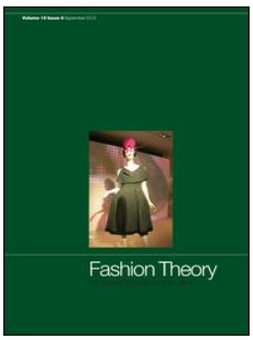

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Dilemmas in African Diaspora Fashion

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Introduction

This article examines the political assertions that are central to where and how the African Diaspora is situated within Western culture. The article will examine how the Diaspora uses fashion objects in social and visual (re)constructions of *self*. A contention is that the relationship between the dominant mainstream culture and the African Diaspora is insecure, encompassing opposing referential territories that are revealed in this article as either real or utopian.

The contemporary African Diaspora consists of the descendants of people who were enslaved and transported from Africa between 1430 and

Queen Victoria's reign. The Atlantic slave trade involved the collusion of African, European and American slave traders. At the cornerstone of slavery was the Black African, whose image had been reconfigured and made racial, a feat perpetrated prior to slavery throughout European and American superstructures.

The enslaved black body was, as Gilroy (1993: 124) reminds us, is "reclaimed from its status as a fetishized commodity." Actions of reclamation have become a visible quest for many members of the Diaspora. Fashion is among other activities that provide methods of self-expression, identity and self-authorship in attempts of reclamation.

According to Papastergiadis (1998: xi), the Diaspora state cannot be seen in classic organicist terms of individuals who like seeds are taken, transported, and replanted elsewhere. The need to move away from the notion of the Diaspora being the result of capitalism is to recognize that the Diaspora state is much more about where groups of displaced individuals are currently situated, rather than how displacement came about. Specifically, the Diaspora is allied to postmodern adaptation and articulation within sociopolitical and geographic venues. The African Diaspora triangle comprised of Kingston, London, and New York illustrates contrasting but mutually reliant fashion cultures. In fact these venues share much: all are English-speaking, all are widely recognized for creativity and innovation, and fashion trends are continually transmitted from one to another venue.

The everyday fashion expressions of the English-speaking African Diaspora offer examples both of dislocation from the mainstream culture and of attempts to regain lost identities through the manufacture of fashion. In this analysis of fashion expression, configurations and material fashion objects that are created and adopted by the African Diaspora are shown to chart the story of how individuals and groups attempt to either comply with or reject fashion as defined by mainstream culture. This article will uncover the motivators for change in Diaspora fashion and will propose a binary model which will further understanding of the Diaspora fashion activity.

Push–Pull Political Dynamics in Cross-cultural Fashion

The relationship between the dominant mainstream culture and subordinate cultures is one of unceasing turbulence. The insecurities that are apparent in this relationship remain a core motivator of subaltern creative practice. As a visual discourse African Diaspora fashion elegantly demonstrates the development of social and psychological issues that the Diaspora comes to terms with by making appearance choices that are distinct but contrary; one type of choice is compliant to the mainstream, the other is a protest against it.

While the relationship between fashion wearers from the Diaspora sites of London, Kingston, and New York provides a platform for aesthetic

interchange, a transferable ideology and accompanying social experience is not always imported with the fashion trends. Fashion expressions are pronounced with uncertainty about their genesis, a situation that offers wearers of the imported trend an opportunity to reinvent and augment trends with enhanced relevance that is appropriate to their habitat and culture.

There is an incomplete and nervous understanding of the mainstream culture by the Diaspora and a similar lack of understanding of Diaspora culture by the mainstream. This general lack of understanding and acceptance has created a situation where creative designers and wearers of Diaspora fashion are only able to be articulate and demonstrate freedom of creativity within their own culture. The limitation of creativity is a feature of subordinate cultures within the mainstream, since creative expression requires the triptych of production, promotion, and positive criticism from the media. Diaspora designers tend to lack this necessary union; consequently a truly world-class African Diaspora fashion designer does not exist. The lack of access to production facilities and to promotional media confines the Diaspora position to being one of under-attainment. The separation between the Diaspora and the mainstream exists on financial, diagnostic, logistical, and ideological levels but not on the level of talent. The Diaspora's separation from the mainstream is illustrated in the mainstream's relentless push to subsume new ideas and the Diaspora's pull back to a near (social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s) or distant past (pre-Atlantic crossing) that is distinguishable but not traceable for most individuals.

The push–pull dynamic causes the Diaspora to produce creative outcomes that are unsettled and profound. Yet the socially progressive contemporary Diaspora is impeded in levels of creativity that originate exclusively from the Diaspora. The production of original fashion expressions and objects within the Diaspora is greatest where deep social difficulties exist and where the exclusion from the mainstream is extreme. In such situations, Diaspora aesthetics exist with vivacity and depth and are upheld by ideological determination. A fashion genealogy (Table 1) has been devised to confirm this and demonstrate how mainstream fashion objects are included in the Diaspora retinue of apparel. The genealogy of Diaspora fashion itself is misunderstood and under-utilized and remains unclaimed by the Diaspora. The Diaspora fashion genealogy is the visual outcome of the limited means of a functioning and influencing (sub)-culture whose importance to the history of fashion is neglected by the mainstream. To some degree, the Diaspora reconfirms this neglect by using fashion to visualize separation from the mainstream. The eminence of Diaspora fashion has been eclipsed by an uncomfortable reluctance to admit a broad and encompassing definition of fashion that includes objects produced and worn by "others." Therefore, any promotion of generalist depictions of fashion that exclude Diaspora fashion are incomplete (re)presentations of society.

Table 1 Objects of African Diaspora Trends

New York

Black Panther style (men): mid-1960s–mid-1970s
Black berets
Black turtleneck sweaters
Black tight pants
Black leather jackets (suit or combat style)
Black mid-length leather coats
Cuban shades
Afro hairstyles

Black Panther style (women): mid-1960s–mid-1970s
Tight hipster pants
Black turtleneck sweaters
Yoruba-style headdress
Hooped earrings
Leather jackets
Afro hairstyles

Afrocentric/Soul Brother: 1970 onwards
Dashiki
Kente-cloth-style waistcoats
Denim jeans (bell-bottomed)
African jewelry
Black Power carved wooden fist
Black is Beautiful and "Free Angela Davis" badges
Kufi
Afro hairstyles

Afrocentric/Soul Sister: 1970 onwards
Dashiki
Mudcloth pants
Harem pants
Denim jeans
Cheesecloth separates
African jewelry
Plaited hair with beads inserted

Hustler: 1970–1976
Leather coats
Waistcoats
Leather suits with flared pants
Shark-skin trousers
Fur coats, midi-length
Exotic print shirts cut loose
Alligator-skin shoes
Baker-boy caps

Wide-brim Fedoras
Gold jewelry
Afro hairstyles

Disco Divas: 1970–1976
Hot pants
Boob tubes
Wigs: plain, dayglo
Skinny-rib sweaters
Platform shoes

