

See the Sound, Hear the Style: Musicians as Ambassadors of Fashion

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In 1979 Dick Hebdige explored the notion of “subcultures” and the “ meaning of style” by unpacking the connections between music, fashion, identity and politics in London’s Punk and Reggae scenes. In the years since this book was published lifestyle signifiers have gone from veiled to valued as symbolic goods and cultural branding now pervade our daily lives. In particular, individuals endeavor to develop and project unique stylistic identities, based on what they listen to, what they wear and where they are seen. This paper will consider the catalysts of creativity by analyzing the synergies between two cultural industries; music and fashion. As music and fashion, like most cultural industries, are predominantly urban activities, it is in cities that we find the most influential players. As urban occurrences, the cultural industries have complex dialectics between place and industry (Rantisi 2006), where the production of intangibles seems to rest heavily on the character of the space. This paper will examine the ways in which stylistic scenes fuse, cross-pollinate and support each other. Specifically, it will highlight the practice of bartering where individuals exchange artistic favors and share resources to mediate the precarious nature of creative work and how musicians, as cultural icons, have emerged as trans-local ambassadors of fashion who influence, disseminate and popularize sounds, imagery and behavior. This paper will draw on extensive fieldwork gathered from studies in Toronto, New York and Stockholm.