many different communities but at the same time spotlight the desire for (if not the achievement of) individuality. In this way, fashion can still be understood as acting out the push towards and pull away from group conformity that Georg Simmel wrote about at the turn of the century - the push and pull of union and segregation which propels fashion and society forward in small steps ("Fashion" 544). Through streetstyle blogs and the internet, this activity of everyday dress is recognized and validated.

Part Three: Documenting Streetstyle

Since the development of the instant camera in the late 1880s, the street has been a popular place for photographers enraptured with "the idea of the city as a self-generating source of images and the vision of being able to grasp every moment as an image became a reality" (Eskildsen 11). The city, bustling with activity and all levels of life interacting in one space, provided a whole world of images to these newly equipped photographers. Street photography has historically stood "at the crossroads between the tourist snap, the documentary photograph, [and] the photojournalism of the *fait divers* (news in brief)" (Scott 15). Unlike the documentary

photograph, however, which seeks to evoke the human condition, the street photographer seeks out "the adventures that lie dormant in a street, at a crossroads, in a market, adventures generated by the secret forces at work just below the surface of things" (Scott 59). Paul Martin and Frank Sutcliffe were among the first photographers to make their name taking pictures of the vibrant world on the street (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 103). For these photographers, Clive Scott writes, "this real contact in real time means that the artist's hand does not so much describe what is in front of it...but *designates* it as it happens" (Scott 38). The street photographer's camera was supposed to seize the moment as it happened and hold it in place on film. These photographs were supposed to be candid, capturing real life as it happened, but they benefited from the expertise and artistry of the photographers. The beautiful pictures that resulted from street photography soon appealed to the world of fashion photography, where it became popular to move outside the studio to create "straight" or realistic fashion photographs in the 1930s and 40s (Hall-Duncan 77). As realistic photography developed, mid century artists like Paul Strand and Henri Cartier-Bresson continued developing photographic techniques to capture "the spirit of the imagery" and reflect the movement and energy of the real world out on the street (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 153). The spirit of these photographs also reflected back the fascinations and interests of the photographer, the world according to their eye. These particular views of the world can be seen in Diane Arbus's photos of real life oddities as well as the slice of life photographs of Lee Friedlander, who often captured his own shadows in his photographs in order to testify that he was there (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz 388). Street photography shows something to the world that might otherwise be missed were it not for the street photographer's eye.

Streetstyle photographers today continue in this tradition, drawing attention to the real

style of individuals on the street. Beginning with Bill Cunningham's legendary *New York Times* column and exploding over the last ten years with popular streetstyle sites like *Facehunter, Garance Doré, Jak and Jill*, and *Mr. Newton*, the work of style on the streets has become the subject matter of countless internet sites. The street provides a common thread through the projects of these different photographers and provides the backdrop to much of their work. The historical implications of the street as both "the stage upon which this drama unfolds and the bottom line metaphor for all that is presumed to be real and happening in our world today" which encouraged the original street photographers to go outside and document their world still remains as part of what makes streetstyle so appealing (Polhemus 6). These sites reveal the everyday experience of fashion in the world, providing photos as inspiration without explicitly trying to sell the reader anything. They take seriously the project of style construction and treat consumption as meaningful and valuable, but they are not selling the shirt in the picture. The sites provide inspiration from real people about things that could be found at a variety of price points and locations and images that speak to different ways of being and looking in the world.

One of the most famous of the new streetstyle sites is *The Sartorialist*, an archive of street style fashion produced by fashion photographer Scott Schuman. Since September 2005, he has been taking pictures of people on the street and posting them on his site. He captures streetstyle in its new iteration, noting that:

> The thing that is really different from street style that came before is that it always seemed like they were trying to find the really different thing, find the crazy people and take a picture...I'd take a picture of a guy in a suit, and people would say, 'That's not street style,' and I say, 'But he was on the street!' There's much more subtlety on my blog than on other blogs. (Larocca)

Schuman is interested in fashionable people that exist within fairly conventional parameters of style. At first, his focus was on the fashionable men that he noticed while working in the fashion industry. As his site developed, his focus broadened to include women and people from fashionable cities all over the world. Through the popularity of the site, Schuman has become a fixture at fashion events in fashionable cities like Milan, New York, and Paris where he often takes photographs, not of the shows themselves, but of the people on the street outside the shows (sometimes models or editors, sometimes normal people). He usually presents these people without captions or identifying job titles – the stories and backgrounds of the people pictured are secondary to his own appreciation of their style.

The Sartorialist provides a site for the examination of this moment of real life. This does not mean it provides a perfect window to the outside world. Rather, the site can be understood as an approximation of the experience of the street, a recreation of a lived experience that works on many levels to fool the eye into seeing the photographic image as reality. The realistic style of the photography on *The Sartorialist* supports the mythic quality of the street available to the viewer through the site. In his photographs, Schuman makes the camera (and the lighting choices, and the inevitable posing and discarded shots) disappear. The verisimilitude of Schuman's image hides the choice that is implied in every flash of the camera, the choice to privilege a particular kind of fashionable person. The fashionable world he presents is very much the fashionable world as Schuman sees it and that fact is obscured by the presentation of the photographs on the site, displayed with no discussion of how they were made beyond an acknowledgement of the cities where the shots were taken. Most of the photographs present the subjects in medium or long shots looking right at the camera (looking at the lens as if they are looking at the viewer). The pictures are intimate in so far as the subjects of each photograph present themselves to our

look even though there is distance between the viewer and the subject. Rather than using close-ups to show all the details, Schuman's photographs maintain a comfortable distance from their subject, a distance which feels appropriate for an interaction with a stranger. The camera replicates the experience of the eye. Because the photographs appear so real, they help make real the imaginary fashionable individuals within them.

Schuman's photographs are tied up in the same tension between the real and the fabricated which exists in the fashion that is their focus. Photographs, as Susan Sontag writes, "seem to have the status of found objects – unpremeditated slices of the world. Thus they trade simultaneously on the prestige of art and the magic of the real. They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of information" (Sontag 69). Photographs freeze a moment in time and present it in a frame like a window to another moment, hiding the work of lighting and framing and angle that created that particular look in that particular moment:

> Like a wood fire in a room, photographs – especially those of people, of distant landscapes and faraway cities, of the vanished past – are incitements to reverie. The sense of the unattainable that can be evoked by photographs feeds directly into the erotic feelings of those for whom desirability is enhanced by distance. The lover's photograph hidden in a married woman's wallet, the poster photograph of a rock star tacked up over an adolescent's bed... all such talismanic uses of photographs express a feeling both sentimental and implicitly magical: they are attempts to contact or lay claim to another reality. (Sontag 16)

The wood fire in a room incites reverie because it reminds us of a warmer time, a safer time, a port from the storm and a place where things seem easier and time seems to pass less quickly. When we look at photographs, we come in contact with that time. They remind us of another

time, another place, another moment and lay claim to it as real. On *The Sartorialist*, the photographs work aspirationally - we want to be young and interesting and beautiful and fashionable - but they also make that reality reachable because they look and feel real. The documentary style of photography lends credibility and authenticity to the mythic experience of fashion recreated through the site.

But more than it captures any documentary-style truth about the people photographed, *The Sartorialist* really captures Schuman's own eye on the street. The camera provides a mechanism for Schuman to share his particular point of view with his readers and this point of view is implicated in every picture he takes. He acts in the tradition of Baudelaire's flâneur, "as an 'I' with an insatiable appetite for the 'non-I', at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive" (Baudelaire 10). The pictures that Schuman takes create a living portrait of fashion on the street, frozen in the moment of appreciation. Rather than passing a stranger on the street and never seeing them again, or seeing them again and finding out that they are much less interesting than they first appeared, the streetstyle photographer creates an image that lets personal style project out and fill the frame. On the digital card in the street photographer's camera:

> the external world is reborn...natural and more than natural, beautiful and more than beautiful, strange and endowed with an impulsive life like the soul of its creator. The phantasmagoria has been distilled from nature. All the raw materials with which the memory has loaded itself are put in order, ranged, and harmonized, and undergo that forced idealization which is the result of a childlike perceptiveness – that is to say, a perceptiveness acute and magical by reason of its innocence! (Baudelaire 11)

In capturing the scene of the street, the streetstyle photographer mixes the raw materials of the

subject matter – the jeans, the blonde hair, the cement sidewalk – with the intangible, the phantasmagoric power of the experience of seeing style come together on the individual on the street.

When Schuman points his camera at someone and puts the picture on his website, he is alerting his readers to something special, something worth noticing. As a spectator of the creative work in the city, the streetstyle photographer "becomes the translator, so to speak, of a translation which is always clear and thrilling" (Baudelaire 15). By pointing his camera at people on the streets and uploading those images to his site, Schuman makes us pay attention to these interesting ways that fashion works. In this way, he is able to get around the question that haunts all fashion work – maybe people *could* dress to make political statements or create visual interest, but most people don't. On his site, Schuman is able create a virtual world where most people do. And because he offers little information on his subjects, he doesn't foreclose the notion that they could be everything they appear to be. He lets this conflict go unresolved, encouraging the mythic power of fashion. Writing about the relationship of the Surrealist movement to fashion, Elisabeth Wilson notes that, "the relationship between organic and inorganic, natural and artificial is a gap, or tear in the fabric of our experience, through which we may glimpse a different version of the world" (Wilson "Magic Fashion" 383). When the streetstyle photographer captures real fashion on the street, the realistic quality of photography makes it seem like it really holds the moment, holds the feeling and the experience of looking at a person made of and styled with raw materials. Through the website we return to the moment on the street. The display is given power where the imagined is made real.