Breaker-boys: late 1970s
Knee-length athletic socks
Sherling coats
T-shirts
Corduroy jeans
Acid-washed jeans
Training shoes

Breaker-boys: early 1980s–Mid-1980s
Early phase
Anoraks
T-shirts (often emblazoned with the logo of leading sportswear manufacturers)
Hooded sweatshirts
Bell-bottom jeans (Lee jeans)
Basketball shoes (Pro-Keds, Converse)
White sailors caps (brims worn straight up)

Mid-phase
Leather windbreakers
Leather and denim pants and jacket suits
Leather trousers
Dark-colored leather jackets
Leather waistcoats
Body-warmers
Camouflage pants
Jeans (narrow Calvin Klein)
Sunhat (Kangol)
Pork-pie hats
Sheepskin coats
Sneakers (Nike, Puma)
Golf caps
Cazals (oversized spectacles)
Jheri curled hair
Beat boxes

B-girls/Fly girls: early 1980s
Stretch-fitted jeans
Pantsuits
Denim jeans narrow-cut
Leather wind-breakers
Track pants
Sneakers (Pony)
Heavy gold jewelry
Straightened hair

B-boys: mid- to late 1980s
Baseball caps (worn back to front)
Leather jackets with fake Gucci and other designer insignia
Leather jackets with multicolored appliqué
Tracksuits (Adidas)
Tracksuits (Le Coq Sportif, Robe di Cappa, Tacchini)
Two-toned kagouls (Nike)
Troop jackets
Puma "Gazelles" sneakers
Jeans (cut wide and worn tucked into pants)
Denim jackets and pants
Skiing earmuffs
Adidas "shells" sneakers with oversized "fat" laces (untied)
Dookie ropes and other substantial gold jewelry
Hi-top hair sneakers
Tag belts

B-girls/Fly girls: mid–late 1980s
Leather jackets (often decorated with fake Gucci, Louis Vuitton, and other designer insignia)
Lycra leggings
Stonewashed denim jeans (Sassons)
Lycra body suits
Oversized T-shirts (often emblazoned with black centered insignia)
Harem pants
Calf-length leather boots
Space-boot-styled sneakers (Reebok, British Knights)
Fake Fendi bags
Oversize gold earrings
Bamboo earrings
High–low hair (often worn colored)
Straightened/hair extensions

B-boys (Gangsta): early 1990s
Baseball caps (emblazoned with sports teams and iconoclastic images, X, marijuana leaves)
Plaid flannelette shirt

Oversized T-shirts
Denim jeans (Cross Colors)
Basketball shirts
Hooded sweatshirts
Boxer shorts (worn pulled up with low-slung baggy jeans)
Sweatshirts (FUBU, Polo)
"Triple fat" goose-down jackets (North Face)
Combat boots (Lugz, Catapillar)
Ski-goggles
Fades hairstyles
Flat-top hairstyles
African medallions

Mid-1990s
"Triple fat" goose-down jackets (Polo, Bear)
Multicolored nylon jackets (Tommy Hilfiger)
Jeans (Maurice Malone, Karl Kani)
Sweatshirts (FUBU, Polo)
Hunters' vests
Pull-on wool hats
Tube hats
Skulls
Kufi
Bandannas
Ice-hockey shirts
Backpacks (East Pak)
Combat-styled boots (Timberland)
Tattoos
Bald heads
Dreadlocks
Bleepers and mobile phones

B-girls (Gangsta): 1990s
Pull-on knitted caps
Camouflage pants
"Triple fat" goose-down jackets
Skulls
Hooded sweatshirts
Bandannas
Prison baggy pants
T-shirts (cut oversized)
Bra tops
Midriff tops
Weaves: Patra braids, blondes
Tattoos
False nails

Kingston

Rude Bwoys: 1970s
Arrow shirts
Narrow ties
Trousers (worn very short at "Half mast")
Leather jackets
Bum-freezer jackets with trousers
Bally shoes
Wraparound sunglasses
Face towels (worn over one shoulder)
Berets
Hair worn short

Rude Gyals: 1970s
Pedal-pushers
Blouses
Custom-made dresses
White socks
Wigs
Iron-combed hair straight or beehive
Rastafarians, 1970s onwards
Dashiki
Modified denim jeans
African robes
Toweling armbands (usually in Rastafarian colors)
Jesus sandals
Knitted tams
Dreadlocks

Rastawomen: 1970s onwards
Long skirts
Long dresses (sometimes in African-type fabrics)
Head wraps (concealing dreadlocks)
Jesus sandals

Rude Bwoys: 1980s
Army combat jackets
Tracksuits (usually Adidas)
Brazil football shirts
Small wire-framed sunglasses
Italian suede-fronted sweaters (Gabbicci)
Formal suits
Beaver hats

Rude Gyals: 1980s
Custom-made dresses decorated with fringing, metallic trims, shapes were predominately fitted
Oversized Ghanaian-influenced jewelry

Dancehall/Raggamuffin men: 1990s
Slashed ganzee
String vest
Towels
Trousers featuring simulated motifs of bullet holes and knife slashing
Ewing basketball shirt
Oversized denim trousers (worn with one leg rolled up just below the knee)
Click-styled suits (in plain or African-type fabric, often patchworked)
Shell suits
Heavy cargo jewelry (featuring items from everyday life, guns to the Nike swoosh)
Holsters
Training shoes
Versace sunglasses
Hair worn short with "patterns"

Dancehall/Ghetto Girl/Raggamuffin women: 1990s
Bikinis
Crochet leggings
Crochet dresses
Batty Riders
Transparent all-in-ones
Custom-made dresses featuring: Ric rac trim, S & M embellishments, African influences, children's Victorian-influenced, Sunday church dresses
Cleopatra hair
Blonde toppers (wigs)
Oversized fake (sometime real) gold jewelry
Tattoos

London
Soul Boy: Mid-1970s
Deerstalker hats
Bib and brace jeans
Short Afros
Tweed jackets
Raincoats (Burberry)
Jeans (narrow-cut, usually Fiorucci, Lois)
Harrington jackets
Hooded sweatshirt tops

Early 1980s
Bomber jackets
Mao-collared jackets
Crew-neck sweaters
Collarless shirts
Bandannas
Polo shirts (Fred Perry, Lacoste)

Thin gold chains
Funki Dreds

Early to mid-1980s
Formal fashion suits
3/4-length jackets
Tracksuits
Gold jewelry
Training shoes

Junglist (male): 1993–1997
Jeans (narrow-cut Versace)
Printed shirts (Versace)
Button-down shirts (Moschino)
White training shoes (Nike)
Sweatshirts (Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, DKNY)
Windbreakers (Polo, Tommy Hilfiger, DKNY)
Short plaits often decorated

The Case for Diaspora Fashion

Within the context of postmodernism, Diaspora fashion may be the most complete example of a cross-cultural, multi-variant creative expression. Arguing the case for Diaspora fashion will require a simultaneous discussion of empirical data and political antagonisms while fashion's pure dynamic must also be considered. That elevated dynamic is perplexing, intriguing, and irritating, but also uniquely aesthetic, social, and philosophical (Craik 1994: 40).

