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Shifting Cultures of Recycled Style
A History of Second-Hand Clothing Markets in Montreal

Kimberly A. Diggins
Graduate Program in Communications
McGill University, Montreal
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Abstract

Shifting cultures of recycled style: a history of second-hand clothing markets in Montreal draws a cultural history of the evolving circuits through which discards of the fashion system pass. The focus is on three manifestations of the market: the female-dominated charity circuits of the nineteenth-century into which the flow of used goods was redirected following the introduction of mass-produced garments; the revival of cast-off clothing's stylish potential by punk and grunge subcultures in their respective creations of a poverty aesthetic; and the more heterogeneously mainstream market of the late 1980s and 1990s operating within a consumer environment seeped in nostalgia.

The second-hand market is a facet of the fashion system receiving scant attention by the academic community. This study aims to redress the oversight by demonstrating how much of a given society is revealed through the ways in which its members manage the matter of sartorial waste.

Résumé

Cultures changeantes de style recyclé: l'histoire des marchés de vêtements usagés à Montréal trace l'histoire culturelle des systèmes à travers lesquels passent les rebuts de la mode. L'étude examine trois manifestations du marché: les circuits de charité du dix-neuvième siècle qui furent dominés par les femmes, et dans lesquels le flot de biens usagés furent redirigés après l'introduction des vêtements fabriqués en série; la reprise du potentiel chic des vêtements rejetés à l'aide des "subcultures" punk et grunge à travers leurs créations respectives d'un esthétique de pauvreté; et le marché plus hétérogène, dans la ligne du courant dominant des années 1980s et 1990s, qui fonctionna dans un environment de consommateur infiltré par la nostalgie.

Le marché des vêtements usagés est une facette du système de la mode qui reçoit peu d'attention par la communauté académique. Cette étude vise à régler cette omission en démontrant combien une société donnée est définie par les façons dont ses membres gèrent leurs surplus vestimentaires.

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special mention, as his scrap book and slides were an invaluable resource helping me substantiate a history that for the most part had been left to slide into a vaguely remembered half-light. Guylaine Theriault and Jacinthe Collard at *Scarlett O'Hara*, Darrell (aka "Brian") Legge at *Drags*, and Marthe Leclerc at *Bla-bla-bla* were also particularly helpful.

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Introduction
From Screen Dreams to Local Scenes

This was originally going to be a study of fashion on television.

As a devoted fan, I was attracted to the idea of exploring the trendiness of style as a vehicle for television entertainment. I intended to demonstrate how fashion's dictates and rhythms underlie the slick surfaces of such Canadian programs as *Fashion Television*, *Fashion File*, and *Flare TV*; how they show at a micro level fashion's shaping power in contemporary society and its influence over people's conceptualizations of themselves, of time and space, and of popular culture. While maintaining a critical stance *vis à vis* these weekly installments charged with the visual dissemination of beauty and adornment practices lying outside most viewers' versions of the possible, I aimed to further undermine any lingering notions of fashion as a subject unworthy of rigorous academic consideration. For rather than suggesting an inevitable passivity on the part of viewers, I hoped to demonstrate how these images were being *used*.

Of course, *Shifting Cultures of Recycled Style* is not a study of fashion on television. While researching matters pertaining to mediated style, a seminar I presented on retro evolved into a term paper, which in the process of writing opened up more avenues of interest than could be managed within a single essay. With second-hand shopping being a pastime of mine for at least as long as *Fashion Television*, I was faced with having to choose between two manifestations of style which intrigued me in entirely different ways. In the end, the challenge of trying to make sense of a fashion sub-system grounded in the concrete and local, yet almost entirely overlooked by cultural theorists

and historians, ultimately prevailed. Images of the latest Paris designs may have been available at the click of my remote control, but a real Charles Balmain dress on sale at a local retro shop was only a few blocks from my door – fashion I could touch. Thus did television give way to the present theoretically-informed study of Montreal's second-hand clothing market over the past century.

The reality of used garments is indeed a far cry from the otherworldly images presented by televised vehicles devoted to the elite fashion industry. One could hardly get further away from scenes of New York runways or the cult of the designer. At the same time the two extremes are linked by what people *do* with fashion. In the first instance I was preoccupied with what individuals captivated by images of vogue, such as myself, were bringing to and/or taking away from the viewing experience. Dissatisfied with the notion of *Fashion Television* as mere fluff colonizing people's minds, I wanted to explore the possibility of something beyond a unidirectional transmission from TV screen to narcotized, empty-vessel viewer. Thinking of it instead as a process of cultural assimilation occurring in conjunction with an individual's overall way of life, we might further posit that second-hand shopping is part of the next step: the moment the fashion spectator gets up from the couch and heads out to express his or her own derivative of hip. Yet herein lies the difference: while televised fashion demonstrates the upper creative limits of style according to "authorized" fashion gurus of the moment, the second-hand market (especially the twentieth-century's) shifts the exercise of creativity to the consumer as he or she forsakes the standards of the day to sift through the hodge-podge of eras amassed by the second-hand system. In this sense, shopping becomes a creative activity as opposed to a programmed, mindless response to capitalist seduction.

This change from mediated fashion to the improvisations encouraged by thrift-shopping reflects a development in how I think about fashion, an evolution I identify as analogous to one experienced lately by the academy. Until quite recently, the study of fashion as a phenomenon had been generally limited to historic accounts based on a time and place's most prominently documented and/or photographed, painted, or otherwise visually reproduced articles: i.e. the bustle skirts and tight corsets characterizing the Victorian era, the enduring image of the 1920s flapper, Dior's "New Look" in the years immediately following the Second World War, the mini-skirted "Swinging Sixties," etc. The problem with this once predominant approach, as fashion theorist Jennifer Craik has accurately observed, is that these histories of (mostly) western clothing systems "become designated retrospectively as *the* norm of fashions of the moment" (1994: ix). When style thus becomes conceptualized as an elite affair governed by celebrity designers and famous fashion plates, other phenomena – such as the everyday stylistic efforts undertaken by those residing beneath the notice of historic consecrators – are left to settle to the bottom of the heap of texts, images, and surviving artefacts comprising an era's raw materials for historical analysis.

A growing number of theorists in the last few years have worked to counter such exclusivity by presenting competing notions of just what it is that *fashion* ought to designate. Bound up with these efforts has been a redefinition – or, we might say, expansion – of terms. Just as *culture* has become established throughout the interdisciplinary field of cultural inquiry in its anthropological as well as more conservative sense denoting aesthetic excellence, that of *fashion* has been conceived of lately in a manner no longer limited to hierarchically favored *couture*, being seen as

encompassing everyday adornment practices of a wider segment of the populace. Indeed, fashion has become an important tool of urban anthropology, acting as a barometer of not only social and cultural change, but also of economic and technological revolution.

What follows here is only a sampling of recent fashion texts operating in this redirected vein. Craik's *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion* (1994) self-consciously articulates the notion of fashion in the everyday, lived context by dealing with its more common manifestations, receptions, and uses: from women's fashion magazines, to gradual transformations in lingerie and swimwear. *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader* (1992), edited by Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson, adopts a similar stance by collecting essays treating subjects ranging from "Dress and the Lesbian Couple" (Rolley), to "Asian Women's Dress" (Khan), to "Popular Fashion and Working-Class Affluence" (Partington). *On Fashion* (1994), edited by Shari Benstock and Suzanne Ferriss, and *The Gendered Object*, edited by Pat Kirkham, are both anthologies of a heterogeneity comparable to *Chic Thrills*, with each being comprised of articles focused on components of popular adornment practice. Malcolm Barnard's *Fashion as Communication* (1996) takes as its organizing principle the multiple meanings and messages imparted by fashion, alternately treating the subject as, for example, an agent of social reproduction, or as bearer of meaning in times of social revolution. In *Body Invaders: panic sex in America* (1987), co-edited by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, fashion is considered within the context of postmodern theory. Much of the inspiration informing the Kroker text is owing to Jean Baudrillard, who refers to fashion time and time again in such works as his chapter "Fashion, or The Enchanting Spectacle of the Code" in *Symbolic Exchange and*

Death (1993). Even more preoccupied with the intricacies of fashion's codification is Roland Barthes in *The Fashion System* (1983).

These works usefully encourage new ways of thinking through fashion, providing a sound basis for contemporary studies on the subject. However, most have only an indirect – if any – bearing on the second-hand market. With the exception of Baudrillard's insistence that fashion "is always and at the same time 'neo-' and 'rétro-', modern and anachronistic" (1976: 90), most of the above theorists conceive of fashion only in terms of how images and objects of particular periods and locales are consumed by people of those same times and places. Left largely unquestioned are the implications surrounding discarded garments appropriated for renewed wear. Over the course of researching this project, the list of articles uncovered on second-hand style (as there were no books) was strikingly short. Aside from Beverly Lemire's "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes" (1988) and "The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England" (1990), Madeleine Ginsberg's "Rags to Riches: The Second-Hand Clothes Trade 1700-1978" (1980), Angela McRobbie's "Second-hand dresses and the role of the ragmarket" (1994), Janice S. Gore's "Bringing 'The Masses' to Culture: Thrift Shopping, Use(d) Value and the Aesthetic of Poverty" (1995), Karen Tranberg Hansen's "Dealing with Used Clothing: *Salaula* and the Construction of Identity in Zambia's Third Republic" (1994), and the concluding section of Silverman's "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse" (1994), very little scholarly attention has been given to the meanings acquired, and uses to which, cast-off garments have been put over time.

This scarcity of texts was another motivating factor in my choice of topic, one which furthermore permitted a certain degree of freedom in my method as I have often felt as though I were charting new territory. However, that which is addressed by the above – as well as elided – has gone some way to informing my approach. To begin with, circuits for worn clothing predating the emergence of postwar retro chic have been almost entirely overlooked in both popular and academic writing, with only fragments of its particulars having been recovered from the recesses of archival obscurity by researchers such as Ginsberg and Lemire in their work on the early market in Britain.

With no similar published studies having been undertaken in Montreal, I used Ginsberg and Lemire as a starting point for my first chapter. Consisting of an overview of the second-hand market's decline in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century, the chapter considers the redirection of used clothing from the business realm to the predominantly feminine charity circuits emerging in response to the system of novelty production. With improvements in technology providing more widely affordable ready-made garments, more people were permitted the luxury of new clothing – even as the likes of the British aesthetes strove to convince consumers that the goods on offer were little more than fool's gold. Meanwhile, housing the proliferation of new products were department stores enticing middle-class women into the public sphere as never before, while those unable to keep up with sweeping social changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution were effectively shut out.

As women and a new class of indigents made their presence felt in the public sphere as never before, both came together respectively as benefactors and beneficiaries of a new wave of philanthropy. The collection of donated garments to clothe the needy

was a task with which secular women's groups such as the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society charged themselves, undertaking these and other duties as a means of participating in public affairs without impinging on the affairs of men. While taking the plight of the poor seriously, they approached their work as an activity yielding a degree of pleasure more or less equal to that of shopping and other forms of socialization. Whereas second-hand clothing in the preindustrial era allowed those of limited means access to bodily covering – and in more fortunate cases, fashion – used garments in the industrial period retained their fashionable quality only insofar as they provided women of comfortable means a socially-acceptable public role on par with that of their increasingly pleasurable occupation as consumers.

The second chapter takes a big step forward in time to the postwar era, the point at which I identify the next shift occurring in consumer attitude to second-hand clothing. While the market prior to this was not exactly static, during the first half of the twentieth-century there were few significant changes to the state of affairs established in the nineteenth-century. Used clothing outside the charity circuits remained part of, to use Michael Thompson's (1979) term, a "rubbish" market assigned to the covert margins of Montreal's consumer landscape. It was only following the Second World War that used clothing began to be taken up again in the name of style, most visibly by youth-based subcultures in the creation of looks countering the paradigms of mass fashion and the system of novelty production.

In order to set the stage for discussion concerning the emergence of retro shops charged with the aestheticization of second-hand clothing, a survey of subcultural theory provided by the Birmingham School is undertaken. Looking specifically at the clothing

practices surrounding punk in the 1970s and grunge in the 1980s and 1990s – two subcultures employing a second-hand-based "poverty aesthetic" – the limits of British theory are tested in the consideration of these styles appearing outside their places of origin. Taking into account issues of youth unemployment and unrest in Montreal which paralleled situations in London and Seattle (where punk and grunge were respectively spawned) the question of whether displaced subcultural style can be anything other than a dilution of the original form is contemplated.

The final chapter will pick up at almost the same temporal moment as the previous one – the late 1970s – considering this time around other second-hand scenes and shopping practices left unaccounted for by subcultural theory. The concern will be primarily with the 1980s and 1990s, a period during which increased attention was given to the Montreal thrift-shop market by the media, highlighting the fact that the market was no longer the covert, nor exclusively subculturally resistant entity it might once have been. Matters to be addressed concerning this mainstreamed and middle-classed market will be rising public awareness of the benefits of recycling, the yen for nostalgia, and how these issues relate to the concurrently existing subcultural market and enduring charity circuits.

In looking at the contemporary second-hand market in Montreal the definition of authenticity will be considered as it relates to the second-hand market versus the new clothing system, as well as to the second-hand market versus itself. In addition to exploring the implications of a fashion system modeling much of its output on the sort of retro gear carried by second-hand stores, the related consumer acceptance of the thrift-shop trade raises the question of whether there can any longer be such a thing as an

"authentic" second-hand shopping culture. Isolating the parallel ascents of the Mont-Royal Avenue retro shop scene and the *Value Village* department thrift-store chain in Montreal, it will be demonstrated that the matter of authenticity is more complex than the market simply having "sold out" to the very capitalist impulses to which it was once seen as providing an alternative.

In setting the study of Montreal second-hand clothing circuits within this historic frame, I have found it necessary to adopt different methodological approaches at each stage. In the first chapter on women and the charity circuits, I assume the position of a feminist cultural historian; in the analysis of Montreal punk and grunge I become versed in theories of subcultures and trash culture; in the concluding chapter, a dip into postmodern theory is inevitable, along with a look at changing patterns of consumption and definitions of authenticity. Despite this apparent diversity, connecting and underlying each chapter are the following questions: What were the conditions making possible this cultural phenomenon in its different manifestations at different moments? How did these shifts of the second-hand market occur? And for whom did they have meaning?

In responding to these concerns, I have used the intellectual tools best suited to elucidate the circumstances surrounding Montreal's shifting second-hand market. For the aim here really is that of elucidation. With the industry for new fashion bent upon promoting and celebrating itself in the interest of profit by whatever means necessary – be it via television, print, film, new technology, etc. – it has secured itself a stable place in both contemporary thought and as part of social and cultural history. The second-hand market, on the other hand, is only now beginning to realize such visibility. What follows

is an attempt at furthering the process by isolating this single piece of consumer culture and shedding light upon both it and its immediate surrounding features in order to develop a non-traditional, urban cultural history. To achieve this end, the overarching method used may be summarized in terms of the simple truth that one can learn a great deal of a person by going through their garbage.

Chapter One
Nineteenth-Century Second-Hand Clothing Markets: From Riches to Rags

> The officers of the Female Benevolent Society inform the public that they have taken a small house in the Recollet Suburb ... The establishment which is inspected by the managers in rotation, is superintended by respectable and trusty women as housekeepers, and any supplies of clothing, wearing apparel, provisions, wood, etc., however trifling, which the liberal may be disposed to send will be gratefully received and faithfully applied to the wants of the necessitous. (qtd. in Pearce 1920: 14)[1]

Introduction

Broadly speaking, second-hand clothing exists within two contexts: that of the family, and that of the public circuits through which garments pass on their way to either sale or donation. The recycling of worn garments within the family has long been a feature of working and middle-class existence, the mending of old clothing for renewed wear traditionally falling under the category of "women's work." The trade in second-hand clothing is an almost equally well-established, if somewhat different, practice; the anonymous biography inscribed by a faceless owner distinguishing this type of second-hand circulation from that which occurs between blood relations. Both routes for cast-off clothing have enjoyed long histories in western civilization, with wearers and garment uses fluctuating according to changes in social and economic configurations.

This chapter will detail the western second-hand trade's first significant shift of the modern era: that which saw its popularity among the general consuming public wane in the nineteenth-century as it became almost solely identified with fodder for benevolent purposes. To some extent, this emphasis requires that attention be paid to the public

existence of worn garments, the *market* for second-hand goods being suggestive of transactions occurring between strangers. However, it will also be demonstrated that the charity circuit maintained certain traditional, familial features in the labour relations surrounding the clothes. Within the nineteenth-century context of fundamental social and economic change, charities occupied a unique position in between the private and the public, domains themselves in the midst of redefinition.

Drawing on existing work on the second-hand market in Britain, some similarities with colonial Montreal will be staked out. Beginning with an overview of the second-hand market in the pre- and early industrial era, its changing status within the subsequently emerging commodity system will be considered in some detail over the course of the chapter. To summarize here briefly though, the introduction of mass-production in the nineteenth-century made material acquisition so widely accessible that long-standing practices such as the modification of old clothing for further wear, or their purchase second-hand, were challenged by the allure of novelty. Time-consuming and specialized artisan methods of production were superseded by the fragmented labour processes of machine production, with new technology giving rise to different clothing alternatives making second-hand clothing a far less attractive option than it had been before. As a result, the trade in used garments – although once an accepted market for fashion appealing to lower and middle-income earners in the pre-and early industrial period – came to be seen in the latter half of the nineteenth-century as an option fit only for the destitute.

Those unable to keep up with changing modes of work and the emerging system of consumption quickly found themselves pushed to the margins of the new urban

landscape. Used goods obtained either cheaply or charitably became one of a very few clothing alternatives, with fashionable pursuits being forsaken in the scramble for necessities. During this same period, many destitute men and women became connected with members of the upper-classes in such a way as to become participants in the newly fashionable project of philanthropy. It should be noted here that the business of second-hand clothing in the preindustrial age – and as will be seen in subsequent chapters, the post-Second World War era – was generally run by a mix of men and women. However, as the charity circuits for used garments gained prominence in the nineteenth-century over the profit-driven second-hand market, women came to play a particularly prominent role.

