



Keeping it (Hyper)Real: Virtual Fashion and The Face Community

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Transformations, No. 3 (May 2002)

<http://www.cqu.edu.au/transformations>

ISSN 1444-377

Abstract: This article investigates the (history) lessons revealed by THE FACE about the present. As such it concentrates on one area of deviation that exists within THE FACE – the yearly fashion issue. The seductive, and highly hegemonic, nature of fashion is no more obvious than in the pages of monthly style and genre journals. Within these pages, fashion literacy is assumed and naturalised as commonsensical. The visual communities that revolve around magazines like THE FACE further enhance this legitimising process. This framing requires a literacy of THE FACE discourse, one that melds the knowledge of fashion with the familiarity of lifestyle, consumption and pleasure. Fashion, then, is a language embedded with the signs and syntax of the everyday. Fashion is not a free-standing construct: it is socially defined within the sphere of a community ideology. The illustration of THE FACE community could concentrate on many facets of the magazine, but in this investigation it is these vogue registers that demand a specialised understanding of THE FACE and its mobilisation of a verbal and visual fashion language, or indeed a fashionable FACE language.

Key terms: magazines, fashion, hyperreal, imagined (virtual) communities, semiotics.

Introduction

Monday evenings can be fairly eventful in my household. It seems almost ritualistic, as it is one of the only nights of the week that all three of us are at home and happily settled in front of the television. We have found that Monday night television can either present a feast or famine - Channel Nine seems to have the odds stacked in its favour by running 'Friends', 'Spin City', 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?' and 'Sex and the City' from 7.30pm and so we watch. On this night we are unhappily watching Eddie McGuire on that Western television phenomenon 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?' In between the thinking, jeers and choosing of our own three-phone-a-friend-friends, an advertisement appears.

A young woman is found lying on a couch in what can only be described as an IKEA-inspired lounge room. The minimal furniture, numerous cabinets featuring chrome and beech wood are all positioned in such a way as to enhance the pride of the lounge - the Bang and Olufsen home entertainment system. As she lies reading a magazine, resplendent in Mooks/Dangerfield/Lee outfit, complete with red and orange Royal Elastics trainers, she is disturbed by the sound of the phone. She picks

it up and immediately recognises the voice at the other end. After listening for a few seconds, she advises the caller to wait while she goes to check. We are led to assume that 'funky-girl' is babysitting and a worried mother has asked her to check on her child for her while she is on the line. We follow 'funky-girl' into another part of the house as she turns on a set of three light switches. The illuminated room reveals a huge open-planned kitchen complete with excess chrome surfaces and appliances lovingly lit with down lights. It is an advertisement for New Zealand appliance company Fisher and Paykel, more specifically their Quantum series. 'Funky-girl' raises an eyebrow, tuts, turns on her heel flicks off the light switches in a sweeping motion. She returns to the caller - 'Yes, they're fine.' She hangs up and returns to the couch. As the camera pans out to reveal 'funky-girl' lounging, we are able to get a clear view of her magazine of choice - THE FACE.

The 30 seconds of the Fisher and Paykel: Quantum advertisement exposes the political significance of THE FACE as a popular cultural icon. The elements contained within this advertisement, and how they reaffirm the political nature of THE FACE within this article, are numerous: a New Zealand appliance company advertises its products on Australian television during a world syndicated programme, utilising an English style journal as an ironic wink at potential consumers.

What makes this advertisement so relevant to this article is the mobilisation of postcolonial, cultural and stylistic concerns. 'Funky-girl' embodies all that is relevant to THE FACE community of the 1990s - that is, THE FACE discourse constructs identities that are fluid and ever-changing. It is the accumulation of these identity markers that has silhouetted the writing of this article. THE FACE is an atlas of identities through which myriad readers are invited to enjoy the surface of THE FACE's London. It is within this articulation of THE FACE that an Australian is encouraged to investigate the cultural configuration of an English style journal, whilst residing in the most isolated city in the world.