Chapter Two: A Grammar of Style

Part One: Representations

Like other constructed art objects (architecture, sculpture), successful personal style presents itself as a whole but works as the coming together of many conscious and subconscious parts. One way to undo these structures is through deconstruction. Jonathan Culler defines a practitioner of deconstruction as one who "works within the terms of the system but in order to break it" (Culler 86). The theoretical practice of deconstruction is slippery and hard to define, to the point that Nicholas Royle, in search for a way to make its practices clear, reverts back to a literal definition of deconstruction, defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "the action of undoing the construction of a thing" (Royle 24). But beginning with the clothed individual as a constructed object is a useful way to understand the project of style. The act of construction is a meaningful act. We construct buildings and those buildings become real – they are the product of the imagination of the builder, they fulfil requirements of both aesthetic and function, speaking to how the builder thinks the world should look and what the builder thinks fits in this particular neighbourhood. Both a building and an outfit can be understood as a representation, which Kress and Van Leeuwen define as:

> a *process* in which the makers of signs, whether child or adult, seek to make a representation of some object or entity, whether physical or semiotic, and in which their interest in the object, at the point of making the representation, is a complex one, arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-making, and focused by the specific context in which the sign is produced. *Interest* guides the selection of what is seen as the criterial aspects of the object, and this criterial aspect is then regarded as

> adequately or sufficiently representative of the object in the given context. In other words, it is never the 'the whole object' but only ever its criterial aspects which are represented. (Kress and Van Leeuwen 6)

Representations of style work because of their contingent parts. Reading style, like reading other images, is based on an understanding of representation as the result of active and constructive creative work. Using the materials available to them, people put together outfits which can be understood as a series of signs. In semiotic language, "sign-makers thus have a meaning, the signified, which they want to express, and then express it through the semiotic mode which makes available the subjectively most plausible, most apt form, the signifier" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 6). Each individual unit of clothing is the material representation of a signified and a signifier. Together, these different signs work together to create sign system (the outfit) which can be read in different ways. The meaning in the sign system is always polysemic.

In language, our expression is restricted by the vocabulary that already exists; in style, we are restricted by the clothing that already exists. This is not to say that we cannot invent new words or cut and sew our own patterns, but ordinarily we work within the existing structures and materials of our culture. We make our style choices out of the available materials even if they are, as commodities, "'pre-constrained' like the constitutive units of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sense a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre" (Levi-Strauss 19). Our fashion is tied up in our practices of consumption, in looks and styles and materials that are fraught with the assumptions and complications of their capitalist production. Yet, as Elisabeth Wilson argues:

> garments, like other objects, can take on imagined and/or subjectively experienced

> properties that go far beyond the flaunting of wealth or refined taste. It is *because* we live in a society dominated by capital and consumption that we commandeer material goods for the symbolic expression of values remote from materialism (Wilson, “Magic Fashion” 379).

Our materials come from the cultural and political time in which we exist but we re-imagine them all the time. The thoughtful rearranging of existing patterns and normative sign systems to create new meanings is the practice of Levi-Strauss's *bricoleur*, a creative agent who injects his or her own energies to create or recreate meaning from existing forms. Using existing forms creatively, we can build a coherent image that looks and feels just like who we think we are.

The slick outer shell of the fashionable individual projects a mythic notion of personhood, one which is stable, fixed, and solid. Drawing on Barthes' *Mythologies*, Kaja Silverman defines myth as “the deployment of signifiers for the purpose of expressing and surreptitiously justifying the dominant values of a given historical period” (Silverman 27). The myth of the fashionable individual supports two of the core values of modern day capitalism - individuality and wealth. This dual function of the mythic that Silverman retains from Barthes - where it acts to express *and* to justify, secretly, the values of the day - are intertwined within the world of fashion. The need to project one's self out into the world, onto the street, in front of strangers necessitates the time and money spent on the material goods which act out this silent communication. Where expression and individuality is valued, so too is the consumption of goods which provide the raw materials for that expression. The justification is in the desire for the thing itself.

Barthes theorized mythologies as a second level signification practice, where the sign of the first level signification system became the signifier to the second level of signification (Barthes 114). On the first level, the meaning of the sign is made up of the pictorial (image) and understood meaning (concept) of the thing. A physical apple and the idea of an apple come

together to create the sign “apple”. Yet on the second level of signification, that apple becomes the signifier for other mythic associations. Apple's denotative meaning is “apple” but its connotative meaning, depending on the context, could be a reward for favourite school teacher or a sign of good nutrition. Myth sees the apple itself as “raw material” (Barthes 114). These other meanings are also part of our understanding of the sign of the apple - it exists within a web of signification. In the same way, the images on *The Sartorialist* have a mythic value beyond their literal meaning.

Barthes' semiotic analysis of mythologies was based on a multilayered understanding of signs and signifiers which looked at both the denotative sign and the connotative sign. Barthes famously applied this strategy to an analysis of a black soldier on the cover of a *Paris Match* magazine whereby the denotative signs (black soldier saluting the flag) which becomes a signifier to another connotative sign (nationalism, militarism) (Silverman 28). By drawing out the way in which meaning was formed in the image not only through each individual object but by the meaning of the objects together, Barthes was able to show how ideology was formed and upheld. Barthes' tools of semiotic analysis are useful because they provide a way to understand each garment of clothing as part of a larger mythic whole of self-presentation. Barthes also improved on Saussure's original semiotic analysis by allowing for “motivated as well as unmotivated signifying relationships” (Silverman 28). Rather than being completely arbitrary, the links between sign and signifier could be understood in relationship, where a Ferrari indicates wealth not only because it is a symbol of wealth but because it really costs a lot of money. In the same way, a cheap looking suit indicates lower income not only because cheap suits are associated with sleazy salesmen but also because cheap suits are inexpensive. Meaning is made through an understanding of the sign in context.

Part Two: Methodology

In my analysis of the images on *The Sartorialist*, I wanted to discover how meaning was made on the site over the entire archive of images. In order to deal with this volume of material, I drew upon Franco Moretti's theory of distant reading. Rather than close reading, which takes a few texts very seriously, distant reading shifts the focus to "units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes – or genres and systems" (Moretti 57). This way of examining the archive exposes the structures across the different objects (in this case, photographs) displayed on the site. Rather than focusing on a few images and drawing generalized ideas from the specifics, I looked at the entire site and created general concepts which could then be applied within specific images. Given the size of the digital archive, this method allowed me trace ideas through many different images and make verifiable claims about the content of the site. Instead of using the few to speak for the many, I looked to the many to speak for the few.

The digital archive of *The Sartorialist* provided a wealth of information. Thousands of Schuman's photographs are available on his website where he has been posting multiple images four or five days a week since September 2005. Wanting to speak authoritatively on the content of the archive as a whole, I began by reviewing every photograph on the site from the very beginning of the archive. Instead of looking at each picture closely, I scanned the archive looking for recurring concepts or elements. As I noticed objects like cigarettes and cellphones recurring across many different photographs, I was able to situate them within the larger narrative of *The Sartorialist* and see them as more than the minor details they might appear to be in analysis of one individual picture. The elements which emerged from the site were crucial to understanding the underlying messages inherent in the photographs. Letting the images lead my analysis, I built

my theory of the site from the elements themselves. I was then able to apply these concepts to any image from the site and show how each photograph was built around the same basic principles, principles which created the overall meaning and effect of the images on the site.

I sought to create an overarching framework for the display of fashion on the site through the open coding of key concepts as a form of grounded theory, building my theory from the data present on the site. Through the process of viewing the thousands of images that have amassed in the archive, I was able to recognize meaningful structures at work in the photographs. Using Weber's conception of the *ideal type* as a guiding principle (echoing Moretti's focus on the general unit rather than the specific circumstance), I considered these elements or ideal types as “constructed utopias” or “yardsticks” against which real scenarios can be measured (Kalberg 218-219). Like Plato's heavenly forms, ideal types help make sense of what we see in reality, providing “a clear 'standard' against which given patterns of action can be 'measured'” (Kalberg 219). The ideal types discovered through my own distant reading of the images on *The Sartorialist* work together to create the mythical experience of style on the site. In each image on the site, many of these elements appear, creating coherence over all the images (even if all the elements do not appear in every image).

Part Three: The Elements

The reoccurring tropes within the images can be understood as micro mythologies, coming together to create the larger macro myth of *The Sartorialist*. The images are made up of elements which serve different functions within the larger narrative of the site. The kinds of props found in the pictures, the location of the shots, and the style of photography all locate the activity on the site within the realm of the real (rather than an imaginary fashion space). The

repetition of the real in each photograph grounds the mythic power of fashion in an everyday (and thus, attainable) context. The focus on the classic situates Schuman’s fashionable people within the mainstream of style, speaking in a language that we can all understand while the supplemental power of detail and the visual ruptures of reverse stereotyping foreground the creative work of the individual (as well as Schuman's own taste). Through these different elements, *The Sartorialist* both encourages and recreates the appreciation of style on the street. By freezing this moment in time, the site creates a mythic space where the imaginative potential of style on the street is always real and meaningful.

1. Props

The people captured in the photographs on *The Sartorialist* are often holding real objects which link them to real worlds and real lives. These tokens are unrelated to the ensemble in the photograph and act as anchors, linking the imagined world of fashion with the lived experience of being in the world. Keys, cell phones, cigarettes, coffee cups, magazines – all of these props act as signifiers of real lived experience. These real life accessories separate the people in Schuman's photos from models in magazine editorials. These are people with somewhere to go or somewhere to be (keys, flyers), people with friends and loved ones (cell phone, pet). These are people who are bored or tired or addicted (coffee, cigarettes). These anchoring props create a narrative for the individual. They are all of these things while still being fashionable, looking interesting, valuing aesthetics. These props add depth to the imagined profile of these people – they are still fantasy but they are fantasy made real (the word becomes flesh). Usually, the performance of fashion presents only the end product and, like in social situations, mistakes and complications to this slick finished production are concealed to create “an impression of

infallibility" (Goffman 43). In these photographs, the props present indicate that this is not the big performance, when all unsightly and mundane details are swept out of sight; this is the backstage pass.