The eagerness with which the cause of the poor was taken up by upper-class women was the outcome of several factors, many of these being at best indirectly related to the daily lives of those whom they sought to assist. While the increasing numbers and presence of the poor constituted something of a new social development, they had always existed. It was the initiative taken by the leisured classes on their behalf that was truly novel, and thus suggestive of underlying factors that had as much to do with changes occurring within their own class as that of their beneficiaries. As rising numbers of indigents struggled to keep warm, members of the bourgeoisie enjoyed increased access to international fashion as well as a local industry comprised of dressmakers and custom tailors. With basics such as adequate covering being of little immediate concern to those with capital at their disposal, new "necessities" arose.

For example, connected with greater means and opportunities for *looking* up-to-date in both Europe and North America was a growing interest in issues of *visibility* in

general. With women appearing more often in public, spectatorship emerged as a new pastime marked by gendered divisions as women were subjected to the public gaze of men as never before[2]. They were not, however, simply passive bearers of the male gaze; connected with their new physical visibility were attempts at forging a recognizable social image or presence. Whereas Victorian women had long been forced to choose between the roles of angel of the house or fallen woman of the street, the "household saint / public sinner" dichotomy was in the midst of eroding as middle and upper-middle class women's activities opened outwards from the home to include such pastimes as shopping, philanthropy, and feminist social and cultural reform[3].

Yet the new, more liberating possibilities for women (or encroaching, depending on which side of the gender divide one occupied) could not be assimilated all at once. While pleasing to the eyes of men, women venturing outside the home (unchaperoned, no less) threatened to impinge upon traditionally masculine territories; i.e., the streets, centres of business, commerce, or learning. In order to deal with their perceived threat, women of polite society were discouraged from meddling in the affairs of men. This, however, did not prevent them from seeking out ways to channel their energies into socially useful and prominent projects which would take advantage of a public sphere opening itself to new participants and possibilities.

Judith Walkowitz shows in *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992) that women in the nineteenth-century constituted one marginalized group among many appearing on the urban terrain and transgressing former boundaries of visibility. The poor made up another. The connection between middle and upper-class women and the undifferentiated mass of indigents was not so much one of kind as of category (in the sense that both were

problematic presences upon the cityscape), although their eventual pairing was inevitable. As will be seen below, women's outreach efforts towards indigents provided an excellent solution to the unsettling appearance of both groups to the prevailing patriarchal, capitalist order. While several female-run organizations were formed during this period or had already existed for some time[4], specific attention will be given to the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society for the way in which their organization exemplified a number of notable gender and class issues arising from the used clothing market's fall from fashionable grace. In addition to keeping well-off women busy in an area helping to maintain traditional gender roles (in the care of the unfortunate, for example), the assistance of those in need was also taken up as an opportunity to participate in the public sphere – a means to the improvement of an already esteemed image. Meanwhile, women and children aided by the likes of the Ladies were assigned the practice of such skills as the making and mending of donated clothing – tasks generally associated with the private sphere of home production.

With the confluence of expanding, quickened fashion among the sufficiently monied, and a rising population of indigents of such increasing prominence as to be impossibly ignored, upper-class philanthropy was embraced and encouraged as a means of meeting a social need that had long been heeded mostly by church-based groups[5], as well as giving women at either end of the social spectrum a role to play in the public domain.

Second-hand clothing in the pre- and early industrial era

Prior to the onset of the Industrial Revolution, neither the purchase nor wear of previously-owned clothing were considered indications of poverty. The stigma associated with worn goods arose only with industrial production in the nineteenth-century, and was thus historically unprecedented. A centuries-old trade serving both the basic and fashionable needs of individuals from a broad range of social backgrounds, the preindustrial second-hand circuit was an integral part of daily consumer life in its provision of goods for the many unable to afford the still-rarefied component of novelty. While few official documents remain to support the once-respected status of used-garments[6], their popularity in the period preceding the era of mass-production was undoubtedly strong. As Beverly Lemire notes in "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes" (1988), an extensive network for the circulation of used goods was well established to meet this demand by the 1700s, a point at which widespread consumerism was as yet in its nascent stages.

> [u]ndoubtedly the secondhand trade had existed, at least in the major centers, for generations or even centuries before it began to come to the notice of contemporary writers and correspondents. The notice that this trade attracted in the eighteenth century can be attributed directly to the vastly greater quantity of merchandise, in addition to the more visible numbers of traders and their patrons. (3)

Whereas the market had long subsisted in some form or another, it was during this brief interim period when rates of production were on the rise – but not yet at the point of being able to supply the majority with new goods – that the second-hand market truly prospered. Prior to the development of industrial processes, the second-hand market in Britain "flourished as a facet of every-day commercial life, well known by housewife, servant, traders, and gentlefolk" (Lemire 1990: 256). Moreover, as Madeleine Ginsburg

asserts, "[s]econd-hand clothes dealing was regarded as a respectable and profitable way of earning a living, carried out by the 'clothes brokers' and 'salesmen' ..." (Ginsberg 1980: 121). Whether wearing or trading, second-hand garments were not considered worthless disposable items. In fact, they were among the most liquid of assets, the contents of one's closet being equivalent to an in-house bank account[7].

Although the labouring classes in the pre- and early industrial era possessed more cash for the purchase of consumer goods than did their ancestors two centuries previously, they were as yet unable to buy new. Their lack of resources, in combination with the mounting availability of new goods for those with sufficient incomes, produced a robust second-hand market. This in turn lead to the establishment of a two-tiered system of consumption in which the second-hand market became a chief means of catering to members of the lower tier.

> At the top was the open and apparent consumer demand expressed by the middle and upper ranks through acquisition of new furnishings, clothing, tableware, and the hundreds of miscellaneous items manufactured in growing volumes in the workshops of Britain. Beneath this lay the most numerous of Britain's families, at a level below fifty pounds per annum, the amount suggested by one historian as the prerequisite to active consumerism. (Lemire 1988: 2)

While used clothing did indeed provide more affordable covering for the poor, the segment of society most likely to purchase second-hand goods would have been this intermediary group earning less than fifty pounds a year, while still subsisting above the poverty line. Then, as now, individuals in this middle range set considerable importance on clothing, believing that the right outfits could help them socially. They therefore attempted to dress in ways bespeaking a higher station in life, even if this meant taking up clothing set aside by the likes of those whom they sought to impress.

Lemire demonstrates in "The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England" that the strong demand and resulting brisk business ensured the livelihood of pawnbrokers, clothes brokers, hawkers and salesmen, in addition to organizers of a black market so aggressive that the theft and resale of clothing became one of the period's most common varieties of criminality. Ginsberg points out that it also provided a source of employment for Jewish immigrants, another socially-marginalized group which, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, took to second-hand clothes dealing as a result of being unable to find or accept other jobs due to religious restrictions (1980: 125)[8]. Although many clothes dealers were established in cities, there was also much work for itinerant traders and peddlers who spread out across the countryside. Discrepancies between different regions of Britain had no effect on the second-hand market, as English fashion was more or less uniform throughout the country. Moreover, the lapse of time separating the introduction of a new style and its eventual appearance in rural and colonial areas was a benefit to the trade rather than a problem, as the latest London style would have been deemed inappropriate outside urban borders, whereas styles a few years old would have been more readily accepted.

Despite its integration into the fabric of everyday living, Lemire contends in "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England" that the trade in second-hand clothing was only an intermediate step on the way to the establishment of industrial society, satisfying the appetites of a consuming public only until technologies of production improved to the point of lowering prices on new goods to more widely accessible levels. Once cheaper, ready-made articles were available, the market for used clothing could no longer retain its legitimacy among the general population. By the mid-

nineteenth century, most of those depending on cast-off garments were among Britain's poorest citizens, those with higher incomes opting for inexpensive ready-made goods. By 1870, Lemire concludes, the market had "visibly decayed" (1988: 22). Ginsburg is less inclined to entirely dismiss the second-hand market's continuing importance for the urban proletariat, tracing its business-reiated activities into the twentieth-century. She does concede though, the important effects of rising industrialization on the used clothing market. In the following passage we see, for example, how changes brought about by mass-production extended all the way down to young working women, a demographic previously unable to buy new but that could now exhibit what had once been the visible markers of affluence.

> By the end of the century, ready-made clothing had increased in variety and decreased in price and as more and better-paid jobs became available to women so it was a point of pride for the young unmarried girl to buy new ... In the thirty-two budgets prepared by wage-earning women and girls for the 1911 enquiry, the wages ranging between ten shillings and thirty shillings, only one, a tie machinist, on short time because of the death of Edward VII, bought anything second-hand. (Ginsburg 1980: 128)

With novelty having thus become the new standard of legitimacy, consumers began reaching for lower quality new items rather than better quality second-hand goods for fear of what they might communicate in a society increasingly concerned with appearance. With the economic principle of fashion establishing its rapid rhythm of purchase and discard as the logic of the modern consumer era, it followed that fashion in the more sartorially specific sense would adopt a similar tempo for those participating in the new socio-economic arrangement. New in the sense of brand new, rather than the latest addition to one's closet, henceforth became a prerequisite for perceived quality and gentility.

It is difficult to assess to what extent these Britain-specific findings are transferable to the colonial context, as similar documentation for Canada is sparse. Lemire notes though, that cast-off clothing was exported from Bristol to New World colonies such as Quebec, as well as Newfoundland, South Carolina, Ireland, Grenada, and Barbados (1988: 5). While other fragments of evidence may be found to support the existence of second-hand business in the colonies prior to industrial development[9], most studies undertaken on the early trading practices in clothing have focused on the thriving fur trade and such region-specific items as the *ceintures fléchées* of rural Quebec. There is much work yet to be done on the second-hand clothing market in preindustrial Canada, further digging into its existence undoubtedly yielding insights into aspects of daily life left untouched, for the most part, by local histories. With the emphasis of this chapter being on the *transition* of the market in the nineteenth-century, however, fleshing out the preindustrial Canadian second-hand market will have to be left aside in favour of a more direct focus on factors contributing to the shift of the trade, such as the introduction of techniques for mass-production, and the ways in which they functioned within larger cities like Montreal. It is to these subjects that we now turn.

Mass-production and the evolving urban landscape

Whereas sumptuary laws had long dissolved by the turn of the nineteenth-century, sartorial control in the preindustrial period nevertheless remained in the hands of those who could afford the latest tailored styles, leaving everyone else to make do with second-hand goods or with garments produced at home. This changed with the development of

technologies making possible the manufacture of ready-made clothing. As cheap, standardized, mass-produced garments, ready-mades effectively marked the nineteenth-century as an important turning point in the history of fashion, for it was at this point that mass-fashion was inaugurated, allowing members of different classes to dress in the latest styles at the same time.

The first large-scale manufacturing firm for ready-made clothing was established in 1824 in Paris. North America followed closely behind with its first plant opening in the US around 1830, with Montreal getting a foothold a bit later in the 1850s. Although one might assume that developing technologies would have initially been used for women's clothing – they being the chief consumers of fashion – this was not the case. When the initial wave of ready-made clothing was produced between the 1830s and 1850s, the output was geared mainly towards men, as there was not the same type or breadth of market for women. Much of the initial US output, for example, was intended for workers, soldiers, sailors, and slaves. During this period, manufactured clothing was baggy and shapeless since only scant efforts had been made at compiling anatomical proportions for men, and thus were garments produced to fit as wide a range of shapes as possible (Payette-Daoust 1986: 15-24).

It was not until the second wave of manufacturing that some improvements could be discerned. At this mid-point in the nineteenth-century, it was the invention of the sewing machine, coupled with the American Civil war, which triggered intense demand for quantity and quality, and which changed the way clothing was subsequently made. The advent of the sewing machine eliminated former limits to productivity imposed by hand sewing, while the outbreak of the Civil War initiated the first full-fledged effort to

compile measurements from conscripted soldiers which would provide the data necessary for standardized, yet better-fitting, garments (Payette-Daoust 1986: 15-24).

The establishment of women's ready-made clothing took more time to develop. A few reasons for this delay have already been suggested, such as the fact that women in the early part of the nineteenth-century were not participating in the public work force to the same extent as men. Women were also subject to a considerable degree of sexism which demanded that their clothing follow the contours of their bodies. The resulting highly individual forms of women's dresses, in combination with the intricacy of construction entailed by their elaborate design, made them too complicated to be mass-produced. Only towards the turn of the twentieth-century did this begin to change in connection with developments in women's fashion which brought into style, for example, the more easily mass-produced shirtwaist.

Another contributing factor to the delayed rise of ready-mades was quality. This issue applies to both sexes, and might be understood in some of the same terms as the ill-fitting, early mass-produced garments for men. While the second-hand clothing market suffered considerably by being increasingly passed over for poorly produced ready-mades, this did not happen immediately. Ready-mades were criticized throughout the nineteenth-century for their shoddy quality, with the problem being especially acute in the early to mid-1800s. In her study of late nineteenth-century fashion in Montreal, Evlyn Payton Tayler (1992) notes, for example, that the discovery of coal tar dyes in 1856 expanded the range of colours used in textile manufacture, but that in comparison to vegetable dyes the new chemical counterparts were bright and often garish. These were the sort of issues that provoked the ire of aesthetes and intellectuals in Britain and

continental Europe[10], who associated aesthetically inferior methods of production with a form of social and cultural degradation. While the campaign of the aesthetes has only a moderate bearing on the nineteenth-century charity system, its legacy will be referred to in subsequent chapters with respect to the rejuvenated second-hand market of the twentieth-century, and thus will a moment be taken here to flesh out its ideals in greater detail than might otherwise have been done.

According to the aesthetes, a low regard for the popular arts (among which clothing production was included) was indicative of a corresponding disregard and lack of respect for their intended consumers. The ensuing crusade against the "cheap and nasty," as leading socialist aesthete William Morris termed it, was directed particularly at the ways in which declining levels of taste and product affected members of the lower and lower-middle-classes – all recent initiates to active consumerism. More than simply a fiscal matter in which inferior goods were assigned to those unable to afford the luxury of quality, the declining standards of the "lesser" arts had taken on a political dimension for the aesthetes.

Morris felt that the cultural decline and ensuing general disappearance of beauty was a by-product of highly developed, urbanized, mechanical cultures such as his own in which the general populace was at risk of becoming incapacitated by perpetual changes imposed by fashion. Standards of beauty and taste were in peril of disappearing. Quality of life was being endangered by all the above, in combination with the division of labour and leisure which would undermine any enjoyment that might once have been extracted from the work of creation.

In his estimation, a healthy civilization would only be realized when the arts were allowed to flourish at the hands of common people; when craftspersons would be recognized as being among society's leading artists by virtue of their work being at once beautiful and necessary. In this way, the separation of labour and leisure, and of production and consumption, would be lessened. By allowing for a greater degree of satisfaction among workers, a particularly socialist cultural renaissance could take place, and to this end Morris deemed a considerable amount of public education necessary to re-learn skills lost by industrialism. For example, in the "Arts and Crafts Essays Preface" (1893) he encourages his readers to visit the South Kensington Museum in order to study the textiles of thirteenth and fourteenth-century Syria and Sicily. As instances of superior artisan skill, he suggests, their revival could be taken up as a means of defying the industrial order.

> They will then (if, once more they have real artistic perception) see at once the difference between the results of irrepressible imagination and love of beauty, on the one hand, and, on the other, of restless and weary vacuity of mind, forced by the exigencies of fashion to do something or other to the innocent surface of the cloth in order to distinguish it in the market from other cloths; between the handiwork of the free craftsman doing as he pleased with the work, and the drudgery of the 'operative' set to his task by the tradesman competing for the custom of a frivolous public, which had forgotten that there was such a thing as art. (Morris 1893: 248)

In the quest for profit among those heading up production and, at the consuming end, for those pursuing novelty for its provided illusion of participation in the "good life", artisan skills were being undermined. So too, as Morris points out, were individual creative autonomy and independence of mind. Lulled by the flood of mass-produced vulgarities, Morris felt that consumers would be unable to recognize to what extent these objects were complicit in maintaining class-based subordination, and contributing to a generally

declining quality of life. The aesthetic reformers' answer lay in putting art and production back in the hands of the people, and encouraging renewed recognition for standards of quality going above and beyond that of novelty. The more holistic spirit of production encouraged by the aesthetes, as well as a slippage of novelty's foothold in the consumer domain will be seen in the next chapter in connection with the postwar second-hand market. While it would take almost a century for many of their recommendations to be adopted, by the end of the nineteenth-century the aesthetes could at least take comfort in the fact that mass-produced clothing had become more aesthetically-pleasing than previously thanks in part to their efforts.

Finally, for members of the middle-classes unable to purchase expensive custom made goods, there was another option in the early and mid-nineteenth-century besides the second-hand trade or the underdeveloped ready-made market: specifically, that of home production. Advances in the design and cut of women's clothing led to the introduction of graded paper patterns intended to facilitate the job of dressmakers, although eventually they were also sold to the general public by mail order or included in women's magazines also appearing at this time. While only one change among many, the emergence of paper patterns helps to underscore traditional, familial divisions of labour as well as the transition from home production of clothing to its ready-made counterparts, since paper patterns were sold by the new department stores in the dress goods sections. As late as 1891, Timothy Eaton described the sale of home dressmaking materials as the "backbone" of his business even though he also sold ready-made goods. Moreover, Henry Morgan and Co., a major Montreal retailer in the nineteenth-century, requested 5,000 of these so-called "fashion sheets" for the month of April, 1890 alone (Payton

Tayler 1992: 52-3, 60). Although paper patterns continue to be sold to this day, they have long since been outsold by ready-made goods.

Arising in conjunction with new methods of production – and the resulting greater availability of goods imbued with the valued gloss of novelty – were social spaces and relations changing the face of the city as well as how people functioned within them. Among these was the department store, a significant feature of the new urban geography. As dry goods stores expanded to multilevel retail complexes, improved methods of transportation were devised to accommodate increasing flows of people seeking to partake of the new spectacular delights of the city among which these stores and the products they housed were included. Contemporary scholarship is divided with respect to these developments. Representing one school of thought is Rosalind Williams, who identifies the new spaces of consumption as "dream worlds" inducing a sort of "numbed psychosis" (1982: 67) of decontextualized sights and sounds whose only design was to sell. In her estimation, department stores mark a decline of sorts as shopping citizens were sunk into an increasingly passive consumptive mode. However, the stores may conversely be seen as accomplishing more than simply the onset of an unthinking passivity among those moving within them.