Not being under the influence of a controlling, authoritarian and critical media, Diaspora fashion is void of self-criticism, unpredictable and spontaneous. The Diaspora does not foster criticism from within its ranks or from the mainstream; in fact there exists a tyranny which suggests that if work is produced within the noble references of blackness both good and bad work becomes acceptable and well regarded. Diaspora designers who exist within this vortex of quality are not reactionary; rather they are integrated into a visual dynamic that regresses into the safe territory of "exoticism."

Interactions between material objects and human viewpoints provide an opportunity for an evaluation of Diaspora fashion. These interactions provide a methodology that is particularly applicable where single fashion objects are encoded as symbols of unique lifestyle experiences; the cognitive orientations of Diaspora fashion wearers are demonstrative of the variables that affect stylistic conventions that are embodied within the motivation of dressing. Diaspora fashion's position is further situated through the mainstream media and the way it postulates Diaspora fashion

as a youth rather than a subculture. This is despite the fact that many followers of Jamaican Dancehall and New York Hip Hop are not immature and select various mannerisms of fashion as a lifestyle choice. Diaspora fashion acts as an *aide-mémoire* of the black experience and as a coping strategy against the onslaught of out-dated modernist agendas. The Diaspora uses its interrelation with fashion objects to signify the Diaspora's emergent state and as a measure of social well-being. If the fashions of the African Diaspora are to be worthy and beneficial to the Diaspora experience then Diaspora fashion must fulfill all that is expected of the phenomenon.

It should open up a new sensorium; Diaspora fashion should evoke a sense of pride, protection, resistance, and camouflage. The work of the Diaspora designer should be examined against such criteria and not judgments that are bound by processes of production, promotion and positive criticism that are out of the reach of most Diaspora designers.

Ideology and Territory of the Fashion (edited) Diaspora Image

Black fashion and its formation within the Diaspora are defined through two double qualifications; one being of the Diaspora and the Western world and the other of being black and of the Diaspora. The tension between these forms the basis of a social psychological direction that is based upon historical encounters. Both determinations are found in the comments on visual appearance of fashion wearers from the African Diaspora sites of New York, Kingston, and London. For some blacks the double qualification of being of the Diaspora and the mainstream is not necessary. Often attempts are made to articulate an individual expression in only one or the other qualification. Though singular interpretations are rare, discussion of the Diaspora is best understood by exploring the proposition of both qualifications. In urban sites identity is constructed where the black fashion vernacular operates between fashion expressions that are very black, very white or occupy a position midway between the two in a kind of material creolization; this choice reflects a measure of personal and psychological well-being. Individuals are able to decide whether they wish to emphasize blackness or not. Separation from blackness within the Diaspora is analogous to W. E. B. Du Bois's (1903) concept of double consciousness; being both black and of the Diaspora may therefore be more readily negotiable psychologically and then materially than being of the Diaspora and the West.[1] Choices between the two qualifications are based upon contrary histories offering different degrees of freedoms. Individuals who primarily claim to be black connect and entangle an ancient past within their daily fashion performance. Inherent in the experience of African Diaspora culture is a separate yet parallel Euro-American cultural past that is interconnected and influences the

Diaspora. Diaspora institutions have inherited much from Euro-American aesthetics through mimetic behavior and have created metaphors for the establishment of a resistance to the dominant aesthetic.

Pop-music glamour and military costumes within the Diaspora exemplify two opposing convictions based on the one hand upon the emulation of Euro-American beauty and, on the other, the emulation of Euro-American apparel ascriptions of conflict. During the 1960s and 1970s the fashion image of performers who were contracted to the Detroit record company Tamla Motown were seen to invite distinction between female and male attire. Motown, then the world's largest black-owned corporation, had allowed its performers to develop highly stylized mannerisms that utilized the conflicting characteristics of the ghettocentric and the mainstream. All-male singing groups such as the Temptations and the Four Tops portrayed expressions of respectability. The relationship between black fashion and mainstream fashion underwent a series of changes. The wide acceptance of Tamla Motown music and the controlled image of its singers prompted David Morse (1971: 45) to comment that the Detroit Sound was more readily identified with the black bourgeoisie. All-girl groups promoted images of black women that challenged preexisting images of matriarch, maid, cook, and church affiliate; with their beehive hair and glamorous evening apparel they reified the black style artifice into modern cultural production. Due to the hyper-real glamour they portrayed during the 1970s, Motown's black female groups became the first black superstars capable of crossing over to the mainstream market. In some way the appearance of smart, fashionable and at times overdressed personalities inspired the black audience to fulfill the aims of the civil rights movement. These musical groups proclaimed the future where wearing these sorts of apparel expressions would become a lifestyle choice that demonstrates Diaspora membership rather than supposed black credentials.

The iconography of black fashion remains a problem of denoting authenticity and confirming origins, and not committing to a hermetic closure. Black fashion is always open to new trends and modes. Wearing battle costume is a Diaspora-wide tendency best understood in relation to the paramilitary-styled apparel worn by organizations which grew out of the civil rights era. During the 1970s, much Diaspora apparel provided personal affirmations of the civil rights campaign and new expectations in black art, cinema, music, and theater. The collective dreams of many blacks in the 1970s were of combating their oppressors, a theme which has an established foundation within the modern period of the Diaspora. As well as other manifestations, the black liberation struggles of Garveyism and Rastafarianism utilized military dress as a method of crystallizing a sense of solidarity, pride, and common purpose among followers. Photographs of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) showed its members wearing distinctive military uniforms, feather plumes, white gloves, and dress swords. The emblematic use of

military uniform can be traced back to Toussaint L'Ouverture's revolutionaries of the 1798 Santo Domingo uprising, and their parochial and contradictory adoption of colonialist objects, notably French military uniforms (James 1963: 18 and 41). [2]

For the modern-day Rastaman military combat apparel was adopted to depict the role of Rastafarianism ideology opposition to Western ideology. The oppressors (the mainstream ideology) versus the oppressed individual became a constant theme in Rastafarian teaching. In 1932, the Jamaica liberation struggle was given impetus when Rastafarianism began to gain momentum. In defense of black dignity, Rastafarianism presented spiritual, aesthetic, and cultural values as alternatives to the colonial state and the Church. The theme became one of affirming beliefs through a non-violent, non-organized warfare. This meant that the materialism of Rastafarianism, so linked to resistance, gained military uniform such as combat trousers, battle jackets, and berets. These objects, introduced during the 1970s, gave individuals a deeper sense of identity and purpose. They supported the iconic objects and symbols that include Dreadlocks, the Ethiopian flag, the chalice (a smoking implement), and the image of a lion that represents strength and dread. Very few Diaspora designers understand the symbolic importance of Afrocentric fashion objects and the resistance implied in such objects. Those few that do are America's Cross Colors, Woza Cephis-Bushanti House of Fine Art and Jamaica's Ouch!, Biggy Turner, Audrey Gooders and England's David Knight.