Further, the props help situate the individuals in the photographs *within time* giving them both a history and a future. Unlike models in editorials, these individuals are implicitly placed within a time line. The props encourage us to read the people as having a before and after – a trip to the coffee shop, an appointment, a date, a chore – which places them within a space ordered by time. Though the photograph freezes time and represents one single moment of beauty, this is simply one captured moment within a lifetime of moments. The burning cigarette represents a single moment captured but also implicitly references the existence of the rest of the pack. There will be more cigarettes, there will be more outfits, and there will be more days. The prop acts as a kernel encasing the relationship between before, after, and now. They create narratives surrounding the people in the photographs and they authenticate the fashion as personal rather than editorially styled. Props then are tied to the mythic potential of *The Sartorialist.*

("On the Street...Extreme Chic, Paris," *The Sartorialist*, 13 March 2008). A piece of paper as a prop.

In "Extreme Chic, Paris", the woman pictured carries a piece of paper in her hand. Schuman could have asked her to set the paper

down to create a more coherent visual for the photograph, but he did not[1]. As a result, the paper in her hand complicates the visual of the photograph. The paper might be a flyer or a note, an email or a bulletin. People don't usually carry around blank pieces of paper, so we can assume, given that she is outside on the sidewalk, that the paper holds information that is useful to her life. In this way the potential connotative meaning of the paper (flyer, information) explodes out to create more meaning in signification on the second level. The paper means that she has somewhere to go, something to do. The fact that she has a paper in her hand but no purse or carrying case of any kind indicates that she was handed this paper on the street or is delivering it somewhere on the street. She seems informed, purposeful. These associations tie her to a lived experience in the real world.

(“On the Street...Somerset House, London.” *The Sartorialist*, 30 September 2009)
A cell phone as a prop.

This association with a greater life and purpose can also be seen in “Somerset House, London.” In this image, the girl is holding a phone in her hand, potentially in conversation or about to make a call. The cell phone links the girl in the picture to a real life with things to do. Having someone to talk to on the phone means she has somewhere to be, somewhere to go. She is integrated in a network of people who might want to call her or who she might want to call. Merely owning a

[1]The question of exactly how much Schuman stage manages his photographs remains unclear. On September 5, 2006, he took a picture of a woman whose jacket was slightly undone and wrote, “After I took the photo, I felt like I should have asked her to straighten her jacket but then again, the nonchalance in which she wears the vintage coat is part of her charm” (The Sartorialist). The site encourages us to see these moments as untouched and unedited but it is likely given the beauty of the photographs that there is at least some manipulation of light and positioning. For more interrogation of the realities and fictions of street photography, see Scott, Westerbeck and Meyerowitz.

cell phone indicates that communication with other people is a regular experience in one's life. Further, the basic functions of the cell phone suggest that the girl in the picture is someone who talks and someone who listens. She is not merely a pretty face made object in the photograph – she is a living person.

Finally, in “Brooklyn Boho, Brooklyn,” there is a picture of a girl on a sunny day posed like a stork holding a set of keys in her hand. These keys denote access/entrance to a home or car. The connotation of this sign prompts us to read more into this girl and what she represents. Like the flyer before, the keys represent somewhere to go, something to do. They place her in a time line where she will at some point return to this specific home/car place. Keys imply ownership and value; a key is predicated on the idea that you have something worth locking. The other key chains on her key ring, only somewhat visible behind and beside the key, point to a personality, to choices about how to decorate one's life. In some ways, the key works as the perfect mythic object because it is a utilitarian object which always carries with it this mythical potential. Keys often make appearances in jewellery precisely for this reason. Keys provide an entrance to places that are otherwise out of reach. In this photograph, the key represents access to a world.

(“On the Street...Brooklyn Boho, Brooklyn,” *The Sartorialist*, 30 July 2010)
A ring of keys as a prop.

2. Location

As previously noted, meaning making is impacted by all the details that put a sign in context. In

the same way that the apple can represent nutrition or educational excellence based on whether it is on a teacher's desk or on a poster in a doctor's office, the space of signification impacts how we read the sign. On *The Sartorialist,* the photographs are primarily taken on the sidewalk or the side of the street. They are not taken inside fashion shows, or at restaurants, or at parties. They are not taken against white backgrounds or in the desert or another fantastic location like magazine editorials. The sidewalk provides the canvas for these photographs; it is the blank slate onto which these figures are drawn. The sidewalk, too, encourages a reading of these photographs as existing in the behind the scenes spaces of life.

One way of thinking through the space of the street is through a comparison to the world of theatre. The theatre is clearly demarcated into different areas of activity. Erving Goffman compared the spaces of interaction to the spaces of theatre and theorized that people operate within three different interactional spaces: front stage, backstage and places where our appearance isn't tied to role maintaining (Rubinstein 53). The front stage might be our office or date while the backstage would be our homes or dressing rooms. Goffman characterizes the street as falling into the third category as a space where no one is looking to see what we are wearing or judging us on what we wear. Writing about these spaces in terms of fashion, Ruth Rubenstein argues that we can understand the street as an example of this third kind of space, reporting that on the street one finds:

> models hurrying to their assignments carrying the clothes and accessories needed to complete their appearance for the photo shoot. Individuals often do not bother to dress well to run a neighbourhood errand. In cities, women commonly rush to work wearing sneakers, with their business suits and work shoes in their briefcases (Rubinstein 55).

The sidewalks of city streets are spaces we often traverse without thinking in order to get where

we are going in a hurry. And women do, often begrudgingly, sacrifice elements of fashion in order to get to the office on time. Yet the notion that this space is separate from the space of display negates the realities of living in an urban environment.

Especially for the urban dweller, the sidewalk is one of the primary spaces of existence - lookalike liminal spaces we traverse on our way from work to home or play - but even given the time we spend there, it is a space that goes unnoticed on our way to other places. Beyond childhood, the sidewalk is not a destination, a place to sit and stop and play with friends, but a place of movement, a space to go through to get to a more important destination. Unlike the path or the road, the sidewalk is largely devoid of romantic clichés. In his famous essay on the city, De Certeau theorizes that "to walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper" (103). The sidewalk is a place for walking. The sidewalk is only interesting in so far as it exists in relationship to its surrounding buildings - we might look up but we rarely look down. The sidewalk itself is not a mythic space or a space that people dress for. It is not an obvious place of display and thus it adds to the realness of the image.

("On the Street...Dior Homme for Femme, New York," *The Sartorialist,* 12 April 2007)
The sidewalk as a location.

The sidewalk allows for movement between spaces and so it too is implicated in the spectrum of time – the time it takes to get from point A to point B. We are less interested in the sidewalk than the place where the sidewalk ends. As a liminal space between two more important locations, the sidewalk is neither here nor

there and the individual on the sidewalk is out of place, fixed in the middle of a flowing narrative. Though they really exist somewhere else, this moment on the sidewalk creates an imaginary existence in this space. They are not choosing where to be, they're trying to get where they're going. In this way, the sidewalk is a backstage space of life, a space that always exists in relation to other spaces.

This understanding of the sidewalk impacts how we read the location in context. In “Dior Homme for Femme, New York”, the woman pictured is wearing a dark suit is standing on the sidewalk holding a cigarette. Returning to the semiotic reading of the props featured above, the cigarette denotes the habit of smoking but it connotes many deeper associations. The cigarette can be understood as an indicator of stress or addiction. On one hand, it can be a social gesture (smoking together) yet on the other, it can indicate a human weakness at play (even if the weakness is just a desire to look cool). Yet the cigarette existing on the street connotes more than the cigarette achieves alone. On the street, the cigarettes become the signifier for the smoke break, for time off from a day at work or a social engagement. The cigarette is an excuse to be away, to have a moment to one's self. On the street, the cigarette takes on different meanings than it might in a cafe in Paris or in a crowded newsroom. Here the cigarette is not an accessory, it is an activity – something to do that is significantly different from what came before. The cigarette break situates the girl in the picture in a social situation, whether it is work or fun. She is only on the street for the length of time it takes that cigarette to burn out; soon she will be off doing something else because she is not just a model, she is a person with places to be.

3. Costume

Because Schuman's photography focuses on mainstream style (rather than style that exists

on the fringes), elements of *the classic* recur on the site. Schuman seems fascinated with clothes that have a clear, historically grounded meaning, particularly in his appreciation of "old man style" (a term he uses to describe the well-tailored suits worn by older men on the street) and his interest in uniforms. These two fascinations overlap in the way they envelope the individual in the garments of the group; the uniform, after all, can be understood as a blue collar version of the classic grey suit, both in their own way charged with "subordinating the individual to the group effort. Visible uniformity reminds the individual performer that individual excellence should be subsumed in the group endeavour" (Rubenstein 99). Though this sublimation of the individual can certainly be understood negatively in the age of giant faceless corporations, sharing similar signs of clothing can also, as seen in subcultural studies, mean joining in a community with common goals and values. The positive or negative connotation of the community determines the value of the uniform in the eyes of the beholder.

The uniform clearly signals membership in a larger community. Rather than indicating the character or status of the individual, the uniform indicates occupation (for example, the waiter or the barber). As a concept, the uniform provides the standardized basis from which alterations are made, the way to participate and the standard from which one can, if given the option, thoughtfully diverge. When the barber wears his white jacket, he signals membership in a community but the way he wears that white jacket, the way the material is pressed and the shine of the buttons, indicates his ownership of the uniform. This relationship between the individual and their uniform is a reflection of the push and pull between the individual and the collective. The way a uniform is worn signifies something about its wearer because the meaning of the uniform itself is so clear. In a similar way, individual details of the man beneath the grey wool can be understood through the attention to detail, through the subtle ways that the shape and style

of the suit is edited and changed by the wearer. Both the uniform and the suit are clear and reliable signs which associate the wearer with a collective. In this way, these classic styles exist between the collective and the individual.

