theme 5

strand 2



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## abstract

The first pair of blue jeans emerged in U.S.A. by Levi Strauss & Co. for working classes in 1873. Since then, this pair of pants has assumed a character of youth icon and a banner of fashion democratization, being nowadays a part of everyone's wardrobe (Nii, 2012). This company gave various activist meanings to jeans, projecting it to different groups like racial, labour or female sexual liberation movements (Fiske, 1989).

Looking at the past, fashion activism was much more evident in XX century than it is nowadays. There were seen big changes in the way of wear and designing fashion, since the pants adoption by women in the early XX century, to youth rebellious way of dressing in the second half of XX century. At this time, the values of elegance and good taste were disregarded in favour of looking young (Lipovetsky, 2007).

The jeans are very liberating in the sense that reveal very little about the social status and wearing worn and washed out pieces had become something common since the late 50's.

Young groups did not have only desire to individual expression, but also activist opinions about their culture, political and social environment. Even those who were against the current system would see that fashion and style was something essential to their cultural and political struggle (Ewen, 1990). However, today's social jeans activism aspect has been dimmed.

## Fashion Activism: Jeans as a Statement

Jeans had a different social meaning in the past. The anti fashion scene was adopted by capitalism system and that meaning changed.





 Marques'Almeida; 2 - Theyskens' Theory; 3 - 70's punk rock band Ramone; 4 - 90's grunge musician Kurt Cobain; 5 - Hippies; Images via Style.com and Pinterest.com.

key words

fashion, activism, jeans.

Amaro, Ana; Miguel, Rui; Lucas, José; "Fashion Activism: Jeans as a Statement", p. 58-59. In: Tradition, Tragetories: major or minor influences? [=IcDHS 2014 - 9th Conference of the International Committee for Design History and Design Studies], São Paulo: Blucher, 2014. ISSN 2318-6968, DOI 10.5151/despro-icdhs2014-0129 This research aims to analyze how the jeans evolved from work wear to a symbol of social youth activism against existing policies, to become in recent decades a fashion icon, dominated by aesthetic concepts and without any symbolism associated with the social and political intervention.

In the 6o's the Hippie movement emerged in the U.S.A. and was formed by young people who were against the regent policies. Hippies made some of their clothes and ripped their jeans to show that they were on break with the society in which they lived, especially with moral codes in force and with the war in Vietnam. They defend a more casual way to dress, because they believed in freedom of expression.

In 1976, another anti fashion movement was born: Punk. The punk style emerged in groups of young art students in protest and disagreement with the prevailing politics at the time. Vivienne Westwood was a forwarder of this style, explaining it as clothing of confrontation and shocking the conservative population of the time (Jervis, 1998). "Punk was/is a subculture best characterized as being part youth rebellion, part artistic statement" (Sabin, 1999: 2).

In the late 80's Grunge style emerged as a kind of Hippie and Punk's junction (Mendes and Haye, 1999). Grunge movement concerns about social alienation, apathy, confinement, and a desire for freedom. The youth showed that was able to create cultural models independently, dressing alternatively (Livolsi, 1989). Jeans were seen as a symbol for anti-fashion and popularized by these groups of young people who rejected the strict codes.

The act of ripping jeans may be linked with several reasons. One of them was the position against the capitalist system, which made youth give value to each piece of clothing, even if it was in disrepair and/or worn (Fiske, 1989). It was a way to reject the bourgeois way of dressing. Another one was the youth thought that jeans should be personalized to allow self-expression and to show off how against conformity they were (Smith, 2003). In the U.S.A. jeans were a patriotic symbol and the youth wanted

to make an outrage against their country's political behaviour wearing it in a very personal way. The act of ripping jeans symbolized discredit given to social decisions and willingness to put an end to the conductor system.

What began to be dressed in favour of a break with the prevailing fashion became the tool of standardization (Lipovetsky, 2007). In the first moment who bought designer label cloth rejected anti fashion style. Whoever ripped jeans remained a fashion item of rock and roll lifestyle and it was in the early 90's that the fashion mainstream industry adopted worn look jeans. Fashion designers started to invest in jeans wear and treated it as anti fashion youth, but in an industrialized way.

Today is difficult to see anti capitalist inspirations on the designer labels work as Margues'Almeida, Margiela, Balmain, Marc Jacobs, Theyskens' Theory, Acne or Dsquared2. It happens because the intention is to sell the aesthetic and not the activism ideals. Most of the labels are selling the idea of being a rock star, the idea of effortless, the images of 90's grunge, not the idea of being against capitalism, having something important to say throughout the appearance. These jeans are bought by individuals from upper-middle class, who fall for anti-fashion aesthetic. Elements of the anti-system ideologies are adapted to mainstream culture. Even Vivienne Westwood moved the aesthetic to luxury sectors (Silva et al, 2012). Being against the system she did not overturn it. fed him with ideas that were massed (Jones & Mair, 2005).

The social expression through clothing is becoming less. Now that jeans are acceptable everywhere, their old meaning of rebellion and freedom was lost. The capitalist system ended up stealing a vehicle for social struggle, making it the exact opposite.

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