The Diaspora image and the black body are partly controlled by the ideologies of the mainstream that place the Diaspora in positions of dissent, and into a near vacuum of continual retreat and diminution (Lewis 1983: 35). Examples of how mainstream fashion's ruling authorities make demands upon black images is clearly seen in the lack of access and limited success the Diaspora has enjoyed in the process of creating, vetting and marketing fashion. Only two out of thirty of the major influential mainstream lifestyle and fashion magazines have Diaspora fashion editorial directors. None of these publications has championed the use of blacks' imagery with the positivism that proclaims an understanding of black fashion presentation, reality, and circumstance.[3] One exception has been the British magazine *i-D* which during the mid-1990s provided a new vision of Africanness, as well as a temporary popularity to models that were African-looking rather than multi-racial-looking. *i-D* influenced *Vibe*, the American multicultural fashion and music magazine, to renew their use and prominence of dark-skinned African women. Then black lifestyle and fashion magazines such as *Essence* and *Pride* began to use and celebrate models such as Alex Wek (from the Dinka people in southern Sudan). Before *i-D*'s incursion, black magazines did not conceive or even speculate that unhewn Africanness could be fashionable.[4] The challenge for aspirational fashion producers has not been about the inclusion of the various races into their domains, it has been more concerned with effecting and maintaining the appearance of an unobtainable or restricted

image; as such these images are usually linked to the attainment of wealth. The wearer's ability to pay is critical, as is social class. Distinctions of class are especially important in promotions of fashion. Fashion advertising provides the occasion for consumers to make comparisons of gender, race, and class. Gender and race, being "objective," are less prominently featured than class, which affects the individual's capacity for expeditious transformation from one to another position. It is a feature of capitalism that mobility through the class system is possible and ascending movements are promoted as being desirable.

Preeminent fashion companies whose marketing of fashion trends includes this implicit use of class also sometimes employed images and expressions that reverse presumptions of capitalism such as "Grunge," "Heroin Chic" and the "White-Trash" Trailer Park aesthetic. This does set up a paradox. Only those with large amounts of disposable income are able to access these types of fashions in the way designers originally intended and in the way major magazines have prescribed. These fashion expressions are accessed from the comfort of privilege and a knowing that torn, faded, badly sized apparel can be worn for an occasion but the individual has the means to replace this expression with another perhaps more obviously aspirational one. Furthermore, owning the "correct" label negates any misapprehension about the subject being badly dressed or ill conceived. Class and financial status relate not only to the maximization of profits but also ensure that the image is being controlled.

In North America, fashion companies have become thoroughly assimilated into American culture, whereas the opposite is true in England. Until the mid- to late-1980s British fashion companies did not have the status or influence of America's big four fashion companies. The most successful American fashion companies, Calvin Klein, Tommy Hilfiger, Ralph Lauren, and Donna Karan, did not design their advertising strategy to be inclusive. However, an exception is made in street- and sportswear. Both Ralph Lauren and Tommy Hilfiger have been keen to use the genre of photographic tableaux to demonstrate harmonious multicultural scenes where associations between models are shown as cordial. The character of Diaspora fashion expression is seen in the mainstream as a street event represented by grandiose gestures and fascinating apparel. In this way, black distinctiveness becomes suppressed, arbitrary, and ultimately incomplete. This is predicated by the dominant culture's ideology that assigns black images to be judged in an atmosphere of postcolonial guilt and unsettled conflicts. The politics of the dominant orthodoxy does not allow anything near to a preferential or even equitable treatment of the black image.[5] An example of this is the repeated claim that commercial success would suffer if black models were featured on the front covers of fashion magazines, a claim that is somewhat illustrated in a review of magazines that have used black fashion models and are found to have ignored the rationality, topography and social accomplishments of the Diaspora

individual as represented by the fashion model. It is perhaps more befitting to imagine the Diaspora position as being elastic in movement and organic in growth, firmly anchored away from the experiences and determinants of the mainstream. Diaspora fashion does have the capacity to be temporarily attached to the images and traditions of the mainstream where fashion controllers are very adept in suppressing Diaspora connections. This is an analogy to Edward Said's (1993: 357–66) ideas about the legacy of colonial powers and the way their building pattern of dominions and possessions has provided for the globalization that many have become anxious about. Similarly, the temporary and occasional use of blacks in mainstream fashion has opened the way for black creators to make their own statements. In taking advantage of these routes, the black creator does not find the same or similar outcomes. Black fashion designers who attempt to achieve recognition in the mainstream have never been successful. Commercial failure in the mainstream system does not appear to occur at the conceptual, design or manufacture stages of apparel development. Instead difficulties occur in the stages where marketing and promotion take place. The existing structures of the fashion system are found to be so incompatible with Diaspora fashion creators that in terms of both number and type, Diaspora fashion creators found acceptable and promoted within the mainstream are disconcertingly rare.

The Black Designer's Dilemma

Successful mainstream fashion designers tend to conform to a very narrowly defined stereotype. Because mainstream fashion promotion media expect that type, they tend not to promote designers who do not conform to it. Most often mainstream designers who have gained widespread recognition do so because they possess the prerequisite qualifications of being talented, male and gay. Black designers who possess these prerequisites have been able in some cases to coexist within the mainstream. Designers like Stephen Burrows and Scott Barrie both won acclaim as producers of mainstream fashion. During the 1970s Burrows even launched a perfume called *stevie B* which became internationally accepted, yet neither designer had been able to sustain profiles of the type which led to genuine fame and success, either within the mainstream, or in the wider Diaspora.

Despite being black and American, Burrows was treated primarily as being American especially when he showed his work away from America. The now famous mid-1970s runway competition between mainstream American and French designers at the Porte de Versailles was won in part by Burrows, yet he remained a successful "exotic" designer, whose collections failed to be fully recognized in the mainstream which did not embrace his African aesthetic sensibilities. Unlike Burrows, fellow African-American designer Willi Smith did find wide and lasting commercial

success with his moderately priced collections. Although Smith's promotional approach had been to position the company as a commercial but innovative brand for the mainstream, Smith remains important for being the first black designer to pioneer affordable designer menswear. Smith was also revolutionary in directing collaborations with the mainstream. He commissioned David Hockney, Jim Dine and other artists to produce limited-edition T-shirts. Smith became the best known African-American designer to work with the home dressmaker pattern company Butterick. The relationship endorsed Smith as a "bread-and-butter" designer capable of making fashions that were popular. There is a clear contrast between the collections by Burrows and Smith in terms of price. Perhaps one of Burrows's failings was that he attempted to create fashion which demonstrated the residues of an African tradition, when the market really wanted a reflection of African-American tradition. Burrows's collections were paradoxically of the moment, though his ideas had more popularity with the mainstream when explored by mainstream designers. Georgio di Sant' Angelo was one such designer who created collections which were influenced by Western notions of native Indian and African costume. Though I do not wish to compare or contrast the aesthetic merits of Sant' Angelo and Burrows, any reading of fashion history shows an incomplete, unequal treatment of Stephen Burrows, Scott Barrie, and Willi Smith. The collective accomplishments of Burrows, Smith, and Barrie are structurally confined to the peculiarity of apparel designed by black men. These three designers have had marginal acceptance into the mainstream, confirmed by a few appearances in American *Vogue* and other fashion establishment magazines.

