Chapter 8
Cultural Juxtaposition
and Stylistic Fertilisation

"Culture does not merely transmit but interprets and transforms that which it communicates."
Gerard Delanty[1]

"Prod any happy person and you will find a project."
Richard Layard[2]

Grounding QTC in a model of the present requires a departure from the assumption of universally identical metapreferences. Proceeding from this reference case, people differ in the weighting of the two determinants in objective function (13). While some have a strong preference for individuality within the elective affinity (formula [1]), others have a strong preference for social distance of their elective affinity to the social whole (formula [8]). Individuals with a strong preference for social distance will then gather in elective affinities, where the distance from the social whole is broad, and individuality is correspondingly narrow. Individuals with a strong preference for individuality gather in elective affinities where individuality is broad, and distance from the social whole is correspondingly narrow.

There will be more than just one common style, in which individuals with similar such weightings flock together. Every common style belongs to one of two style types: the *distance type*, which is shown in the set of all common styles that sublimate distance, for people with a strong preference for social distance. Or, the *individuality type*, which is shown in the set of all common styles that

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1   Delanty 2011, p. 640.

2   Layard 2005, p. 73.

sublimate individuality, for people with a strong preference for individuality. The shared desire of all for dissimilarity, in combination with varying strong preferences for social distance or proximity, is a contribution of postmodernism to the complex present.

People differ not only in their postmodern preferences for social distance and proximity, but also in other preconditions, such as the resources they command. This is the heritage of modernism in the complex present and the object of interest of the orthodoxy. This heritage includes preferences for vertical distinction, status, or its hamster wheel variant of 'keeping up with the Joneses', mediated via accumulation. With variety in the preconditions combined with a shared desire for dissimilarity, a style system of different, also precondition-driven styles is born. The present is therefore not a juxtaposition of a postmodern style system and a separated style-free modernism. Instead, the complexity of the modern-cum-postmodern present is reflected in the overall style system. The QTC to be further developed here is therefore not a thought experiment for a postmodern fiction, but provides *mutatis mutandis* insights into a more complex present.

The interrelationship between modernism and postmodernism is a dynamic one. It would not even be static if the individual preconditions of all people remained constant, that is if members of a society replicated themselves identically. This is because culture not only conveys the social, but simultaneously transforms it. This is how the connection between modernism and postmodernism is also transformed by culture. The cultural selection worked out in chapter 6 is the transforming force. It is itself owed to human striving in the social sphere. This is the complex reality of the present.

Distance Type and Syndrome – Individuality Type and Syndrome

For the sake of simplicity, I first assume that in postmodernism there are only preferences for either social distance or for individuality, that is, either formula (1) or alternatively (8) determine individual happiness/utility. A style of the distance type is shown by people in whose objective function (13) distance receives weight one and individuality receives weight zero. A style of the individuality type is shown by people when weights are distributed in reverse. Later on, this strict division is loosened again.

We can now assign these postmodern style types causally to the hypotheses derived in chapters 6 and 7. Each style type is causal for a different set of vector components of cultural selection and social evolution. Table 12 shows this

assignment: on the left is the set of the causal effects of styles of the distance type, on the right of the individuality type, at the top is the effect on cultural selection, at the bottom on social evolution.

The dichotomy – left and right – is based on the assumption that elective affinities of the distance type ensure that their distance to the social whole increases, and those of the individuality type ensure the individual style is sublimated in their common style. Each style type is therefore causal for the set of vector components that promotes the goal pursued by people of that style type. Style followers use their *0/+consumption* for this purpose, style leaders also manipulate the operating manual for culture's sorting plant (selection). In this way culture transforms the social (evolution) in the combination of style types. New, width-increasing manuals for the distance-type styles transform social distance, and new length-increasing manuals for the individuality-type styles transform proximity in the social realm.

The vector components of cultural and social dynamics, caused by the two style types, are type-specific symptoms of their dynamic impact. I define the totality of this dynamic impact as the *distance* and *individuality* syndrome. 'Syndrome' in the sense used here does not refer to a symptomatic overall state of culture and society, but to a symptomatic overall direction of change. In the following, where I focus more on the state of the style system, I will use the terms distance and individuality *type*, and where I focus more on its overall direction of change, I will use the terms distance and individuality *syndrome*.

Table 12: Distance- and individuality syndrome (type).

Cultural Selection	
• H_1, H_4: Thinning of chains by feature inflation • H_2: Insistence on incomparability (anti-aesthetics) • H_5: Adding singletons to a style • H_{10}: Austerity and material fingerprint	• H_1, H_3: Elimination of singletons by feature inflation • H_5: Fashions • H_6: Retro, Collections • H_8: De-uniformation in nuances • H_9: Egalisation of material differences
• H_{11}: Low competition for members • H_{13}: Stable membership numbers • H_{14}: Incubation sites for new elective affinities • H_{15}: Emergence of many small elective affinities • H_{16}: Vintage marking over time	• H_{11}: Membership competition • H_{12}: Egalisation of individuality • H_{13}: Instability of the size of elective affinities • H_{15}: Fewer, but larger elective affinities
Social Evolution	

(Left axis: Distance Syndrome (Type); Right axis: Individuality Syndrome (Type))

The left side lists the symptoms of the distance syndrome. It is defined as the total effect of all styles of the distance type on cultural selection (top) and social evolution (bottom). The right side lists the symptoms of the individuality syndrome, defined as the total effect of all styles of the individuality type on cultural selection and social evolution.

Distance type and syndrome: dominance orders are combated, the incomparable is brought forth – what is previously unseen is discovered, shown and cultivated, however irritating it may seem. Savants are shamans of the extraordinary. Individual styles and the common style have a tendency for austerity in what they show. There is little competition for members. Elective affinities are stable. There are always new common styles emerging without the old ones disappearing. They can be chronologised. Boundaries to other common styles are sharpened. Many small elective affinities are formed.

Individuality type and syndrome: the unique is combated and the comparable is brought forth. Collecting is a widespread passion. Retro is cultivated. Savants are shamans of the fine distinctions. Increasingly more nuances are brought into previously uniform-like ensembles. There is a tendency towards egalitarianism. Elective affinities compete for members. They are unstable. They succumb to fashions. Boundaries between common styles become blurred. A few large elective affinities are formed.

We can now again abandon the assumption that in postmodernism, individuals exclusively seek either social distance or individuality. Instead Table 12 can be interpreted so that in the distance type, all common styles are united with a stronger preference for social distance than individuality. And in the individuality type are all those with a stronger preference for individuality than for social distance. The scripts for the syndromes of Table 12 should therefore be interpreted in relative terms – in the sense of more or less. In styles with distance as the stronger (weaker) motive, the script for the distance syndrome merely has a stronger (weaker) effect than the script for the individuality syndrome. Thus, a style of the distance type does not necessarily lack all of the syndromic characteristics that are powerfully evident in the individuality type, and vice versa.

Style Groupings

In chapter 4, I have divided styles into two metagroups, *above-average type/syndrome* and *extreme type/syndrome* (Table 9). In the present chapter I have defined two more metagroups, *distance type/syndrome* and *individuality type/syndrome* (Table 12). The first two distinguish styles according to their above average or extreme design. This distinction is in the style-theoretical tradition of the (art historical/archaeological) signature model from chapter 2. The other two metagroups distinguish according to the dominant motive for stylisation, the motive of seeking distance versus individuality in the social realm. This distinction is in the style-theoretical tradition of the (art-critical) expression model from chapter

2. The four metagroups form a pair-wise operationalisation of the style-theoretical distinction between the *how* and *what* of style. In style theory, however, a strict separation between the *how* and *what* of a style is problematic; the *how* can in particular influence the *what*.[3] That is why I have made a distinction between *type* and *syndrome* in the four metagroups. Type denotes the constitutive part of a metagroup, syndrome denotes the totality of the specific impact of its styles on the overall style system's direction of change.