It is in the virtual space, Planet FACE, that the geographical and cultural link between THE FACE and Great Britain is questioned and fractured. Jane Jacobs exposes the unstable nature of Imperialism:

Imperialism was activated by numerous desires and needs, colonialism took hold in a variety of forms and colonialist formations survive and are reactivated in a multitude of ways. Furthermore, at any one time imperialist visions are open to contest from within and without. Imperialism always produces an indeterminate array of formations, some of which are outside of its reach and work to unsettle its power.¹

THE FACE then, is both coloniser and colonised. It enjoys the spoils of colonial conquest, while remaining culturally subversive to the imperialist project as it disseminates knowledge to the edges of Empire. This breaking down of imperial codes constructs a theoretical space for this postcolonial investigation of THE FACE, where the writer is constantly aware of the struggle over identity - positioned as both insider and outsider.

The desire to depart from the banality of life triggers the most startling styles of our time. From rockers to punks, from mods to acid house, from disco to Seattle, the traces of visual escape are manifest. The imposition of the private onto the public, produces a lattice of visual and musical styles. These styles surface on the plane of

¹ J. M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, London and New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 17.

the quotidian through the cataloguers of a time – magazines. The culmination of reviews, fashion layouts and advertising, enables the cultural study of rupture to take place.

Launched in May 1980, British style journal THE FACE² was configured as the epitome of fashion and youth culture. Arbiter of style and style journalism, it was a magazine that launched a thousand duplicates. Created by Nick Logan, a former editor of *Smash Hits* and *NME*, THE FACE encompassed all that it meant to be young, beautiful and mobile in 1980s Britain. With its innovative design style and clever-clever articles, THE FACE was awarded the title of "Magazine of the Year" in 1983 and "Magazine of the Decade in 1985".³ Constantly pushing the boundaries of taste, it is a magazine that has courted its share of controversy. In 1992 Jason Donovan sued it over the publication "of a photograph casting doubt on his sexuality".⁴ A January 1996 fashion shoot, titled "The Usual Suspects",⁵ was seen to be of doubtful value and criticised as the irresponsible start of the media's fascination with 'heroin chic'.

My research investigates the (history) lessons revealed by THE FACE about the present. THE FACE was seen to be - and sell - everything that mattered in the 1980s. Then, in the 1990s, THE FACE was everywhere. What was once an ironic-posturing-winking-pastiche can now be found in Woolworths advertisements, local daily newspapers, airline in-flight magazines and on billboards. That is, THE FACE's currency in the 1980s hinged on its liminality, its originality and its ability to seduce eager readers with its sweet, soulful London. In the 1990s, the magazine fell prey to its accessibility and ability to relate to a myriad of audiences. This template spawned a market of imitators.

It is not these imitators though, that encouraged readers onto the road to magazine Damascus. Rather, the entanglement of style, pleasure and desire began with THE FACE. The pages constructed a comfortable identity, subjectivity and map for the reader. The success of THE FACE is visible through the pleasure that it generated from - and for - its audience. It allowed readers to extract satisfaction from a multiplicity of popular cultural sites. According to Lawrence Grossberg it is these investments that permit readers to compose affective alliances,⁶ which in turn are catalogued and compiled into mattering maps:

These mattering maps are like investment portfolios: there are not only different and changing investments, but different forms, as well as different intensities or degrees of investment. There are not only different places marked out (practices, pleasures, meanings, fantasies, desires, relations, and so on) but different purposes which these investments can play, and different

² Throughout this article THE FACE will remain in bold capitals, rather than Italics. This usage mirrors the title banner across the top of the magazine. It is a stylistic device used to signify the fact that THE FACE is more than a title. It has in fact become a media icon over the past 20 years.

³ N. Logan, "Magazine of the Decade", THE FACE, London: Wagadon, May 1985, vol. 1, no. 61, p. 3.

⁴ J. Naughton, "Face-Off", *The Guardian*, April 19 1999, p. 3.

⁵ "The Usual Suspects", THE FACE, London: Wagadon, January 1998, vol. 2, no. 88, pp. 118-125.