The question of what territory the black designer occupies remains troublesome. At the opening of Lois Alexander's Harlem Black Fashion Museum, the *Christian Science Monitor* (Friday, 17 November, 1972) reported that all three of these designers were "conspicuously and ambiguously absent." This event reveals the anxieties of the designers who straddle the divide of race and aesthetic that is suitable for inclusion within the mainstream agenda. The challenge is one of context and consciousness, and sorting out some flexibility in both positions. The idea that Diaspora designers might produce fashions that are fully commensurate to mainstream fashion in creativity, production and promotion is undermined because of the structure of the fashion system. Fashion does go hand in hand with power. Both mainstream and subsectional fashion have become part of the social consciousness that subscribes to the idea of fashion becoming the foremost visual delineator of social, economic and political truths (Kennedy 1993: 192–5). In societies of today the concept and activity of fashion has attained a significance which is not replicated in other material possessions. Fashion provides wearers and creators with the opportunity to reinvent and remodel quite specific elements of identity.

Hard and Soft Political Expressions

Since the 1950s the Diaspora has used fashion as a protest tool. Fashion has developed to determine both the local and the wider formations of identity in contrast to the well-defined and permanent construction of the dominant culture. Diaspora fashion represents a wide array of bodily objects, supplements and modifications. Each is carefully selected, mannered, and monitored by Diaspora wearers to the extent that political expressions are then formed to satisfy particular social needs. As a political entity, Diaspora fashion is usually represented by apparel and bodily objects that are symbolic of the protracted race struggle. The discourse is broadened by a need for urban blacks to reenact the established aesthetic nuances of historical and geographic contexts. This includes the use of hairstyles, jewelry, fabrics and apparel items, all of which are given renewed emphasis when modified in the context of the Diaspora. Diaspora fashion always represents the current level of unease that Diaspora individuals are experiencing. Depicted in Diaspora fashion is the need to express the black image as a collection of diverse metaphors. Even though occasional forays are made toward the dominant center, fashion development is conflicting; some wearers and designers claim to be representative of the center. But, no matter where black fashion is found there are beliefs and behaviors which distinguish Diaspora fashion from the mainstream. The expressive Diaspora fashion object is continually linked to a search for identity signified through renewal and innovation and in metaphors of space and history, sociological and cultural referencing. Examples of wearer diversity range from the expressions of successful businesspersons to the unemployed youth. Opportunities for inversion are clearly exploited when Diaspora fashion is included as a worthy form within cultural production. Though rare, the idea of inclusiveness is given a place within mainstream creative productions through focusing upon everyday American, English, or Jamaican life. Examples are grounded in the sociopolitical attitudes that became a by-product of the Radical Chic stylizations of the 1970s. Radical Chic provided a visual narration of the political intensity of the time, and provided individuals who operated at the sharp end of the black American Civil Rights Movement with a tangible costume for the impending drama. There were many manifestations of the expression Radical Chic; a term coined by Tom Wolfe in his 1971 novel *Radical Chic & Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers*. One of the most interesting examples of what happened to Radical Chic was expressed in the conception of the "revolutionary suit." The revolutionary suit and in particular the Bandolier look was popularized by young women who sought to proclaim their status by using cartridge belts complete with mock bullets over combat-type apparel items. This configuration was popular with its nuances of black clothes on black body, combat boots, beret, and leather jackets. The importance of the Bandolier was evidenced in the echoing of the get-a-gun philosophy which allegedly had been proffered by the

Black revolutionary groups. At the heart of the expression are women who accepted and promoted the Bandolier look as a fashion trend and did so with full knowledge of the originating context. These objects are charged with the agitated militancy that had continually been referenced in the 1960s and early 1970s revolutionary period in America. This configuration exemplifies the serious intent which underpinned the revolution to the extent that it becomes a simulation of bearing arms. The Bandolier has a unique ability to affect the look of other banal items it is worn with. In particular non-Bandolier apparel items become contaminated by the symbolism of the Bandolier. This group of wearers emerges as one placed between hardcore political activists and the whites who have adopted the expression as a fashion. White American fashion entrepreneurs, Francine Farkas and Karen Ross (*Jet* 1971: 42–6) recreated the Bandolier belt. The couple did not want to align their version of the belt with the black trend. Ross claimed that her belt was a reinterpretation of a belt she had bought in a London menswear store. This claim does not give credence to a pluralist approach, based on the rights of disenfranchised peoples in this example (blacks and women) to act as equals to the controllers of society. Adoption of the Bandolier expression plainly reflected the black political concerns of 1970s. It allowed mainstream womenswear fashion designers to create assemblages which were conceived in black protest, and then extended the discourse into the mainstream. Without much introspection, versions of the belt were introduced into the wider mainstream. At times, the Bandolier belt developed a subliminal nature. The currency of the object went beyond that of the originators whose standard berets, combat boots, and leather jackets were replaced by upmarket branded items. Bandolier belts were priced out of the reach of many blacks who may have aspired to this expression in the context of protest rather than of fashion. By contrast Diaspora designers Scott Barrie, Willi Smith, Hylan Booker and latterly Patrick Kelly aimed their collections firmly at an inclusive marketplace.

In the 1980s Kelly succeeded Stephen Burrows as the most noteworthy black designer to *cross over* to a wider, more mainstream inclusive profile. Kelly's aesthetic was committed to diachronic continuity; he successfully connected the formulaic practice of Western fashion to the esoteric nature of an African aesthetic. Kelly's work is a comprehensive and searching account of formal Diaspora fashion creativity. His well-rehearsed motifs such as the decorations of hearts, pearls, brass buttons, and pool balls were in keeping with the idea of embellishment that occurs as a motif in the work of many other Diaspora designers. Kelly carved a unique space for himself, not least because of his comprehension of the potentially problematic juxtaposition between the Diaspora and dominant aesthetics. His designs were simple but overdecorated constructions, conjuring up an impression of overdressing which is popular in many sections of the Diaspora. Regardless of how Kelly grooms these objects, the result is of a controlling aesthetic that is African. In Kelly's marketing, there is a

detectable attempt to placate the mainstream market apprehensions by using motifs such as the golliwog, which appeared on labels, garments, and advertising.