From this style-theoretical division into metagroups, style groupings emerge. A stylistic grouping is composed of a set of styles that are of the same design (the *how* of style), and also share the dominant motive for stylisation (the *what* of style). Thus, four style groupings can be formed from the four metagroups. They are shown in Figure 11. The *what* of the distance and individuality types, and the *how* of the extreme and above-average types, span the two axes of the postmodern stylistic field as polar opposites. Common styles (and their elective affinities) are located in it.

As a fusion of the distance type with the extreme type, we find in quadrant I the variety of youth styles (juvenile gangster style, skateboarders etc.). In their opposition to the parochialism of the adult world, distance is the dominant motive. They produce distance with the extreme: the *juvenile gangster style* is extreme in its vulnerability of pride, *skateboarders* and *parkour* in their acrobatic stunts. *Bike couriers* do likewise in city traffic. Hyper-masculine *hip hop* distances itself from the white mainstream, just as *skinhead*, *punk*, *teddy boy* and *mod* seek distance from it – with different extreme forms. The mohawk hairdo of the punk is a synonym for everything never before shown in the style system, incomparabilities with which social distance can be gained with a few stylistic 'tricks'. Dick Hebdige brings many ghetto-like styles into a chronological order; new ones are added with old ones never disappearing completely.[4] Vintage replaces vogue. These common styles show sharp contours through stylistic austerity (the 0/+consumption gets by with few + and many 0), which sharpens the boundaries to other styles. In this style grouping we can find a multitude of styles, each for fairly small elective affinities.

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3   Robinson 1981.

4   Hebdige 1988.

Figure 11: Postmodernist groupings.
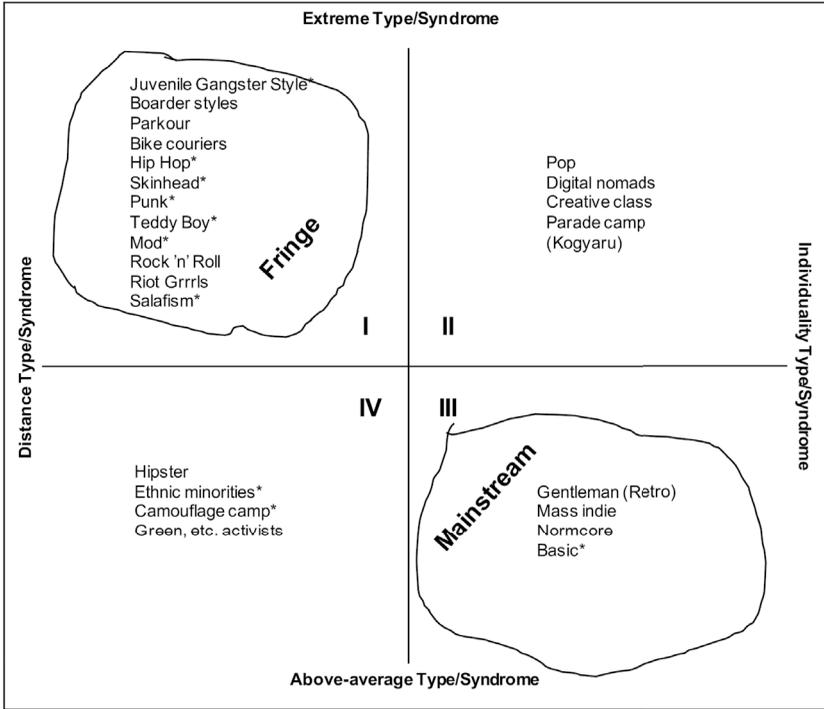
Many small elective affinities with sharp contours are of the distance and extreme type. A few large elective affinities without sharp contours are of the individuality and above-average type. The distinction made in modernist sociology between the mainstream and the subcultural fringes of society, is reflected in these two postmodern large-scale group-ings. The styles marked with * are, from the point of view of modernist sociology, subcultures constituted by their exogenous resource endowment (and whose style therefore has no constitutive function for and effect on them).

Exemplary of the fusion of the distance type with the extreme type is the style of *riot grrrls*.[5] Originating in the 1990s, another wave of feminism is evident in these girl bands. As with punk rock from which it arose, do-it-yourself dilettantism is a formative element of the style. Hence, electric guitar and drums, which girls did not typically learn in the context of traditional gender roles, are their pre-ferred choices. The rock band, formerly a male domain, is another stylistic

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5   Aragon 2008.

vehicle for opposing traditional gender roles. The exaggerated gestures of male rock musicians escalating to a wild dance, and the male ritual of disrobing is imitated provocatively. Not a purely musical style, it also presents itself in extreme bricolage of attire: combat boots with floral dresses, dissolving the traditional gender role. Macho language, contemptuous of women, is reappropriated ironically as part of their vernacular. All in all, the riot grrrls style pushes feminism to the extreme, in irreconcilable opposition and distance from the male-dominated world. The Russian band *Pussy Riot*, which has come into conflict with the Russian judiciary, exemplifies the style.

Another large-scale style grouping is the fusion between the individuality type and the above-average type in quadrant III of Figure 11. A few styles of large elective affinities can be found here. The dominant motivation is individuality. It is primarily achieved by the individual standing out just a little, in as many features as possible, from the average of their group. This is why this grouping does not belong in Asian societies, in which unity with a larger whole is the dominant motivation. In this grouping the number of objects of common styles is inflationary. Boundaries between common styles are blurred. Individuals can almost be assigned to two or more common styles simultaneously, they merely offer different perspectives on almost the same thing. Individuality is egalitarian individuality, no one really stands out, everyone is slightly different from everyone else and therefore everyone is somehow almost the same.

In this large-scale grouping we find the *gentleman* as an example of a retro style. Not showing his full financial potency, refraining from showing-off, he thus stays in touch with less well-off members of other social groups. Clothing, habitus and education only stand out a little, emphasising nuances. Therein we also find *mass indie*, the large clientele of brand labels with an irresistible tendency towards exclusivity, which is then lost because everyone displays it. And we find *normcore*: instead of being a burden,[6] the multi-option society is seen as an opportunity. The opportunities are seized, not by fusing with the larger whole, but by submerging oneself in it, in order to keep all options open – so as to be able to try out any interesting new combination in a stylistically unencumbered way at any time.

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6   Gross 1994.

A New Home for Modernism

Modernist sociology is *stylistically* divided into the mainstream and the fringes of society. The fringes are made up of people with little material (money), social (network) and cultural (education) resources. They have never been able to break away from these basic preconditions and their styles mirror[7] or even stabilise[8] them. They remain trapped in communities they did not join voluntarily, unable to flourish in a postmodern elective affinity. Yet they too find their place in the groupings of Figure 11.

There the mainstream finds its place in quadrant III in the fusion of the individuality type with the above-average type: in particular, in the *basic* style, showing a multitude of only minor peculiarities meant to preserve one's individuality in the great current in which one is carried along. The fringes of society are contained in quadrant I. Their dominant motive is distance from the mainstream, which they produce with the extreme in the world of objects and with which they draw sharp boundaries. The dominant motive of the mainstream is individuality within its elective affinities, which leads to a blurring between its common styles and to the equalisation of individuality.

This stylistic nesting of modernism in postmodernism (Table 12 and Figure 11) throws new light upon an old discussion in sociology. Modernist sociology focuses on the different preconditions by which people are grouped into a hierarchy, in the belief that this hierarchy represents the present. Postmodernist sociology focuses on what is left in terms of individual freedom of choice, given the preconditions the individual must heed, which spans out the space of non-hierarchical differentiation, in the belief that this represents the present.