⁶ L. Grossberg, "Is there a fan in the house?", in L. Lewis (ed.), *The Adoring Audience*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 50-61.

moods in which they can operate. Mattering maps define different forms, quantities and places of energy. They tell us how to use and how to generate energy, how to navigate our way into and through various moods, and how to live within emotional and ideological histories.⁷

It is perhaps this ever-changing environment of fan sensibilities that has retained magazines as a crucially under-theorised site in contemporary cultural studies. The pace in which these textual sites are transformed is dissimilar to many other sites analysed within popular culture. It must be noted that magazines do not reflect society, but are a condensed catalogue of the ideologies that are present in the everyday. As Graeme Turner states, "since ideologies are observable in material form only in practices, behaviours, institutions, and texts in society, the need to examine these material forms seems extremely pressing".⁸ With this theoretical agenda in place it is through the site of fashion that THE FACE is at its height of hyperreality, encouraging its citizens⁹ to adorn themselves in its gloss and ephemera for another walk down the planets High Streets.

This article concentrates on one area of deviation that exists within THE FACE – the yearly fashion specials. These vogue registers demand a specialised understanding of THE FACE and its mobilisation of a verbal and visual fashion language, or indeed a fashionable FACE language. The illustration of THE FACE community could concentrate on many facets of the magazine. For the purposes of this investigation however, the ways in which communities are formed, and the literacy needed in decoding these formulations, are displayed through the fashion specials.

Fashion, at its premise, is concerned with the construction of dominant communities and subcultures, through the hailing of individuals who can be assimilated into the collective. That is, fashion is involved with the presentation of an individualistic ideology in order to build a community based on a collective aesthetic. The influential nature of fashion can be read off the landscape of the everyday. The seductive, and highly hegemonic, nature of fashion is no more obvious than in the pages of monthly style and genre journals. Within these pages, fashion literacy is assumed and naturalised as commonsensical. The communities of belonging that revolve around magazines like THE FACE further enhance this legitimising process. Like many community imaginings, THE FACE readership assumes that it has constructed its own identity, politics and language through the activity of decoding the various elements presented in the publication every month. As such it can be seen that through these key codes THE FACE community constructs a sphere of visual memory premised through the fashionable elements (re)presented on a yearly basis.

Fashion, style and community

Fashion has long been associated with the facile and banal side of the everyday. It is undertheorised and underestimated due to its links with youth, but more particularly

⁷ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁸ G. Turner, "Semiotic Victories: Media Constructions of the Maralingas Royal Commission", in J. Frow and M. Morris (eds.), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993, pp. 180-191.

⁹ The use of 'citizen' here is not accidental, rather it draws attention to the fact that ephemeral cultural sites retain and maintain loyal readers, viewers and fans. THE FACE, then, can be seen to be a (virtual)planet that has embedded cues, ideologies and nuances that are easily decoded by its citizens.

gender. As Christopher Breward attests of the formulation of fashion within the design discourse:

[T]he study of dress and fashion still remains marginal to the wider design historical concerns. This perhaps reflects the discipline's roots in industrial and architectural design practices, with their modernist sympathies. A theoretical and inspirational aid to students of industrial and graphic design, design history as originally taught in art and design colleges tended to prioritize production in the professional 'masculine' sphere, re-enforcing notions of a subordinate 'feminine' area of interest, into which fashion has been relegated.¹⁰

Attitudes towards fashion theory are beginning to change as it becomes more familiar within the frameworks of cultural studies, feminist theory, youth studies and sociology. Certainly, this association with the feminine has marked the fashion discourse with the monikers of the simplistic and facile. But it also must be seen that the ephemeral nature of fashion is heavily implicated in this gender generalisation. This relegation of fashion as a site lacking credibility, undermines its credibility as a serious site of academic investigation.

