

Glimpses of the Aftermarket

by Silvia Bombardini



Supreme hammer, Supreme ashtrays. In *Supremacist* by David Shapiro – [via nymag.com](http://via.nymag.com)

Gone, at last, are the days of fashion victims, gone are the days of guilty pleasures and irresponsible shopping sprees. Brands can no longer dictate, nor could they persuade the youth against their will: it's with a great deal of self-awareness, insight and often hands-on competence in the ways of worths of the aftermarket, that Millennials and Gen Z's indulge their fashion appetites. More realist and less impulsive, they recognise escapism as a form of weakness. As a mirror of society, fashion takes note – even the press adopt a whole new glossary. Recent shows are ever more seldom praised for the *dream* that they sell, instead, Vogue gives credit to the “*meat-and-potatoes*” outlook of Coach 1941 FW16 collection, and GQ approves of Gucci's newest Men's Cruise that “*offers everything and the kitchen sink*”. Luxury designers begin to recognise that it's what the crowds wear, rather than the bespoke suits, that will come in posterity to define our time. Like Orson Welles' Charles Foster Kane, they seem to be gagging on that silver spoon: from Demna Gvasalia's notoriously literal references to day-to-day garments, to Kanye's much quoted, and questioned, wish for Yeezy to reach a postulated “*Zara level*” ideal of accessibility. Contemporary high-end streetwear, on the rise more than ever before, aims to present itself as contemporary low-end streetwear. If not yet financially, then certainly aesthetically, and allegedly ideologically.

Doing what it does best, fashion romanticises for upper-class kids traditionally affordable subcultural staples, from shiny puffa jackets to grey marl tracksuits and hoodies. They are either minimally altered, hence nodding to counterfeit culture, or realised in partnership with the well-known sportswear brands that originally produced them, which don't quite reach yet on their own either heritage or cult status, and that's precisely what makes them desirable. Take Gosha Rubchinskiy's SS17 collaborations with Sergio Tacchini, Kappa, and FILA, for example. While these labels benefit from their newfound popularity among fashion-savvy young men, the Muscovite designer can wear the cloak of a curator, almost a *collector* – who inspires trust and loyalty in his fans, as he doesn't present them simply with products to buy, but with a rounded experience, something akin to mentorship. Vetements did something similar with the famed 18 collabs of their couture debut in June, bringing the likes of Juicy Couture and Eastpak back in style. But a generation of more conscious and more informed consumers, who are also in great part digital natives, can buy into these uplifted staples knowingly: which means that it's well past the moment of their first sale that the closest comparison with street culture can perhaps be drawn, not just as aesthetic inspiration but almost as a business model. It happens on consignment e-stores-cum-communities such as *Depop* and *Grailed*, *Kixify* or *K'LEKT*, subreddit marketplaces and customer-to-customer (C2C) mobile apps. On forums like *Superfuture* or *StyleZeitgeist*. On public or private Facebook groups like *Wavey Garms* and *The Basement*, and the kind of highly specialised pockets of the website that have gathered members in recent years, such as *Buying and Selling Raf Simons*, the *Rick Owens Buy/Sell/Trade Group*, or the ever more niche *Cav Empt Talk* or *Bianca Chandôn Talk UK/EU*. "Any designer or label currently making waves is almost guaranteed to have a corner of Facebook that their devoted fans have taken over to discuss their movements" writes Jack Stanley for Dazed. These are the virtual speakeasies of connoisseur and archival menswear – here gather young dealers, bargainers and gamblers, hunters and hawkers, hypebeasts and sneakerheads. They operate on a system of values that's largely independent from designers' intentions, and via classifieds and peer-to-peer negotiations that rely remarkably, the onlooker could say unwisely, on faith and good will, spin user-generated narratives of legendary hauls. Members legit check one another's finds and take care of their peers, oddly enough in a commercial context, at times even before their own personal interest. "I know there cool as shit bro but don't spend that much on a hoodie" Instagram reseller *Sole Street Sneaker Co.* dissuades a prospective buyer whose finances are limited, "box logos aren't that cool cash in your pocket to do shit with your friends is cool AF tho!". Indeed, they speak their own lingo too. On busy boards, WDYWT is short for *what did you wear today?*, BNWT and BNWOT are brand new items with or without tags, and deadstock, which shortens as DS or VNDS if it's only *very nearly* so, stands in the sneaker aftermarket for "shoes that's still in-the-box fresh, despite being years – even decades – old. It's a mint condition, wearable time capsule" according to VICE, "a pair of deadstock kicks is more or less a holy grail". A coarse and sloppy vernacular works like a dialect, in the digital age, it ties a community together however geographically distant its initiated members might be. If genuine enough that they won't come across as trying too hard, brands can embrace it too. As does Palace, the British skatewear label whose web shop's hilarious descriptions have now fans of their own. Founder Lev Tanju, who named the brand after the Palace Wayward Boys Choir (PWBC) skate gang in

London Southbank, told *The Guardian* earlier this year that he writes those bullet points himself, for laughs. They're frequently unrelated to the item on sale, always uppercase, and often wax poetic about junk food.