QTC provides a framework for continuing this discussion under new auspices. Because as Figure 11 shows, modernism presents itself in the stylistic dress of would-be postmodernism. The fringes and the mainstream find their homes in different postmodern stylistic groupings: as if the preconditions for all were the same; as if fringes and mainstream differed only in their respective dominant motives and preferred stylistic instruments – the fringes with the motive of social distance and the instrument of the extreme, and the mainstream with the motive of individuality and the instrument of the above-average. Group membership may be called elective or compulsory, depending on one's point of view. Stylistically, however, this makes little or no difference. This is the *a priori*

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7   Veblen 1970.

8   Bourdieu 1982.

conclusion from QTC, a conclusion which, on the basis of the cursory empirical account presented here, also promises *a posteriori* validity.

Sociology should carry on its debate about precondition-rich versus precondition-poor society completely independently of style. Or, sociology should at least bid farewell to two of its conflicting paradigms: modernist sociologists should abandon the idea that endowment differences are causal for style differences, and postmodernist sociologists should abandon the idea that style differences do not correlate with endowment differences. The discussion should be steered away from the issue of causality or correlation, and towards the issue of the emic dimension of stylisation. What do people feel more driven by in their stylisation – their (alleged) preconditions or their (alleged) freedom of choice? Here, consumer anthropology offers support that is still untapped by sociology.

The transition from modernism to postmodernism need not be understood as the disappearance of endowment differences in terms of money, networks and education. Instead, it can be understood as an exhaustion of its effects on the style system. In postmodernism then, the style is decoupled from differences in people's preconditions. Style no longer shows what a person possesses, but who one is, no matter what one has. In a postmodernist democracy of taste "*Le style c'est l'homme même.*" This precondition-free interpretation of society will be relaxed again in the final chapter, when the effects of different preconditions on the agency of style leadership and the agency of its followers will be addressed.

Special Groupings

The fringe and mainstream groupings in society are not the only ones in the style system. There are also the styles in quadrants II and IV. Together they blur the boundary between the mainstream and the fringes of society. The grouping in quadrant IV shares the dominant motive of social distance with the fringes and the preferred instrument of the above-average with the mainstream. The grouping in quadrant II shares with the mainstream the dominant motive of individuality and with the fringes the preferred instrument of the extreme.

Thomas Hecken, pop expert, sets *pop* apart from popular or mass culture.[9] For him, pop is typified by the seven features of: superficiality, functionalism, consumerism, showiness, immanence, artificiality and 'stylistic blend' (meaning the complementarity of things and behaviour, such as in the extreme type). The majority of these features are also a mark of popular culture – from tabloid

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9   Hecken 2012.

journalism to hit songs, to TV series and advertising. Only showiness, pop-typi-cal immanence, and openly displayed artificiality, he claims, are excluded from popular culture. Showiness is evident in pop's strict disinterest in human imma-nence, only the purely sensual is what counts. For example, the eye shows merely a sparkle and not the soul that popular culture sees in it. Immanence is always cited ironically. The car is a showpiece alone and not a conveyor of freedom and adventure as it is for popular culture. Artificiality is not unfamiliar to popular culture though, but only pop presents it openly: for example, not as the natural artificiality in the aesthetic functionalism design style, but as an exaggerated combination of artificiality (design) and technicality (functionality). According to Hecken's description, the *gadget* design style, which includes the beeping 'Detlef' egg, is therefore pop.

To which postmodernist groupings does pop belong? To answer this, let the popular or mass culture be located in quadrant III in Figure 11, which is the fusion of individualism as a motive with the above-average as instrument. According to Hecken, pop must not be confused with popular culture, but it is also not that easy to clearly distinguish the two. Pop therefore does not belong in quadrant I, where styles are sharply distinct from the mainstream. It belongs in quadrant II or IV, which blur the boundaries with grouping III. I suggest that pop be placed in quadrant II, as a style born out of the fusion of the individuality type and the extreme type. Individuality as the dominant motive, which it shares with popular culture, is, however, pursued with the instrument of the extreme. Rigorous showiness, a rigorously ironic approach to the immanent, and the artificial heightening of artificiality are stylistic means that make use of extremes. *Pop* shares with the mainstream the excessive use of the world of objects and the blurred boundaries towards other common styles. This is what makes it so hard to define. With the fringe styles it shares the penchant for the extreme in terms of showiness and artificiality wherever the contrast with popular culture is most pronounced. Media scientist Jörg Metelmann has coined the term 'mass original' for that which is typical of pop.[10] An originality that in mass production can only be preserved with a penchant for the extreme.

Digital nomadism hardly differs from normcore in terms of *0/+consumption*, except in the manner in which people work and live: with a computer, making ideal use of new media, with no permanent workplace but always travelling, with stopovers in places with good IT infrastructure. Software development is an oc-cupation that can be performed in this way. Being completely independent of a fixed place of work, and thereby gathering as many new experiences as possible,

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10   Metelmann 2016.

sublimates individuality compared to all those whose individuality disappears in traditional work and family life. Increasingly exceptional destinations and working conditions, collected like trophies, are the means for success. The fusion of the individuality and extreme types (quadrant II) is the grouping this style belongs to.

Digital nomadism is a stylistic variant of the *creative class*, the historical stylistic fusion of Protestant work ethos (mainstream) and hippiedom (fringe).[11] Its archetype is the creative mind in the IT industry: without a dress code or regular work hours, but still hard-working, and always seeking new experiences in work and leisure. This raises standing within the 'class'. The motive of individuality is pursued with the instrument of enhanced performance. The creative class therefore belongs in the same style grouping as pop. But both differ in what exactly is taken to the extreme. In pop it is showiness and the negation of immanence, in the creative class it is the opposite – immanence and the negation of showiness. Andy Warhol (pop) and Steve Jobs (creative class) are incarnations of this missing versus existing immanence and this existing versus missing showiness.

Quadrant IV is a grouping with very different common styles. They share the fusion of social distance as the dominant motive and the above-average as the preferred stylistic instrument. *Hipsters* dig up objects from the junk room of the world of objects which the mainstream has recently discarded. With these, they distance themselves from the mainstream, which they accuse of destroying the urban environment. And they stress their own competence in leading a good urban life.[12] With the fringes of society, they share the dominant motive of setting themselves apart from the mainstream, but they do not share their preference for pursuing this goal with the extreme. Stylistically, hipsters tend to be above average only, because one cannot shock the mainstream with objects that it has only recently abandoned. Unlike pop, hipsters do not use the world of objects excessively, but rather pick bits out of it selectively. They always know which bricolage is needed at any given time, until the mainstream discovers it as cool, at which point a new bricolage is needed.[13] Through these substitutions of a few objects at a time, hipsterism draws its boundaries with the mainstream. That's why it belongs in grouping IV.

The *ethnic minority* typically also belongs there. In order not to be absorbed into the ethnicity of the majority, it maintains its distance to it. Its choice of means is rarely extreme; its goal is achieved when the dissimilarity between the

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11   Florida 2002.

12   Greif, Ross, Tortorici and Geiselberger 2012.

13   Mohr 2016.

ethnic minority and majority remains visible. Assimilation yes, but within clear limits. That's all it takes. *Activist* styles also belong in grouping IV, unless they use the extreme like the politically autonomous. Eco-activists are one example. They distance themselves from the ecological footprint of the mainstream but are not fundamentally opposed to the mainstream. With its smaller ecological footprint, its style stands out in a variety of features, but rarely dramatically so.