As the seasons change, so too do the threads of adornment. When this temporal shift occurs, the previous season is erased from the discourse by propelling the consumer into the next fashion period. This layering of discursive practices, with the aid of visual and verbal codes, creates the notion of an inherent fashion sensibility within the consumer's identity. Fashion, then, is a language embedded with the signs and syntax of the everyday. Patrizia Calefato opines:

Clothes, coverings the objects with which we adorn ourselves, the signs that engrave and decorate us are forms through which our bodies relate to the world and to other bodies. Just as a language is the device for shaping the world that is typical of the human race, so in every society and culture dress is a form of projection, or simulation, of the world, valid both for society and for the individual, expressing itself in signs and objects through which the human body is placed, temporally and spatially, in its surroundings.¹¹

Far from facile, fashion requires an articulate reader in order for the codes and signifiers to be deciphered and its ideologies easily integrated into a sense of identity. Fashion is not a free-standing construct: it is socially defined within the sphere of a community ideology. As such, it is reliant upon readers agreeing and defending the rules through which the language is framed. To ignore the political relevancy of fashion in popular culture is to dismiss not only the feminine sphere, but also the cultural industries that are reliant upon it. Magazines, music, advertising, television and shopping precincts all engage with fashion overtly to express the underlying social themes attached to capitalism. The unstable nature of the fashion system endorses change and hyperconsumption - fashion is not concerned with comforting the consumer. Rather, it is a language that, by design, seeks to express the need for additional adornments in order to complete a look and therefore the identity of a wearer. Fashion is eloquent in the expression of modernist narratives, while engaging with the lexicon of postmodernism and the fragmentation of identity

¹⁰ C. Breward, "Culture, Identities, Histories: Fashioning a Cultural Approach to Dress", in *Fashion Theory: the Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 4, December 1998, p. 303.

¹¹ P. Calefato, "Fashion and Worldliness: Language and Imagery of the Clothed Body", in *Fashion Theory: the Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1997, p. 72.

politics. While fashion may mark the body with signs of origin or status, the instability of the discourse makes these acknowledgments fleeting.¹²

It is the logic of temporality that envelops fashion. Fashion changes with the calendar and to a degree the calendar changes with fashion. Indeed, "fashion makes the world seem as if it is constantly changing".¹³ In the past, the fast paced, instant-exchange ethos of fashion was framed as shallow, frivolous and empty. This dismissal of the fashion discourse disregards the influence of fashion within the quotidian. Joanne Finklestein comments:

To regard fashion as only a frivolity playing over the surface of human existence is to underrate it as a social force...what is harder to see is its direct effect on everyday life, how it fiercely imposes a value system on our private desires.¹⁴

The ideological force of fashion is linked to the politics of gender through an investigation of consumption. A model of consumption allows the critique of fashion to be prefaced upon economic power and the spending patterns of the cultural elite. The political possession of fashion through the means of economic spending, particularly of women, is well documented,¹⁵ as is the analysis of fashion as bodily inscription and 'surface' of desire.¹⁶ These explorations are valid and well argued moments in the cultural investigation of fashion, but it is against the grain of gender politics that style journals, such as THE FACE, tend to move. The power and impact of fashion within a broader cultural framework is often assumed, but it is the impact of subversive and resistive depictions of lifestyle that surround the visual pictorials constructed in THE FACE.

THE FACE often maintains an androgynous position in its attitude toward fashion stories. The layouts constructed each month contain both male and female models or highly stylised gender narratives.¹⁷ It is this practice of 'democratic' hyper-consumption that places THE FACE on the periphery of magazine racks. The melding of varied and unrelated forms allows THE FACE to become a catalogue of (life) style that hails both men and women, gay and straight. As a result, THE FACE can be seen as an amalgamation of magazine genres: it is a music magazine, movie magazine, trade-fair magazine, advertising magazine, features magazine, gossip magazine, personality magazine, style magazine and fashion magazine.

¹² Particularly the concerns of gender, race, age, sexuality and class constructions in the everyday sphere and the pursuit of consumption and pleasure.