("On the Street...Waiter at Caffe Florian, Venice," *The Sartorialist*, 13 July 2009)
A waiter's uniform as a costume.

In "Waiter at Caffe Florian, Venice", we see a young man standing in front of a restaurant. He is dressed in a white dinner jacket with a black vest and a white shirt. Even without the information given in the title, the combination of black and white has the cultural connotation of a waiter or waitress in a restaurant. Ordinary people would not often wear these clothes unless they were attending a very fashionable and fancy party. Further, the man is standing up straight with his hands behind his back, giving the appearance of a person who is ready to serve. The location and body language here impacts our reading of this gentleman as *actually* in uniform rather than just playing with the fashion look of the uniform. Taken on their own or on a hanger, we could not know for sure if the clothes were for real or just a playful imitation. The person is implicated in the clothes and has the capacity to define the clothes just as the clothes define the person. Thus we see these clothes, the classic uniform of the restaurant server, and we see them worn with pride, buttons done up, shoulders fitting elegantly. Especially for the American photographer in a European setting, a service industry professional dressed in such a pristine manner evokes a certain pride in their work, proud membership in a group of people with specific and important roles in society. While this might not be the reality of the

individual, it is the connotation of the clothes in the photograph.

The suit is a different kind of uniform which has traditionally carried a positive connotation. In the 1950s, the grey flannel suit was the uniform of the Organization Man and signalled that a man was part of the team, fulfilling the role of the breadwinner in the household (Steele 41). The suit was tied to the family home and the role of father and provider. The suit was closely linked with masculinity, symbolizing "mastery over one's feelings and ...rationality, the state of making decisions on the basis of calculation, organization, abstract rules, and procedure" (Rubinstein 45). Though the suit today has lost some of its symbolic value - as Elisabeth Wilson writes, "Even the city stockbroker dressed in his bespoke Jermyn Street uniform can no longer be self conscious about it...It is no longer possible to *be* the perfectly dressed gentlemen whose dress never calls attention to itself" - it still holds onto associations of classic masculinity ("Adorned in Dreams" 173). The suit represents the pinnacle of lived nostalgia and imaginative fashion because it speaks to deeply entrenched cultural values. Before we deconstructed gender and looked behind the curtain of suburban family life in the 1960s, these signs provided comfort (even as they encouraged conformity). While these ideas may have tarnished some, the material objects still retain glimmers of these associations, glimmers which grow stronger when they are worn by the same men that have been wearing them since the 1950s.

("On the Street...Luca R., Milan," *The Sartorialist*, 17 May 2011)
The suit as a costume.

The continuing power of the suit can be seen in

"Luca R., Milan" where a man in a grey suit is photographed on his yellow vintage-looking bicycle. Though this prop injects a sense of whimsy in the photograph, the suit itself is classically cut and styled. He projects an air of professionalism and seriousness.[2] The jacket, pants, shirt, and tie come together almost as non fashion. Everything fits – across the shoulder, down to the shoes – and the way the suit is worn reflects a pride in appearance and a commitment to a certain masculine standard. Here, the clothes are not trying to express a particular individual style but rather make group affiliations clear. This is not to say that the clothes are not actively chosen by the individual, but the aesthetic quirks of his own personality are not pushing through his clothes.

On *The Sartorialist*, Schuman does not highlight subcultural style – he highlights cultural style, the style at the centre of fashionable development in the West. It is not about the avant-garde on the fringe, not about the without but rather the within. The clothes featured are recognizable and the style is largely defined by nuance – tailoring, detail, accessories – rather than wholesale reinvention of clothing from the ground up. The language of the fashion presented is largely a vocabulary that people understand, even if they're a little fuzzy on the dialect. Schuman's affection for the classic through these uniforms of Western culture engages the audience as members of the imagined community, rather than just viewers of it. Schuman highlights classic shapes and styles, playing within the lexicon. The communal sharing of meanings suggested by the clothing texts embraces shared space and shared cultural history through clothes.

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[2]This picture, taken in Milan, Italy, highlights one of the complications to fashion analysis across borders. The experience of seeing well dressed men on bikes is common in Italy, much more common than it is here. When I read and analyze these images, I am inserting my own culturally specific experience into the analysis. Though the site focused on Western fashion, there are some meaningful differences between the different cities and countries that Schuman photographs. Further study of these cultural differences on the site would be interesting and valuable. See Christopher Breward and David Gilbert *Fashion's World Cities* for more on this topic.

4. The Supplement

Though the outfits in the photographs are generally constructed out of the building blocks of common Western fashion (suits, dresses, jeans, trench coats, blazers), Schuman's subjects often embody more than just a rote performance of already hollowed out fashionable ideas. As much as his work celebrates the community built through fashion, it also highlights the power in the personal style on the fashionable individual. In each photograph, there is an element of specialness that draws attention to the choices made by the individual. This eye-catching moment is often created through bright colour, accessories, and contrast, play within existing and classic elements of fashion rather than wholesale creation of new ones. Each of these elements of distinction adds to the imagined narrative of the individual and opens up space for closer readings of the outfit as a whole. These elements are not necessary to be adequately stylish - many people look very nice and preserve their warmth and modesty on a daily basis without moving beyond the basic and functional - but through an understanding of this extra addition, we can see how fashion expresses something about the individual.

Personal style involves taking that which is whole and making it personal, making something more intimate with the materials of the masses. How can we make sense of this extra work, this addition to that which is already complete? One way this extra element can be understood is through Derrida's concept of the supplement. In Derrida's poststructuralist thought, the supplement is defined as that which "forms a part without being part, it belongs without belonging" (Royle 49). The supplement is separate from the thing but has a relationship to it. Derrida writes:

The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the

> *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates presence. It is thus that art, *techne*, image representation, convention, etc., come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating function. (144-145)

He distinguishes between manmade art and nature here, where manmade craft or techne is supplementary to the natural world – though the natural world is complete without it, art adds something to it (perhaps to our ability to appreciate it). Derrida explains his concept through the distinction between writing and speech that he finds in Rousseau's *Confessions* where writing is supplemental to speech. Derrida writes that writing "must *be added* to the word urgently...as an image or representation" (144). The spoken word disappears upon speaking so the written word must step in as a secondary or unnatural addition to the spoken word, "a sort of artificial and artful ruse to make speech present when it is actually absent" (Derrida 144). In this way, we understand the second function of the supplement; "it intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void" (Derrida 145). The supplement at once adds plenitude to plenitude and fills a space that was not filled by this plenitude. While writing appears in this construction as secondary to speech, Royle argues that "there is a kind of primacy, presence and 'worth' that writing can embody, that is not possible in 'society'" (52). Though the supplement is not the natural world or the immediate speech, it offers something that neither "whole" concepts can attain by fixing them in time, by commenting on them and providing secondary analysis and understanding. In this way, the "whole" and the supplement are unstuck from these clear distinctions of primary and secondary.

Personal style can be understood as a supplement to our real selves, the selves we experience in our own minds. In the same way that writing is supplementary to speech in that it takes that which disappears in a moment and fixes it on the page or computer screen, clothing

provides a means through which we can take who we are and how we feel in a particular moment and export that feeling out into the world for an evening or an afternoon. When we create a self through clothing, we are caught up in the project of identifying ourselves in the world and identification, for Derrida, is "inextricably linked and interminably bound up with the supplementarity, the phantasmatic, or imaginary. Identifying always entails a logic of adding on, making up, being in place of" (Royle 59). Fashion is supplemental – it adds something meaningful to that which was already formed, it fills a space that could not be filled.

The concept of the supplement is especially useful for looking at personal style and the way it creates the presence of the individual through the photographs on *The Sartorialist*. Personal style (style that expresses something about the individual) is indicated in the photographs through the addition of elements which draw the reader's attention. Immediately, bright colours draw attention to the individual. In a crowd of people, the eye is naturally drawn to the woman with the bright blue hair or the man in the magenta pants. But it is not just that the colour happens to be eye-catching – it is that the bright colours indicate a willingness to be noticed. The bright colours act as an attention beacon, as a material call to attract the gaze. The stranger on the street is not only creating an imaginary persona through their clothes, but they are also indicating a willingness to be read, an active participation in a translation of self from one form to another. It is an element of active

("On the Street...Not Blue Jeans But Bright Blue Pants, Milan," *The Sartorialist*, 24 April 2007)
Bright blue pants as a supplement.

styling, something that indicates that what we see on the street is a work of effort and thought. Accessories provide a similar function. Hats, scarves, purses, belts and jewellery, while often functional, also provide avenues for creative expression. Taking their functionality and adding an aesthetic element creates more depth in the image of the individual. The text has more layers and there is more to be read.

The addition of these supplementary elements work in an ensemble according to the same rules that provide the basis for all art - line, colour, symmetry, proportion. A visual can be made pleasing or interesting to the eye by breaking the traditional rules or norms of fashion in thoughtful or unusual ways. One way vibrant visuals of personal style are often seen in the photography on the site is in the development of contrast. Contrast exists when some element of the individual is in tension with some element of their style. There is beauty and power in the visual of the well tailored grey suit or the combination of long blonde hair and a slinky dress, but these looks often appear flat or lifeless beside an image which tweaks this classic look to present a more personal style. Conscious contradiction in clothing reflects a self that is always a mess of contradictions, always more than an easy definition or label. The individual, already made real by the props and the location, is given life through the personal style displayed in these moments.