Using a cartoonesque illustration of a golliwog as his corporate motif, Kelly had been able to attempt his brand of blackness in an ambiguous strategy designed to ease the anxieties of the potential mainstream wearer. However, the absurdity of expropriating an image that summons up a racial stereotype and racism is not defused by placing this image in the construct of marketing fashion. From a mainstream perspective, Kelly's self-deprecating honesty about his race and rare position in the fashion industry is, I believe, similar to that of the black minstrel from the nineteenth-century caricatures by caricaturists Edward Clay, David Claypole Johnston and James Thackera. In the period after the abolition of slavery, the work of these artists fostered themes of interracial relationships. This did much to propagate fears among the white population that black integration and miscegenation might become intractable problems. Kelly's reappropriation of the golliwog image became both a source of alarm and a reminder to his customers (both black and white) that the issue of race and the origin of African-Americans had become a permanent fixture in his collections. Kelly, like other Diaspora designers, has a commitment to a dual aesthetic which is framed by the Diaspora aesthetic and further nuanced by a need to present a European standard. As the first black designer to be granted the honor of officially showing in Paris Fashion Week, Kelly seemed to understand that he had to work between the great narratives of classic Parisian couture and postmodernity.

This mix brought Kelly's work to the center of the mainstream marketplace, while retaining the enigmatic qualities of Diaspora fashion. The uniqueness of this accomplishment appears to understate the use of black fashion as an innovative attitude. Further, this use of the Diaspora aesthetic is curious; it incorporates the dissipation of self-respect and submits to an acceptance of oppression. Secondly, black culture is only acceptable in the mainstream when it is concomitant with common mainstream design characteristics. Signified in the ability of the designer's work to aid blacks in their quest to move beyond the visual assimilations of the lower class, Kelly's work became relevant to the black middle classes even though it featured the gaudiness of the Jamaican Dancehall and *Ebony* magazine's Afro kitsch Fashion Fair fashion shows. This design resonance allowed blacks to gain an unprecedented position within the mainstream. The currency of Patrick Kelly is found in his ability to recontextualize the schema of the periphery and provide a clear route to the center of culture. Kelly opened up the notion of freedom within black cultural work. This later encouraged and enabled blacks to present themselves with a commitment to postmodernity. Where Kelly's presentation succeeds, it is as plastic representation. It is artificial because Kelly traded upon Diaspora traditions of the modern age and was consummate in his regard for African design in its randomness and organic nature.

These elements are replaced with a solution based on the formation of fashion which owes much more to being of the center. In effect Kelly reinvents references to marginality.

Other designers have sought similar positions in working as subordinates in mainstream culture. Kelly's demonstration of an astute mixing of discourses and fragments of Diaspora philosophies becomes a tangible three-dimensional concept which has a commercial significance. An attempt is made to place the mere motif of black fashion or elements of black fashion outside the constraints of an established political agenda. Kelly must be viewed as a renegade who made significant inroads to the center while maintaining a sense of historical rhetoric and self-discovery bound in a proud boast of an African aesthetic. Ultimately Kelly himself became the political event enabling black designers such as France's Laminé Badiane Kouyabe, America's André Walker, Epperson, and Lawrence Steele and England's Oswald Boateng to practice and become profiled within the mainstream. Due to his aesthetic signature Patrick Kelly existed as the most successful Diaspora fashion designer, while Stephen Burrows endowed the idea of the black creator of fashion as a facilitator of change and the popularizer of strategies of alliance. Contrasts of these two examples do much to outline the ranging dispersal of the black political event. The contrast uncovers stark differences between fashion that is embedded on the periphery, and fashion found in intermediate mainstream positions.

Fashion Activity in Real and Utopian Worlds

Diaspora fashion exists in two very distinct yet dependent worlds. Each offers a basis for individuals to plan, prepare, and try chosen configurations. The study of real and utopian worlds challenges the hypothesis that Diaspora fashion actually exists. In an analysis of the two opposing worlds, there are a number of questions concerning the dichotomous tendencies of wearers. Real and utopian worlds are interrelated and interchangeable; in fact they are symbiotic. Yet this intimate relationship often results in a blurred and misinterpreted reception, not least by the wearers themselves. For evidence of this contrast, the following analysis is divided into three subsections.

Utopian Worlds

Frames of reference are paradoxical in their range of possibilities. In this utopian world, wearers can explore apparel repertoires and scenarios that possess a high quotient of escapism and which can be seen as offering a dramatic escape from the wearer's present situation. These range from objects that are unconventional to those that are resolutely based on fantasy. This utopianism is fueled by manufactured settings such as film, sport, and music, which all perform crucial functions in exemplifying improvements in prestige, status, and opportunity.

Psychologically based theories such as those dealing with socialization and appearance offered by Mead (1934), Stone (1962) and McCracken (1990) claim that a principal function of apparel is to provide wearers with opportunities to establish themselves through committing to a recognizable difference, and therefore obtaining an advantage over other wearers. Wearers in the setting of social events contextualize the importance that individuals place upon apparel configurations; such is the importance of these events that the collective or community memory becomes the repository of objects that signify exact places, times, and crucial happenings. Fashion configurations with characteristics that demonstrate a reliving of past expressions are exemplified in Table 1. An example is the sober clerical spectacles popularized by Malcolm X during the latter part of his life and repopularized in Spike Lee's 1991 movie *Malcolm X* which prompted spectacle manufacturers to market Malcolm X spectacles to the mainstream marketplace. Black adopters such as those who wear fashion objects that are linked to the past are keen to involve themselves in a kind of instant satisfaction, a positive connectivity to the encounters of past traditions. Objects such as head wraps, neck ties made from "African" fabrics (kente or batik), and belts constructed in Rastafarian colors, tie-dyed cheesecloth shirts, and cut-work apparel objects, all express a time and a place which represents the uniqueness of the Diaspora experience. The expediencies of recent Diaspora revolts and uprisings are fundamental to the continuity of socialization because the originating context is collectively stored in the object for as long as the social collective is able to invoke the original events. In adopting objects of the past, present-day Diaspora individuals are able to reuse the objects from real-world experiences in their synthesized world as a means to develop cathartic and self-expressive perspectives.

In recreating such significance, wearers use broad utopian world scenarios to engage in what Kaiser (1985: 161–2) calls "fantastic socialization". Fantastic socialization is usually applied to children and their creative experimentations exemplified in the activity of dressing-up. When applied to adults in the Diaspora, individual fantastic socialization differs from the type experienced by children in their search for identity. The Diaspora assumes ownership of the apparel expressions of popular music, sports personalities as well as political leaders, and black religious groups. Here the aim of the wearer is to draw upon such fantastic apparel objects and to reconfigure them into creative concepts that may anticipate trends. The management of such configurations involves hesitations and characterizations that authenticate an alliance between real and utopian worlds. Utopian concerns are continually distilled as sentimental memories; images of the past become innovative tools, which only partially contribute to the apparel image of the present.