> Ladies' kiosks, new cafés and teashops, the use of buses, department stores where women could met their female friends unchaperoned were as "important," argues Leonore Davidoff, "in freeing middle-class women from strict social rituals as the slow erosion of chaperonage." (Walkowitz 1992: 47)

France and the US in the 1830s and 1840s were leaders in the development of such new approaches to shopping which not only undermined the second-hand market, but also transformed what was once a tedious activity into a pleasurable, social pastime to be

experienced outside the confines of the home. The fixing of prices eliminated haggling procedures which slowed sales and reduced rates of turnover, and the extension of credit over ready money for purchases created yet another standard with which second-hand dealers were not prepared to compete. With department stores promoting themselves as places in which to browse without being pressured to buy; exchange unsatisfactory goods with little inconvenience; frequent tea rooms and waiting areas; and enjoy a general sense of luxury, pleasure and comfort through elements of decor and the hiring of sympathetic shop girls, these consumer environments further encouraged the venturing forth of women into the public sphere – and away from the comparably less pleasurable second-hand markets.

It was not long before these shopping complexes appeared in Canada. Although still very much a city in its developing stages, Montreal in the nineteenth-century was the wealthiest and most sophisticated Canadian urban setting. As a commercial centre in which members of the upper-class were accustomed to obtaining up-to-date styles from foreign as well as local dressmakers and custom tailors, and members of the middle-classes could keep abreast of fashionable developments in Europe by way of moderately-priced local publications, Montreal's consuming public was ripe for the introduction of department stores. Thus did Henry Morgan and Co., W.H. Scroggie, Samuel Carsley's, James A. Ogilvie, and Dupuis Frères all function according to the premises established in Europe and the US.

More than a meeting place for shopping ladies, the department store was a point of convergence for a number of important developments of the nineteenth-century; developments which may be conceptualized generally by considering the split between

production and consumption. This division was deep and far-reaching, being experienced not only in larger socio-economic terms of factory procedures for commodity production, but also along the more personal lines of gender. To put it simply, production had become associated with men, and consumption with women. For proof of this we have only to look to the shopping complexes which were designed, after all, with women in mind. Moreover, we might consider the fact that they made fashion – already inflected by the gendered production/consumption divide – more readily available.

Indeed, since the late-eighteenth century when men abandoned sartorial extravagance in favour of the more sober (pur)suits associated with middle-class life, fashion had been generally considered a woman's occupation. Viewed as markers of their husband's financial success – a conception articulated forcefully by Thorstein Veblen (1899) – women's adherence to fashion's dictates came to be seen as demonstrating the degree of luxury and leisure that men's productivity could buy.

> It needs no argument to enforce the generalization that the more elegant styles of feminine bonnets go even farther towards making work impossible than does the man's high hat. [...] The substantial reason for our tenacious attachment to the skirt is just this: it is expensive and it hampers the wearer at every turn and incapacitates her for all useful exertion. (Veblen 1899: 121)

Free time and stylistic extravagance having been deemed feminine traits, it henceforth became men's jobs to produce in order that their wives might consume on their behalf. According to these terms, fashion became a visible means of communicating social status, one in which women acted as bearers of meaning, rather than producers.

With women engaging in new public activities, however, it becomes apparent that the distinction is not quite so neat. The more familiar sight of women in the city may have been due in part to the attractions offered by the department store, but there was

more to their public appearance than simply passive consumption. Women also sought forms of status outside the home which had to be acquired by means of their own active initiative. Philanthropy provided one such opportunity to establish a social presence. Interestingly, Walkowitz notes that charitable involvement was on par with shopping for English middle-class ladies in terms of the recreational elements yielded, with women fitting benevolent activities in between social engagements (1992: 53). As will be seen below with respect to the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society, this was as much the case in the developing metropolis of Montreal as it was for London.

The Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society

> The roll of its officers and supporters contains the names of many of the outstanding families of Montreal [...]
>
> *The Montreal Gazette*, January 13, 1951[11]

The benevolent circuits of the nineteenth-century emerged not simply as the result of a bourgeois whim. While privileged women enjoyed increased wealth and new social opportunities allowing them the luxury of taking on the poor as personal projects, the widening gulf between the affluent and a rising population of indigents was, of course, just as determining a factor in the expansion of charitable institutions. Indeed, if the poor were making themselves more offensively visible to members of the dominant order, it was because there were a lot more of them: during the nineteenth-century in London, some 20% of the population lived below the poverty line (Moyles 1977: 3). The growing problem of abjection in Victorian England has been famously documented in such fictions as those of Charles Dickens, and in social tracts such as the Salvation Army's

manifesto for social reform, *In Darkest England and the Way Out*[12]. For many, however, the way out had nothing to do with the Salvation Army's suggestions, but rather in reserving a spot on a boat heading overseas. In the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Canada and the US were being touted as lands of opportunity, inciting many to leave behind the miseries endured in England and other European nations in order to seek out their fortunes in new lands. There were some success stories, of course, but a great many emigrants failed to realize their hopes abroad and soon found themselves in as dire straits as they had back home. The reasons for this are complex and many, although one of the more easily identifiable elements would have to be their numbers. Arriving *en masse* to their North American destinations, the new arrivals could not be accommodated by their host countries all at once, and thus were many of the conditions outlined by the likes of Dickens and the Salvation Army in England replicated in colonial Canada.

According to Huguette Lapointe-Roy, large influxes of immigrants – pushing Montreal's population up from 28,000 in 1831 to more than 107,000 fifty years later – severely strained an economic infrastructure ill-equipped to absorb the flood of new arrivals. With the British mercantile system dependent on Canada as a main importer of goods, industrialization took longer to establish on this side of the Atlantic. This had implications not only for the rate at which ready-made clothing began to be produced; it also resulted in high levels of unemployment as jobs could not be provided for all those seeking work. These conditions, worsened by the outbreak of several health epidemics, gave rise to a mounting class of indigents lacking in food, shelter, and clothing to weather the harsh climate of their new environment. With there being no official social welfare

programs yet in place, Montreal's bourgeoisie and religious institutions took it upon themselves to organize and deliver assistance[13].

The gathering of clothing, as both an end in itself and as a means to the acquisition of garment-making skills, was but one of several altruistic activities with which these groups busied themselves. In comparison with other projects – such as soup kitchens, women's shelters, orphanages and schools – the gathering and distribution of donated clothing was a sub-activity among larger concerns. However, as suggested by Lemire in her studies of the declining second-hand market in Britain, the ways in which the particulars of dress have been approached by particular peoples at particular times tend to underscore greater social and economic implications. The establishment of the fashion system coincided with the relegation of used clothing to a growing class of similarly devalued individuals unable to contribute to the upkeep of the new economy. With increasingly ubiquitous novelty setting the foundations for a modern culture paradoxically grounded in ephemerality – and by extension, disposability – the expanding charity system functioned by taking up society's human, as well as sartorial, leftovers. It became, in a sense, the underbelly of Montreal's changing face of fashion.

While second-hand garments may no longer have been deemed stylish, the gendered connotations of fashion did not disappear. There remained important issues of production and consumption, and of action and display. Rather than confirming the previously-drawn gendered divisions, however, these were significantly problematized by the ways in which clothing was handled by benevolent institutions. Whereas shopping and fashion displayed the luxury and leisure afforded by men's work, the philanthropic uses to which worn garments were put functioned towards an opposite, yet related, end.

Second-hand garments as part of the greater charity mission became a gender-specific means of showcasing *productivity* in their gathering, mending, distribution, and sale by mostly female agents. While women did not function alone in this capacity (there were also a number of notable clergymen working in Montreal for the relief of the poor[14]), the traditional division of household labour that had assigned women the task of clothing the family was similarly observed in the extended social context of charity work among bourgeois and religious groups. If second-hand garments were no longer fashionable, their philanthropic channeling became so under the guiding hands of such secular groups as the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society.

The Ladies initially came together in 1815 in order to "meet the three-fold needs of the poor in the provision of the necessities of life, the care of their sick, and the education of their children" (Pearce 1920: 7). For members of the organization, charitable involvement was about as close as a woman of polite society could get to actual work as a means of occupying her requisite leisure time. A perusal of those listed as being involved throughout the course of the nineteenth-century and into the twentieth reads like a veritable "who's who" of Montreal high British society: McGill, Bethune, McCord, Ogilvie, Molson, Papineau, Redpath, etc., names now affixed to museums and university buildings, street signs, and in connection with well-established businesses. These women, judging from the photographs included in the *History of the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society -- 1815 - 1920*, were quite fashionably attired, thanks no doubt to their powerful families. These were women who not only had the financial means and leisure to dress according to the social standings of their families, but also to act as organizers for the relief of those less fortunate than themselves. If indeed "[p]ure philanthropy was not

fashionable" (Pearce 1920: 11) when they began in 1815, they quite likely contributed to making it so.

While occupying this modified showcasing position, they were nevertheless far from passive agents, "displaying modern and businesslike directness in the work they accomplished, qualities then not often associated with womankind in the average mind" (Pearce 1920: 23). The Ladies acted in what were basically supervising, managerial roles: i.e., liaising with the media; organizing fundraising bazaars; soliciting assistance for their endeavours from powerful connections forged by their husbands, etc. The work undertaken by their charges, however, was far more hands-on. In 1818 the Ladies opened a school offering free education (previously unavailable outside the convents), in which the predominantly orphaned children learned not only reading, writing and arithmetic: girls were also taught how to make linen and mend clothes. In addition to – or as a form of exchange for – the offer of food and shelter, the making and repairing of clothes became a key skill with which the Ladies sought to endow those they assisted. The handiwork of indigent women in turn helped to fund the Society's activities, some repaired donations being sold at bazaars[15].

With the Ladies functioning as organizing, supervising agents, women and children in need became not only the recipients of cast-off goods, but by means of their renewal of worn garments' depleted use-value, were "being trained for useful living as Canadian citizens."[16] Although *charity* is technically defined as the performance of "benevolent actions of any sort for the needy with no expectation of material reward,"[17] there was nonetheless a process of exchange taking place between the Ladies and their beneficiaries. Whereas religious charity groups sought to bring about some sort of

ideological grounding of as many drifting souls as possible in exchange for the provision of alms, the secular Ladies were operating according to the morality of the Protestant Work Ethic, even if their work was not tied directly to the church. While they and the concurrently-operating church-based groups were substantially different from one another in many respects, their general mission was the same: to meet the physical needs of the downtrodden in order that they might serve a larger purpose. The greater cause of the Ladies was certainly bound up to some extent in their own quest for a more public lifestyle, although it was also about improving the face of their burgeoning city. With respect to the former, at least, they were successful..

Yet one can be cynical of the Ladies' motives only to a point, as the work undertaken by themselves and their charges helped to preserve values undermined by industrialization and urbanization, such as those of recycling, community and craftsmanship. As the production of clothing shifted from artisan to industrial processes – with its onus on automated, alienated labour – creativity in clothing was increasingly expressed in terms of how garments were worn as opposed to made. For those nineteenth-century women undertaking the repair and distribution of second-hand clothing, issues of exchange and transaction informed their activities, although in an altogether different manner than would have occurred in the for-profit market for worn garments. There was a different work ethic afoot: one encouraging the exertion of skill towards a more holistic form of production (albeit upon an already existing piece), within a working environment whose bottom line was ultimately calculated in human rather than monetary terms.

Conclusion

The traditional sexual division of labour relegating tasks of bodily covering and adornment to women occurred at all social levels. It was the way in which labour was variously assigned and carried out that significantly differentiated actors at either end of the spectrum. While the gathering of used clothing constituted only one part of the Ladies' many activities, the isolation of this component for study has illustrated a larger and more complex picture. Second-hand clothing after its popular decline continued to do more than simply serve the needs of the poor; it also opened up new opportunities for women of diverse social standing by allowing them to function in ways generally discouraged by the patriarchal rules of business economy governing new commodity production.

While the value of second-hand clothing declined in the eyes of the expanding middle-class, for those existing beneath and above them cast-off garments remained a valuable resource. Those in need of charitable assistance continued to take up worn clothing for their use value, as well as for the way in which they encouraged the exertion of skill in their reparation for renewed wear. Meanwhile, female philanthropists discovered a useful role for themselves by coming together and mobilizing the resources they had at hand to help clothe and generally care for those in need. In their charitable work bourgeois groups such as that of the Ladies' remained poised between the feminized, private components of their activities, and involvement in the public sphere hitherto inhabited primarily by men. While the inherently stylish character of second-hand goods was undermined by new technologies and spaces for self-fashioning, worn

clothing retained fashionable connotations as elements of a publicly visible social project, rather than as components of spectacular sartorial ensembles.

While enduring for several decades, the fall of the second-hand market was only temporary. The following chapter will look at its gradual renewal of popularity in the twentieth-century, signalled in part by used garments' appropriation among subcultures seeking to create a "poverty aesthetic." In particular, the use of cast-off bits of mass culture in the construction of style by the punks in the 1970s and the grunge movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s will be considered. While theirs was an anti-aesthetic which would have likely had Morris rolling over in his grave, it nonetheless came out of a disaffection with the system of novelty production encouraging small-scale artisan modes of production along the lines of the model promoted by the aesthetes. In the assembling of their subcultural looks, we will see conceptions of old versus new established in the previous century significantly rethought as the second-hand market reemerged from behind the shadows cast by the system of novelty production.

Notes

[1] When initially formed in 1815, the group referred to themselves as the Female Benevolent Society. When they reconvened after having disbanded in 1822 – believing their mission against the miseries of poverty to have been accomplished – they changed their name to the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society. In order to avoid confusion, the group will henceforth be referred to by its latter title, whether addressing its first or second incarnation.

[2] See Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema," *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Patricia Erens (ed.), (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). In this seminal essay of feminist film theory, Mulvey considers how the gendered roles of looking and being looked at play themselves out in the context of classical Hollywood cinema.

[3] See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[4] In addition to the several "Dames de la Charité" associations which came together in 1860 (which the Anglophone Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society did not join), there were also the Soeurs de la Providence, Soeurs Grises, and the Filles de la Charité de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, among others. For more on these groups, see Huguette Lapointe-Roy's *Charité Bien Ordonnée: le premier réseau de lutte contre la pauvreté à Montréal au 19e siècle* (Québec: Boréal, 1987). The Salvation Army also had a strong presence in Montreal in the latter part of the nineteenth-century. For details on their general activities see R.G. Moyles' *The Blood and Fire in Canada: A History of the Salvation Army in the Dominion 1882-1976* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Limited, 1977). For information on the roles played by women in the Salvation Army as Hallelujah Lasses, see Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight*, 73-76.

[5] See Lapointe-Roy.

[6] Lemire observes that the market generated no official records of its existence due to the lack of manufacturing processes warranting government legislation. Ginsburg furthermore points out that purchases negotiated mostly in the street with ready money, or as part of trade deals for such items as crockery or plants, yielded few hard-copy transaction accounts for posterity. In order to pull this "invisible trade" out from behind the shadow of predominating period accounts documenting rising rates of production and a broadening range of available consumer goods, Lemire in "Consumerism in Preindustrial and Early Industrial England: The Trade in Secondhand Clothes" and "The Theft of Clothes and Popular Consumerism in Early Modern England" focuses upon several unofficial, yet highly revealing, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources: newspaper advertisements and cards promoting second-hand businesses; legal documentation of criminal prosecutions involving the theft and resale of clothing; and literary and social tracts penned by contemporary notables who, more often than not, expressed disapproval of the crude pretensions of the lower and middling classes to modishness.

[7] This was quite literally the case, as clothes were often pawned in exchange for cash. "Spare clothing was pawned on Monday, one pawnbroker witness observing money from his till going straight into that of the baker, not to be redeemed until Saturday pay-day for wear on Sunday" (Ginsburg 1980: 125).

[8] The long-standing association between the second-hand clothing trade and the Jewish community has not received substantial scholarly attention. The subject would indeed be worthy of study, especially within the context of Montreal with its strong Jewish community.

[9] For example, Brian Osborne's "Trading on a Frontier: The Function of Peddlers, Markets, and Fairs in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Canadian Papers on Rural History, Vol II*, ed. Donald H. Akenson (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1980) suggests that the sort of criminal activity documented by Lemire in the UK existed in Canada as well, since the theft of peddler's wares, which often included

clothing, was not an uncommon occurrence. *Lovell's Montreal Directory* for 1854-55, a pre-Alexander-Graham-Bell version of the *Yellow Pages*, lists one Thomas Patton at 77 St. Paul and 14 St. George under the heading "Trader in Clothing and Books."

[10] This movement was not limited to Britain. Rosalind Williams describes a similar initiative taking place in France: the Decorative Arts Reform Movement headed by Camille Mauclair. For more on this, see Williams' *Dream Worlds: Mass Consumption in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[11] Edgar Andrew Collard, "The Ladies Benevolent Society," *Montreal Gazette* 13 Jan. 1951.

[12] For more on this tract penned by Salvation Army founding father General William Booth, see Robert Sandall, *The History of The Salvation Army Volume III: Social Reform and Welfare Work* (London: Thomas Nelson (Printers) Ltd., 1955) and Norman H. Murdoch, *Origins of the Salvation Army* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994).

[13] See Lapointe-Roy.

[14] Lapointe-Roy draws particular attention to Le Séminaire de Saint-Sulpice de Montréal, and L'évêché de Montréal.

[15] Unfortunately, documentation indicating who the buyers were of these reworked items is not available.

[16] Collard, "The Ladies Benevolent Society."

[17] *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, New York: Portland House, 1989.

Chapter 2
Rubbish Aesthetics in Montreal

Introduction

This chapter will take a major leap forward in time to the postwar era in order to consider the next significant development of the second-hand market: the appropriation of used garments by youth subcultures for stylistic creations countering prevailing sartorial standards. While there were surely fluctuations in the market during the intervening period – likely in connection with the onset of the Great Depression and two World Wars – they would not have been on par with that which occurred in the postwar period. From the early to mid-twentieth-century, the second-hand clothing market outside the charity circuits might be understood in terms of what Michael Thompson (1979) calls "rubbish theory."

Briefly, Thompson in his book of the same title argues that an object's worth is based not upon intrinsic qualities, but is rather socially imposed. He outlines a schema by which things are categorized according to the ways in which they are approached by those using them: either as "durables," "transients," or "rubbish." Durables and transients are the overt, socially recognized items of the commodity system, with the former referring to those objects into which one is willing to invest time and money (i.e. antiques), and the latter pertaining to items intended to be consumed and replaced once they have been used up. Situated at the bottom of the scale is covert rubbish, a term standing in for used-up items having zero value. While durables and transients can slide into rubbish, transients cannot rise to durable status since they are meant to be consumed.