In "Not Blue Jeans But Bright Blue Pants, Milan", the man pictured is standing on the street wearing a navy jacket, white dress shirt, and black tie. Instead of the expected black/grey/navy dress pants, he is wearing bright blue pants. On the surface, this seems like an arbitrary distinction. After all, what's the difference between bright blue pants and navy pants? Yet by deconstructing this image, one can see the meaning in this sartorial choice. On the surface, these are just blue pants but they connote more. These blue pants connote a lack of fear of being noticed, of stepping outside of the boundaries of classic menswear. Further, they suggest

knowledge of the classic silhouette and a play upon it. This reading of the pants as playful (rather than accidental) is encouraged by the other accessories in the ensemble (the belt, the pocket square). These elements indicate a concern for detail and an engagement with a full head to toe presentation. This play within the existing rules of menswear creates an ensemble which appears consciously constructed. Rather than simply joining in the crowd of men in neutral suits, this man clearly wants to stand apart.

Part of the reason these moments of contrast provide interest for the viewer is because they require the viewer to engage with different levels of cultural knowledge at once – assumptions about class/race/age/gender – as well as their varied assumptions about and associations with particular clothing items, colours, skirt lengths, etc. In these paradoxical moments, fashion has the capacity to become a political act, however briefly, by calling into question how natural the natural order of things really is. Rather than always validating our assumptions, fashion can reveal the arbitrariness of the ideas about appropriateness that are upheld in culture beyond the norms of fashion.

5. Reversed Expectations

One of the ways visual interest is continually created on the site is through the reversal of sartorial expectation. A subset of the supplemental elements of fashion described above, the reversal of stereotypes creates tension between the expected wearer and the actual wearer, between one garment and another garment. This visual rupture creates interest by referencing deeply rooted cultural knowledge and expectations. For example, when masculine suits are worn by women (or young male hipsters), they take on a different, inevitably more ironic connotation than they do on older men. Reclaiming objects from the past in a new context has always been

part of fashion's history. In the 1960s, hippies rejected the current moment and searched for more authentic (and less corrupted by "the man") clothing "of long ago and far away" (Steele 74). Of course, the past never returns in quite the same way it was experienced originally; the fringed headbands borrowed from the American Indians still evoked earthiness and mysticism, perhaps, but the connotations were much different on the bodies of American hippies. Fashion writer Valerie Steele is critical of this nostalgic re-imagining of objects of the past. She argues that fashion's propensity to borrow from the past is not indicative of:

> a mass flight into nostalgia. Indeed, the evidence indicates that most fashion trendsetters have very little sense of history. The actual past is essentially irrelevant; it exists only to be cannibalized. Designers, stylists, photographers, and club kids all ransack the past for usable images, which are then ripped out of context and ruthlessly stripped of most of their original meaning. (Steele 152)

This understanding of the fashionable turn towards objects of the past is limited in its understanding of how relevant the past is within objects reworked for the present. Rather than thinking of these objects as empty relics, we can conceptualize them as carrying with them the associations and meanings of the past, re-understood through the way they are worn and carried in the present. Clothing is always "pre-constrained", always caught up in what it meant before it was re-contextualized by twenty first century

("On The Street...Lower East Side, New York," *The Sartorialist*, 5 June 2006)
Menswear on a female body as a reversed expectation.

hipsters (Levi-Strauss 19).

Rather than existing as empty shells hollowed out by the artifice chasing fashion crowd, these objects are re-imagined by being placed in a new context. For instance, a recurring theme in the photographs is women in menswear. A woman in menswear subtly questions what it means to dress like a woman, what it means to be a woman in a man's suit, what it means to be a man in a suit that a woman can wear and re-appropriate. Especially because Schuman demonstrates such a fidelity to and affection for the old traditions of men in suits, his interest in gender bending (however slight) seems particularly significant. These questions create a moment around the fashion that is about more than just pleasing aesthetics. In “Lower East Side, New York”, we see a woman on the street wearing a tailored shirt and pants with large black suspenders. This is not a woman in drag – there is no sense that this is a costume, but rather a play on the different meanings inherent in her sartorial choices. The unbuttoned blouse creates a femininity that contrasts the masculine lines of the suspenders. She may not be actively performing an act of cultural questioning, but she is making a thoughtful choice. By capturing these moments, Schuman puts a spotlight on certain kinds of dressing and creates a moment surrounding fashion that is fleeting, capturing and privileging this supplemental project of personal style.

(“Truth is Stranger, No...More Fantastic, than Fiction,” *The Sartorialist*, 22 November 2005) Dreadlocks and a suit as a reversed expectation.

But this tendency to capture contrast through the reversal of stereotypes can waver awkwardly between

the celebration of difference and an almost condescending appreciation for the implications of a man with dreadlocks wearing a nicely tailored suit. As much as clothes provide materials to play and create different meanings, people's bodies hold all kinds of culturally constructed meanings that they cannot control and the reason that we are drawn to particular styles, whether it be for ourselves or on strangers on the street, does not exist outside of a cultural history and subconscious ideas about what is beautiful, what is professional, what is feminine, what is strong. In "Truth is Stranger, No...More Fantastic, than Fiction", a black man is pictured wearing a well-tailored grey suit and a wide brimmed straw hat. The contrast of the hat with the suit creates visual interest through the reversal of expectation – the formality of the suit is in tension with the casualness of the hat where the hat undercuts the formality of the suit. The suit looks more casual, more like an everyday uniform when it is worn with the straw hat. At the same time, however, the man has long black dreadlocks. The visual power of the image also derives from the contrast of the dreadlocks against the suit. One of the reasons why this image is powerful is because we do not expect to see a man in dreadlocks in a suit. Kobena Mercer writes about wearing dreadlocks as a move towards more natural black hair, a "liberating rupture or 'epistemological break,' with the dominance of white-bias" (104). Unlike straightened or permed hair, dreadlocks represented a natural black stylization and thus were a powerful statement of acceptance of blackness over an attempt to fit into whiteness. The suit, on the other hand, is traditionally associated with white, male power. The tension in the image reveals elements of the initial separate signs that might not initially come to mind. In this way, the power to reverse expectation through fashion can be as limiting as it is liberating.

These five elements of *The Sartorialist* provide a language through which we can understand the structures of the site. The props and locations act to anchor the photographs to the

real world. The costume acts to situate the fashion within a classic, translatable context. The supplement and reversed expectations interject the personal into the project of style, highlighting the individual along with the clothes. These structures provide a way of understanding the site and lend a vocabulary to a discussion of the phenomenon of streetstyle. The repetition of these elements subtly reinforces the key concerns of the site, creating a cohesive representation of style on the street.

Chapter Three: On Looking and Feeling

Part One: On Looking

The images on *The Sartorialist* affect us, not only because they are beautiful images offering a window to the real world but also because we identify as both the bearer and object of the gaze. What Schuman captures simultaneously in his photographs is both the experience of looking and the imagined experience of being looked at. Susanne Holschbach writes that,

> this process of becoming-a-picture...is not limited to the specific situation of being photographed or filmed; it takes place in the street as much as in public places, even in one's own four walls, because it is a fundamental mechanism of intersubjectivity: in order to be perceived and recognized as a person at all, I need to allow myself to be identified within the framework of a series of possible pictures. (Holschbach 172)

Implicated in the fashion project catalogued on the site, we identify with these people photographed on streets and sidewalks just like ours. We are at once the spectator and the object of the spectatorship; we are the ones watching and the ones waiting to be seen. *The Sartorialist* recreates the experience of our eyes and bodies, watching and being watched on the street.

In busy urban centres, where we are surrounded by visual and auditory stimuli all the time, our interaction with strangers often occurs in glances “so rapid [that they are] subliminal (and seldom something we are conscious of): a quick flick of the eyes as people glance at each other, scan their appearance and then look away” (Hubbard 17). This glance can be enough to secure us in the knowledge that people are not dangerous or are not going to bother us. This glance also sees people in limited terms - in a short amount of time, we are able to judge if someone is stylish or not, while simultaneously being judged ourselves. Jacques Lacan

considered the gaze to be a simultaneous seeing and being seen, writing that:

> what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside. It is through the gaze that I enter light and it is from the gaze that I receive its effects. Hence it comes about that the gaze is the instrument through which light is embodied and through which – if you will allow me to use a world, as I often do, in a fragmented form – I am photo-graphed. (106)

It is in the gaze that we come into being. The experience of being seen is equal to the experience of seeing.

For Lacan, this importance of looking begins with the mirror stage in development where the child, still unable to run around, recognizes the face of another. In this moment, "curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world" (Mulvey 836). It is in this moment that the child is thought to recognize the difference between image (the other) and self-image (themselves). Because in this early stage in development, they are still lacking mobility, they see the other as superior:

> The child's fragmented body becomes, thanks to the way that the mirror is read, a whole. The ideal of the body as a unity over which the child has mastery emerges as the illusion produced through the mirroring experience. Though the mirror simply returns an image of what the child actually does, the mirroring experience deceives insofar as it presents the body through a coherent image. The wholeness of the body is seen in a way that is not experienced. (McGowan 1)

Fashion has the ability to recreate this experience of looking and seeing wholeness where we are fragmented. On the pages of magazines where fashion models wear outfits styled by someone

else (perhaps less beautiful and certainly outside of the frame of the photograph), whose makeup and hair are done professionally and whose minute imperfections at the end of all of that constructive labour are washed away by a cursor in *Photoshop*, we look in the editorial mirror and sees a person that we could never be - perhaps not so unlike ourselves, but better, more fashionable, luckier.