Utopian Dreaming

The continuing emergence of the Diaspora is a result of various stimuli for boundless imaginative interpretation. In particular, films provide

exemplars to ways for being, so that key segments from Euro-American films have become influential in the composition of the Diaspora's visual narrative. Key film segments contribute stability to the progression of fashion trends. The normative state of Diaspora fashion is undisciplined and unpredictable, with no conventional pattern for change though film and music do provide a barometer. Wearers are able to assess their intended roles with regard to the example offered by cinema. The level of unreality varies and is dependent upon the type of film, the disposition of its players, and when the film is viewed. During the 1990s films enabled blacks in the wider Diaspora to externalize references to roles which for many had previously only existed as an unobtainable concept. Recent social improvements have suggested a new form of access into mainstream society.

Such roles of the black body and apparel configurations are new and unfamiliar. While these are desirable they are also part of a reformist maneuver to recast the black male away from what bell hooks (1994: 109–13) calls bodies out of control, misogynistic, rapist, in the mold of, but different to their colonizers. In addition, the black female has reconstructed her purpose, no longer confined to the monoscopic abstractions of victim and nurturer; she now has control of her sexual and intellectual body.

There is a purposeful campaign by black males and females expressing claims of affirmation. The movie characterization has potential to induce simulation and demonstrate ways of acting. In *Set It Off* (1996), Blair Underwood has a cameo role as a banker with stoic views on his life and career. As a Harvard business graduate, he expects to attain a high level of success. His apparel configuration offers an underpinning of his social position and reflects his status. As a young successful conservative professional, Underwood performs several roles. The narrative is about freedom, gentlemanly dignity, and a relaxed loyalty. Underwood's role also demonstrates how the American black middle classes construct apparel repertoires that are subtly textured in between the black agenda and that of the mainstream. Character roles shown on film are by definition extremely limited, yet even the minimal glimpses of apparel in film do offer aspects of modification, which will extend and transform Diaspora fashion from a myth into a transverse reality. The women in *Set It Off* (1996) seek to empower themselves by breaking free of conventional contexts such as bank workers, office cleaners, and single parents who are confined by their ghetto existences. Taking charge of their situation means using phallocentric behavior that is illustrated by robbing banks and using a pastiche of womanhood. Their clothes are purposeful, mainly jeans, sweatshirts and zip-fronted jackets, and long-haired wigs. The use of these fashion items requires an acute understanding of deviations of maleness and femaleness; femininity is replaced with a masculinized femininity, the need to look like a woman, a different woman is appropriated as a disguise.

The breakthrough of the 1970s Blaxploitation genre came through the attempt to reform the usually subservient exotic individual into a new norm, or beyond to a narrative expression. The treatment of blacks in post-1970s films extended these new roles and the apparel configurations which supported and confirmed them. In the 1970s, film became noteworthy because it began to explore the Gangsta and Pimp culture phenomenon in American society. Blaxploitation contradicts the unreality of pre-1970s film that focused upon a scaled-up microcosm of mammies, toms, butlers, and bucks. For wearers, the ability to maintain and control the way they look and act is underscored in the popularity of films such as *Boyz 'n' the Hood* (1991), *House Party* (1991), *New Jack City* (1991), and *Jungle Fever* (1991). All of these films offered composite characters whose artificiality in the situations they existed in epitomized the new opportunities for subversion. Not only do these films resonate with the real world, they also adapt and elaborate it, until the discourse becomes one where stories of black leadership and accomplishment provide new fashions expressions. The development of realism in 1990s films allowed black men to exhibit emphatic displays of masculinity, leadership, depth and complexity.

The main female roles did not develop similarly; female characterizations have generally remained confined to being supporting roles demonstrating the virtues of beauty and have not fully built on the iconic heroine roles portrayed by Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson. During the 1970s these two actresses developed roles that were equal to the models of male Blaxploitation; by the 1990s the female role had reverted back into that of nurturing exemplified by Phylicia Rashad as the wife, mother, and doctor in *The Cosby Show* or the parental misery of Tyra Ferrell's Mrs. Baker in *Boyz 'n' the Hood*. Images of consummate glamour have largely been abandoned by Hollywood. Instead, the role of glamour as a fascination of itself has been portrayed in the 1997 Jamaican production *Dancehall Queen* (1997) and *Babymother* (1999), an English rags-to-riches adventure. In both these presentations the lead characters are objectified through ridiculous though dramatic apparel expressions that are somewhat removed from the reality of the everyday. These fanciful apparel expressions are transmutations of those which have been tried, tested, and developed in the dancehalls of Kingston, London, and New York.

My contention is that wearers are empowered through their use of images taken from film characters and in many cases film roles are developed after expressions in the Diaspora have occurred, however infrequently. The inauthenticity of film-referenced apparel items evokes creative expressions that extend far beyond the prescribed demand of Diaspora culture. These objects are adopted within the mainstream and take on the guise of being radical, but the eventual effect is a neutralization of any expression not configured as being so.

As Baudrillard (1983: 15–48) reminds us, mass groups do not constitute a passive receiving structure for media messages, regardless of

whether they are political or from mass media. The ability to intercept and transpose codes is the basis for responses that are less confident versions of utopian dreaming.

Real Worlds

The real world expedition into the possibilities of Diaspora fashion commences with the destruction of the black image that has become commodified due to the dilution of black fashion into popular culture. This has created an activity that not only enabled, but also determined fashion's cultivation and maintenance. An example of the loss of black image and moves towards replacing or recontextualizing the image is offered in comments made by a London-based Rastafarian after attending the 1975 Bob Marley and the Wailers concert at London's Hammersmith Odeon. When asked about the concert he replied, "There was nothing there for me." This comment speaks of the absence of any new verbal or visual information. As a Rastafarian based in London he expected a concert featuring very high-profile Rastafarians from the heartland of Jamaica to have been more engaging. Rastafarian wisdom had not been offered during the concert, yet the idiom of Rastafarian music has the potential to offer much more than words and music. In failing to refresh his concept of Rastafarianism this English Rasta has found Rastafarianism surrendering to the supremacy of popular culture. The outcome of this engagement with the mainstream is the pluralist approach that fashion manufacturers incorporate into the design and production of clothing for the Diaspora market. The theme of Rastafarianism became popularized to the extent that the Rastafarian aesthetic is recontextualized even into children's wear. In subsequent years European design companies Complice, Jean Paul Gaultier, and Rifat Ozbek used the Rastafarian motifs in what the fashion press had pretentiously called "international ethno-chic." However such demonstrations of pluralism do not necessarily signify a willful acceptance of "others." Subcultural history in England has shown how group adoption of musical and fashion expressions does not necessarily denote an acceptance of the accompanying ideology or racial standpoint of those offering the expressions. When Skinheads and Aggro-boys of the 1970s adopted the Jamaican Rude Bwoy expressions of dress and blue beat music, any goodwill that existed between the two groupings quickly dissipated. Diaspora objects are fashionable because they are self-images of people who exist in an unenviable position. Since the 1950s and the birth of rock and roll, "whiteniggerhood" has become the preferred position for cutting-edge white youth culture. In the later 1970s the Skinhead expression became inextricably connected to working-class conservatism and various far-right political groups. As a consequence, the English Rude Bwoys and their singular visual crossover fashion lost approval in the black community and was replaced with Rastafarianism which represented a culturally and racially secure sanctuary.