Rubbish, on the other hand, can occasionally make the leap to durable when discovered by collectors and re-valued by means of acquisitive ardour. Until then, rubbish "just continues to exist in a timeless and valueless limbo where at some later date (if it has not by that time turned, or been made, into dust) it has the chance of being discovered" (Thompson 1979: 10).

Thompson posits that rubbish items, being covert, tend not to be historicized. This would indeed appear to be the case with respect to the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth-century second-hand market – when seeking to uncover its history, one comes up almost empty-handed. Aside from *The Montreal Directory* which, from 1920 onwards, listed second-hand stores generally (with 101 entries in 1920, although it is unknown how many among these sold clothing), there is virtually nothing to be found on the cast-off garment business until the postwar era. As far as most period documentation on Montreal is concerned, second-hand clothing establishments might as well have not existed.

This changed in the years following the Second World War, with youth-based subcultures playing a role in the revival. While bringing aesthetics back to a market long characterized by necessity, *they* did so by creating a *rubbish aesthetic*, thereby carrying over something of what the market had been while setting it within new contexts, and putting it to new uses. Most notable among subcultural styles making use of the rubbish aesthetic – or *poverty aesthetic*, as it might also be called – are the punks in the 1970s, and champions of grunge in the late 1980s/early 1990s. What this chapter aims to accomplish by looking at these subcultures and the theories devised to understand them, particularly those of the Birmingham School, is more of a scratching at the surface than a

complete and definitive account of their respective appearances in Montreal. In order to do justice to how punk and grunge manifested themselves in the Canadian context, a far more in-depth analysis would be required than what could be accommodated here. Thus will this chapter undertake an overview of theories coming out of the Birmingham School in order to assess some strengths and weaknesses, and then offer some starting points for thinking about what kind of impact punk and grunge had on the retro shops which began appearing in the 1970s.

Retro shops (called *friperies* or *fripes* in French) were the first stores to marry a stylistic aesthetic to used garments after a long period spent in the utilitarian environments of the charity circuits and the junk shops. I introduce the term "retro" here somewhat hesitantly, as the concept really belongs to the next chapter dealing with the second-hand market in the late 1980s and 1990s. The problem with bringing it up here is that punk and grunge were not built upon a retro base *per se*. Punk has been frequently noted as making no attempt at identifying itself with any past cultural formation, whereas grunge has been associated with something only vaguely hippie-like, with a 1993 *Globe and Mail* article declaring that:

> Although true grunge might appear new to its teenaged devotees, it was actually a prevalent style back when they were still in nappies. In the early 1970s, however, the look was no-name, distinguished only by what it was not: not quite hippy, definitely not establishment. The closest you could come to an accurate characterization was to say that it [grunge] *was* Neil Young. (Smith 1993)

While pieces of subcultural style may be found in retro shops, it is important to understand that the retro definition associated with an idealized past has little bearing upon punk and grunge. However, when thinking about retro specifically as it relates to second-hand clothing – as opposed to an advertising ploy – the term may be seen as

having some relevance for the study of resistant subcultural style. Drawing strength from Thompson's ideas, an expanded definition of retro will be outlined below, hinging on the transformative potential of the circuits through which garments pass as they definitively leave behind their former identity as novelty items to become garments salvaged from the waste heap of capitalism.

Theoretical inheritance: the Birmingham School

While still relatively new, the field of subcultural theory has become too vast for this chapter to be able to account for it in any complete way. From the work of the Chicago School of sociology spanning the 1920s to the 1960s, to the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham during the 1970s, to the post-Birmingham inquiries in which reactions and returns to both earlier phases have in turn redefined and contested the field, there has amassed a considerable body of theory hinging on the definition of the term *subculture*. With the present concern beginning in the 1970s, and with some of the related subjects having been addressed directly by members of the initial Birmingham set – Dick Hebdige on punk (1979) and Angela McRobbie on second-hand clothing markets (1988) – this phase of the field will constitute the main focus.

The founding principles of the Birmingham School's approach to subcultures are set out in "Subcultures, Cultures and Class" (1975) co-written by John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, and Brian Roberts. In this theoretical tract, the subject of youth is isolated for study as a postwar "phenomenon" in Britain which had come to stand in for social change, while having yet to be understood in any meaningful way. Dissatisfied

with the term *Youth Culture* used liberally by the media as a catch-all for youthful articulation, the Birmingham School sought to draw attention to the *sub*ordinate character of subcultures by defining them as "sub-sets – smaller, more localised and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks" (Clarke et al, 1975: 13). In contrast with undifferentiated Youth Culture eliding class disparities – even suggesting youth as a class in itself by assembling them all under the banner of "Teenage Consumer" – the Birmingham School extracted subcultures for consideration as a specifically working-class occurrence.

Against pronouncements of the disappearance of class due to generally higher levels of affluence in the immediate postwar years, members of the Birmingham School contended that class as a social marker was indeed alive and well. In their estimation, it was simply being experienced in different ways as a result of new mass media, changes to the education system, to work and leisure, etc., all of which served to fragment – rather than obliterate – working-class culture. They discerned the effects of class disparity time and time again via their studies of British youth, especially in the ways their subjects made use of time, money, and objects. In the opinion of Clarke et al, "[w]hat is needed is a detailed picture of how youth groups fed off and appropriated things provided by the market, and, in turn, how the market tried to expropriate and incorporate things produced by the sub-cultures: in other words, the dialectic between youth and the youth market industry" (Clarke et al, 1975: 16).

The unique ways in which youth subcultures utilized objects of the mass market are presented by subcultural theorists as a response to particular social conditions arising in the postwar period. Drawing extensively on the work of Phil Cohen (1972) the authors

of "Subcultures, Cultures and Class" note, for one thing, the impact of modern urban development disrupting the traditional working-class way of life by breaking up the "kinship structure" of extended families and isolating people in new housing complex units. Meeting-places such the independently-run grocery store or the local pub, as well as small-scale artisan businesses, were also in the process of disappearing. These developments were observed by Cohen as occurring in connection with the emergence of new economic and industrial patterns immediately following the Second World War.

> In the late 1950s the British economy began to recover from the effects of the war and to apply the advanced technology developed during this period to the more backward sectors of the economy. Craft industries and small-scale production in general were the first to suffer; automated techniques replaced the traditional handskills and their simple division of labour. (Cohen 1972: 91)

This significantly altered the working-class neighborhood by destroying generations-old family-run businesses in which youths had once been assured employment. With the cohesiveness of the community already undermined, youths were faced with having to choose between leaving the working-class neighbourhood, or staying and facing the very real possibility of perpetual un- and/or underemployment.

The emergence of subcultures came to be theorized as a response to the social dilemma being experienced by the working-classes, albeit one quite different from that of the parent culture. The latter term is used by the Birmingham School not in reference to actual parent/child relations, but rather to the working-class community into which the youths under consideration were born, an environment which itself occupies a subordinate position with respect to the larger dominant culture. While maintaining connections with the parent culture, subcultures nevertheless expressed their response to the general working-class problematic quite differently. "Through dress, activities,

leisure pursuits and life-style, they may project a different cultural response or 'solution' to the problems posed for them by their material and social class position and experience" (Clarke et al, 1975: 15). In addition to positioning themselves *vis à vis* the parent culture, they were also establishing a resistant relation to the dominant culture by appropriating their objects and/or behaviours for specific purposes. In this sense, they were seen by Clarke et al as engaging in a double articulation.

Acquiring the means for such expression required youths to undertake waged work. What this in turn meant was that subcultures could exist only within the leisured sphere of the work week's after hours, or the weekends. (This confinement of subcultures to leisure periods as opposed to whole lifestyle is the point which Clarke et al see as distinguishing subcultures from counter-cultures. They associate the latter with middle-class youth groups such as hippies foregoing organized labour to express political and ideological resistance by means of alternative institutions, stretching of the transitional age beyond the teens, and blurring of the distinctions between work, home, family, school, and leisure – distinctions steadfastly maintained in subcultures.) While working-class youths faced shortages of long-term opportunity and job satisfaction, even menial employment provided them with higher levels of spending power than their inter-war counterparts. Moreover, being as yet free from the financial responsibilities of adulthood, youths were able to invest more on leisure. Subcultures thus came together as like-minded individuals to specific places in which certain modes of behaviour, dress, music and argot could be developed. At once temporarily forestalling their inevitable absorption into the parent culture, and defying the dominant culture in the appropriation of mass-produced objects for purposes unique to the group, their behaviour has been

identified by Cohen and his contemporaries as a "magical solution" to the problems of their lived experience.

Birmingham School theory is quite insistent on the notion of lived experience. In "Style," for example, Clarke asserts that the stylistic components of subcultures emerge from group concerns informed by their activities and the particular sets of institutions within which they interact. "This specific group nexus is generated out of the wider network of the material and cultural context of the working class community, which, as we saw in the theoretical overview, is constructed and reconstructed both by, and in response to, the broader social movements of the society as a whole through their particular local consequences" (Clarke 1975: 180). Yet just as subcultural youths borrow items from the dominant culture in the creation of style, so does the dominant culture in turn take from the subculture. Because of their highly visible, avant-garde nature, subcultural styles are highly marketable.

As will be demonstrated below, punk and grunge as subcultural styles were readily exported to contexts outside their originating locales; or, to use the proper theoretical terminology, were *diffused* and *defused*. Stylistic diffusion is the selective appropriation of subcultural elements by parties outside the subculture for distribution to wider segments of the public. Hebdige points out that the mass media tends to focus on subcultural style either with fascination for their fashion reports, or alarm in their moral panic pieces (Hebdige 1979: 93). In either case, those elements most photogenic or most disturbing, respectively, are featured in conjunction with the dominant culture's general view of the subculture's significance. The mass media is most often charged with diffusion of the subculture; yet as Clarke points out, also playing a role in the diffusion

process – a role generally preceding that of the mass media – are groups operating at a "grass-roots" level.

> The small-scale record shops, recording companies – these versions of artisan capitalism, rather than the more generalised and unspecific phenomena, situate the dialectic of commercial 'manipulation'. The whole mid-1960s explosion of 'Swinging London' was based on the massive commercial diffusion of what were originally essentially Mod styles, mediated through such networks, and finally into a 'mass' cultural and commercial phenomenon. (Clarke 1975: 187)

Following the lead of the small-scale entrepreneur, the mass media is generally seen as taking up those components of the subculture identified as most marketable, and commercializing them as part of the defusion process. The fashion industry is most notorious in this respect. While style exists for the generating subculture as part of the "total lifestyle," through the defusion process it becomes a "novel consumption style" (Clarke 1975: 188) for outsiders. Once defused and thus separated from "the context of social relations" (ibid), the commodified style is absorbed into the youth market, and the former class dimension is lost.

Much of the balance of this chapter will try to think about how the diffusion/defusion process operated in bringing punk and grunge to Montreal. However, rather than giving "privileged attention to the 'moment' of stylistic creation" (Clarke 1975: 177), as does most Birmingham subcultural theory, the approach here will be more in line with McRobbie's insistence that the significance of style does not simply begin on the backs of the "lads." As she astutely observes, it ought rather be traced back to the point of purchase. Where the present study diverges from McRobbie's theory, though, is on the subject of gender. Part of McRobbie's agenda is to remind the reader that in

Britain's male-dominated subcultures, girls also play an important role by providing the stylistic elements making up their spectacular sartorial ensembles. Along with punk (and grunge) music, style was another aspect of the subcultural identity which – while significantly influenced by the designs featured at Vivienne Westwood's *Sex* shop – was created for the most part without recourse to the professional designer. Like the do-it-yourself (DIY) mode of production which Hebdige associated with punk bands, publications, etc. (1979), McRobbie identifies style as another subcultural component undergoing a process of collection and creation before appearing as a finished product.

Whereas teen-aged punk boys became the (anti-)dandies of their time by means of attention to style rivaling that of the girls, McRobbie discerned the old gender divide still in effect in the second-hand market. The assignment to women of the buying, selling, and general maintenance of clothing, which we saw in the previous chapter, was identified by McRobbie as still holding in the late twentieth-century context of the British street fairs. With success in the fashion industry being but a faint hope for most young women, the second-hand market is presented as offering the possibility of exercising creativity of an organic nature not unlike the three-chord bands started up by the boys. In so doing, operators of street fair stalls became acquainted with their customers and their tastes, thereby allowing for a more direct form of interaction between buyer and supplier than seen in the high fashion industry.

McRobbie's argument that young women carved out a space for themselves within male-dominated subcultures by means of the second-hand market is an attractive one to the feminist subcultural theorist and cultural historian alike. Reporting that this state of affairs reproduced itself in Montreal would seem logical, given that women were

crucial players in the nineteenth-century charity circuits. As it turns out, however, this appears not to have been quite the case.

When punk first hit Montreal in the 1970s men were at least as prominent in the retro market as women, if not more so, with a gender balance occurring more manifestly in the 1980s and beyond as more shops were established. With respect to the 1970s, it should be noted that information is difficult to obtain as few records have been kept detailing the people and particulars of the stores. However, two of the first retro shops in Montreal are still in business (*Twist Encore* and *Drags*), and both have been run from the outset by men. According to the owner of *Twist Encore* though, there was a retro shop located on boulevard Saint-Laurent near Prince Arthur from the late 1970s to the early 1990s which was run by the same woman who operates the currently existing design shop *Scandale*.

While further study would need to be done before any definite conclusions could be made, we might speculate on why McRobbie's model failed to carry over to Montreal. Part of it may have to do with the fact that McRobbie was exploring a different sector of the market than what is being looked at here. While still small-scale artisan capitalists, retro shop owners have to function in a more organized manner than their street fair counterparts (the former being real estate owners or renters, having to contend with issues of staffing, etc.). In this way we might say that they take part more manifestly in the *public* realm of business. To get a sense of the implications of this public participation, it is useful to recall the charity circuits offering nineteenth-century women an occupation that nevertheless relied upon the exertion of skills usually associated with the private, domestic sphere (nurture of the weak, food preparation, garment collection and

reparation, etc.). Taking up the objects and human beings marginalized by industrial capitalism, philanthropic ladies practiced what Michel de Certeau (1984) identifies as "everyday" practices making use of "unrecognized" forms of knowledge.

> A sort of 'knowledge' remains there, though deprived of its technical apparatus (out of which machines have been made); the remaining ways of operating are those that have *no legitimacy with respect to productivist rationality (e.g., the everyday arts of cooking, cleaning, sewing, etc.)*. On the other hand, what is left behind by ethnological colonization *acquires the status of a 'private' activity*, is charged with symbolic investments concerning everyday activity, and functions under the sign of collective or individual particulars ... (de Certeau 1984: 69-70; emphases mine)

The private activities among which cooking, cleaning, and clothing production are included have been traditionally associated with unpaid women's work falling under the category of unrecognized knowledge. When industrial methods made ready-mades widely available, second-hand clothing become covert except when taken up by women in the charity circuits where clothing collection and repair lost their former legitimacy. Once reinserted into the "productivist rationale" in the latter half of the twentieth-century – and thus into the fully public space of profit – they became more inviting for men than previously. This is one way of thinking about men as *established* retro shop owners: recognizing the overt potential success of the market, entrepreneurial spirits were more inclined to take the investment plunge in a type of knowledge no longer simply perceived as "women's work," and a business sector no longer dismissed as "rubbish."

Retro shops and punk

Before moving on to punk, a few words need to be said about retro shops. While some newer items find their way to second-hand shops, most retro clothing is selected on

the basis of the spatial and temporal distance they have traveled on their way to utter unfashionableness. Based on this dual notion of distance in combination with a distinction formulated by Janice Gore (1995), we see the meaning of retro at once narrowing and expanding. Gore notes:

> [W]hen members of a bohemian subculture do the searching, they tend to look for clothes with evidence of having been worn. ... Retro styles also endow secondhand clothes with use(d) value, but that usedness generally has more to do with history (a well-cut forties jacket, for example) than with evidence of wear. In retro terms, then, use(d) value is all about purchasing history; for poverty-based styles, it is purchased experience. (Gore 1996: 43)

In assembling their stock, retro shop owners take what they can from wherever they can find it (i.e. rag depot centres, charity bazaars, yard sales, individual closets, etc.), with many selected articles being mass-produced items of past seasons sold for reduced prices. While seemingly another version of Morris' dreaded "cheap and nasty", this is not quite the case. Salvaged items whose origins lie in the factory system do not have the same significance as when purchased for the first time. They have, to use Thompson's terms, run the course from transient to rubbish, and from rubbish to durable, with the necessary qualification that clothes are meant to be worn, and thus consumed in the manner of a transient. The ready-made item passing through the thrift-store circuit has undergone a change in meaning: no longer generating a profit for its original capitalist producer as a mass-produced and mass-marketed item, it is bestowed an authenticity and individuality to which it could not have laid claim when first appearing on the market. These items are seen as surviving artefacts – badges proclaiming one's subversion of the system of novelty production dominated by the push towards ever-increasing rates of turnover. The rubbish items carried by retro shops are therefore ideal raw materials in the creation of a

type of style challenging the dominant order's system of mass-novelty production: one which takes up its waste and puts it to use creatively to meet new, unintended ends.

With both punk and grunge emerging to some extent in reaction to a decrease in opportunities and a sense of exclusion from social and cultural institutions, they self-consciously appropriated the identity with which they felt they had been saddled: that of rubbish. In so doing, they could register defiance by embracing and exploiting their assigned place in the social pecking order, thus reasserting power at some level. The power, however, is all in how items of clothing are combined and worn. Retro shops in Montreal cater to various kinds of shoppers, for the most part without making any corresponding differentiations among their stock, and thereby supporting Thompson's thesis that objects have no real meaning or value in themselves. These notions of appropriation and combination are key elements in the creation and spread of subcultural styles, as we will now see with respect to punk.

Much has been written on punk's origins in working-class London in the mid-1970s, followed shortly by the art-school version in New York City. Since no account would be complete without referring in some detail to Hebdige's seminal book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) – concerning itself primarily with British punk using the theoretical basis set out by Clarke et al – our consideration will begin there.

Identifying punk music as a hybrid of rock and reggae, Hebdige views its style as an amalgamation of all the major postwar youth subcultures.