JACKETS SWEATSHIRTS T-SHIRTS HATS BOTTOMS ACCESSORIES HARDWARE CART (0)



PALACE / ADIDAS BUCKET HAT REFLECTIVE

Sold Out

- REVERSIBLE FULL 3M BUCKET
- I SEE YOU FAM
- MY ACTUAL FAVE
- PLEASE MUM
- WHAT IF IT'S MY CHRISTMAS AND BDAY MONEY
- LUKE SKYWALKER AT RAVE

- [UK SHIPPING INFO](#)
- [WORLDWIDE SHIPPING INFO](#)



"LUKE SKYWALKER AT RAVE" – via palaceskateboards.com

But what is it exactly that could make those clothes you no longer wear worth a dime online? As the names of the Facebook groups suggest, the right logo will get you a long way, because if luxury now makes us queasy, labels are still how we demonstrate our judgement, and recognise our kin in a crowd. This used to be because the crowd at large simply couldn't afford the labels wealthy kids wore, but now, it may just as well be due to the fact that one particular style, however cheap, was notably produced in such low numbers that only a true fan would have been privy to the ways to get it before it sold out. Indeed, an item's value in the aftermarket also has a lot to do with its rarity, which explains how a t-shirt with a picture of Kermit the Frog, once sold at retail for \$44, now resells on the internet for around \$600. Some companies have cottoned on to this, releasing overpriced limited editions that could almost be seen as an attempt to secure for themselves, in advance, a slice of the future earnings of traders' swaps and resales. But then there is age, which may be just as meaningful yet is much more difficult for brands to capitalise upon – the Kermit x Supreme tee, for example, dates back to 2008. Age is also, probably, the most subversive aspect of these self-reliant retail virtualities: for within an industry in perpetual spin to divine future trends and tastes, nostalgia and patience may well be radical.

The most successful example of someone who's made a business out of them, is without a doubt David Casavant. When eBay was still the only option around, Casavant began his menswear collection browsing from Tennessee in his early teens. A decade later, *The David Casavant Archive* in New York City welcomes, according to its website, "several thousand pieces" and "the world's most comprehensive scope of garments by Austrian

designer Helmut Lang, and Belgian designer Raf Simons". They are undoubtedly two of most valuable designer labels in the international trading market. Having legendarily shredded his archive as he retired from fashion in 2005, any one garment designed by Lang himself is incredibly difficult to find, and a Raf Simons x Peter Saville FW03 parka appears to have gone for \$7000 last year on Grailed – "*David Casavant is that you*" reads the comment of user theultimatebr0 on the page of that sale. Unlike a museum, Casavant frequently loans his finds to trusted regular clients, the likes of Lady Gaga or Rihanna, Big Sean, Travis Scott, Young Thug and Lorde. This allows him to keep the archive running without having to actually flipping anything, with the added benefit, as he sees it, to let his garments fulfil their purpose: being worn. "*The big deal for me is that my clothes get to be used*", he told [Dazed](#) "*I don't want them to be locked away. It keeps life in them for people to wear them*". Casavant, who's a stylist as well, also said that he didn't think of his collection as an investment at first, and only recently did the archive start to pay off. Why do it then, for such a long time and with such dedication, at such great expense? Psychoanalysis has come up with plenty of reasons why people collect. Freud linked it to the anal-retentive stage in childhood, Jung to the influence of our collective unconscious and early ancestors who would pile up nuts and berries for survival. Millennials, besides, have been dubbed as the most nostalgic generation of all. Still, most collectors would rather admit that they do so for the thrill of the hunt, the dopamine rush of winning an auction as if it were a race, and the camaraderie that comes with sharing their trophies with other collectors, something which dedicated online communities can provide in spades. Casavant even offers a buying service for celebrities looking for a specific piece, to help them find it – not unlike a private detective in his field. And he's not the only one who does this either. Benjamin Kickz, the 16-year old reseller from Miami who runs sneakerdon.com for the general public, is also described by [The Cut](#) as a *sneaker broker* for those *famous people*: "*he will do whatever it takes to get you the sneaker you want – a high-end, single-product TaskRabbit so monofocused on the job of finding the right shoes*". Usually, these would turn out to be a rare pair of Nike Air Jordan, by far the most valuable sneaker around. Indeed, while it's worth noting that Kanye's glow-in-the-dark Yeezy Boost 750, going for \$1,471 with a 400% markup, now top the latest of StockX and Highsnobiety's quarterly reviews of the most expensive shoes to hit the secondary market, the same chart shows how most buyers would still rather spend their money on J's or other Nike releases. Sure, adidas' Yeezy kicks are doing exceptionally well for such a young line, but certain Nikes age like fine wine: the Air Mag Back To The Future, originally launched in 2011, are on sale on Benjamin's e-store for \$8,500 – and they glow, too. Don't let all those zeros put you off though: to join the traders' clique even just as an amateur may still be worth it. When asked by [WGSN](#) how he funded his parody brand, Vetememes' Davil Tran, also in his early twenties, answered: "*Whenever I buy something, I research it and make sure there's a value to it, and that it's worth it. That way if I don't enjoy it that much, I can resell it. I've been doing that a lot – it's fun*".