The homosexual style *camp* is a special one.[14] Instead of orienting finished identities like all other styles, in particular those belonging to grouping I and III, camp depicts the fluidity of its identities (for example, gender). It exposes the goals of the fringes (distance) and the mainstream (individuality) as an illusion. Individuality and distance are disillusioned by the stylistic proof of their artificiality. In this respect camp stands in contrast to both the fringes and the mainstream. However, it freely makes use of both groupings and, depending on its subtype, it shows the extreme or the above-average.

The *drag queen* with her make-up, glitter, feather boa and camp behaviour is the parade role of camp in grouping II. The Christopher Street parades show the variety of this subtype. Presenting a fake individuality, it is the lie that tells the truth about individuality. And, typical of the individuality type as a whole, boundaries blur, here especially the boundary to pop: Andy Warhol can be assigned to both camp and pop. The second, older subtype of camp avoids the extreme and uses the just-above-average with utmost caution. It belongs to grouping IV and is the camp bequest of modernism. Because of the social stigmatisation of homosexuality, there was a need to not attract attention and to communicate non-verbally with secret signs. Oscar Wilde's green carnation in the buttonhole is a classic example. In a subtle way that can only be understood by insiders, thus avoiding sanctions, distance to the heterosexual mainstream is established and proximity among themselves is found.

Camp belongs in two different postmodern style groupings (quadrant II and IV), because stylistically they are two distinct common styles. One is offensive like *riot grrrls* by means of the extreme. Deliberate irony, however, detracts from the aggression (grouping II). The other style of camp, like *normcore*, is defensive due to the very careful use of stylistic means. But the carefully chosen distinguishing features show all those who need to know their joint distance from the rest. If one wanted to label these camp styles, they could be *parade camp* (grouping II) and *camouflage camp* (grouping IV). However, the convention is simply to leave both styles combined under the label of camp. The widely-held belief in a

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14   Bergman 1993.

homogenous group prevails here over phenotypic evidence and style-theoretic substance.

Refinement and Limitations

Style groupings could be further refined. The dominant motive, for example, need not be equally pronounced in all styles of a grouping. Hipsters may give more weight to their individuality than an ethnic minority, and would thus be positioned closer to the mainstream in grouping IV. The minority, in turn, could be more inclined to go to the extreme than hipsters, which would bring them closer to the fringes of society. Thus, boundaries between groupings become blurred. An ethnic minority, for example, can get close to *Salafism* in terms of style. Or a weaker preference for the extreme than parade camp would bring pop closer to popular culture.

Such a refinement of the style groupings would have to be empirically established. A further refinement would be the identification of trajectories in stylistic space. Do the common styles converge in a grouping or do they diverge over time? In the long run, do styles move in and out of groupings? Is there a trend in the style system as a whole in the weighting of the two motives and in the use of the basic means, i.e. in the stylistic *what* and *how*? All these questions must remain unanswered for now.

QTC, on which Figure 11 is based, cannot be applied to the whole of the present. It remains a theory of the West, cultures in which individuality in the group (formula [1]) – the more, the better – is an argument of the objective function. Therefore, dissimilarity and not similarity is the appropriate analytical concept. Similarity would be the appropriate concept for Eastern cultures, in which being one with the group would be the goal and proximity (formula [2]) the argument in the objective function – the more of it, the better. For these reasons it would be problematic to assign the Japanese youth style *kogyaru* from chapter 1 to any of the groupings in Figure 11.

Stylistic Encounters

For Gerard Delanty, cultural encounters are relationships between culturally different social actors, in processes by which some of these relationships shape long-term cultural regularities. He distinguishes six types of cultural encounters. First, *clash of cultures*, which leads to a persistent enmity between cultures,

such as between political or religious fundamentalisms. Second, *cultural divergence*, where the cultural encounter leads to mutual differentiation and autonomisation, such as the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in Christianity. Third, *cultural assimilation*, in which a weaker culture absorbs elements of a stronger one, such as in colonialism. Fourth, *peaceful coexistence*, as expressed in the economic idea of international trade. Fifth, *cultural diffusion and adaptation*, which leads to a blurring of cultural boundaries and the merging of cultures, as in the case of Brazilian 'tropicalisation'. Sixth, *cultural fusion*, by which something completely new emerges from the fused, such as the US-American culture.[15] Although intended by Delanty for cultural encounters on a large scale – between ethnicities, religions, in colonialism, etc. – I use the approach to analyse encounters in the style system. Figure 12 summarises the result.

Stylistic fusion is typical for grouping I. Because the combination of objects previously thought to be uncombinable is a way of showing the extreme. It catches the eye, provokes and promotes social distance. The classic punk combination of tartan kilt and mohawk hairdo, and the riot grrrls' combination of military and girlish outfits exemplify this. Rock 'n' roll provoked the American mainstream with its fusion of black gospel with white country and western music. Dick Hebdige's *Subculture - The Meaning of Style* presents a whole collection of subcultural style innovations from the fusion of black and white styles. It also describes the origins of those black styles in the reggae of slavery. In such fusions, whites, mostly the youth from the lower end of the social ladder of modernism, could also gain autonomy. Grouping I is the pole position that leads to divergence and autonomy. The clash of cultures looms over its relationship with the mainstream. Grouping I is a hotbed of style innovation, of divergence and a breeding ground for 'brawling'.

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15   Delanty 2011.

Figure 12: Syndromic encounters.
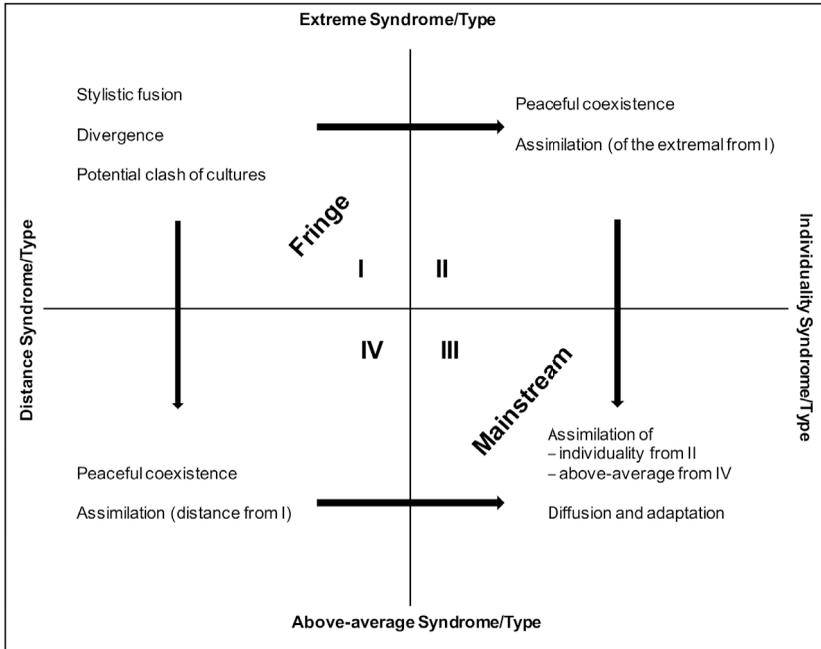
The mainstream and the fringes of society share no stylistic interface. The innovation impetus emanating from the fringes is paving its way into the mainstream via groupings II and IV. These have an intermediary function, because each of them has a different commonality with the mainstream and the fringes, a preferred means and a dominant motive. Grouping IV absorbs the stylistic potential of grouping I via the commonality of the dominant motive, and grouping II does it via the commonality of the preferred means. The mainstream absorbs the impetus from the fringes only from groupings II and IV, where it has already been weakened – from grouping II via the commonality of the dominant motive and from grouping IV via the commonality of the preferred means.