> Punk reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth cultures in 'cut up' form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs. There was a chaos of quiffs and leather jackets, brothel creepers and winkle pickers, plimsolls and paka macs, moddy crops and skinhead strides, drainpipes and vivid socks, bum freezers and bovver boots – all

> kept 'in place' and 'out of time' by the spectacular adhesives: the safety pins and plastic clothes pegs, the bondage straps and bits of string which attracted so much horrified and fascinated attention. (Hebdige 1979: 26)

Hebdige returns to the combinatory aesthetic of punk often, interpreting it as a form of communication drawing attention to itself; a means by which punks could express their opposition symbolically. He thus attributes considerable importance to objects and the ways in which they are used to generate meaning. Following Clarke's lead by employing Claude Levi-Strauss' notion of the *bricoleur* – in which a basic set of elements may be arranged in any number of ways to create new meanings – he likens punks to the Dadas and Surrealists for the ways in which each sought to subvert traditional forms of meaning by juxtaposing apparently incompatible elements. In taking up items from the most "sordid" of contexts, an object could be diverted from its intended ends, and to this effect he cites lavatory chains, safety pins, trashy fabrics, tampons, etc., as stylistic components used in a DIY mode of production. In this sense, punks were collectors of sorts, taking up rubbish and infusing it anew with a certain kind of value.

The resulting styles were intentionally shocking and, as Hebdige demonstrates, altogether ripe for appropriation. Elaborating on Clarke's diffusion/defusion model, he outlines two forms of incorporation arising from the media's "amplifying sequence" (Hebdige 1979: 93) which are ultimately used to recuperate the subculture: incorporation via the commodity form, or by the ideological form.

> Once removed from their private contexts by the small scale entrepreneurs and big fashion interests who produce them on a mass scale, they become codified, made comprehensible, rendered at once public property and profitable merchandise. In this way, the two forms of incorporation (the semantic/ideological and the 'real'/commercial) can be said to converge on the commodity form. Youth subcultures may begin by issuing symbolic challenges,

> but they must inevitably end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones ... (Hebdige 1979: 96)

Let us begin with the media's amplification of "symbolic challenges," by considering a *Globe and Mail* piece from 1977 on the clashes between the teds and punks in Britain. Written in foreboding terms, the article detects something worrisome in the style and philosophy of these teenage subcultures with a "message to destroy."

> On the one side are the Teds, perversions of the nostalgia revival because they ape the leather jackets, drainpipe trousers and slicked hair of the 1950s, along with that era's gang violence. On the other side are the Punks, self-proclaimed new wave in teen-age subculture, some with safety pins piercing the skin of their cheeks or ears, shirts torn on purpose, affectedly decadent. (Henderson, 1977:3)

Hebdige points out that transgression of sartorial codes is generally identified by the media as symptomatic of deviant behaviour, which is clearly discernible here. Bound up with this identifying, incorporating tactic is the tendency to make subcultures "both more *and less* exotic than they actually are" (Hebdige 1979: 97; emphasis his). Accordingly, with the above article having started by focusing on the "exotically" gruesome piercing and general stylistic practices of the punks, it proceeds to position them within a larger social problem: that of rising unemployment.

> In the 1960s, Britain averaged about 70,000 people unemployed in the 15-20 age bracket. Today there are 252,328 unemployed in the 15-20 bracket, with the prospect of that doubling in the coming year as more grow up to enter the job market in a shrinking economy ... With little chance for jobs, their nation on the decline, and living standards actually falling, today's British teen-agers appear to have given up hope of making anything for themselves, or their country. The 1960s teen-agers wanted to reform the system; today's have given up on it. (Henderson 1977: 3)

Here we see not only the "explanation" of the subculture's incomprehensible, deviant behaviour and style, but also the eliding of class, not mention race, issues. The specifically working-class conditions giving rise to the punks have been ignored, their

behaviour having been made to stand in for all British youth. With youth in turn being seen as the metaphor for social change, there is an implied association here of the punks/youth with Britain's decline. Indeed, as Hebdige notes, "the punks were not only directly responding to increasing joblessness, changing moral standards, the rediscovery of poverty, the Depression, etc., they were dramatizing what had come to be called 'Britain's decline' by constructing a language which was, in contrast to the prevailing rhetoric of the Rock Establishment, unmistakably relevant and down to earth ..." (Hebdige, 1979: 87).

Within this context, sartorial rubbish was taken up and infused with a whole new meaning and value: with postwar youths considering themselves a wasted generation within a wasting nation, its members embraced a corresponding aesthetic in their clothing and adornment practices. The situation recalls to some extent that of the nineteenth-century, when cast-off members of society wore their social standing on their backs in the form of cast-off clothing. This time, however, the youth demographic in particular stood out as the social "detritus" of the era, one which moreover chose to wear its status in an utterly overt manner. Moreover, unlike the charity workers of the nineteenth-century who took up worn clothing in accordance with moral ideals, the punk subculture in Britain appropriated cast-offs as part of a new nihilism resulting in part from unprecedented levels of unemployment.

The circumstances in Canada were quite different to those in Britain. To take but one, extremely general example, the matter of Britain's decline was due in part to it being divested of its colonies. As one of the UK's former territories, Canada was a nation as yet in its nascent stages, and was thus neither in a comparable state of "decline" nor quite

so marked by the class distinctions ingrained in Britain's history. Montreal music promoter Donald K Donald opined in 1977 that "the violent punk rock of this cultural revolution taking place in England will not be popular here in North America ... the youth of America has less frustration to rent and the social ramifications of the UK scene won't prevail here" (Radz 1977: D1). He is only partly right. While the class component was not so strong, the fact remains that there *was* frustration being experienced on the part of youths in Canada, that this feeling was not entirely unlike that of their UK counterparts, and that punk did make its way to Montreal to some extent.

Without intending to reduce everything to political economy, it nonetheless bears pointing out that in 1977 headlines proclaiming the potentially "explosive" issue of youth unemployment were splashed across Canadian newspapers from coast to coast: "Jobless rate for youth is more than double that for those over 25, new report shows" (Bell 1977: 13), "Lack of jobs for young people explosive situation, Canada told" ("Lack" 1977: 8), "'Grim' job outlook seen for graduates over next 15 years" ("Grim" 1977: A1), "Student employment outlook bleak until 1990" ("Student" 1977: A5), "The unemployed young people are the economy's new chronic disease" (Fullerton 1977: C4). In 1976 statistics gathered by the Canadian Council on Social Development showed the youth unemployment rate at 12.8 per cent, in sharp contrast with the 5.1 per cent experienced by those over 25[1]. A 1977 Statistics Canada report heaped further doom upon the already prevailing gloom by predicting poor employment prospects for college and university graduates lasting until at least 1990 – if not throughout the course of their entire lives.

This emphasis on the middle-class component of the issue might help to explain why a major working-class punk subculture did not materialize in Montreal on the same

scale as in London. What also needs to be taken into consideration though, is the American version of punk which undoubtedly had at least as much impact on Montreal as the British variety. "American early punk-era bands tended toward minimalism and 'New Wave,' and were often the products of art school dropouts ... [who] eschewed the intense nihilism, vacancy, or even safety-pin style of the English punks" (Shevory 1995: 28). In addition to the art school background of many second-hand shoppers and store proprietors, the American influence could also be discerned in local nightspots such as *Studio 1234* – the Montreal version of *Studio 54* – which catered to punks, or at least those wishing to associate themselves with the trendiness of a subcultural sensibility (this is according to Serge Bilodeau, a retro shop owner in business since the late 1970s, who will be further discussed below). To fit into such places one had to have, of course, the right look, and it is in this capacity that retro shops played a role.

The best case study available for this period is Bilodeau's business, which started out in 1978 as *Cha-Cha Animaux* on lower rue Saint-Denis between rue Ontario and de Maisonneuve, became *Twist* when he moved to avenue des Pins near Coloniale in the Plateau area, and was renamed *Twist Encore* when he moved again in 1994 to boulevard Saint-Laurent near the corner of Duluth, where the shop currently resides. According to Bilodeau these changes in location have been necessary to keep up with the movements of his coveted "avant-garde" clientele from the influences of urban gentrification, or the settling down of a neighbourhood as its residents age. In order to keep the store's identity in synch with the city's youthful trendsetters, staying within their proximity has been crucial.

With creative tendencies in the areas of fashion, as well as window dressing and interior design, Bilodeau qualifies as an artisan capitalist. In a manner similar to that endorsed by the aesthetic reformers, his work is his art, and his art his work. Even as a second-hand clothing dealer though, novelty maintains a certain precedence not only in terms of creating fresh looks, but as will now be seen, in his offering of some actual new goods. When he first went into business, Bilodeau catered primarily to the punk trend, although his shop was also frequented by the occasional hippie. He recalls that in addition to selling used clothing, some items were adapted to suit the punk aesthetic. The first store on Saint-Denis was divided into a front and back section, with used goods in the front and his own Westwood-inspired punk designs in the back, the rationale behind the layout being that customers had to be "eased" into the shock of punk. Equally remarkable though, is the fact that Bilodeau's designated punk stock was made up of entirely new materials. Brand new white t-shirts were dyed black, pink, or gray and adorned with such everyday (yet out of place) objects as zippers, bolts, studs, plastic, etc. (This is the one exception to the rule of subcultural accessories being integrated among other retro shop goods.) According to Bilodeau though, *real* punks bought second-hand.

With his core punk clientele numbering about twenty, Bilodeau had to widen his base by producing the pre-assembled version of punk described above, and by subsequently going into what he termed "post-punk." Appropriating the term in 1979 from Edwidge – one of Andy Warhol's models – Bilodeau describes it as being somewhat more "mainstream" than punk proper in its inclusion of bits from the more widely prevailing disco style. Bilodeau is in this sense an excellent example of the "grass-roots" entrepreneur helping to diffuse and defuse subcultural style by selecting its most

marketable elements. His efforts, however, ought not be viewed as a dilution of authenticity based on a greedy profit-making mandate. In order to stay in business, retro shop owners have no alternative but to reach out to a somewhat wider clientele than the narrow subcultural market. Moreover, as McRobbie notes, from the beginning punk was about buying and selling, citing Westwood's establishment as an example (1988: 136). Retro shops might thus be seen as participating in an economic infrastructure picking up where charity circuits left off. It is an infrastructure which has endured and prospered, as will now be seen as we turn to grunge.

Flannel shirts dans la belle province

In many respects, Seattle-based grunge bears a striking family resemblance to punk. Consider, for example, the following assessment made by *Rolling Stone* of Seattle and its residents, who seemed just as eager as their punk counterparts to avoid the trappings of adulthood:

> Seattle's youth culture is chronically in transition. People drop the word 'goal' with sarcasm or distaste. Seattle is the place to go not to find out who you are but to *postpone finding out who you are*. (O'Brien 1993: 38; emphasis mine)

Such accounts do not explicitly state what it was about Seattle that drew in these youths, nor what brought out its trademark music (aside from perhaps mentioning a generally laid back atmosphere, or the fact that the city's chronically rainy weather left little else for youths to do other than keep indoors and learn to play guitar). Indeed, there is work yet to be done on grunge approximating the rigour and depth of the Birmingham School's study of UK subcultures; work which would go well beyond the scope of this chapter. While not having at hand the same type of social analysis provided by Hebdige,

McRobbie, and others, their work in combination with Gore's and Thomas C. Shevory's on grunge together provide a sufficiently sound basis for consideration of this more recent second-hand subcultural style.

To begin with, a few basic concepts and conceptions. Grunge, like punk, began as a musical phenomenon with an equally powerful impact on fashion, arising in conjunction with a severe economic downturn from which the cliché of the "Generation X" "slacker" was born[2]. Issuing from Seattle, Washington, grunge came to be associated first with the city's glut of bands which rose to fame in the early 1990s, then with an accompanying form of anti-fashion, as well as a general disenchantment among youths with corporate America. Following the excesses and "good times" of the 1980s, a recession hit forcing businesses to change in order to keep afloat. As terms such as "downsizing" became catch-phrases of the day, youths often found themselves in the line of fire as baby-boomers tried to hold fast to their jobs. What emerged from all this was the media's gathering together of youth as a class (although not usually stated as such in the less class-conscious US), of which we saw an earlier example with punk. Just as Birmingham School theorists took issue with the use of the term Youth Culture for its disregard of class differences, Shevory points out with respect to grunge's generational dynamic that it "means very little without being particularized in race, class and gender terms ... and they [issues of race, class and gender] don't dominate the thematics of grunge rock songs ..." (Shevory 1995: 34).

The matter of Shevory's article being in effect an extended criticism of grunge as a "softened," depoliticized version of punk will be left aside here in order to concentrate on matters more directly pertinent to grunge's style. Shevory identifies punk roots in

grunge music, describing it as "a synthesis of heavy metal and punk" (Shevory 1995: 31). Or, as one Seattle resident put it:

> Nobody here considers it grunge. We just consider it rock & roll, punk rock. We never invented that word. Somebody else invented that word and brought it here. (O'Brien 1993: 40)

While it is not clear exactly where the term came from, it quite likely had something to do with the style surrounding the music ("because grime was such an integral part of the trend, garment gurus labeled the burgeoning movement 'grunge'" [Smith 1993]). A grunge wardrobe typically consists of well-worn ripped jeans, old flannel shirts, combat boots, long johns, toques, loose-fitting floral print skirts and dresses, perhaps a dash of polyester, and other similarly old, tattered accessories, as well as a generally laissez-faire, un-showered look. Like its punk antecedent, underlying grunge is the rubbish/poverty aesthetic identified by Gore: "'authentic' grunge style, like the style of so many spectacular youth subcultures (punk, hippie and beat, to name a few examples), is itself an appropriation, an aesthetic of poverty adopted by predominantly white (and in many cases predominantly male) members of the middle and upper middle classes" (Gore 1995: 39).

While recognizing the validity of Gore's distinction between retro and the poverty-based aesthetic cited earlier, the fact that grunge has been linked with the hippie movement is nonetheless fitting to some extent given the increasing popularity of retro in the late 1980s and 1990s (which will constitute the focus of the next chapter). In a related comparison, the subculture has also been associated with an anti-materialist sentiment often seen as an identification with the economically marginalized. If there was any distinction to be made between punk and grunge, and between the rubbish- and poverty-

based aesthetics, we might say that punk was more manifestly grounded in rubbish, whereas grunge draws more distinctly from the poverty aesthetic.

Gore extracts a few examples of grunge's media coverage to illustrate the diffusion/defusion process, with two of her choices worth citing here to demonstrate simultaneously what the subculture came out of, and what it quickly became as it moved away from its Washington base.

> Throw out your detergent! This is not a call to arms; it's an invitation to dress down and party up! As the fin de siècle draws near, greed has gone to seed. What started out as a serfs' rebellion against aristocratic glamour has turned into a fashion revolution that champions 'revolting' for its own sake. ... Flannels, ratty tour shirts, boots, and baseball caps have become a uniform for those in the know, and their legions are growing. (qtd. in Gore 1995: 35)

> Enjoy this 'Do you own thing' time thanks to the street people. ... Be clean and have a good haircut and care less about clothes and more about life. (qtd. in Gore 1995: 37)

The first example comes from a 1992 *Vogue* article co-written by Jonathan Poneman, co-owner of the grunge record label Sub Pop. The second passage appeared a year later in *L.A. Weekly* as part of an ad for fashion designer Betsey Johnson. Both hint at what grunge started out being, while also demonstrating the ease with which it could be plied to the incorporation process. This defusion seems to have occurred more quickly than it did for grunge, with Gore noting the role of new technology and publications (never mind *MTV*), and with Shevory implying that grunge was more style than substance in comparison to punk, and thus more amenable to appropriation. Grunge, at any rate, did not inspire the same kind of moral panic as did punk (that is, in terms of violence, although heroine-use was an oft-noted pastime) and therefore did not carry the same type

of stigmatized connotations which might have somewhat limited its wear among the general public.

With the high fashion industry's adoption of grunge being addressed by Gore and Shevory, its appropriation by second-hand venues located far from Seattle's orbit will here be given attention; the poverty aesthetic of second-hand grunge opening up some interesting avenues for consideration. For example, it complicates one of the chief tenets of subcultural theory which states that a subculture can only maintain authenticity as a local entity. While retro shops present themselves as being grounded in regional colour, most obtain their stock from abroad. Consider, for example, Frédéric Zamour – co-owner of four Montreal retro shops – who has been known to visit Tokyo for hand-painted Kimonos, and Europe for Austrian jackets, German military uniforms, and British firemen gear[3]. All of the retro shop owners interviewed below (*Twist Encore*, *Crazy Freddy's*, *Bla-bla-bla*, *Scarlett O'Hara*, *Folles Alliées*, *À la Deux*) operate similarly, with clothes being obtained from places as nearby as Ontario and the US, and as far away as Mexico and Japan. While not able to speak authoritatively on the retro shop markets in London or Seattle, it is not unlikely that they operate similarly, as the second-hand clothing trade has become in the postwar period a tightly organized global industry, with clothing being shipped all over the world to satisfy every need from the most desperate, to the most decadent. Assuming that American and British retro shops operate similarly, to what extent can we say that Seattle grunge, or even London/New York punk, is grounded in the local if the accessories are acquired from sources as equally dispersed as in Montreal?

Another question grunge helps to highlight is to what extent second-hand style belongs to the field of subcultural theory. While the popular media – as well as subcultural theorists – provide one version of the story, store proprietors tell a different tale. By most media accounts (as we saw above with *Vogue* and *L.A. Weekly*) grunge took the world by storm. Nirvana released its groundbreaking *Nevermind* album in 1991, and suddenly the world went plaid. Granted, certain social conditions were in place approximating those of the late 1970s which made for a more ready acceptance of this second-hand poverty aesthetic. For one thing, youth joblessness was once again on the rise, with the rate of employment in Canada for those aged 15-24 dropping a full 10 percentage points between 1990-1992 ("Youth" 1994). Many retro shop dealers in Montreal admit that they profited from the subcultural explosion, with flannel shirts flying off the racks. On the other hand, they also indicate that the cash cow was ultimately not as significant to their business as is often made out, and that its arrival in Montreal was a more organic and diffuse process than one might gather from such hyperbolic accounts as Poneman's in *Vogue*.