The people who will pay that much for a pair of old trainers, however, are out there. Complex UK traces the origins of the sneakerhead fellow back to the 2001 launch of the Stussy x Nike Dunk High shoe, which was only available for two weeks, in a limited edition of 24 pairs per day, at just four Stussy stores around the world – and fans would start to queue outside, hoping to get their kicks, and the lines have only got longer ever since. It's unsurprising really, that it's with Stussy that this trend began. Streetwear labels like Palace or A Bathing Ape, and

Stussy before them all, are much better suited than high-end designers, though Gosha or Raf may come close, to inspire the kind of loyalty that turns customers into collectors, and often resellers next. That's because they are tribal brands by nature, experiential – what they offer transcends the physicality of the product they sell. Sure, Palace could use the web shop's product description to praise the high quality of that bucket hat, but does that matter really? What's on sale, truly, is the opportunity to belong to a group, which may no longer be limited to the skating community of the label's early days, but retains a similar ethos of exclusivity and localism due to the scarcity of these public invites. Stussy had introduced the International Stussy Tribe (IST) Varsity Jacket already back in 1988, and that was rarely ever even for sale, mostly a collection of one-of-a-kind personalised models the brand has gifted to selected individuals through the years – premium Tribe members, if you will, who in 2012 were the likes of A\$AP Rocky and Pigalle's founder Stephane Ashpool. The most exclusive label of them all, however, is by far Supreme. Known for their ever so slightly rude customer service and extremely selective press presence, Supreme is the brand whose founder once famously said, "if we can sell 600, I make 400". Though they do, after all, drop new items frequently enough, there are so few pieces of any given style that kids will camp outside the stores days ahead of a high-profile launch, and those looking too obviously like resellers will end up getting themselves banned. If at first glance their behaviour might seem irrational or impulsive, it is truly anything but. Supreme flippers have their own consignment shops, like *Unique Hype Collection* in New York's Chinatown, their own conventions, like *Solepreme Con*, and now a docuseries too – *Sold Out: The Underground Economy of Supreme Resellers*, by Complex News. In one of these clips, fashion expert Glenn O'Brien ventures that there could be something almost idealistic in the notion of a label sharing revenue with their fans – still, Supreme generally looks down on traders' extravagant markups, and that's ostensibly because the brand takes pride in keeping its price tags sensible at retail. Some resellers however, believe that their business helps a good cause in making Supreme available, via web, to anyone who lives outside the only eight major cities in the world where Supreme stores can be found and queued by.

But as honourably piratical as it may seem when it's the youth who take the reins, it's important to remember that the practice of buying and selling fashion online is still a by-product of capitalism, and in many ways more capitalist even than the conventional shopping which precedes it. In *Sold Out*, Highsnobiety's executive editor Jeff Carvalho even draws a parallel with the stock market: something that the speedy, impalpable nature of virtual transactions does certainly recall. It's here where exchange value most obviously exceeds use value, leading to a generalised case of commodity fetishism and alienation. In the very first stanza of Frank Ocean's much-awaited new album, to *want Nikes* is a metaphor for gold digging, and the authenticity of the shoe mirrors that of those who wear it: "All you want is Nikes / But the real ones / Just like you / Just like me". Collecting itself can become compulsive, an addiction – which makes the comparison with street culture all the more bleakly real. David Shapiro's semi-autobiographical new novel, *Supremacist*, delves into the risks of streetwear abuse. Described by VICE as "part love letter to the cult streetwear brand, part cry for help", it recounts the ill-fated quest for meaning of the junkie main character, who shares the same alias as the author, whilst on a road trip to visit every Supreme store in the world. "Every item in the store that I might have wanted, I already had. Things I didn't even like" writes Shapiro, or "I bought two packs of Supreme-branded Post-It Notes for \$2 each. They were

selling on eBay for \$18 each". His is the paradox of the conscious consumer: whose self-awareness, though certainly preferable to naiveté, does not necessarily make him invulnerable to the insidious ways consumerism works.

PRINTED IN [MODERN WEEKLY. CHINA](#) - SEPTEMBER 2016 - BY SILVIA BOMBARDINI