

4. Influence on Mainstream Style and Communication Industries

LOOK CASUAL AND BE IRONIC

The sell-out is less a betrayal of hip legacy, more a natural outcome. As MTV began to reign supreme in corporate cool, its position in the UK market was cemented; it was no longer an outcast. But in terms of hip's crossover, we need to look beyond the music charts. The greatest role that MTV played was as chasm translator between subcultures and mainstream business. The real impact was the ideological shift from rock's ideology of authenticity into another form of elitism expressed through irony. MTV opened up opportunities for the dance, hip hop and indie cultures, but each had its life outside MTV. There were, of course, other chasm translators contributing to their crossover and, ultimately, the displacement of rock's hegemony. This influence would not just be felt in the music industry but more generally in the way subcultural idioms translated into the mainstream style and communication industries.

By 1994, rap was among the greatest trading commodities, and hip hop would turn into a global lifestyle enterprise. Being an intrinsically entrepreneurial subculture, dormitory-room hustlers or small-time dealers from the 'hood would go on to become proper businessmen. Russell Simmons, one of the founders of Def Jam recordings (with Rick Rubin) whose signings included iconic acts like Public Enemy and the Beastie Boys, would branch into fashion in 1992. The label Phat Farm, from the hip hop jargon for 'hot' (as in looking good), was launched as hip hop style for the masses. In 1999, a worldwide licensing agreement was signed to exploit the brand to the maximum. Def Jam itself was sold off to majors, through a series of stake purchases of the company until a complete takeover occurred. Diversification became the norm. Examples ranged from Roc-A-Fella Records launching Rocawear Fashion, through to hip hop outfits such as Wu Tang Clan producing records *and* clothing lines. Similarly, dance culture would exert its influence on the mainstream music industry as well as on style, with a series of clothing labels reflecting what ravers were wearing. Like hip hop, this was another casual style, giving rise to the mainstream look dubbed 'combat' (sported by pop bands such as All Saints).

What is important to stress is that the categories of music genres were a means of commercialising the music, but that these divisions were somewhat

artificial. The 1990s was the era when eclecticism took centre stage. A seminal...