What follows here is a short sampling of store owners' descriptions of what the supposed grunge boom meant for them. Bilodeau relates that when his store was still located on avenue des Pins, it was suddenly declared grunge due to its plaid decor and ready stock of overalls, plaid, and other like accessories. At the time he claims to have never heard of the term, that he simply liked plaid, and that all the fad really meant to him was that he sold more of what he already had on offer. A stroll down avenue Mont-Royal to converse with the many resident retro shop owners – the rise of this second-hand scene being a phenomenon in itself to be looked at in the next chapter – yields similarly blasé

accounts of grunge's significance. Guylaine Theriault of *Scarlett O'Hara* (which opened in 1987) describes the arrival of this subcultural style in terms of a process whereby she observed what people on the street were wearing, and responded to customer requests. She points out that much of what she carries in 1998 might still be considered grunge, and that it is simply a matter of how clothing is worn and accessorized. *Crazy Freddy's*, a discount second-hand store (with everything priced at $20 or less) offering what owner Freddy describes as "outdoorsy," "collegiate" clothing, notes that while he benefited from high turnover rates on certain items (including the staple plaid flannel shirts), he felt it threw off the balance of his business. Marthe Leclerc at *Bla-bla-bla* (which has been in business since 1987 when it opened on rue Roy near Saint-Denis, only moving to Mont-Royal in 1993) states that she responded to the demand for grunge gear reluctantly, noting that prior to this she never considered buying the type of clothing made popular by this subcultural style (singling out polyester shirts with particular distaste). The owners of *À la Deux* (in business since 1992) and *Folles Alliées* (previously located on rue St.-Denis, moving to Mont-Royal in 1993) noted that grunge made little impression on their respective businesses, with both aiming for more of a boutique-like, upscale feel (but nevertheless still retro)[4].

While recognizing the lack of rigour and potential for inaccuracy arising from personal anecdotes such as the above, the want of enthusiasm grunge elicits from most store owners interviewed nevertheless highlights an important point: while theorists such as McRobbie insist that "second-hand style or 'vintage dress' must be seen within the broader context of postwar subcultural history" (1988: 135), the fact is that the renewed popularity of second-hand clothing in Montreal is owing to more than diffused

subcultural style. As Darrell Legge, the current manager of the veteran retro shop *Drags* so aptly put it, second-hand shoppers in Montreal have long run the gamut from "kings and queens down to the scum of the earth"[5].

Admittedly, his store is something of a special case. As *Elle Québec* insisted in 1992, "avant d'entreprendre un pèlerinage des friperies montréalaises, il faut commencer par visiter LE musée des fripes au Québec, *Drags*, une boutique qui, après plus de quinze ans d'existence, fait toujours le bonheur des touristes américains, des finissantes en quête de crinolines, des coureurs d'Halloween et de Carole Laure (une fana de fripes)" (Lavigne 1992: 79). Located in Old Montreal since 1977, *Drags* is a museum among museums, offering goods dating from the turn of the century to the discarded styles of only a few seasons back. In order to appeal to tourists and locals alike, the store has to gear itself beyond a subcultural youth market.

Drags, however, might be seen as the best exemplification of the retro shop market's diversity of clientele, one which existed before punk came to Montreal, and has continued to thrive as other subcultural styles have come and gone. The attention subcultural groups brought the second-hand clothing market likely helped bring it back as a component of everyday life after a century on the consumer margins. The fact remains though, that just as there is more to a subculture than its style, so is there more to the retro market than its subcultural clientele.

Conclusion

The second-hand clothing market underwent a significant shift in the postwar era. While still catering to the less fortunate desiring only covering and warmth, used

garments in the hands of youth subcultures were worn in such a way as to adapt their covert rubbish status into overt statements of style. While accounting for only a fragment of the second-hand shopping public, subcultures nevertheless did play a role in bringing the second-hand trade more attention than it had received in a long time. By supplying pieces salvaged from the popular sphere to be self-consciously used beyond their "best before" date set by the fashion industry, retro shop owners provided an avenue for style creation unlike anything found in the mass-produced lines – styles lending themselves quite readily to the media spotlight.

Birmingham School subcultural theory has proven useful for understanding those youth groups upon which it specifically elaborates, such as the punks, as well as offering basic tools for approaching subsequent formations like grunge. What has also been shown though, are the limitations of these models. By generally considering the Canadian context and the ways in which subcultural style appeared in Montreal retro shops, Birmingham School concepts of the local and of the significance of subcultures within the wider second-hand market have been demonstrated as open to debate. While there is some validity to McRobbie's location of the second-hand market within the parameters of subcultural theory, its application to the Montreal retro market is by no means smooth.

In the following chapter the growth of the second-hand market in the 1980s and 1990s will be looked at, the overriding interest being the fashionable status it acquired bringing it back as a component of everyday life after a century spent on the consumer margins. Addressing such contributing, yet opposed factors like the recycling of

resources by consumers in the interest of thrift, and the recycling of images by producers to encourage conspicuous consumption, the market's expansion in Montreal will be demonstrated as the outcome of social and cultural determinants larger than itself. Focusing also on such new developments as department thrift-store chains, the matter of authenticity touched on here with respect to subcultures will be opened up further. As the market becomes more overtly diverse and organized along capitalist lines, the matter of whether it can anymore lay claim to an oppositional position *vis à vis* the system of novelty production will be interrogated.

Notes

[1] Patricia Bell, "Jobless rate for youth is more than double that for those over 25, new report shows," *Globe and Mail* 15 Mar. 1977: 13. As the article furthermore points out, the numbers can be deceiving. The situation was probably worse than it appeared based on the data available, as is suggested by the following:

> In no field are there fewer useful statistics," Mr. Baetz [executive-director of the Canadian Council on Social Development] said. The source book was prepared from data drawn from larger employment surveys, and do not include the concept of underemployment or the number of young people in full-time jobs that are far below their capabilities and not part of any career ladder.

[2] "Generation X" refers to a book of the same name by Douglas Coupland published in 1991, and which came to be associated with the post-baby-boom generation of youths in their twenties.

[3] This information is set out in Lucie Lavigne's "Les Fripes c'est Chic!" *Elle Québec* Feb 1992: 79, and was also corroborated in a conversation with the store's co-owner, Dominique.

[4] All accounts come from personal interviews conducted July 3, 1998.

[5] Personal interview conducted April 30, 1998.

Chapter 3
Looking Forward to Days Gone By

> Les fripes sont partout et prennent Occident des allures de phénomène culturel. Les fripes sont devenues incontestablement hip!
>
> *Elle Québec*, 1992[1]

Introduction

While subcultures made spectacular use of second-hand clothing, its members were not alone in seeking options aside from the novelties of the fashion system. Underlying isolated media images of sartorially-experimental youths was an expanding network for worn garments spilling over the boundaries of poverty and disaffection. The used clothing trade had been catering to a widening clientele as early as the 1960s and 1970s. However, years and a variety of changes would come to pass before it gained widespread recognition as an established part of the Montreal urban landscape. This concluding chapter will focus on transformations within the intimately linked arenas of culture and consumption allowing for the renewed overt status of the second-hand market, and its implications in relation to subcultural and charity-based antecedents.

The 1980s and 1990s have been striking for the proliferation of second-hand shopping venues opening in and around the city to accommodate a widening base of individuals prepared to don previously-worn garments despite – or even because of – the histories with which they had become imbued. Church-based organizations continued community fundraising endeavours initiated in the nineteenth-century; consignment boutiques carrying quality, "lightly" worn items maintained the aristocratic tradition of selling clothing to those wishing to dress above their social station; military surplus stores

peppered the downtown core; the US-spawned *Value Village* department thrift-store chain (henceforth *VV*) established its presence in the Greater Montreal Area; and avenue du Mont-Royal became renowned as a retro shopper's haven. Both the covert association with poverty formed in the nineteenth-century, and the deliberately overt poverty aesthetic adopted from the likes of the punks to proponents of grunge dissipated considerably within this increasingly segmented market.

The second-hand trade had become highly profitable, to the point of being promoted in tourist publications as an identifying feature of cosmopolitan Montreal. For example, in the 1996 Édition Griffe of *Montreal's Antiques, "Friperies," and Fine Food*, second-hand shopping is held up as one of "life's favorite pastimes," a hobby in which to indulge according to one's predilection (be it for "Upscale," "Contemporary," "Military," "Nostalgia," "Retro," or "Retro '60 & '70"). "From last season's haute couture, to movie props, clothing accessories for nostalgia lovers, or just fun 'retro,' Montreal 'friperies' cover the whole gamut" (1996: 51). Quite a turnaround from the invisible status the market had occupied only a few decades previously.

The appearance of these stores in Montreal and their promotion in city guidebooks and *Lifestyle* sections of daily newspapers is symptomatic of the extent to which yesterday's threads have become hot commodities at the close of the twentieth-century. In addition to ongoing demands for garments to clothe the needy, and accessories for the visual establishment of identities countering generic, "established" society, a chief driving force of the thriving second-hand market has been a recycling ethic and aesthetic functioning for the seemingly opposed ends of thrift and increased spending. On the one hand, pre-worn items have been increasingly sought-out for their use value by a

civilization sensitized to the economic and environmental benefits of recycling. Recalling Gore's distinction between second-hand shoppers seeking history via retro and those desiring the experience inherent in "rubbish", her definition of retro will inform this chapter (along with the nearly interchangeable term *vintage*) as we move away from the visibly worn rubbish aesthetics of subcultures to a broader clientele of recyclers seeking either the *appearance* of history in retro, or its utter lack thereof in "almost new" items. At the other end of the spectrum, form of recycling is also carried out by the fashion industry in its use of past styles as inspiration for new production. The heightened visibility of the second-hand market underscores the valuable nostalgic potential of styles from previous decades, as the recycling of eras by their images and artefacts becomes a key means of maintaining high rates of purchase by capitalist producers. Appropriation of retro elements in the production of new goods has bolstered the popularity of the second-hand market, with the latter's more sought-after items being in turn fed back to the fashion system to produce "new" vintage goods and mass-produced "oppositional" style.

The fashion system's feeding of its own offal has been frequently addressed in academic circles, and will be briefly considered as a point of entry into the issue of second-hand authenticity. Touched on in the last chapter with respect to subcultural style, at stake here is whether there is, or in fact ever was, any such thing as an "authentic" second-hand culture. At first glance, the matter may appear simple. As seen with subcultures, the authentic is generally thought of as that which is not copied, but rather genuine, or "real." When pitting second-hand shops against carriers of simulated retro style such as *Le Château* or *Urban Outfitters*, the identification of "authentic" retro

would not seem too difficult. Yet in Jay Newman's *Inauthentic Culture* (1997), which sets the apparently contemporary matter of its title within an historical and philosophical context, the meanings of the terms *authentic* and *inauthentic* are given a slightly different emphasis. "When we are concerned with the relative authenticity and inauthenticity of cultural products, we nearly always have in mind the relative integrity of the producers or promoters of the products, and we are concerned with why and how those people see it as in their interest (as well as perhaps ours) to accept the products in precisely the spirit in which they would like (or would have liked) us to accept them" (Newman 1997: 8). This emphasis on the intentions surrounding the commodities becomes especially pertinent when thinking about the second-hand system, with the channels through which the garments pass and the conditions under which they are bought and sold being significantly governed by the intentions of those involved. As will be seen below, it is through these circuits and in the designs of those moving, selling, and wearing the clothes that second-hand authenticity/inauthenticity is forged.

For example, cast-off clothing used by youth-based subcultures tends to be thought of as an alternative to the fashion industry's mass-produced, overpriced items. But what happens when the second-hand market becomes so lucrative that it begins to emulate the strategies of the fashion system? How should one interpret the fact that Montreal retro shops have all but dispensed with thrift by charging higher prices for clothing supposedly providing more "authentic" used clothing looks, when most of these stores and their stock are no longer readily distinguishable from one another? What does one make of *VV*, which departs from the small-scale, artisan entrepreneurial ideal in favour of becoming just as corporate as the makers of novelty in the way it gathers and

sells its clothing? The Bellevue, Washington-based used clothing chain with a half-dozen stores in Montreal has overshadowed the purely charitable or aesthetic intentions which previously defined the market in favour of operating in the well-oiled fashion of a truly Capitalist enterprise. Ought this necessarily be seen as undermining the second-hand market's status as an alternative to the local mall?

By addressing these and other questions, it becomes clear that the late twentieth-century has witnessed changes on par with those of the previous century. For even as new items continue to fill shopping mall shelves, a recycling ethic and aesthetic has significantly permeated the operations making possible the existence of fresh goods in the first place. In the process, authenticity has become a slippery element, with the fashion system and the second-hand market increasingly overlapping as suppliers of style. Indeed, whether dealing with the system of novelty production or that of cast-off goods, looking forward while looking back appears to have become a common reflex within the contemporary consumer domain.

The Janus-face of consumption

> Tradition is no longer the pre-eminence of the old over the new: it is unaware of either – modernity itself invents them both at once, at a single stroke, it is always and at the same time 'neo' and 'retro', modern and anachronistic. The dialectic of rupture very quickly becomes the dynamics of the amalgam and recycling. In politics, in technics, in art and in culture it is defined by the exchange rate that the system can tolerate without alteration to its fundamental order (Baudrillard 1976: 89-90).

Despite still-lingering reservations concerning second-hand clothing, there has been a slow and steady change at work. The gradual reintegration of used garments into everyday clothing practices is the outcome of several factors, one likely having to do with

two generations of consumers never having had to endure the grey privations of a catastrophic economic depression like that of the 1930s, or rationing measures implemented over the course of two World Wars. Yet the system of novelty production remains just as firmly in place as ever. How to account, then, for the resurrection of the second-hand market? There is the pragmatic response that more goods produced in the name of novelty yield more waste in need of disposal. In western cultures where accelerations in fashion have speeded rates of turnover from a seasonal to monthly basis, contemporary styles are intentionally transient, and thus have dealers large and small cropped up to sell what others have been prepared to give away.

While the interest of this study is with Montreal stores as a cross-section of second-hand network end-points, it should be noted that the rising profitability of the market has extended the flows of used goods beyond local and national borders: clothes from diverse regions of the world are imported to Canada in bales and sold by the pound at recycling centres[2]; "collector" items such as *Nike* running shoes and *Levis* jeans are picked up by international dealers and sold for high returns in Japan[3]; items meeting with poor success in the local market are shipped to areas in need such as Afghanistan and Zambia[4]; and remaining pieces are made into furniture stuffing or, as a last resort, dumped into rising landfill sites. Although second-hand stores tend to be thought of in terms of the local, their business both draws in and extends outwards from national borders, and while this internationalism is hardly a new development of the second-hand trade – recall the mention made in the first chapter of Britain exporting used clothing to the colonies – it has grown with the innovation of improved transportation and communication technologies.

Although seemingly removed from the immediate, local context (insofar as it *is* local), these cross-border relations come to bear on the character of Montreal second-hand stores. For example, the *Salvation Army* (henceforth *SA*) and *VV* – which obtain their stock by means of donations from their communities – may arguably be deemed more "local" than the independently-run Montreal retro shops despite the fact of the *SA* being a global organization, and *VV* stores appearing in uniform style across North America. As seen in the previous chapter, retro shops themselves may be local businesses, but their stock more often than not comes from outside the Montreal region. With the business of recycling having achieved such a degree of international prosperity, the notion of a truly "local" market has become quite complicated.

From the consumer perspective, rising public awareness of environmental issues made recycling fashionable in and of itself by the 1970s. In a different manner than cans, bottles, or paper products, recycled garments became especially attractive for their potential to demonstrate both a sense of social responsibility and personal style. To add another layer to Gore's separation of subcultures from retro and recycling shoppers, another important distinction can be made, this time specifically between rubbish and recycling: whereas punks sporting the rubbish aesthetic grounded themselves in nihilistic amorality, the chief impetus behind recycling is the preservation of resources with a view to the future. Again, in order to look forward it becomes necessary to look back.

Second-hand shopping in the late twentieth-century is not, of course, undertaken merely out of socio-political motivations or a yearning to save the world. There is, for one thing, the "fun" factor: thrift shopping has become just as potentially pleasurable for

the middle-classes as the department store excursions of the nineteenth-century. Take, for example, the case of the Wentzell family featured in *Canadian Living*:

> They're country folk who confess that they hate shopping. They're members of a close-knit family who enjoy horseback riding, beachcombing and each other's company. Why then, on a bright Nova Scotia morning, is the Wentzell clan [...] setting out on a shopping spree? Because to them it's a kind of treasure hunt – or even an adventure. But they're not off to an upscale mall. They're heading out to check out the used clothing stores in their neighbourhood. (Comfort 1994: 53)

To those for whom second-hand shopping is not undertaken out of necessity, it can indeed become one of "life's favourite pastimes," with the search for stylish bargains providing a degree of satisfaction removing to some extent the element of drudgery with which the practice of shopping had once been so heavily tinged.

Yet even for middle-class consumers financial matters play a determining part in their decision to purchase second-hand, with thrift-shopping being frequently undertaken to stretch household budgets. Just as youths faced with bleak futures and limited economic capital took up the poverty aesthetic as a virtue made of necessity, recycling is perhaps more readily adopted when funds for luxuries are low; and in this way pleasure converges with environmental and economic concerns. These elements emerge again in the garment selection process, with used garments most often being taken up either for their obvious status as "vintage" items, or as "barely used" garments providing the opportunity to "dress up" while "spending down."

In the latter case, consumers from the lower and middle-classes seeking to avoid paying high prices for new fashions will search with a highly discerning eye for that which can either be worn without drawing attention to the garment's used character, or which can become a source of pride for the way it highlights the shopper's consumer

savvy and resourcefulness ("You wouldn't *believe* how much I paid for this... etc."). Shoppers seeking "vintage" goods, on the other hand, do not attempt to deny the item's used character. Even if the found item is a pair of flare pants mass-produced in the 1970s, its reappearance as a salvaged item challenges contemporary fashion's codes. Rather than being approached as "rubbish" pieces, used items purchased either for the pristine vestiges of novelty they retain as marked-down goods, or for their hearkening to an idealized past, come to be seen as having "chic" – as opposed to "shock" – potential. We see these elements coming together under the banner of style in the following portion of a *Maclean's* article, which provides an early glimpse of the then-emergent recycling ethic.