When the glamour of fashion works, it creates a whole where there are only separate parts. We see the whole person, the vision in tights and tweed, and sometimes we are captivated by it. Style can create something unfragmented in a world where everything is fragmented. Sometimes, when this package is built without the required nuance and thoughtfulness (and perhaps artistic talent), the work is visible behind the image. You might think of those times when you can't help but notice the middle aged man in his leather biker jacket or a young girl in high heels and a miniskirt. We understand that these people are trying to project something through their clothes; we sense their unease in the outfits they have chosen. We can see the work. But successful fashion hides the work, especially in the short interactions that happen on the street. We just see a glimpse, a ghostly image, and then it is gone. The performance of successful fashion gives us the impression that someone's "present poise and proficiency are something they have always had and that they have never had to fumble their way through a learning period" (Goffman 47). "Red, Green, and Grey, Paris" is an example of a successful image of style, frozen in time through Schuman's photography. His visual design choices - to center the woman within the frame, to position her in front of a dark building to create a monochromatic image (apart from her already striking hair) - encourage a reading of this outfit as successful style by subtly supporting the sartorial choices with his own stylistic choices. This woman would be striking even in a poorly shot and lit photograph, but she benefits from Schuman's expertise as a visual designer.

The combination of the slightly longer menswear grey jacket with the denim creates a masculine silhouette, even as the nip in at the waist suggests a feminine body underneath. Though the jacket has a traditional line and cut, it is made out of a soft, almost velvety fabric. The hard lines of the suit are in contrast to its soft materials as well as the subtle paisley print over the grey background. The grey scarf tucked into the neck opening creates a feeling of being enveloped by fabric while the narrow cut of both the jacket and the jeans suggests the body beneath. Upon further investigation, the jacket is a site for repeated reversed expectations, between masculine and feminine, hard and soft, revealing and covered up. The longer one looks at this jacket (depending on the detail visible in the image), the more details become available as elements working together to create this visual rupture. The layers of the outfit become visible and definable.

(“On the Street...Red, Green, and Grey, Paris,” *The Sartorialist*, 1 October 2007)

Her bright red hair acts as a call to be noticed, a shining beacon in a sea of blonds and brunettes. It is the supplemental element of the ensemble that encourages a closer reading by suggesting an interest in the project of personal style. Especially given that she appears slightly older, the red reads like a challenge against fading away. The striking shade of red along with the youthful bangs creates a freshness that brightens the grey of her ensemble and the ombre effect at the ends (where the red appears to fade into a bright orange) indicates an attention to detail and to depth. Where bright coloured hair could evoke punk rock, this sophisticated dye job mitigates

associations with *Manic Panic*. The visual interest created through the hair inserts personal style into a sophisticated image.

But this could just be a picture in a salon window. Because the clothes and hair work together so successfully, the image could be read as an editorial image, styled by an entire team of professionals. The location of the photograph (outside, against a wall) immediately makes it seem more candid than most editorially produced images. The natural light against the dark wall suggests an outdoor space rather than the inside of a studio. Further, she's holding a piece of paper in her hand, a prop that links her to a world and an itinerary. This prop acts as a visual distraction, consistently situating the image within the real world made up of real people. Through these elements in the photograph, the stylish image which so successfully rendered personal style is made theoretically attainable.

On *The Sartorialist*, the display of this work of style in archived photographs creates time for reflection. Instead of being momentarily mesmerized by the wholeness of the image, we are given time to see its parts. We see the image and think about the person. We see the outfit as art and think about the choices made to pair those shoes with that dress, why it works or why it does not. We think about the origins of that menswear suit on that woman and wonder what she is trying to say about masculinity femininity (or both or neither). Given the time to reflect, we can see the person and their constructed image as interrelated things. In essence, we see the work of successful artistic construction as more than just decoration.

Part Two: On Feeling

Subjectivity is an important component to the appreciation of fashion. Through *The Sartorialist*, this is made clear through the repeated elements and looks which make up Scott

Schuman's particular, subjective view of what is (and implicitly, what is not) stylish. While Schuman's images create a fashionable real, they also often exemplify a beautiful, unique fashionable image. These beautiful images cause us to stop and look; they are not merely pretty but also interesting, evocative, compelling. The arresting image of personal style on display is important because it grabs our attention and creates a moment of appreciation or what Nancy would call a shared experience of *presence*. These moments are worth investigating. Through a synthesis of Nancy's conception of the presence of the image and Benjamin's hopeful wish within the inevitable dream of capitalism, the power and potential of the successful fashion image will be unearthed. Yet what specifically makes up the content of moments is tightly tied to our own subjectivity. Being receptive to particular fashion images depends on the kind of stores you shop at, the kind of clothes you wore growing up, the practical necessities of your life, and many more particular and personal style modifiers. If your tastes align with Scott Schuman's, *The Sartorialist* might provide you with many moments to reflect upon compelling images. If they don't, then the images might appear technically proficient, but flat.

It is difficult to convince another person that something is beautiful if they do not see it themselves - perhaps it is all in your head, anyway, in your own projections and associations which read more into a pair of jeans and a grey jacket than might be present in the image itself. In the following theoretical discussion, I support my discussion of Nancy and Benjamin with images which I find personally evocative, recognizing that is a personal choice based on feelings which are difficult to translate into words. In my analysis of the images, I employ the elements to show how the image works, focusing on the way combinations of garments create a compelling image, attempting in words to describe how the feeling is built. Through the separation of theory and my own favourites, I strive to reflect the very project of thoughtful looking that exists as one

function of Scott Schuman's project on *The Sartorialist*. Though you may not agree about what you see, he encourages us to take the time to really look.

Jean Luc Nancy discusses the importance of looking in his discussion of the *image*. For Nancy, the image is different from the ornament. Where the ornament provides mere decoration, the image provides access to another's world. The image is defined by its relationship to its source material. Though it resembles the thing itself, the image "is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially" (Nancy 2). In terms of fashion, we can understand this as the separation between the self and the fashionably constructed self. Though the painting of the sunset may look exactly like the sunset or our outfit may be a perfect reflection of who we are, the space between the reality and the resemblance is the domain of *the distinct*. The image's "distinction is the dissimilarity that inhabits resemblance, that agitates it and troubles it with a pressure of spacing and passion" (Nancy 9). The image's power resides in the reality that whatever resemblance exists between the image and the thing, there is always dissimilarity within it, a knowledge that there is a fundamental difference between being something and looking like something. The image presents a window to the world while simultaneously presenting distance from it.

The distinct is separate from the world of things (described as those things which have use). In the image, however, the distinct "establishes simultaneously a withdrawal and a passage that, however, does not pass" (3). The image can only offer a passage *towards* something because the image is never the thing itself, never the actual person beneath the style. The spectator is caught in the passage that does not pass; "an intimacy is thus exposed to me, but *for what it is*, with its force that is dense and tight, not relaxed, reserved, not readily given" (Nancy 3). The spectator is intimate with the image – it affects them and they are shown something private/secret

through it, a glimpse at the space between ourselves and the other. This intimacy at a distance is described by Nancy as "barely touching the skin, *à fleur de peau*" (Nancy 4). This French phrase is evocative of this closeness-at-a-distance that Nancy is talking about here. Like a flower touching skin, the presence of the image is a delicate sensation, one that would be lost in an attempt to grasp it, to crush it within one's fingers.

In this image, both the phone and her placement on the street make her seem real. However, it is the combination of supplemental elements which is more powerful in creating the visual of a thoughtful person who has made so many personal choices about her outfit. This image is built out of many disparate pieces – the striped skirt, the knee highs, the granny cardigan, the boxy red purse, the bowler hat – that don't match but still complement each other. There is an effortlessness in the rumple of the tucked in shirt and the softness of the cardigan. The combination of thoughtfulness and effortlessness creates a tension in the image, creating visual interest and drawing our attention to each individual piece.
("On The Street...Hudson St., New York," *The Sartorialist*, 7 April 2011)

Nancy uses the portrait as an example of how this presence works and this example is useful to an understanding of what gives clothing presence. Nancy writes that portraits touch us *à fleur de peau* or else they are not portraits of all – their portraitness (as it were) is caught up in their ability to touch, to reveal a presence of the individual, and only in so far as they do that are they separate, as Nancy notes, from a license or passport photograph. The distinction between the portrait and the identification photo is that the portrait "pulls and *draws* (this is the semantic and etymological sense of the word), in that it *extracts* something, an intimacy, a force" (Nancy 4). Through the image, the very drawing of the image,

something of the essence of the person is brought out. The focus on drawing both literally and figuratively here foregrounds the creative work of image-making. The presence appears in the image but is also is created through the image. When the artist draws a portrait, they create this space of presence. The individual in front of their closet, staring at their clothing, making choices about how they would like to appear, is also pulling and drawing in order to create an image of themselves.

When people dress, they make choices about how they want to be presented in the world. Though some people are more eager participants in their own image-making than others, everyone is created and exists first as a visual billboard when they walk into the room or into a conversation. The question that remains for us is if that image can be understood as Nancy's image or merely as a driver's license photo – something that merely recreates the individual without drawing attention to the space between the representation and the self that exists beneath it. It is only through the process of styling that this distance is highlighted. When an ensemble catches the attention of a passerby, when they ask, "What's he wearing?" or think, "Cool shirt", they are noticing both the thing *and* the

This image works through its reversed expectations. The combination of the backpack, long dress, and white sneakers suggest a flurry of different motivations. An everyday glamour exists in the combination of these practical items, like the sneakers (which reference the real) alongside the formality of the floor length gown. The unnaturally red hair encourages the reading of this combination as a thoughtful display (rather than a wardrobe malfunction). Schuman's photograph also encourages us to read this as a successful fashion image through her positioning on a wooded street - she seems almost like a fairy, a little out of space and time. The unexpected combination of elements works with the setting to create this other worldliness. ("On the Street...Whitaker St., Savannah," *The Sartorialist*, 6 May 2011)

individual – the closeness-at-a-distance. For Nancy:

> The distinct *distinguishes itself*: it sets itself apart and at a distance, it therefore marks this separation and thus causes it to be remarked – *it becomes remarkable*, noticeable and marked as such. It also, therefore, attracts attention: in its withdrawal and from out of this withdrawal, it is an *attraction* and a *drawing* toward itself. The image is desirable or it is not an image (but rather a *chromo*, an ornament, a vision or representation – although differentiating between the attraction of desire and the solicitation of the spectacle is not as easy as some would like to think…). (Nancy 6).