¹³ J. Finklestein, *Slaves of Chic*, Melbourne: Minerva, 1994, p. 115.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁵ See: T. Brabazon, "What will you wear to the Revolution? Thatcher's Generation and the Fashioning of Change", *Hecate*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1996, pp. 114-133; L. Negrin, "The Meaning of Dress", *Arena Journal*, no. 7, 1996, pp. 131-146.

¹⁶ See: E. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*, London: Virago, 1985; E. Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder and Women*, London: Virago, 1991; J. Finklestein, *Slaves of Chic*, Melbourne: Minerva, 1994; J. Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*, London and New York, 1994; M. Barnard, *Fashion as Communication*, London and New York: Routledge 1996.

¹⁷ Such as gangster or subculture shoots for male fashions and storybook or fantasy shoots for female fashion. This position places the politics of fashion as the dominant and demands extravagance from both genders.

It is the excessive pastiche of cultural signs that shows why THE FACE is likened to a planet rather than a ghetto. On planet FACE, the inclusion of many and varied communities is encouraged – the spectacle of a watered-down global village. THE FACE is not a representation of 'this' planet (world). Rather it is the product of a sign-saturated world – a simulacrum. It is the communities that orbit this planet that elevate it to the more real than real. It is their participation that makes visible the emptiness that lies within.

The semiosphere that encapsulates THE FACE is so littered with signs that its place in the hyperreal is assured and encouraged. The balance of style and substance gives the semblance of organised chaos. So then, it is the appearance of cohesion that frames THE FACE and the community that resides within it. This framing requires a literacy of THE FACE discourse, one that melds the knowledge of fashion with the familiarity of lifestyle, consumption and pleasure.

Fashionable semiotics

We now wander through one level of THE FACE. On this plane, there is a visual spectacle that encourages consumer/reader extravagance while also maintaining the façade of a functional and wearable style. That is, while the newest fashion spectacle of the summer season may be that of the white singlet, it is not just any white singlet. It is Dolce and Gabbana. It is at this echelon where style entrepreneurs meet and greet one another, whilst 'cruising' the designer racks and bargain bins on planet FACE. It is the site of THE FACE fashion special. This is an annual event where readers are invited to participate in the spectacle of excessive pastiche. The second level does not preface the grammatical truths of fashion. Rather, it is a lounging area that is dedicated to the opinions, cheers, jibes, observations and comments of THE FACE community. It is here that readers can communicate about the substance, relevance and importance of issues that concern their existence. It is an arena where the 'chosen' ones present and collate judgements of the direction of their journey. This is THE FACE frequent flyers club – a textual space or complaints exchange for Planet FACE.

The fashion issues (the fashion issue appears in the August or September issue of THE FACE - the Northern Summer) often recruit the world's most 'hip' photographers and stylists to create their interpretations of this and the next season fashion 'must have'. While dedicating much of the issue to designers, shoes, and accessories, there are often features on the most 'desirable' obsessions of the year. This melding of art and obsession usually fills much of THE FACE with well-constructed and visually pleasing advertorials. This observation may seem a little cynical, but this section demonstrates how the collision of the public and the private provokes a pastiche of popular culture that is constructed within THE FACE.

THE FACE fashion issues teeter between consumption and obsession, framed by grandiose statements such as - Beyond the Fashion Classic. It is the rationale of these announcements to create an impression of achievability while creating a distance of unobtainability. This is the game that THE FACE encourages and referees. While consumers may look at the clothes, often the price tag attached is far too extravagant and just when they may think that all hope is lost, underneath that 200 pound Alexander McQueen skirt are an obtainable and FACE sanctioned pair of 50 pound trainers. The attention of the reader is focussed upon the spectacle of the co-ordination. The combination of visual extravagance with functional, yet dubious, affordability dares the reader to participate in the parade of bricolage. This is where

East meets West on the streets of London and credibility in its many combinations is assured.