New Agendas Applied

Two protagonists stand alone in their reticence to define the apparel and bodily modifications worn by black political groups as fashion: Angela Davis, the 1970s Black Panther revolutionary, and Kwame Brathwaite, founder of the 1960s Harlem-based Grandassa Movement. Through questioning the moral relevance of black nationhood as a fashion concept both Brathwaite and Davis have created new agendas. Angela Davis's assertion that the pro-revolutionary apparel and bodily expressions of the 1970s should not be construed as fashion underestimates the importance and definition of African Diaspora fashion. Apparel and bodily constructs become important schemes of protest against the failings in mainstream attitudes and ineffective social collusions between black and white people. Brathwaite (1994: 4) and Davis (1994: 37–45) provide a problematic break in the cause of Diaspora fashion. They deny the existence of a black fashion based on revolutionary imagery. Yet protest is also a continual marker of what constitutes apparel trends in the Diaspora. It is not that Diaspora protest is not important, rather it is that apparel objects are representative of the allegories of resistance, and across the Diaspora new meanings of protest are created. There is now greater resonance in the reuse of the Afro, the Dashiki, kente cloth, and the black leather jacket outside of the context of initial protest. Going far beyond the initial articulations of political empowerment, these objects are continually muted through adoption by the mainstream or are greatly marginalized by agencies of authority that are found in all of the venues that use an individual's appearance to make judgments of group membership and potential behavior. The incentive for black youths to confirm the patina of self-determination through their apparel configurations is relative to their inability to influence the dominant establishment view which itself is very cognizant of the supporting ideologies of past fashions.

Summary

Mainstream restraint and control leans toward the Hegelian master–slave dialectic. Said's (1993) thesis reminds us that the master [read modernist mainstream] controls the dialectic. So any recovery of the Diaspora self must come through a form already established by the mainstream. The protest which fuels the Diaspora's varying and numerous fashion expressions continues to be inadequate for people whose image is often misread, misrepresented, and treated as a style trend, an intermission which leads to yet another style trend. Exclusion is not dealt with through the control of social structures; it is, however, dealt with in elaboration of representation through control and ownership of fashion image. Information received by the commercial audience is determined and transformed as assumptions about black aesthetic values are made. As Diaspora fashion

images become popularized through their use in the mainstream media, the reasons for initial protest are compromised if not neutralized. Indeed the political event is determined by the placement of the black Diaspora image as part of a capitalist function that is read differently by black and white audiences. The functions of images vary from patronizing to being inclusive and heroic. In debates about political events, fashion apparel remains central to the political agenda and argument. It is important to note that the Diaspora fashion image fails to demonstrate the rise of the black individual as autonomous, but instead characterizes a fetishistic protest that is always an extreme and polarized concept. Ultimately, the success of any fashion trend relies upon mass adoption and confident self-interpretation made by individual wearers and not the dictates of the mainstream.

Conclusion: Diaspora Fashion Binaries

To conclude, I propose the binary propositions in Table 2 as useful devices for the understanding of Diaspora fashion development.

Table 2 Diaspora Fashion Binaries

Economic Poverty/Wealth	=	Cultural movement
Political/Ghetto/Mainstream	=	New Aesthetic
Representational Real or Imaginary	=	Process Techniques

Utopian and real worlds exist simultaneously; their interaction is relevant to the total picture of Diaspora fashion authenticity. A link emerges between freedom of the wearer and the representation of black images processed through major fashion organizations. This results in fashions that are fixed in the Diaspora. The economic relations between poverty and acquired wealth are rephrased both by consumers and by unofficial designers into ways of breaching their peripheral position. As a consequence Jamaican, English, and American ghetto cultures celebrate the idea of opposing mainstream aesthetics by uniting them into the colloquial term "Ghetto Fabulous" which is the mixing of ghetto and luxury fashion items. Fashion's new guise is a monolith, connecting the Diaspora and the commercial mainstream. At its core, this formation of black Diaspora fashion still contains the vestiges of utopian musings, thoughts and imaginations of the forever-lost past. Fashion introduces the idea that purity and originality are not protected, or exclusive, especially in a situation where the Diaspora does not have anything approaching parity

in the formal production of fashion. Every determination of fashion attitude is effected through control. However, a lack of control or involvement in education, design, manufacture, and retail has limited the effects of the black fashion experience and ultimately its representation in the wider society.

Notes

1. W. E. B. Du Bois writes in Chapter 1 of *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903: 9): "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."
2. In *The Black Jacobins* (1963) C. L. R. James comments that Haitian mulattoes were forbidden to wear swords and sabers and European dress while "Haitians" (who were not exclusively black) chose to distance themselves from all things European. They sang "Eh! Eh! Bamba Heu! Heu! Canga, moune de le! Canga, doki la Canga li!" When translated this means, "We swear to destroy all whites and all that they possess, let us die rather than fail to keep this vow."
3. Titles reviewed include French, British and American *Vogue* and *Elle*, *Spoon*, *Frank*, *Interview*, *Sleazenation*, *FHM*, *Visionnaire*, *Tank*, *Purple*, *Detour*, *L'uomo* and *Homme Vogue*, *Arena*, *Arena Homme*, *Tatler*, *Wallpaper*, *Tatler*, *The Face*, *i-D*, *Nylon*, *Surface*, *Bazaar*, *Dazed and Confused*, and *W*.
4. During the 1940s Dorothea Towles Church became the first black fashion model to gain international recognition; see Alexander (1982: 40). Naomi Sims was the second, and she was the first to be featured in mass-circulation mainstream publications (*Ladies Home* in 1968 and *Life* in 1969), although it was Beverley Johnson who became the first black model to appear on the front cover of American *Vogue* in 1974.
5. Naomi Campbell remonstrated that she was dropped from the cover of American *Vogue* in 1996 because the American public was not ready for a black cover girl. "This business is about selling—and blonde and blue-eyed girls are what sells," said Campbell. Since then former models Iman and Bethann Hardison have fervently criticized the fashion industry for inequalities based upon race.

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