The mainstream and the fringes of society can only encounter each other directly in the (potential) clash of cultures. This is because they have no stylistic commonality, neither in the *how* nor in the *what* of style. Fringe styles are too alien to the mainstream, too scary for it to accept direct stylistic impulses from there. But groupings II and IV belong respectively to the other of the two style types combined in the fringes. By virtue of this commonality, they can partake in the fringes' stylistic productivity. At the same time, they belong respectively to the other style types combined in the mainstream. Through this complementary

commonality, they pass on to the mainstream the impetus received from the fringes.

From grouping I, which pushes the social distance to other styles to the extreme, grouping II receives the impetus to push individuality to the extreme. Pop icons like Karl Lagerfeld were inspired by this. He assimilated manifestations of the extreme from grouping I and integrated them into his phylograms and polytomies, thereby adding length. Lagerfeld's personal clothing style was as extremely stylised as the velvet Edwardian suit of the *teddy boy*, but it did not, like the latter, fall completely outside the scope of the bourgeois business suit. It only exaggerated it, for example, with Lagerfeld's typical oversized shirt collar.

Sharing the dominant motive with the fringes, grouping IV also receives its impetus from there. For the purpose of clandestine communication, camouflage camp receives impetus in the form of new objects from the fringes. The earring worn on the correct side of the male head is an example (meaningless today). Living in geographical proximity to marginalised members of the dominant ethnic group, ethnic minorities experience social distance as normal in society. This also applies within the dominant ethnic group. In their distancing from the mainstream, hipsters receive impetus from the fringes and together they enliven urban milieus. The cultural encounter with grouping I results in assimilation in groupings II and IV. Grouping II assimilates what is extreme (the *how*) and grouping IV what is distancing (the *what*).

Encounters of groupings II and IV with other groupings are peacefully coexistent. The critique of the mainstream by pop, camp, hipster, the creative class or eco activists is moderate in comparison to the fringes, because they have already blunted the impetus they received themselves. It is only this process that makes what is received from the fringes palatable to the mainstream. The syndromes shared with the mainstream allow the attenuated to be diffused within it. The mainstream indirectly assimilates from the fringes what it would reject in direct contact. Contrary to popular belief, it is not the mainstream that is culturally strong, but the fringes. Not through their own effort alone, but because the fringes are supported by groupings II and IV.

The metamorphosis of the fringe tattoo of sailors and criminals into a mainstream fashion tattoo is a case in point. Distance-marking tattoos became fashion attributes that now convey individuality. Not by uncensored adoption of the fringe formats (e.g. full-body tattoo) and its symbolism (of belonging to a subculture), but rather in the form of smaller motifs on discreetly concealable body parts and with a symbolism that now signifies the values of the mainstream.[16]

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16   Kjeldgaard and Bengtsson 2005, Irwin 2001, Landfester 2012.

Tattoos first entered the mainstream via youth styles, from where they were diffused into other styles in the grouping. It is difficult to imagine that young people, in the bosom of bourgeois families and exposed to their sanctions, carried out this creative metamorphosis in an autonomous act. They were dependent on intermediaries: on the pop idol (grouping II), not completely unknown to the parents, or on the next-door hipster (grouping IV), who had already taken the repulsiveness out of the tattoo. Thus, what was formerly distance-marking in the extreme became that what produces above-average individuality.

The career of the male earring is another example. Originally also fringe, for example in the style of travelling craftsmen, it was adopted by camouflage camp (grouping IV) as a secret sign not understood by the mainstream, only to be absorbed by the mainstream in sheer ignorance of its secret meaning. Its widespread distribution forced camouflage camp to find a replacement. Today the knowledge of which ear was the 'gay' one is lost, and the ring in the man's ear, no matter on which side, is part of popular culture.

The mainstream also absorbs from ethnic minorities (groupings IV). The success story of attenuated international cuisine is a case in point. Knowing the best deli, or where to get an 'authentic' kebab lifts the mainstream eater above the average. The hotness of the curry has long since been adapted to his/her palate. Traditional middle-class eating habits and meal times in traditional surroundings (family, circle of friends, at noon) are supplemented by time and location-independent food selection that was previously subcultural.

'Dumpster diving' – rummaging through rubbish bins for food – is stigmatised in the mainstream. Eco activists (grouping IV), who dissociate themselves from the food waste of the mainstream, tried to fight wastage with dumpster diving, which failed as a movement due to its stigmatisation. Only in the more moderate, dialectical form of 'foodsharing' did it become acceptable to the mainstream. Foodsharing is the organised rescue of food (almost) past its expiry date shortly before its disposal by supermarkets.[17] A taboo was thus broken by attenuation.

Syndromic diffusion from the fringes into the mainstream can be understood as a path-dependent step-by-step exchange of the *what* and the *how*. The *what* (distance) and the *how* (the extreme) leave grouping I and arrive in grouping II as the *how* (the extreme) and in grouping IV as the *what* (distance). From grouping II they are passed on to the mainstream as the *what* (individuality) and from grouping IV as the *how* (the above-average). Thus, at the end of the diffusion process, the *what* (individuality) is reunited with the *how* (above-average). This

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17   Gollnhofer 2017.

postmodern diffusion process across the style system illustrates the impossibility of separating the *how* from the *what* as postulated in style theory.

Spiral into the Extreme

The fringes, and hence their extreme innovations, fuel the centrifugal forces of society. But there is also a counteracting force in the syndromic transformation of these innovations into the merely above-average in the mainstream: the constant striving to exceed the mainstream average lifts it up over time. It is a constant movement towards more extreme feature values, which in turn must be surpassed by ever-increasing extreme feature values of what was previously already above average. Small tattoos are getting bigger and bigger, shown more and more visibly. The now completely tattooed arm of the fashion-conscious professional soccer player shows this development.

This affects the whole style system. If the average of the mainstream shows individuality via increasingly extreme feature values, then individuality must be addressed with a corresponding escalation of the extreme in grouping II. What was considered extreme is no longer so, previous suprema in the phylograms and polytomies are constantly being replaced by new suprema producing increasing length. The superficiality displayed by pop is becoming increasingly superficial, artificiality increasingly artificial. Parade camp is becoming increasingly bizarre in the unmasking of 'finished' identities. The fringes must come up with an answer to this, or they themselves risk their distance. Thus, increasingly extreme stylistic fusions and innovations occur. The maintenance of distance using the extreme becomes increasingly extreme. The impetus sent out from the fringes becomes more and more radical: tattoos are trumped by self-mutilation, mainstream values are negated, elective affinities are politicised. The assimilation in grouping IV of these increasingly extreme stimuli from grouping I produces above-average results with increasingly large feature values. Thus, the above-average things that the mainstream assimilates from grouping IV reach increasing heights. This reinforces the inherent increase in the average. This in turn makes the spiral to the extreme steeper and steeper with each new round of innovation transformation.

That is why people mourn the past as a time when everything was more orderly, more normal, healthier, more reasonable, more moderate. The past is the old operating manuals for the sorting plant of culture, which have become obsolete due to the spiral into the extreme. What once stood out is no longer worth looking at today. What is normal today was once extraordinary.

The spiral into the extreme is a driver of behaviour independent of any increase in material wealth. In QTC, the spiral replaces the hamster wheel of accumulation in the orthodoxy (Veblen world, signalling of possession, 'keep[ing] up with the Joneses'). The consumer pursues their happiness/utility with increasingly extreme objects, both at the level of the extreme and at the level of the above-average. If they didn't do it, they'd fall behind, since there are plenty of others doing it. Whether they operate with the means of the extreme or with the means of the above-average, whether distance or individuality is their dominant motive, it does not matter, they are condemned to perpetual enhancement. Enhancement is a process that transforms the entire style system. Not one style grouping, and not one common or individual style in it, can resist this. All stylistic encounters flow into this spiral. The extreme, the peak of any quality, is the future and destiny of us all. This compulsion to constantly enhance quality is the price paid for the integrative power of the style system of Western society.