The A-Z of fashion and the top 100 barometer reveal more about THE FACE as simulation, rather than exploring the happenings on the streets of London. On Planet FACE, the wielders of fashionable power are representations - Kate Moss, Alexander McQueen, Sophie Dahl, Versace and trainers. It is here that the discursive panty line becomes visible. THE FACE discourse, on the planes of the hyperreal, is further revealed when there is a focus upon design outlay and editorial choices. At first glance, it would appear that THE FACE is short on ideas and concepts as to what fashion constitutes. This is revealed comparing two varying issues in the introduction of the 1993 and 1995 issues. There is a distinct fracturing of THE FACE style:

Fashion is in the state of flux right now: it's a confusing time for many of those involved in it, with no one 'look' dominating the others, no strong, single source of ideas like Paris shows once provided. Fashion is no longer dictated by designers, it comes from below, from you, and it can be anything you want it to be: a mini one day, a floor-length skirt; Armani or Adidas (or both); a designer shirt with high street leggings and a jacket from a jumble sale. Fashion is above all now about knowing and liking yourself, about attitude. Which is why the world starts our personal and by no means complete dictionary of modern style.¹⁸

London, Spring 1995. A boy and girl walk up Bond Street. She's wearing Adidas shell-toes, white D&G Jeans, a fleamarket tank top and may or may not be Arnet Ravens. He's sporting combat pants, old Redwing workboots, wooden beads, a Ralph Lauren sweatshirt around his waist and, inexplicably, an outsize Joy Division T-shirt. Shell-toe turns to Joy Division and tells him she likes his T-shirt, that it looks good "for some reason" with the sweatshirt. Now. Combat pants on Bond Street? Eighties trainers with moderne Dolce and Gabbana? If in August 1995, the prospect of dissection, discussion and delectation on the state of that elusive world known as style fails to arouse you from your summer days then - where have you been? From trainer fetishists in Cobra and JD Sport to the catwalk cognoscenti currently hanging on every last crumb from Comme from the done-up dancefloors to the newly-labelled-up Britpop indie kids... This year's fashion issue of THE FACE looks to the details of the way we wear for clues to the clothes; and the trail starts here...'¹⁹

To establish why the similarities are constant in these two prologues may have less to do with THE FACE and more to do with the temporality of style. It is within these observations that there is confirmation of an essentially 1990s-fashion style. The style is not beyond categorisation and indeed it could be described as freestyle: a style that is about comfort, style and perhaps more about the lack of a D&G income. That is, rather than being able to afford Dolce & Gabbana, consumers construct a style that is prefaced upon ultimate, but singular, purchases: the D&G jeans, the skirt and the almost mandatory white shirt/singlet. By making these once-every-so-often purchases, the wardrobe becomes an amalgam of all and none. Hence the label freestyle, because if you've got it flaunt it, but make sure you have the right \$10 singlet to go with those \$240 jeans.

¹⁸ "Zip It Up!", THE FACE, London: Wagadon, August 1993, vol. 2, no. 59, p. 32.

¹⁹ "Introduction: Summer Fashion Special", THE FACE, London: Wagadon, August 1995, vol. 2, no. 83, p. 39.

In 1993, THE FACE's fashion feature consisted of a six-page spread titled 'FASHION: a bluffer's guide.' Essentially this is an A-Z of fashionable terms, designers and excesses. Starting with ATTITUDE and ending with ZIGGY, the guide is informative but mostly fun, frivolous and humorous. With one eye on themselves and the other on rival style journals, THE FACE's guide employed and engulfed the term freestyle and framed it as integral to the lexicon of THE FACE: from 'dahling' to trainers, from Fred Perry to Queens and Destroy to workwear. The guide is not only a perfect example of FACE charm, but also a map for planet FACE, with the inclusion of definitions such as:

Q

Queens: Let's face it, the fashion world would be a sorry place without them. If you're not one, then affect that dizzy high-octane drawl anyway.²⁰