> "People are simply more discriminating today," says Viki Mandzuik. "They are not willing to pay the prices demanded for new clothes even if they can afford them. Fashion changes too quickly." Fred Norman believes [Toronto's] Ex-Toggery shoppers reflect a segment of the "conserver society" in which clothing is seen as a commodity to be recycled, much like soft-drink cans and paper products. (Dobbie 1978: 62)

As recycling becomes a virtue made of necessity, virtuous necessity subsequently becomes saleable. Novelty's hegemony may well be in the process of contestation here by the second-hand market, although in these cases the battle is entered into for different reasons than the punks in the 1970s, or the critics of William Morris' era. With respect to the late twentieth-century second-hand shopping public, aesthetic and anti-aesthetic ideals give way to a different motivating factor: waste management. As we go along this issue of refuse control will be seen increasingly as central to the contemporary second-hand market. For the time being, however, the subsequent progress of the Montreal market

will be followed, as the seeds planted in the 1970s were seen to fuller fruition in the 1980s and 1990s.

Second-hand shops continued to prosper into the 1980s, with examples of each type mentioned at the outset of this chapter either just opening, expanding, or continuing on as before. For example, new consignment boutiques such as *Incognito* in Outremont joined, in 1991, more established businesses such as *Boutique Encore* and *Boutique Fantasque* (established in 1953 and 1965 respectively); the likes of the *Salvation Army* continued their charity work; *VV* stores were springing up on the outskirts of the downtown core; and new retro/design shops began opening, especially on the burgeoning avenue du Mont-Royal. The progress of each second-hand store type during this period is worthy of its own discussion. That of the Mont-Royal retro market in the late 1980s is most notable though, the emergence of this concentrated scene helping to establish a definite second-hand presence in the city. Since Mont-Royal thrift-shopping has become renowned as a leisure activity in itself, a survey of its development in the 1980s is worth outlining.

Undergoing a steady gentrification process since the early 1980s, avenue du Mont-Royal and the surrounding Plateau area went from an immigrant area to a hippie neighbourhood in the 1960s, to attracting a more middle-class crowd of young professionals in the 1980s with the erection of new building developments. As the area increasingly drew in a younger set of students and professionals who mixed in with established immigrant families, the average age of residents dipped in the early 1980s to between 25 and 34 (Rousseau 1984). The youth demographic undoubtedly contributed to the street's growing resemblance to "other downtown arteries with its café terraces where

trendy types go to sip cool after-work drinks and to be seen" (Seideman 1983). Just as Mont-Royal and its residents became overt components of urban Montreal, so would the retro shops which began appearing just a few years later. As would be declared in 1995 by *La Presse*:

> Paris a ses Puces. Londres, son Portobello. Montréal? Son avenue du Mont-Royal. Bref, à chaque métropole sa coterie de fripiers, ses bazars hallucinants. Notez: notre avenue du Mont-Royal – entre le boulevard Saint-Laurent et la rue Saint-Denis – n'a pas son pareil au Canada. (Lavigne 1995)

A rather hyperbolic statement considering the existence of other Canadian second-hand clothes shop clusters such as, for example, the Kensington Market in Toronto. This point aside, the high concentration of retro shops on Mont-Royal is indeed remarkable enough for it to have garnered an established place on Montreal's cultural map.

Moving away from Mont-Royal momentarily, it is worth noting that according to Bilodeau of *Twist Encore* (on boulevard Saint-Laurent), his clientele has not changed so much since the late 1970s as it has grown. As seen in the last chapter, there has indeed been an increase in stores, with many of these assuming a place on Mont-Royal: *Scarlett O'Hara*, *Blablabla*, *Hatfield & McCoy*, *Humide*, *Les Folles Alliées*, *Boutique Mille et Un Trucs*, *À la Deux*, etc. Continuing on the course set by the likes of *Twist* in the 1970s and, to a somewhat lesser extent *Drags*, the stores still cater primarily to youths with disposible income seeking a degree of (sub)cultural capital through style, and are still run primarily by artisan capitalists, among which a few employ arts and crafts techniques. *Scarlett O'Hara* (*SO*), for example, was one of the very first retro shops on Mont-Royal when it opened in 1988. Run by two French-Canadian women – Guylaine Theriault with a degree in business, and Jacinthe Collard with a background in design – the store carries

second-hand garments as well as new items made from recycled materials. Just a few doors down, *Hatfield and McCoy* (*H&M* here, which opened at the same time as *SO*) operates similarly. Both stores, incidentally, also have more than one shop running on the Mont-Royal strip, *SO* with a line of children's wear, and *H&M* having separate men's and women's boutiques.

Lest it be assumed that the only thing changed since the 1970s is the number of second-hand shoppers, the gentrification component of Mont-Royal's transformation ought to be kept in mind. Like *Drags* in Old Montreal, the stores on Mont-Royal invite both the local (urban and suburban) dollar, as well as that of the tourist. It is an area in which to see and be seen, a thoroughfare purporting to offer a higher degree of hip than the Eaton centre. Mont-Royal stores' atmospheres and clothing are meant to suggest an alternative to the system of novelty production: brightly coloured walls and odd trinkets set about the shop; music playing prominently in the background (some stores making their own DJ tapes, whereas others such as Bilodeau's having struck deals with record promoters in recent years to obtain advance copies of new CDs to play in store[5]); an inevitable sense of clutter as garments of different eras, design, colour, and material are jammed together rack upon rack; new and old costume jewellery under glass at the cash desk; and signs (i.e. announcing store hours, sales, asking patrons to leave their bags at the cash, etc.) hand-made with a self-consciously creative flourish.

Yet for all appearances of offering something outside the norm, store owners admit their interest in keeping up with contemporary fashion, with the likes of *Twist Encore*, as well as *SO*, *H&M* and the recently sold *Plexus Fripe* all seeking to offer the latest in vintage style (before the fashion industry clues in and appropriates it), as well as

a collection of new designs containing hints of retro, whether it be with respect to design or by using recycled fabrics. While second-hand items are still for the most part cheaper than buying new, retro shop prices are nonetheless higher than in less trendy stores such as *VV*. Owners of the former claim to be selling style as well as convenience, having already undertaken the labour of cleaning their stock, which they obtain by separating what they deem to be the stylish from the unremarkable. *VV*, on the other hand, leaves these laundering and taste-gatekeeping tasks up to the consumer. In this sense, retro shops maintain a parallel position to the fashion system rather than veering too far off in the opposite direction.

In spite of grim predictions made in the late 1970s concerning a struggling economy and high unemployment, business in the 1980s was obviously keeping at a steady pace. Once the excesses of the decade gave way to recession in the early 1990s, however, unemployment returned as a major social issue and an influential component of style, bringing the second-hand trade to an even higher degree of prominence than before. While the recycling ethic and the nostalgia component (to be discussed below) were already strong contributing factors of the market's success, the subsequent economic downturn brought back the exercise of thrift as a consumer practice after the general extravagance of the 1980s.

Grunge emerged at this time, although lifestyle downsizing affected more than just the young. As job losses cut across social and demographic strata, the second-hand market became a popular media target, with used-clothing stores being touted as fashionably "newsworthy"[6]. This development is significant in itself. Second-hand activities of the nineteenth and early twentieth-century were advertised chiefly in terms

praising the good works of those sustaining the charity circuits, with the profit-driven market left in obscurity up to the years immediately following the Second World War. Even in the late 1970s and early 1980s there was, compared to the 1990s, very little attention given to the second-hand market, with much of the existing coverage being devoted to second-hand style as opposed to any thrift shop "scene." In the 1990s, however, the local second-hand market becomes sufficiently popular for the likes of *Châtelaine* and *Elle Québec* to cover it in a manner similar to the Griffe guide, yielding articles such as "À la friperie avec Jean Poitras," and "Les Fripes c'est Chic!"[7]

Theorizing the nostalgic turn

The modishness of recycled style was not, of course, merely the outcome of straightforward economic or environmental concerns, as significant as these were. Another important factor to consider in the rise of the second-hand market is the cultural phenomenon of nostalgia, as demonstrated in this *Montreal Gazette* article:

> It's a wave of nostalgia that doesn't end with movies. From bell-bottoms and daisy prints to MuchMusic reruns of the Monkees, teenagers continue to indulge in the sights and sounds of the 1960s and '70s in a trend that has outlived the predictions of trendspotters. (Hurley 1997)

While bordering close on the recycling ethic, the nostalgia mode is more concept than practice, and will thus be addressed here with a greater emphasis on theory than the sort of ethnographic evidence set out thus far; the latter may, in fact, act as supporting evidence for the following, considering the overlap between the conceptual and the practical.

In general terms, nostalgia refers to the revaluation of one's past, with personal memory as the thread linking yesterday to today. While there can be no guarantee that that which is remembered is accurate or "real," there is a certain degree of authenticity implicit in nostalgia on the individual level. Within the wider cultural sphere, however, nostalgia has been undertaken as a creative project bent upon commodifying general experiences or notions of the past. The goal of these personally non-specific pasts is, of course, to sell whatever product or service has been attached to the fabricated memory, and thus is nostalgia's rise intimately linked to the push for heightened rates of turnover which have made recycling such a hot topic to begin with. Or, to put it slightly differently, with pressures to maintain elevated levels of novelty production, stylistic innovation has become increasingly necessary to keep outputs high; what this often involves is the borrowing of styles from the past, with these same "new/old" items eventually making their way back into the second-hand circuit once their fashionable time has expired. Think of it as "retro squared."

Nostalgia's pervasiveness in contemporary society has been frequently commented upon in recent years, especially in terms of advertising geared for mediated diffusion. David Harvey, for example, attributes the economic turn from Fordism (with its emphases on mass-production and consumption, as well as product standardization) to flexible accumulation, with accelerations in production cutting in half the shelf life of products in such sectors as textiles and clothing industries. Not only does such intensification of output produce more cast-off goods, it is also "accompanied on the consumption side, therefore, by a much greater attention to quick-changing fashions and the mobilization of all the artifices of need inducement and cultural transformation that

this implies" (Harvey 1990: 156). Fredric Jameson says something similar when he observes that "[w]hat has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation" (Jameson 1984: 56). He discerns a form of "aesthetic innovation" in the "nostalgia mode," which he understands as an attempt to "appropriate a missing past" by having it "refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the emergent ideology of the 'generation'" (Jameson 1984: 66). ("Generations" being most often loosely conceptualized in terms of the temporal bookends surrounding decades, with the 1960s being all the rage one season, the 1970s in another, followed by renewed fascination with the 1980s, and so on.) Historical periods thus become subject to aesthetic colonizations, in which the salvage of the past becomes a means by which attempts are made to "lay siege" to the present, the immediate past, or to a past out of one's existential experience.

Taking the nostalgia concept a step further in the direction set out by Jameson is Arjun Appadurai, who makes a case for nostalgia's pairing with fantasy as important components of a new form of consumerism, one which has become the "principal work of late industrial society" (Appadurai 1996: 82). By "work" he means that a form of labour is involved in creating the "conditions of consciousness" necessary for buying to occur, including planning techniques to manage open-ended consumer credit and purchase "in a landscape where nostalgia has become divorced from memory" (ibid). In this interpretation, nostalgia becomes a main rhetorical device used in contemporary

advertising (especially in the electronic media) to encourage expenditures payable in the future to recapture ideals gone missing in the past. The work of the present thus becomes a skilled straddling of past and future horizons. The evoked nostalgia does not, however, involve a lifestyle actually lost, but rather one never experienced.

> In thus creating experiences of losses that never took place, these advertisements create what might be called 'imagined nostalgia,' nostalgia for things that never were. This imagined nostalgia thus inverts the temporal logic of fantasy (which tutors the subject to imagine what could or might happen) and creates much deeper wants than simple envy, imitation, or greed could by themselves invite. (Appadurai 1996: 77)

What Appadurai seems to suggest is that such nostalgia produces an insatiable desire driven by fantasy and maintained by perpetual pillaging of the past for fresh images of lifestyles non-existent and yet, paradoxically, extinct. At the same time, they are presented as being somehow just within reach by means of purchase on credit.

Recent manoeuvring by the culture industry supports the above commentaries pertaining to nostalgia. The late 1990s, for example, have been soaked with the 1970s: from music and films to racks of bellbottoms, polyester shirts, and platform shoes at the local mall.

> "The look mimics the '70s," says Rosalie Stanley, chairman of fashion and creative technology at George Brown College. "It's something we've all seen before and not necessarily liked." But for teens, she concedes, the look is fresh. "They've never seen it before. It's new to them." (Hurley 1997)

The past itself may never be recaptured although its artefacts are always available for reproduction, thereby allowing the fantasy of transcending the ages. In keeping with this train of thought, Jameson notes that the nostalgic mode emerges from related inabilities to experience history, or to represent contemporary living. In this sense, nostalgia becomes not only desirable but *necessary*. In terms of nostalgia's practice, fashion plays

a key role, with the body being an ideal "site for the inscription of a generalized desire to consume in the context of the aesthetic of ephemerality" (Appadurai 1996:84). This latter concept is similar to Thompson's notion of transience, and just as subject to descent into rubbish; while consumption creates time, *modern* consumption replaces the aesthetic of duration with that of ephemerality (Appadurai 1996: 84-5). With the rapidity of change accompanying this aesthetic of ephemerality comes an ever greater segmentation of time, thereby creating a widening range of smaller temporal units to be resuscitated at increasingly rapid rates. The satirical web site *The Onion* offers their view of this phenomenon in its article "US Dept. of Retro Warns: 'We may be running out of past'":

> At a press conference Monday, U.S. Retro Secretary Anson Williams issued a strongly worded warning of an imminent "national retro crisis," cautioning that "if current levels of U.S. retro consumption are allowed to continue unchecked, we may run entirely out of past by as soon as 2005. ... the mid-'80s deregulation of retro under the Reagan Administration eliminated that safeguard," he explained, "leaving us to face the threat of retro-ironic appreciation being applied to present or even future events." (http://www.theonion.com/onion3214/usretro.html)

It is the task of heads of the fashion industry to test the overall cultural climate and judge which past moments and looks may be resurrected in order for new items to garner profits from images of old. As trendsetters in their own right, retro shop owners contend with a similar situation when planning upcoming searches for stock. In conversation with several Mont-Royal store proprietors in the early spring of 1998, I found most expressing unease at not knowing to which past temporal aesthetic their future merchandise ought to conform since the demand for 1970s gear had waned. What time capsule would become the next "big thing?" While approximating the plight of the fashion industry, retro shop owners obviously differentiate themselves by going after the

actual artefacts of retro, with this distinction inviting observations of contrasting adherences to authenticity.

Yet, rather than reducing the fashion industry's appropriation of second-hand style to a matter of the "authentic" versus the "nefarious corporate counterfeit," the relationship would more productively be seen, again, as one of interdependence. For example, Gore observes that the "economy of recycling, in which the fashion industry discards as tired or outmoded once-validated commodities that it eventually re-values as "new blood" from the streets, positions the spectacular subculture as broker in the negotiations between high and low cultures" (Gore 1995: 39). Her claim is valid, although the broker role is easily extendible beyond subcultures to the used clothing market generally, as the lately popular disco look found in both second-hand and new clothing stores is nothing if not the very antithesis of subcultural style. After all, the fashion industry exploits such retro looks at least as often as the poverty aesthetics assembled by subcultures. Thus does the second-hand market help to ensure the renewal of both high and commodity culture: when retro style is taken up by elite fashion markets it also reverberates through the "lower" fashion spheres in some form or other, thereby endorsing mass cultural forms for mass culture consumers. Rather than thinking about the second-hand market as being pillaged by the fashion system, therefore, it may just as readily be seen as teaching us what *new* commodities to desire.

No matter how one conceptualizes the relationship between second-hand style and its fashion system counterpart though, the fact remains that the nostalgic element of a second-hand dress from the 1960s will always be more authentically 1960s than a 1960s-style dress at a new clothing outlet. To return to Gore and subcultural style once more,

she notes that "high fashion is never completely successful in appropriating the aesthetic of poverty ... [and] perhaps this is where any 'authenticity' that can be claimed by a subculture lies: in practices like thrift shopping" (Gore 1995: 41). With subcultural style constantly redefining itself against the incorporating tendencies of the hegemonic dominant order, the second-hand market would seem to offer itself as a haven for authenticity. Yet as has been implied thus far, where one actually locates this supposedly unadulterated quality within the cast-off market is another matter altogether. In the increasingly mainstreamed Montreal second-hand market of the 1980s and 1990s, the issue of authenticity is not always so amenable to such neat dichotomies of the second-hand margins versus the fashion system middle. Whereas the market for new retro versus that of used vintage boils down to a matter of authenticity of product, a final, focused look at the retro-laden, recycling-driven second-hand shopping cultures of Montreal will reveal the highly relative quality of authenticity manifesting itself in the circuits through which the garments pass, the intentions of the individuals guiding them through, and the spaces in which the clothing eventually winds up.

Duelling authenticities of the contemporary second-hand market

> *Les Éditions Griffe* are pleased to present a guide which allows its users to quickly discover how Montreal caters to three of life's pastimes, with its wealth of antique stores, "friperies", and restaurants. Whether it be a search for reflections of 'times past' or the vast array of culinary delights for the needs of 'times present', the following pages will reveal a carefully selected group of merchants ... (1996: 1)

Despite the *Griffe* guide's encompassing tone in passages cited at the outset of the chapter, the quotation immediately above significantly undermines its purported inclusiveness. Indeed, *Griffe* makes no mention of non-profit organizations, nor of the

decidedly less-than-glamorous junk shops, nor of the "no-frills" *VV* franchises springing up on Montreal's urban margins. Factors contributing to the disavowed existence of the former two have already been addressed, with the conditions of their exclusion still being in effect to varying extents in the late twentieth-century. Yet *VV*, despite the snub, is an important development of the second-hand trade, its operation as a corporate department thrift-store bringing the market for used goods a higher level of public visibility and lucrativeness than it had enjoyed since the preindustrial era (it is the only second-hand store, for example, that advertises on television).

VV's exclusion, along with the others, belies the fact that *Griffe* is less concerned with listing *all* of Montreal's second-hand shops than it is with citing *all that matter*. *Griffe* is not alone in such selectivity: "Le Petit Guide Chic & Swell," can only make room in its tiny pamphlet publications for a selection of second-hand shops among which *VV* is not included, and broaching *VV* as a topic of conversation with any given retro shop owner will almost inevitably produce a decidedly disdainful response. In their estimation, *VV* is too big, too bland, too much in the way of "no-frills" to be the site of anything authentic except as a chintzy suburban sellout. At work here, obviously, are definitions of authenticity justifying inclusions and exclusions.