The Innovation Cycle

Figure 12, supplemented by the spiral into the extreme, is based on QTC in its transformative details, but not in the assumed direction of transformation. This direction is, however, based on a broadly accepted empirical finding: it is the mainstream that picks up stylistic elements from the fringes of society and not vice versa. Which is what forces the fringes to constantly come up with new stylistic innovations. Empirically, the fringes are the hotbed of stylistic innovation in society.[18] I have investigated elsewhere why this cycle does not collapse.[19] QTC complements this analysis with the precise diffusion path through the style system, as well as with the precise cultural transformation that stylistic innovation undergoes along this path. QTC also adds the 'fuel' that keeps the cycle going.

The diffusion of innovation takes two detours to the mainstream: via grouping II, which shares a penchant for individuality with the mainstream, and a penchant for the extreme with the fringes; and via grouping IV, which, like the mainstream, masters the craft of the above-average, and like the fringes has a stronger preference for social distance.

Digestibility of the heavy fare from the fringes does not spring up in the mainstream alone. It is also not obtained ready-made from the neighbouring groupings but is produced with them by division of labour. Grouping II supplies

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18   Peterson and Anand 2004.

19   Mohr 2016.

what is already individual, but which is still too extreme. Grouping IV supplies what is already only above-average, but which is still too distant. The superficiality of pop from grouping II must be roughened up in the mainstream itself, and more authenticity must be brought into its artificiality. The foodsharing from grouping IV still needs to shake off the whiff of social criticism, through dialectical assimilation as economically efficient, ecologically effective and socially beneficial behaviour. The transformative capacity of the mainstream corresponds to the combined capacity of both neighbouring groupings. It must still transform the *how* in the transformed innovations from grouping II, and the *what* in those from grouping IV. In the neighbouring groupings stylistic transformation specialists are at work in either the *what* or the *how*. In the mainstream transformation generalists are at work in both the stylistic *how* and *what*.

The innovation cycle is fuelled by qualitative enhancement: the average and the above-average shift towards more extreme feature values, and old extremes are replaced by new ones. The innovation cycle would only dry up if no further enhancement were possible. The average and above-average would continue to rise for a while, moving ever closer to the extreme. The style system of Figure 11 would be compressed in the vertical. At the end of this stylistic tale there would only be the syndromic poles of social distance and individuality left. But is an end to qualitative enhancement, not as a slackening of volition but of ability, possible at all?

Groupings II and IV have an enzymatic function in the innovation cycle. The 'bad' taste of the fringes, as seen from the mainstream, is partially fermented there. Its fare now stimulates in the mainstream a good experience alongside the bad one. Thus, it acquires the charm of the unusual. What initially came from the fringes is now *cool* and attracts the interest of the more daring among the mainstream.

Cool

The stylish present offers a bonus for special performance: *coolness*. Cool is who stands out from the crowd, but still belongs to it, testing the style boundary of an elective affinity without overstepping it. Coolness is a concept of outside perspective: you cannot be cool without others finding you cool. Coolness is effective within elective affinities: you are cool if your elective affinity thinks you are cool. Coolness is relational: when others find you cool your self-esteem increases. Coolness is object-driven: without displaying something, be it a thing or a behaviour, nobody is considered cool. Thus, coolness is to be found in *0/+consumption*,

but not in just any form of it. Coolness triggers an association: autonomy.[20] Not any kind of autonomy, but that which shows itself in norm-breaking behaviour. Not any norm-breaking, but the type that raises one's prestige.[21] Coolness is a manifestation of the somatic style, the fusion of the outside and the inside (chapter 2). The associative connection is between the observable exterior and the personal as perceived by the observer:[22] The outfit or behaviour itself isn't cool, but one is cool in how one exhibits the outfit or behaviour. It must fulfil three conditions: the conduct must be seen as intentional, the actor must be understood to be an expert in the situation at hand, and there must be a clear violation of a norm.[23]

The association of autonomy thus conveyed is *stand-out coolness*.[24] It conveys a trait of detachment from and indifference towards one's own elective affinity.[25] The egoism assumed in objective function (13) is the breeding ground of this indifference. The autonomy of those who are stand-out cool lets them try out the new and discard what everyone is displaying.[26] Whoever is stand-out cool is a style leader. Tables 8 and 11 summarise their agency.

Fit-in coolness is the non-authentic form of coolness.[27] Whereas stand-out coolness is counter-culturally cool, fit-in coolness is commercially cool: with trendy labels one stands out from the average. Fit-in coolness cannot trigger the association of autonomy. Stylistically, the fit-in cool consumer is merely an *early bird*, following a trend sooner than others and also jumping off sooner. The fit-in cool person is the early-acting agent in the fashion cycle and is a style follower. They differ from the uncool ones by acting faster in their style volition. Figure 13 positions the various forms of coolness within the mainstream as a desired characteristic of mainstream identity.

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20   Warren and Campbell 2014.

21   Bellezza, Gino and Keinan 2014.

22   Pountain and Robbins 2000.
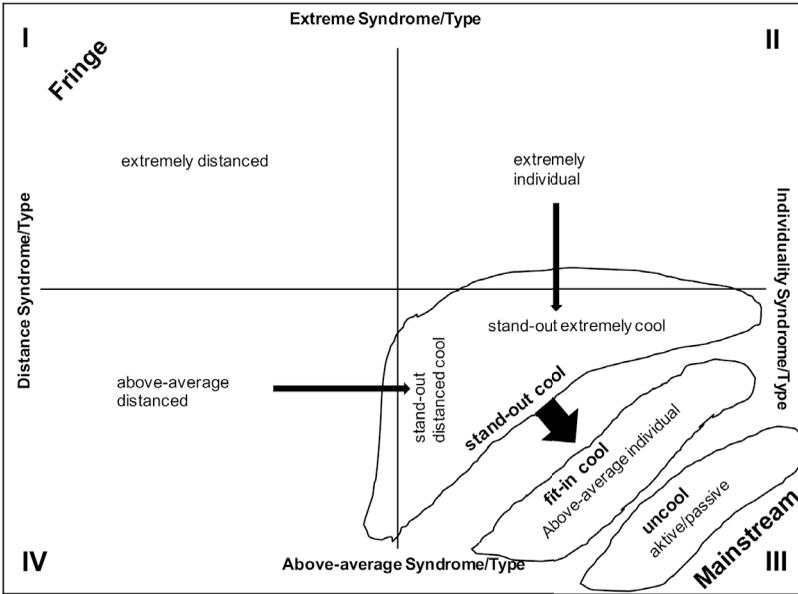
23   Budzanowski 2017.

24   Wooten and Mourey 2012.

25   Pountain and Robbins 2000.

26   Berger and Heath 2007.

27   Wooten and Mourey 2012.

Figure 13: Coolness.

The style leadership of the mainstream is stand-out cool. As a boundary crosser, it is oriented towards the neighbouring style groupings. Stand-out coolness has two dimensions. A stronger penchant for the extreme, imported from grouping II, than is typical for the mainstream. And a tendency, imported from grouping IV, to also maintain some distance from the mainstream when showing one's individuality. The fit-in cool ones are style followers of the stand-out cool style leadership. Their coolness only shows itself as above-average individuality. The uncool members of the mainstream either show stylistic failure (actively uncool) or successful disregard for striving for the above-average (passively uncool).