Here Nancy points out one of the cruxes of these aesthetic arguments. Subjectivity is always involved in deciding what is merely ornament and what is image, what is flatly decorative and what opens up the closeness-at-a-distance that defines the image. Given that images work to place the spectator in this window to another's world, in a liminal space between one world and another, one way to understand this complication is to consider the relationship working both ways where

This image is built out of the different textures - the knit of the grey sweater in contrast to both the furriness of the scarf and especially the sparkly sequins of the skirt. The knit above and legs in black tights below further encourages us to note the competing interests at play in this outfit. This feels like the coming together of two costumes, a fashionable walk of shame where the desires of the night compete with the realities of the day. It is the individual beneath the clothes that foregrounds an individual's choice in these combinations. The smile beneath the knit cap encourages us to read this combination as playful. The combination of the oversized furry cowl and the short, sassy sequined skirt, combined with her age, creates a whimsical playfulness which hints at the woman beneath the clothes.
("On the Street...Being Cool, Staying Warm, NYC," *The Sartorialist*, 17 February 2010)

the spectator depends on the image to reveal its presence and the image depends on the spectator being open to the presence. Who the spectator is affects how open they are to appreciating the presence of the image. Later, Nancy seems to recognize this, writing that "the image touches me, and, thus touched and drawn by it and into it, I get involved, not to say mixed up in it. There is no image without my too being in its image, but also without passing into it, as long as I show it *consideration,* maintain my regard for it" (Nancy 7). The content of this consideration is vague. How does one maintain regard for the image? The history of distinguishing mass art from high art reveals how Western culture has historically treated art images as either those which critics might show regard for and those which were not worthy of their consideration in this same way. It is only by choosing to give things consideration that we are able to pass into the presence of the image. Importantly, then, it is not the presence that would seemingly come first but rather the choice to maintain regard for it. In this way, the importance of the viewer who chooses to see is clear. When Schuman walks the streets looking for style, he "maintains his regard" for the project of fashion, for the power and possibility of the styled individual to express something worth understanding or documenting out into the world.

In the close of his chapter on the image, Nancy gestures towards an understanding of the presence of art as a means through which community could be built through art appreciation. When we look at art, "resemblance gathers together in force and gathers itself as a force of the *same* – the same differing in itself from itself: hence the enjoyment [jouissance] we take in it" (Nancy 9). We recognize the distance between the artistic image and the thing that it represents. Through our reflection on the art, "we touch on the same and on this power that affirms this: I am indeed what I am, and I am this well beyond or well on this side of what I am for you, for your aims and your manipulations" (Ibid). This distinct presence of the image is not something to

be used, traded or owned by someone else. Creating the distinct through art is a declaration of independence and through art, "we touch on the intensity of this withdrawal or this excess. Thus *mimesis* encompasses *methexis*, a participation or a contagion through which the image seizes us" (Ibid). The image is more than what we get from it, more than what we want from it. In this way, the mimesis of the image also carries this distinctiveness and we participate in it. We are seized, not simply by the resemblance to the thing, but by the fact that there is more there than simply resemblance (that is, the presence of the translation of the thing into the image). However, by recognizing the presence of the distinct in the image "he enters into the image, he no longer looks at it – though he does not cease to be in front of it. He penetrates it, is penetrated by it: by it, its distance and its distinction, at the same time" (Nancy 10). The spectator's one sided relationship turns into a reciprocal relationship, whereby the image opened up to him and he to it. This openness is crucial to the way the image works to reveal presence. The presence is contingent on the openness and vice versa.

The image reveals a presence of a real thing, it reveals, in Heideggerian terms, a world worlding beyond its borders. A world, for Heidegger, is more than the things that we could

This image is successful because of its details. The shopping bag and the little dog give this woman a history, a life beyond her clothing, within the realm of the real. The smartly (and tightly) tied trench and carefully rolled up sleeves indicate a pride in appearance through the attention to line and silhouette. The bright blue dress beneath is bold, especially against the shock of white hair, and it attracts the eye. This image plays as a reversal of expectations in so far as it speaks back to culturally constructed ideas about women fading away as they age. The pride in appearance and bold colour choices creates an image of a feisty woman. Her existence out on the street, still active, still taking care of a little dog, combines with her fashion choices to create a vibrant image of an older woman who seems lively, not faded.
("On the Street...Trench Tie, Milano," *The Sartorialist*, 25 June 2009)

describe filling a space. A world is an experience of human existence. It is “that always-nonobjectual to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keep us transported into being. Wherever the essential decisions of our history are made, wherever we take them over or abandon them, wherever they go unrecognized or are brought once more into question, there the world worlds” (Heidegger 22-23). It is within worlds that things gain their meaning, within worlds that the material is made art.

Through style, we can gain entry into other people's worlds and let them into our own. Style is personal and there is a certain intimacy of relationship between our interior existence and the material things that fill our closets and empty our wallets. There are some items of clothing, some combination of items that you can put on and feel like yourself, or maybe more accurately the self that you want to be. Even those who do not work to cultivate a cohesive personal style often experience clothing as personal – whether it is because the clothing carries with it the memories of the experiences during which it was purchased or worn (a great band t-shirt or a wedding dress) or just because it looks good in front of the mirror. These are the moments when style becomes an image, not an ornament.

Yet the privileging of the personal in personal style is always in tension with the way that style exists in the world. For all the idealistic talk of individualized fashion, most people wear pretty similar things. That leather jacket that seems to manifest your interior world out to the exterior one is a piece that is also worn and embraced by many other people, people who also grew up watching James Dean or watching their cool older brother ride his motorcycle after their curfew or people who did neither but understand the leather jacket as a signifier of cool based on their experiences of other people who wore them. Clothing *feels* personal but exists in the world as mythologized objects, things with certain associations and cultural contexts. They act as texts

that people can read *because* that leather jacket means a lot of the same things to me as it means to you. As previously mentioned, subcultural groups based on music scenes or political viewpoints have often used clothing as a site of liberation yet, as Elisabeth Wilson wryly puts it "if liberated dress meant doing your own thing, no one ever commented on how strange it was that everyone wanted to do the *same* thing" (Wilson 240). Part of the experience of clothes is being-in-clothes together. We are speaking in a language that we (more or less) all understand. As society becomes more permissive and the icons of past rebellions like dyed hair and piercing become commonplace on the streets of most cities, we see each other and we understand this coming together of signs and symbols and associations.

One of the criticisms of streetstyle and its exploding popularity in the last decade is that it starts with the notion of individuality and inevitably descends into a phenomenon that Freud called, "the narcissism of small differences" (Prickett). Each streetstyle blog becomes a collection of people dressed in similar ways, cultivating their individuality through a slightly different haircut or skirt length. What starts as a project that appreciates difference descends into a project which celebrates a particular kind of sameness. Though this criticism is lobbied against streetstyle blogs specifically, at least in part because they have been heralded as a completely democratized space for freedom in fashion, it is a criticism that applies to fashion in general. If the experience of independent self definition through fashion is really just a myth, then what is the point of putting so much energy into a personal style that just ends up looking more or less like a lot of other people? What is the value in that display?

One way of considering this question is through Walter Benjamin's idea of the wish image and the dream image and how they work in a capitalist society enthralled by the potential for display. In his unfinished final work *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin uses the World's

Fair to consider the value and spectacle of display. At the Fair, "the crowd was conditioned to the principle of advertisements: 'Look, but don't touch,' and taught to derive pleasure from the spectacle alone" (Buck-Morss 310). Rather than creating a market where things could be bought and sold, the World's Fair trafficked in the spectacle itself. The sights and sounds on display created a space of "utopian fairyland" where the "physical transformation of urban space gave material form to the utopian dreams of the bourgeois Enlightenment the century before...It called on human beings to use their own, God-given reason to create the 'heavenly' city here and now" (Ibid). People travelled from all over the country to witness the potential of human imagination. At the World's Fair, it seemed as though human potential really could create utopian environments even though the real world as yet lagged far behind. Benjamin compared this spectacle to Marx's conception of the phantasmagoria. For Benjamin, in the World's Fair, the phantasmagoria developed to the point that "exchange value no less than use value lost practical meaning, and purely representational value came to the fore" (Buck-Morss 311). People were enthralled with these massive displays of human energy and creativity. The images were not just pretty, they promised more than their display alone.

In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes about the potential of the dialectic image to awaken the individual to a collective consciousness. Objects, in his theoretical framework, are "prototypes" for political awakening, holding within them both the promise of what could be (its forehistory) and the failed reality of what it is in the present (its afterhistory) (Buck-Morss 312). Through subjective reflection, the individual could recognize these mass cultural objects as "politically charged monads, 'blasted' out of history's continuum and made 'actual' in the present" (Buck-Morss 314). In other words, through a reflective mode of interaction with objects of mass culture, Benjamin believed that the individual could be awakened from false

consciousness to recognize the real potential of life beyond the limited options presented by capitalism. Unlike other attempts to deconstruct mass culture, this theory "takes mass culture seriously not merely as the source of the phantasmagoria of false consciousness, but as the source of collective energy to overcome it" (Buck-Morss 316-17). Instead of only being a vehicle for continued oppression, the phantasmagoria here holds within it the potential for collective political engagement.