The language employed in these fashion specials demands a specialised literacy: Queens do not only reside at Buckingham Palace and Ziggy is not always a cute cartoon rascal. The use of a sub-language is deliberate and accepted within the FACE community. This is particularly evident within the fashion issues of THE FACE, as the sign 'fashion' is devolved to the second-order and emptied of its excess baggage. It is then reconstituted into FACE language that allows familiarity and exclusion to dominate over all other forms. In this context, "fashion declares the majority to be the most attractive, the most aesthetically pleasing, the most valued".²¹ In the FACE's semiosphere, credibility is only acquired within FACE-friendly locations where all the desirables expressed are stocked and available for consumption. This dominance of enjoyment and consumption of fashion is further exposed onto the agenda that framed the 1995 fashion special:

10 OBSESSIONS: BEYOND THE FASHION CLASSIC

- 1- The **Sabotage**: Sweatshirt
- 2- The **Jacqueline Rabun**: Ring
- 3- The **Prada**: Belt
- 4- The **Gucci**: Hipsters
- 5- The **Helmut Lang**: Reflective Jacket
- 6- The **Nike**: Chris Webber Trainer
- 7- The **Cryolan**: Eye Shadow Grease
- 8- The **Sony**: MDRD 77 Headphones
- 9- The **Evisu**: Jeans
- 10- The **Ape**: Windcheater

Why are these items beyond the fashion classic? The immediate answer would be consumer expenditure - these are fetishised, obsessional objects that are expensive

²⁰ "Zip It Up!", p. 37.

²¹ Finklestein, pp. 121-122.

and momentary, where knowing about their existence is just as important as owning any of them. The Gucci hipsters have since been replaced - as have most of the other items - as they only have limited currency. This is the dictum of the fashion discourse. To the community of THE FACE, the value that is invested in these items has little to do with their limited temporality and more to do with instant satisfaction. Time is irrelevant (or indeed hyper-relevant) within the pages of THE FACE. All that exists here is pleasure propelled by desire and credibility. The only space where these desires and excesses are questioned is when the reader re-enters a modernist framework: this is when race, class, gender, sexuality, price, substance and necessity all become part of the equation. These items are immediately accessible on the pages of THE FACE because, while only few can afford to purchase the 'fashion classics,' all of THE FACE community can afford the cover charge of entry to the spectacle. In the pages of THE FACE, income, job and suburb are not factors in the equation. All that is necessary to existence is the 2 pounds 40 required to complete the visa application. Hence, style is the great leveller in FACE society. All that is necessary is the acceptance of what is presented as mandatory to be a part of the style community, the commodification of identity and belonging.

It is not surprising that the 1995 special is tailored toward those satellite industries reliant upon the fashion industry.²² It is also not surprising that the guide is overwhelmingly personality orientated - '**POWER: The 100 most influential people in fashion.**' The guide is presented as a sequel to the previous year and framed like the Australian Business Weekly's top 100 richest men and women. Following on from the 1994 guide, the 1995 barometer ranks the players and indicates if they have moved up or down the ladder. The dynamic and temporally challenged nature of the fashion industry, or indeed THE FACE, is visible with the inclusion of 47 new entries. Ever the diplomat, THE FACE crowns an inanimate object the winner of 1995 - The Quantel Paintbox. This industrious machine is described as:

The hardware that revolutionised fashion photography by making the impossible attainable. Previously used in commercial advertising, it's now being appropriated by the creative cutting edge to put subjects against imaginary backgrounds and retouch images to polished perfection. First seen at a magazine near you, this is the new virtual vision.'²³

A sign of the times where the tantrums and favours of fashion 'queens' is passed over for the smooth, hardworking, drug-free stamina of the Quantel Paintbox. Clearly, this list is more about influence than 'cred' and a cynical observer could flick through a copy of THE FACE and count the times that second place winner Ralph Lauren, preppy king, is advertised or listed. What is quite obvious from both fashion issues is that it is not about who has power, but how they wield that power that makes an impression on the community of planet FACE.

Quite simply, it is a relationship between the magazine and its clients that is rewarding, suitable and relevant. It is a sphere that promotes the smooth transition into the world of hyperconsumption. That is, to be successful in this environment, readers learn what is relevant to their FACE lifestyle and what is not. That is why

²² For example; designers, models, advertisers, film makers, music producers, television producers and stylists.