The sizes of the spaces framed in Figure 13 do not reflect the relative share of the subgroups in the total number of mainstream consumers. Rather, they reflect the stylistic 'territory' they occupy in the style system. In the stylish present day, the number of uncool people is greatest, the number of fit-in cool people is lower, and the number of stand-out cool people is lowest. The large number of the uncool occupy the smallest stylistic territory, and their cultural penetration of the whole is the lowest. The smaller subgroup of the fit-in cool occupies a larger

stylistic territory, and the smallest subgroup of the stand-out cool style leaders occupies the largest.

The stand-out cool ones edit the boundaries the mainstream shares with the neighbouring groupings. They are not afraid of stylistic poaching beyond these boundaries. Their coolness, associated with autonomy, is owing to this work. In the style system we can distinguish two kinds of stand-out coolness. The one, *extreme stand-out coolness*, draws its association of autonomy from the boundary to style grouping II. The other, *distanced stand-out coolness*, draws its association of autonomy from the boundary to grouping IV. The style leadership of the mainstream works by division of labour.

Extreme stand-out cool: not typical for the mainstream on the whole, extreme elements from grouping II are absorbed but also defused. These include pop superficiality, which does not completely negate immanence; exciting weekend-experiences of the creative class, which are not completely outlandish; the digital nomad's escapes from traditional workplace settings, which are not entirely irregular; a penchant for bold colours in parade camp. Autonomy is shown in more extreme feature values that are atypical of the mainstream. Extreme stand-out cool style leaders violate the norm of the stylistic *how* of their grouping, and thus give the impression of condescending superiority.

Distanced stand-out cool: a distance to the social whole, atypical of the mainstream, is adopted from grouping IV but also defused. Examples are: frequenting hipster hangouts; consumption of international cuisine that has not yet made it onto the mainstream menu; selective adoption of the positions of political activists or the practices of ecological activists; the import of a secret sign from camouflage camp, whose meaning is (as yet) unknown in the mainstream. Autonomy is shown in features that are not typically distancing for the mainstream. Distanced stand-out cool style leaders violate the norm of the stylistic *what* of their cluster, and thus give the impression of criticising the mainstream.

The extreme stand-out cool are rather apolitical and uncritical of society, or fit politically and socio-critically into the ranks of the mainstream. Their coolness is not proselytising. Criticism of the mainstream resonates in the style of the distanced stand-out cool. Their coolness is of a missionary sort.

The stand-out cool are the role models of the fit-in cool. Early imitation but no autonomy is associated with fit-in coolness. The fit-in cool are merely more stylising than the average of their grouping, but possess all its stylistic features: critique of the mainstream remains a platitude without consequences, material labels replace material substance. Only their faster pace of stylistic adaptation lifts the fit-in cool out of the legions of the uncool. The stand-out cool are the transformation experts of the mainstream for the stylistic *how* and *what*. The fit-

in cool lack this transformative power. They are merely radiators of the diffusion of innovations from the fringes of society into the mainstream masses.

Coolness and Viscosity of the Mainstream Style

In my analysis so far, the coolness bonus granted by the stylish present day is the addition of a model-exogenous third argument in the objective function of the productive consumer:

$$U_i = U[Distance, Individuality, Coolness]$$

This bonus is larger for the stand-out cool than for the fit-in cool. But the closer these can move towards the stand-out cool, the larger their bonus too. As laid out in the previous section, coolness can be characterised in QTC. This characterisation can be further sharpened by the concept of viscosity of style introduced in chapter 4.

The fit-in cool person is driven by the desire to be seen as a stand-out cool style leader. They lag behind the role model, but at the same time stand out from the uncool masses. They are positioned in the feature space of the mainstream between the uncool and the stand-out cool. Stand-out coolness increases the viscosity of the mainstream style via the *outside principle* (see Table 7). Fit-in coolness reduces the viscosity of the mainstream via the *in-between principle* (Table 7). This is intuitive. Positioned at the boundary of their own style grouping, the stand-out cool person shows something more extreme or more distant than the fit-in cool and the uncool. With the stand-out cool as the most salient in the grouping, the fit-in cool and the uncool move stylistically closer together (outside principle). Thereby the stand-out cool strengthen the stylistic coherence in the mainstream masses. Fit-in coolness, on the other hand, shows stronger feature values than uncoolness and weaker values than stand-out coolness. With the fit-in cool in the grouping, stylistically sandwiched between the stand-out cool and uncool, these move stylistically further apart (in-between principle). The fit-in-cool thereby strengthen stylistic divergence in the mainstream. The uncool masses, on the other hand, bring the stand-out cool and the fit-in cool – as their most immediate followers – stylistically closer together again. Together, the stand-out cool, the fit-in cool and the uncool determine the viscosity of the mainstream style. What is the net effect?

Viscosity does not (solely) depend on the existence of the different forms of (un)coolness *vis-à-vis* each other, but also on the frequency of their occurrence in

the mainstream (see footnote 4*, chapter 4, with h as the total number of mainstream members). The uncool lot make up the bulk, there are fewer fit-in cool members and even fewer stand-out cool ones. Let the (hypothetical) reference case be the viscosity with an equal distribution of mainstream members in these three subgroups. By comparison, the uncool masses allow the stand-out and fit-in cool to move closer together in terms of their rank distance. In contrast, the few stand-out cool members are only barely capable of reducing the rank distance between the groups of the uncool and fit-in cool. Compared to the reference case, the net effect allows the fit-in cool to move stylistically further away from the uncool masses and closer to their stand-out cool style leadership. It is therefore difficult for the uncool *and* fit-in cool to differentiate between the stand-out and fit-in cool. This unequal distribution thus increases the contribution of fit-in coolness to the happiness/utility of the fit-in cool members compared to the reference case.

Is this distribution stable with many uncool, less fit-in cool and even less stand-out cool ones? More specifically, why do the uncool not change sides when the coolness bonus beckons? Viscosity in the mainstream would decrease due to the decreasing number of uncool (outside principle) and the inversely increasing number of fit-in cool (in-between principle). The perceived differences between the subgroups would increase. The bonus on fit-in coolness would decrease. This is an endogenous stabiliser that counteracts the emergence of a uniform distribution and helps stabilise viscosity.

A further stabilising factor is modernism nested in postmodernism. In the final chapter I will introduce exogenous preconditions for fit-in coolness – *sensitivity to cultural selection (H_1 - H_{10})* – which the masses do not possess. The lower number of those capable of cultural sensitivity then forms the upper limit of the number of fit-in cool. The scalability of the business model of exclusive consumer brands is limited by this cultural restriction.

Unequal distribution of wealth and income gives those who are better off the opportunity to buy into the smaller fit-in cool circle by displaying luxury labels. They thereby move closer to the even smaller circle of the stand-out cool. But there is a risk involved. Trying to buy into this group ends in social disaster to the extent that sensitivity to cultural selection is a necessary condition for achieving fit-in coolness. If this cultural capital is missing, luxury consumption merely shows cultural insensitivity and unmasks the pretender. The social bonus for pretence is negative.

Whether and to what extent this cultural capital itself is dependent on financial wealth or upbringing needs to be explored elsewhere. However, QTC does offer a precise definition of what exactly the cultural capital is that is so

important in Bourdieu's tradition and whose origin must be traced: *the sensitivity to cultural selection (H₁ - H₁₀).* This cultural capital is *prima facie* quite different from what formal educational qualifications *grosso modo* imply and quite different from what the biographical career in a single class or milieu conveys. It seems more easily accumulated via postmodern wanderings through the style system than via stratified inheritance. To conclude, the internal stylistic structure of the mainstream can no longer be captured by concepts of modernist sociology.