In *Inauthentic Culture and its Philosophical Critics* (1997), Jay Newman establishes authenticity and its opposite within a complex philosophical framework going back to Plato and classical modes of analysis. While much of what he addresses goes into issues not directly related to material culture, of particular interest to the current study is the notion of cultural relativism he addresses, offering as it does a means of

approaching the different value judgements made by various second-hand providers and consumers with their own levels of economic and/or cultural capital at stake.

> Perhaps the standards or criteria that we apply in ascribing inauthenticity are themselves arbitrary. Perhaps they are themselves simply cultural products that were initially appropriated by us in some basic form as a result of highly sophisticated parental or communal manipulation, or as a result of other features of our early social environment that had little to do with any sort of "objective" or "absolute" truth or goodness. (Newman 1997: 52)

The arbitrariness of in/authenticity's criteria is a major, yet rarely acknowledged feature of the second-hand trade. The market's history over the past century has produced competing notions which have had at least as much to do with the items up for sale as they have with their dealers, as well as with the particular ethics of both buyers and sellers. As the systems for used clothing have shifted, public perceptions of what the market is, how it ought to be run, what it is to be used for and by whom, have been repeatedly redefined. A significant portion of the population, for example, has been irreversibly encultured into seeing used garments as raw materials for charitable endeavours; others have learned to locate authenticity in lower prices rather than style, and vice versa; many see the second-hand business as an anti-capitalist, small-scale trade, whereas corporate measures have conversely been approved by others in the interest of higher levels of recycling and/or profit.

What becomes apparent here is that locating an authentic second-hand culture is more complex than simply looking to, say, subcultures for an undiluted ideal. Groups such as the punks or champions of grunge and their shopping haunts may appear to represent a ground zero of second-hand authenticity in their members' selection of styles countering the conservative ideals of propriety and industriousness. Any such conferral

of status, however, necessarily privileges their usage of second-hand style as somehow more "pure" than any other. In such a scenario, subcultures become positioned as the central axis around which all other second-hand shopping activities revolve, and as has been demonstrated over the course of this chapter and the last, it is a highly misleading and narrow view of the situation. Moreover, we should recall here that the poverty-based styles of punk, and especially grunge were borrowing the cast-off looks of the poverty-stricken. This itself might arguably be seen as a bastardization of the charities' efforts to provide clothing for those unable to buy new, which itself came out of the once thriving second-hand market providing customers with the goods necessary to look as though they were of a class able to buy new, which in turn was geared to help create inauthentic images of novelty. It is a dizzying exercise that may be carried on backwards almost indefinitely.

Retro shops providing elements of oppositional and/or vintage style have themselves been demonstrated over the course of this chapter as having major shortcomings in the way of authenticity – if it is agreed that second-hand shops are supposed to provide affordability, originality of ambience and stock, as well as adherence to the ideal of the local, small-scale entrepreneur. Proprietors might beg to differ on the grounds that the urban *milieux* in which they establish themselves and the taste-gatekeeping processes they use are themselves sufficient markers of authenticity. However, an equally strong argument can be made for *VV*, although for altogether different reasons. Not only does the chain charge less and obtain its stock from the surrounding community, it also maintains ties with the disadvantaged in deed as opposed

to simply style, while also allowing the consumer a greater part in the search for pleasing finds by dispensing with the strict standards of style set by retro shops.

Since moving into Canadian territory in 1980, *VV* has sparked controversy by turning the market into a Capitalist enterprise while promoting what some deem to be questionable ties with charitable organizations. The philosophy underlying *VV* might be summarized as "striving to be all things to all people," with the chain claiming to operate in part for the benefit of local charities, while also offering a wide variety of clothing ranging "in quality and style from suits by designers such as Armani and Versace to no-name polyester jumpsuits" (Drewry 1996a: 118-119). This eclecticism extends only to its stock though, as all locations conform to a standard of uniformity: generally appearing in suburban areas, each occupies large, sparsely decorated warehouse or department store spaces filled with rack upon rack of clothing in long rows going from one end of the store to the other, and with the sounds of shoppers and cash registers providing the only soundtrack overlaying the bargain-hunting activities. With a half dozen stores operating in the Montreal area alone, there is little need for shoppers to venture from their neighbourhoods to the downtown core to purchase second-hand goods.

One of *VV*'s main points of pride is that it operates in conjunction with local charities, giving a portion of all revenues to the non-profit organizations with whom they ally themselves. Part of the partnership deal involves the creation of a tightly organized system for the collection of clothing, with the first step being for the charitable organization to set up a telephone solicitation operation to make direct calls for clothing or household donations. Those with contributions to make are requested to put items into

plastic bags outside for pick-up. The next step occurs when the collections are dropped off at the *VV* depot.

> After unloading, the clothing is divided into what is and isn't saleable. Two sorters, decked out in red vests, move the clothing from carts to low tables, where it is checked for stains, lint balls and tears. If none of these is present, the clothes get passed on to a second group of workers, who recheck quality and sort the items into men's, women's and children's wear. They then put them on hangers and place them on speed rails (long clothes racks that snake from one end of the sorting room to the other). When they reach the other end, a third group of workers – with measuring tapes around their necks and vest pockets stuffed with price tags – dart from item to item, sizing and pricing as they go. (Drewry 1996a: 115)

This division of tasks is critical, as it suggests how second-hand clothing, which came to be overshadowed in the nineteenth-century by processes of mass-novelty production, may be recuperated for profit by capitalist concerns: rather than profiting from the production of new goods, the chain benefits from selling used goods in large quantities thanks to the generation of new alienated labour surrounding the items gathered, sorted, and sold.

While different from other second-hand store types currently operating, *VV* actually operates in a manner not unlike that proposed by *SA* founder Reverend Booth in the nineteenth-century:

> I propose to establish in every large town a civil force of organized collectors who will patrol the whole town as regularly as the policeman, who will have their appointed beats, and each of whom will be entrusted with the task of collecting the waste of the houses in their circuit. ... The unoccupied wilderness of waste is a wide enough area for the operations of our brigade. (qtd . in Sandall, 1955: 122)

VV, of course, has no religious affiliations, and has furthermore been denounced by competing charities and church groups for failing to be up-front about the amount of profit it gives away, as well by retro shop and consignment boutique owners for its blandness and for setting quantity above quality. Moreover, by corporatizing local thrift-

shop markets and bringing them back as major money-making enterprises, *VV* has, ironically, opened itself to further criticism by employing a large-scale model of business similar to the department stores in the nineteenth-century which put the second-hand market out of commission to begin with. Yet, for all its departures from second-hand rules of operation concocted over the course of the past century, the department thrift-store chain has been a major force in bringing back the market for used garments "as a facet of every-day commercial life, well known by housewife, servant, traders, and gentlefolk" (Lemire 1990: 256).

Rather than having "sold out" to capitalism by its success, it might be argued that *VV* has simply learned how to thrive in a consumer culture driven by novelty production. Whereas many choose to see *VV*'s success formula as an automatic failure for its alleged lack of authenticity inherent in a *modus operandi* borrowing so freely from the dominant order, perhaps what ought to be questioned is the true value of a second-hand market consisting solely of pockets of philanthropic impulses and/or resistant tendencies. In either a purely charitable or subcultural second-hand market, what ends are being served, and how do they fit into the greater scheme of things? Newman suggests that "[p]erhaps we should even regard inauthentic culture as preferable to authentic or, alternatively, alter our conceptions of authenticity and inauthenticity to conform to the "real" values and ideals of a society ..." (53). This would indeed seem to hold for *VV*, which balks at rejecting clothing for recirculation based on narrow notions of style, or of marketing itself only to the destitute.

In attempting to appeal to as wide a clientele as possible – from the lowest social denominator on up – *VV* is representative of the general contemporary market for used

clothing in Montreal. By going beyond semi-covert charity circuits, the second-hand market has once again become an established business, a real alternative to the system of novelty production. In addition to making clothing more affordable and offering options other than the latest looks devised by the fashion industry, a strong second-hand market allows for the subversion of rapid rates of novelty turnover and its attendant rising rubbish heaps. According to a recent television ad campaign, *VV* brings in more than 4000 items a day, thereby providing the opportunity for the recycling of items that might otherwise have been trashed. If no other single criterion of second-hand authenticity may be arrived at, we may at least look to the important waste-management role the market plays. Considered in this way, establishments such as *VV* and charity-based organizations excluded from the Gr*i*ffe guide may in fact be the most authentic sites of second-hand shopping culture around.

Conclusion

Despite opposing philosophies of different second-hand store types, most cater to consumer tendencies highly reminiscent of what Morris advocated in the nineteenth-century, namely: the quest for quality of design and material; the opportunity to create a style based on one's personal preferences rather than the dictates of the fashion system; and the exercise of economy in the face of overpriced new goods. In a sense, we have come full circle since the preindustrial era when the second-hand market operated for the benefit of the lower consumer tier. While second-hand shopping no longer has the same kind of subcultural cachet it might have appeared to have had in the immediate postwar

period, the market's reintroduction into the mainstream is not simply a matter of the incorporation of a once-resistant market into the dominant order.

For it is precisely in its supposed incorporation that the second-hand market is able to operate most effectively both with and against the system of novelty production. On the one hand, it functions with the fashion system in its selections of parallel styles, in its increasingly profit-oriented activities, and in its inspirational capacity for a clothing industry relying heavily upon the nostalgic mode. Yet, in addition to providing the poor with affordable clothing, and subcultures with a rubbish aesthetic allowing them to defer their inevitable induction into the age of responsibility, the wider, thriving second-hand trade has invited the middle to what were once the covert margins of the consumer terrain. As greater numbers of shoppers are acquainted with the residual value of worn garments, the market may further challenge the prevalence of novelty. The more established the second-hand clothing market becomes as a visible presence in Montreal's consumer domain, the higher the degree of alternative power it can exert from within.

While the stigma of pre-worn garments is likely to linger into the twenty-first century, the popularity of the second-hand market shows no signs of abating anytime soon – especially as the nostalgia mode itself carries on with nary a indication of losing its fashionable and revenue-generating steam. Perhaps the only foreseeable downfall of the second-hand trade and its recycling ethic would be in the closing of the gap between retro and the present by an ever-quickening aesthetic of ephemerality, a possibility only half-humourously broached by *The Onion*:

> "Before long," Williams warned, "the National Retro Clock will hit 1992, and we will witness a massive grunge-retro explosion, which will overlap with the late-period, mainstream-pop remnants of the original grunge movement itself. For the

first time in history, a phenomenon and nostalgia for that particular phenomenon will actually meet." (http://www.theonion.com/onion3214/usretro.html)

Notes

[1] Lucie Lavigne, "Les Fripes C'est Chic!" *Elle Québec* Feb. 1992: 78. "Fripe" or "friperie" are the French designations for second-hand store.

[2] This is according to the owner of a now-closed Mont-Royal second-hand shop called "Frip," who mentioned the Copnick Corp. as a major source of his stock.

[3] For example, see Sallie Hofmeister, "Why used jeans mean big bucks," *Globe and Mail*, August 23 1994, p. A10; and Derek Drewry, "Your feet are paved with gold," *Canadian Business*, October 1996, p. 113.

[4] For example, see Karen Tranberg Hansen, "Dealing with Used Clothing: *Salaula* and the Construction of Identity in Zambia's Third Republic," *Public Culture* Vol. 6 (1994), p. 503-523; B. Northgrave, "Used Clothing," *Foreign Trade* Vol. 132, August 16 1969, p. 12-14; Dave Todd, "From rags to riches," Montreal Gazette, November 13 1993, p.B3. Hansen's article is particularly interesting for the ways in which it addresses power issues involved in the sale of worn clothing exported from the West – going beyond the dependency argument to consider the possibilities for self-empowerment made possible through small-scale entrepreneurialism. While no study of the social and political implications of the other forms of international second-hand trade mentioned above can be undertaken here, it would undoubtedly make for a fascinating research topic.

[5] Bilodeau, Serge. Personal interview. 3 July 1998.

[6] "Second-hand stores growing fast as shoppers become more thrifty," *Toronto Star* 1 July 1991: C2; Catherine Élie, "À la friperie avec Jean-Claude Poitras," *Châtelaine* Oct. (1991): 7-13; Margot Gibb-Clarke and Linda Hossie, "Second-hand rose: resale boutiques serve up haute couture at affordable prices," *Globe and Mail* 9 Jan 1992: D1; Lucie Lavigne, "Les Fripes c'est Chic!" *Elle Québec* Feb. 1992: 78-81; "Now they call'em second-hand rows," *Toronto Star* 10 June 1992: A1; Claude Arpin, "Major contributors: The Salvation Army cleans up in springtime," *Montreal Gazette* 28 Mar. 1993: A3; Joyce Carter, "Clothes encounters of the second time," *Globe and Mail* 16 Dec. 1993; "Vintage chic: for hot looks at pin-money prices, shop the secondhand stores," *Chatelaine* Aug. 1994: 77; Judith Comfort, "The Frenchy's Connection: Jeans, men's suits, designer kids' clothes – there's nothing Nova Scotians can't get in their beloved secondhand stores," *Canadian Living* Oct. 1994: 53-55.

[7] Lavigne, "Les Fripes c'est Chic!".

Conclusion
Epilogues

To most effectively sum up what this study has sought to accomplish, it is worth once more emphasizing its difference from scholarly analyses of styles in their own time. With the latter focusing on garments in the full flush of fashion, later post-stylish phases tend to be overlooked in order to consider those newly assuming the limelight. In other words, although fashion is just as manifestly marked by birth as it is by death – with garments appearing before the public eye only to rapidly fade as casualties of the ongoing process of stylistic redefinition – most attention is given to garments' blossoming periods. In this way, fashion comes to be historicized paradigmatically, with items gathered into sets representing the style of a particular time and place without following through to the epilogues succeeding their expiration as novel forms of adornment. Without undermining the usefulness of treatises providing glimpses of times, places, and communities via the most current cuts of people's clothing, the fact remains that these account primarily for moments surrounding garments' initial purchase and wear.

Once garments lose currency as contemporary contexts shift, however, the subsequent meanings they accumulate are less easily accounted for. Indeed, one might argue that pieces passing through second-hand clothing markets make for difficult historical subjects precisely because of their surplus of historicity. With these circuits functioning as repositories for discarded fashions overlaid with unreadable biographies inscribed once a garment leaves the arena of public consumption, they do not lend themselves to tidy analysis. Yet as demonstrated over the course of this study, it is possible to lay hold to a history by considering the second-hand market as a reflecting

surface for greater changes occurring in a given society over time. The analysis of the evolving market in Montreal carried out here has been as much about tracing the flow of used garments since the nineteenth-century as it has been an attempt at illuminating facets of the city's broader history. The intertwining of these two projects highlights the ways in which broad social transformations – be they social, economic, technological, environmental, etc. – directly affect a community at the level of such everyday practices as self-fashioning.

Beginning with the nineteenth-century, we have seen that any business for second-hand clothing that may have existed in Montreal suffered a decline corresponding with several contemporaneous rises: that of industrial technology making possible the production of ready-made clothing; immigrant population levels contributing to heightened rates of unemployment; women's overall visibility in the public sphere as gender roles underwent fundamental change; greater numbers of existing charitable organizations providing clothing, and among which the Montreal Ladies' Benevolent Society was included. While there have yet to be studies published of the Canadian context approaching in depth and detail those of Lemire's and Ginsberg's on the pre- and early industrial second-hand market in Britain, what the confluence of the above-cited factors underscores is that the altered status of second-hand clothing cannot be thought about simply in terms of fashion change. Rather, the shift of the market ought to be seen as a marker of Montreal's induction into the Industrial age; of the city's rise as a major urban centre with its increasingly organized institutions including a developing social safety net; and of the new roles women were carving out for themselves at the turn of the twentieth-century.

The second-hand market maintained its refractive potential into the next century. Following foggy decades spent in the charity circuits and on the covert margins of consumer society, second-hand clothing enjoyed a renaissance of popularity among sartorially expressive youths as well as a wider social and demographic stratum. With respect to the former, their appropriation of subcultural anti-aesthetics like punk and grunge using creatively combined and/or altered mass-produced cast-offs has been conceptualized by the Birmingham School as the outcome of a complex matrix of social conditions specific to the postwar period: i.e. the emergence of youth as a readily identifiable entity; grim views of the future provoking the adoption of a rubbish/poverty aesthetic; a related sense of alienation from dominant cultural institutions encouraging DIY modes of production in fashion and other creative realms; an increasingly developed and organized mass media making possible the diffusion and defusion of styles abroad, etc. To definitively portray how punk and grunge subsequently manifested themselves in Montreal would require a depth of study going well beyond the scope of the present thesis – being better suited to the parameters of a dissertation. However, that which has been set forth here has at least offered a few first steps in thinking about the uses and limits of Birmingham School theory, as well as providing a glimpse of the personalities and procedures running the burgeoning retro shop market in Montreal.

Of course, subcultures had by no means cornered the second-hand market. As became increasingly clear in the 1980s and 1990s, Montreal's market for worn clothing attracted a wider clientele not only by its potential to oppose the dictates of the fashion system, but also for its salvage of sartorial history and its encouragement of a recycling ethic/aesthetic at a point in history when the ramifications of conspicuous consumption

were being more clearly recognized. Changes in the production and marketing of goods occurring in order to maintain an economic system dependent on steady rates of novelty turnover also contributed to the heightened profile of the second-hand market – specifically that of retro shops. As the production of nostalgia became a culture industry staple, past fashions – both authentic and simulated – were seen to emerge as hot commodities. By considering the matter of authenticity not simply in relation to simulated retro but to the second-hand market itself, the significance of this once-denigrated fashion subsystem within contemporary consumer culture is seen as being at once integrated within, yet still alternative to, the regular and rapid rhythm of novelty production.

These histories, both recent and only slightly distant, have been brought together here as points of departure; beginnings to be taken up in order that the epilogues of styles passing through the fashion system may begin to be written. We might even say, in fact, that *epilogue* fails to accurately describe the second-hand phase, with the word implying as it does a terminus following a clearly demarcated beginning and middle. Just as the fashion industry's rhythms have been generally recognized as cyclical – not only in terms of its seasons, but in its periodic resurrections of past styles – so might we similarly conceptualize the system for cast-off clothing. A garment's introduction into the second-hand system may mark the end of its existence as a novelty item, but it also signals a beginning, a new lease on life and style in which it may be taken up again and again in different times and in various spaces. It is a sort of rejuvenation not unlike that experienced by the second-hand market itself since the nineteenth-century. By further

exploring what has been set out here, much more may be gleaned from this most reflective form of rubbish.

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