Benjamin's conception of the emancipatory experience of the object relies on the distinction between the wish and the dream to deconstruct the potential from the fetish. Susan Buck-Morss writes that:

> ...this fetishized phantasmagoria is also the form in which the human, socialist potential of industrial nature lies frozen, awaiting the collective political action that could awaken it. The *wish-image* is the transitory dream-form of that potential. In it, archaic meanings return in anticipation of the 'dialectic' of awakening. (Buck-Morss 316)

The wish is the seed of what could be in the dream state of what is. It holds within it "the utopia that has left its trace on a thousand configurations of life, from enduring edifices to passing fashions" (Benjamin 4-5). The relationship between the individual and their clothing (or between clothed individuals) reveals the dynamic between the wish and the dream very effectively. The play between the individual and the object is not an empty one. The contemplative process through which people engage with their clothing can be understood as the manifestation of the wish to be an agent of one's own creation. Yet the wish manifests as a consumerist dream, "a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish" (Buck-Morss 332). It is a dream that a person can be whoever they want to be through a pair of jeans or a shirt, but the relationship between self, identity, and presentation and consumption illustrates the dialectic image that

Benjamin saw as existing in mass cultural objects. The wish was played out through the dialectic of the object as a kind of continuing fantasy.

The photographs on *The Sartorialist*, like fashion itself, are a physical manifestation of the wish within the dream. The mythic idea of fashion presented on the site is the ephemeral pinned down and frozen in time in the photograph, existing only in a moment in the world. The site recreates a fleeting moment on the street and validates the meaning in that moment, even if it can never after achieve the same glory. Recognizing the opposing forces working within the object is useful because it validates, rather than ignoring, the wish that is left upon recognition of "the dream as a dream" (Buck-Morss 319). The existentialist idea that individuals can fully construct their lives, ignoring all the ways people are born into culturally constructed bodies, races, sexualities, and classes, is enticing partly because sometimes it feels like it *is* possible. Sometimes, for a moment when you enter a room, the work of display has been meaningful and the dream has come true.

Conclusion

On *The Sartorialist*, the mythic idea of fashion as a means by which we can create ourselves as a beautiful image is supported and encouraged. Drawing on the tradition of flânerie, Schuman created a catalogue of his own taste in style, focusing on the details that inject the individual's creative energy in their clothing. Rather than celebrating the subculture or the fringes of the avant-garde, Schuman focuses on fashionable people that play within the existing confines of Western fashion. He is drawn to specific looks - old man style, reversals of expectation, girls on bikes - and his website catalogues his own eye as it moves through the streets of fashionable cities capturing what catches his fancy. Schuman documents a particular view of style, posting for a particular fashionable community who appreciates his focus on the mainstream, the detail, the play within the existing tropes of Western style. He is not posting pictures for everyone. But he is presenting one way of seeing and appreciating the world.

Of course, magazines also provide fashionable images and a particular view of fashion. But while on the pages of magazines, the construction of style comes together seamlessly, on the digital pages of *The Sartorialist*, the real world inches in and complicates the perfect image. The visual grammar of the site (the props, the location) creates a recognition that these images really do exist in time and space. These elements represent the real and distinguish Schuman's work from the professionally styled images of mainstream fashion photography. As Todd McGowan writes, "to affirm the real is to affirm that the work of ideology never comes off without a hitch. Every ideology includes a point within its structures that it can't account for or represent. This is the point, the real, at which ideology opens up to the outside" (McGowan 3) Even while they present an aspirational image of finely tuned personal style, each photograph is linked to the real world and the fragmentary reality of human existence.

Although these elements of the real separate the photographs from the kind of pictures found in magazine editorials, it is important to recognize that the site does not present a wholly real, candid, or grassroots experience of fashion. Though the style of photography and the real life moments captured create the feeling that we are glancing through a window at the actual experience of fashion on the street, the site is constructed to sell particular ideas, even if it is not selling actual garments. In fact, streetstyle websites can be understood as filling a necessary place in the fashion cycle. After a season of fall fashion shows where *Celine* and other big name fashion houses showed camel coats on the runway:

> [another blogger] Doré shoots three gorgeous women attending fashion shows in their camel coats (the real runway version), and Schuman shoots Doré shooting those gorgeous women, which means four thin and gorgeous ladies are captured working a trend as they go about their days. And the fashion loop is complete. (Larocca)

In this way, the very real people that Schuman photographs are sometimes just another stop for a trend as it makes its way around fashionable publications. He is not trying to sell jackets, but through his site, he sells the *idea* of fashion. The site itself features banner ads from clothing companies like *American Apparel*, selling clothes to the fashionable audience Schuman has cultivated through his photography, an audience which respects his eye and his recommendations.

Drawing on this authority, Schuman asks many of the fashionable men who reoccur on the site about their favourite tailors, drycleaners, and cobblers in the city and provides this information on a page called *The SartoriaList.* Though Schuman is not selling anything explicitly, he is selling a way of life that costs money and takes time. His beautiful images of men in jackets are tied to the dream of self-creation, of being just as fancy and well groomed and important as the men pictured on the site through the acquisition of the kinds of pieces featured on the site.

Further, as a fashionable insider, Schuman can likely tell when someone is wearing the real version rather than the downmarket knock off. The vision of a good looking person really living in and wearing a good looking piece of clothing in a well lit and perfectly shot photograph is an excellent advertisement for the company, and one they likely did not have to pay for. As Benjamin said about Baudelaire's flâneur “the department store is the last promenade for the flâneur” where the department store “makes use of the flâneur to sell its goods” (Benjamin “Paris” 40). Schuman shoots people in luxury goods, outside fashion shows. He is very much within the mainstream world of fashion and that implicates him in its concerns and fascinations.

At the same time, however, *The Sartorialist* provides a useful space for the analysis of the realities of fashion on the street. Because these moments of fashionable appreciation in the urban environment happen in the blink of an eye, the photographer's camera acts as a helpful intermediary. Schuman's photographs provide a way to study the way that fashion works on the streets. Although his pictures are not the real moment of recognition and appreciation on the street, they reflect Schuman's own moments of appreciation (even if they are reframed or better lit through posing and positioning after the initial moment of appreciation). Through the site, we see how one person sees style. Though these images are imperfect representations of a real moment, they are useful for capturing and sharing the experience of fashion on the street. Schuman's images are downloaded onto his site and shared with fashion lovers all over the world, democratizing fashion through internet browsers.

Further, Schuman's photographs, while still largely white, young, and thin, capture a broader range of fashionable images than fashion magazines, capturing people in the boroughs of New York City wearing clothes that have never seen a runway. His photographs of editors and other important fashion people have created mini fashion celebrities, but his pictures are just as

often nobody as they are somebody. Whether the subject of the photograph is nobody or somebody, the allure of individual tied to the real, authentic, lived reality of the world adds legitimacy to the fashion image and help sell the dream that *The Sartorialist* represents. The variety in styles, genders, ages, and races side by side on one site further encourages a reading of the site as a catalogue of personal style across borders. Mainstream fashion magazines very rarely have old women beside young men beside professional women beside guys on skateboards. Though *The Sartorialist* does present a particular view of what (and who) is fashionable – that is, Scott Schuman's own perspective – it provides more variety than more specialized publications aimed at selling a particular kind of clothes to a very particular kind of person.

The images on the site validate the work of fashion by giving the necessary task of daily dressing an international platform and spotlight. The site privileges the construction of style as a valuable project. It takes the normal, day to day reality of seeing other strangers on the street and freezes it in time, prompting us to question what it means to see and be seen by so many strangers every day. The website recreates the imaginative experience of city living where a stranger on the street catches the eye for just a fleeting moment through an attraction to the fashionable image they've created; our imaginative experience of the city is made real on the site. The photographs fill a gap in our minds where "we come back to the city time and time again in pursuit of that true experience that constantly eludes us, and so, unable to embrace the metropolis in its profound totality, we take refuge in the landscape of memory" (Parker 18). Photographs, as Susan Sontag has noted, "give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal" (Sontag 9). They make real a time that never really was. The photographs fill the distance that the city creates through its disconnected communities; through the photos, we know the other strangers

on the street. They become people to us, people offering up some of who they are to be read.

Part of the reason the photographs on *The Sartorialist* work is because we want this transformative dream of fashion to be real. If we really could be whoever we wanted to be through clothing, then all the money and hours spent would be worthwhile and we would have more agency over our lives. If what Schuman is capturing is real – if our reading of these pictures is an authentic understanding of these people – then the site works as an affirmation that we can create ourselves. But because we recognize the space between fashion in that one moment (even if it's captured on a digital card) and the actual realities of living as a being in clothes in the world, we recognize this hopeful notion as a myth, a wish encased in a doomed dream which undoes the very mythic quality of the site.

Yet there is more to the site than just the failure to deliver on a promise of wholesale fashionable potential. In his conception of myths, Roland Barthes believed that mythologies only worked in the support of oppressive ideologies, transforming "meaning into form" (Barthes 131). Myth then is a means by which we are kept in our place. As Kaja Silverman notes, Barthes falls back on the Marxist notion that "ideology is a condition of false consciousness promoted through fictions sponsored by the dominant class, fictions which it is presumably possible to penetrate by means of a deconstructive analysis" (Silverman 30). This understanding sees ideology as a blanket which hides us from a separate but somehow (someday) accessible real. This ideology or myth is a singular notion which keeps us from being who we would like to be or doing what we would like to do. Yet Silverman argues "there is always a heterogeneity of conflicting ideologies concealed behind the dominant one. While it may not be possible to step outside of ideology altogether, it *is* possible to effect a rupture with one, and a raprochement with another" (Silverman 31). In other words, as Hebdige writes, "forms cannot be permanently normalized.

They can always be deconstructed, demystified" (Hebdige 16). As much as *The Sartorialist* presents an impossible view of fashion, it also provides an opportunity for self-reflection and fashionable options beyond the decorative existence that stores and magazines sell us by subscription. *The Sartorialist* provides another way of thinking through the question of style and its potential importance. If our clothes cannot change who we are, they can at least show who we are. In a world of faceless nameless strangers, making yourself into an image can be the first step to revealing your own personal subculture in the middle of the mainstream.

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