²³ "Summer Fashion Special", p. 76.

while Silk Cut fits into THE FACE's agenda, but Top Shop does not²⁴. Diesel does - Top Man does not.

Contemporary adverts adopt the manners of the markets and the magazines in which they appear. Pernod is clearly a drink for the 'faces,' the young stylists (hip to the mythologies of 'cool': the '40s and '50s, jazz, clubbing, shades, hair gel and Continental fashion) who peruse the pages of The Face.²⁵

Those who choose to advertise in THE FACE do so because their aesthetically pleasing campaigns fit. It is obvious when readers are from planet FACE and when they are not, it is less about choice and more of hegemonic acceptance. This is the (hyper)real world of FACE self-regulation. A space that is both accepting and monitored by the inhabitants of planet FACE and if a citizen no longer suits THE FACE lifestyle they expel themselves. This movement can be one as simple as closing the journal's back cover and placing it on the shelf, table, or even in the bin, never being asked to leave by the overseers of the planet. As a reader departs, though, they leave their mark of aversion:

OUCH!

I am afraid that I can't agree with Reuben (Letters, FACE 15) who complained that your 'fashion' shoots are often indistinguishable from the adverts. I find the adverts tend to be much better.

CP

Via e-mail²⁶

This letter balances appreciation and criticism of FACE dwellers. While it is the citizens of planet FACE who control their inclusion and exclusion, there must also be some knowledge of these movements. As such, it has been the premise of this investigation to expose the inherent hyperreal nature of THE FACE. From fashion specials to direct readership intervention, THE FACE is assembled as a site of signifiers, anchored through the styles in which it is constructed and imagined.

If there is to be an appreciation of Hebdige's analysis of Baudrillard, then there must be an understanding that entering and leaving the hyperreal is the same movement at the same moment within the same space:

As far as he (Baudrillard) is concerned, we are - all of us - merely stations on the endless, mindless journey of the signifier: a journey made by nobody to nowhere²⁷

The relationship between citizen and planet, reader and magazine, is shrouded in nothingness. It is not the 'we' that passes through THE FACE, but THE FACE that passes through 'us'. What makes this relationship all the more interesting is the absurd fact that it is the 'we', 'us' and 'you' that sets the timetable of when THE FACE will pass and not necessarily the other way around.

²⁴ A local variation of this would be that *Marlboro Lights* fits, but the *Myer's* men's department does not.

²⁵ Chambers, p. 70.

²⁶ C.P. "Letter", London: Wagadon, May 1998, vol. 3, no. 16, p. 10.

²⁷ D. Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light*, London: Comedia, 1988, p. 165.

This article has sought to initiate debate on the status of public texts such as style journals. There is an inherent politics to THE FACE – a link between reader and text. This article has illustrated that magazines are far more than banal consumer catalogues that frame their readers as passive and uneducated. Magazines are community-orientated discourses that represent a wider cultural framework to readers. It can be seen that magazine texts are far more than glossy eye-candy. They are politically-motivated pedagogical instruments that are active in the making and reproducing of sense. As Henri Giroux argues,

texts become not merely serious objects of struggle over how meaning is constituted, but also practical sites that register how power operates so as to make some representations, images and symbols under certain political conditions more valuable as representations of reality than others.²⁸

Hence THE FACE in the 1980s symbolised a Thatcherite drive, and as such was empowered as the style journal to be seen reading on tubes, in bars and at art colleges. In the 1990s however, THE FACE became one of many representations of British style. As such, its significance was rendered outside of Britain in regional areas such as Australia, New Zealand and South-East Asia. Encoded in this shift were the territorial markings of a readership community intent on investing in visual memory codes clearly located outside of an English-derived sensibility re-presented through THE FACE.

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²⁸ H. Giroux with P. Shannon, "Cultural Studies and Pedagogy as Performative Practice", H. Giroux with P. Shannon, *Education and Cultural Studies: Towards a Performative Practice*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 7.