The style innovation paradox from chapter 4 shows up in the mainstream as follows. The stand-out cool style leadership's crossing of boundaries brings innovations into the style grouping. In their wake, the leadership's stylistic autonomy compared to its followers is increased by the associated norm violation (distanced/extreme stand-out coolness). But what is new, deviant from the norm, does not drive the mainstream stylistically apart but closer together: stand-out coolness shines a light on what the majority has in common in the otherwise so heterogeneous ordinariness. The stylistic conglomerate of the gentleman (retro), mass indie, normcore and basic styles move closer together as a whole. Each new norm-breaking assimilation from the neighbouring style groupings II and IV makes the mainstream appear somewhat more coherent.

The innovation paradox throws new light on the situational prerequisites of the mainstream's style leadership (intention, expertise and violation of norms). It is the expert, deliberate and blatant violation of the norms of the mainstream that binds it together stylistically. The stand-out cool shamans of the mainstream lead their followers by deliberately violating their own operating instructions for the sorting plant of culture. Through this situational manipulation, the options for style leadership listed in Table 11 are made a success.

The irony is that style leadership does not manifest itself in the exemplary *0/+consumption execution* of their own manual, but rather by setting *0/+consumption exemplifications* of what its violation can consist of. The followers in the mainstream are thereby constantly being told that they have not (yet) understood the true operating manual. The followers are therefore constantly confronted with new stylistic challenges that need to be worked out anew. The followers do not respond to this constant disturbance with renunciation, but instead with admiration and gratitude. The question is why.

Aesthetic Liking and Interest

Fast, habitual thinking is the default of the human brain. We think in fast mode as long as our own expectations are met. These expectations include those about

the individual style of other people, for example in our own elective affinity. If we notice the individual style of a punk or a work colleague in the way we expected, our fast, habitual thinking will continue. But if we see our own stylistic expectations violated, we switch into a mode of slow, deliberate thinking. The style that speaks up against our expectations is the stimulus that determines the mode of our thinking (chapter 6). If both match (approximately), then we possess (large) stimulus fluency: we can quickly make sense of the stimulating style and therefore remain in the mode of fast thinking. If both (strongly) diverge, we find ourselves in a situation of low stimulus fluency. We cannot (yet) make sense of the stimulating style and shift into the mode of slow, deliberate thinking. We use it to try to categorise the guy in the punk bar who doesn't seem to fit in at all. Stimulus (non-)fluency moderates not only the timing of the human response to the stimulus, but also the type of aesthetic response. Stimulus fluency triggers aesthetic liking/disliking by thinking fast, and stimulus non-fluency triggers aesthetic interest/disinterest by thinking slowly.[28] We constantly experience it ourselves in our consumption practice. We listen to a short sequence of sounds on the radio and know immediately if we like the song (stimulus fluency); we stand thoughtfully in front of an artwork in a museum and only find out after a while whether we are interested in it or not (stimulus non-fluency).

Stimulus (non-)fluency is also known in psychology as undercoding and overcoding.[29] An undercoded object is met with stimulus non-fluency, an overcoded object with stimulus fluency. Semiotics stresses the subjectivity of over/undercoding. What is familiar to one person may be unfamiliar to another.[30] In the following, I use the concept of under/overcoding for two reasons. First, because it is rooted in both the psychological and semiotic traditions. Second, because it refers to properties of objects, even though these properties only begin to exist in the brain; stimulus (non-)fluency, on the other hand, refers to a neuronal secondary process triggered by encoding (which in turn triggers the neuronal triage of liking and interest). The notions of under/overcoding therefore fit better with the (material) cultural-economic approach of QTC.

Whether and how strongly an individual positively reacts to an object (stimulus), be it a liking or interest, depends on the degree of its over/undercoding. The relation has the functional form of an ∩. On the vertical axis the dependent variable is liking/interest and on the horizontal axis the independent variable is over/undercoding. To the right of the peak there is overcoding, to the left there

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28   Graf and Landwehr 2017.

29   Berlyne 1971.

30   Eco 1979.

is undercoding. A strongly overcoded stimulus bores you and you react with (quickly assumed) dislike. Art enthusiasts, for example, often disqualify a work that bores them with the label kitsch. With decreasing overcoding (from the right towards the middle), liking increases. The other extreme, a strongly undercoded stimulus, overstrains even slow thinking and one turns away with disinterest. Those unfamiliar with performance art, for example, are unlikely to develop a lasting interest in it. With decreasing undercoding (from the left towards the middle) interest increases. Moving from these two poles towards the middle, liking/interest reaches a maximum at the peak of ∩ at a subjectively felt moderate under/overcoding of the stimulus. In the mid-range of under/overcoding, the individual will approach a specific object or a whole style with the greatest liking or interest.

The mystery of why style followers in the mainstream react positively to the sly norm-breaking by the stand-out cool style leadership has now been solved: stand-out cool individual styles are relatively undercoded through their adoption from neighbouring style groupings, deploying stylistic elements in an original, surprising and stimulating way. They therefore reduce the overall overcoding of the common mainstream style, triggering interest in the slow-thinking mode. In turn, the stand-out cool style leadership is rewarded with a bonus from its followers for its contribution to the reduction of their boredom.

This psychological mechanism runs recursively through the whole style system. The original source of undercoding is the fringes of society in grouping I. The mainstream is so unfamiliar with these styles that it turns away from them disinterestedly. But the elective affinities from grouping II and IV are familiar enough with the fringes to be interested in them and to adopt elements from them. In turn, their styles are familiar enough to the boundary-crossing stand-out cool style leadership of the mainstream for them to find them interesting and adopt from them. In the end, even the mainstream finds interesting what was fringe to start with. The whole style system thus contributes to the reduction of boredom in the mainstream. The prerequisite for this, however, is the capacity and capability for cultural encounters.

In his book *The Joyless Economy*, economist Tibor Scitovsky analysed everyday American life in the 1970s, describing the very boredom left behind by a style system devoid of cultural encounters.[31] He described the lifestyles of the white American suburbs and countryside as bare of surprises. There are no ups and downs, everything is totally overcoded, no stimulus is unfamiliar enough to be inspiring. Joylessness prevails in spite of material prosperity. It emerges in a

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31   Scitovsky 1976.

style system in which the mainstream completely recedes into itself, devoid of the ability to process stylistic impulses from other groupings. Different metatypes of styles existed in this America, showing their specific *how* and *what* (white suburbs, black ghettos), but the syndromic potency had run dry.

Honecker's Legacy

The egoism/altruism obsolescence (chapter 5) in the objective function (13) is manifested in a society that accommodates both social coldness and warmth. Coldness even to the extent that the style system accommodates extreme egoisms, to the point of disdain for those belonging to the same elective affinity. And warmth that does not depend on altruism of the individual or state care, but is fuelled by a comprehensive symmetrical integration of the individual into the social whole: you and me and our individual styles always contribute symmetrically to the social whole, no matter how poor I am and how rich you are!

Which social coldness and warmth the objective function (13) is able to accommodate and which not, becomes clear with the example of German reunification and the then emerging *ostalgia* (east nostalgia). Ostalgia is a longing for lost social warmth that glorifies the GDR past, due to the former belonging of the individual to a consumer collective, which (in the perception of the ostalgics) has been destroyed by FRG consumerism. In Honecker's GDR economy of scarcity, consumer happiness/utility was owed to the performance of the procurement collective to which one belonged: one member organised hotel rooms for a Black Sea vacation for the consumer collective, another organised washing machines. Warmth was thereby found in this consumer collective. The FRG consumerism that set in after the fall of the Berlin Wall was instead regarded as a reward system for individual success, and the life associated with it was felt as cold.[32] What the former GDR life and objective function (13) have in common is that individual happiness/utility is owed to a collective. But egoism, as assumed in (13), was not alien to GDR citizens: the promise "If the D-Mark does not come to us, we will go to it!" shows the immanent egoism at the time. It was therefore not the experience of egoism *per se* that triggered the perception of a new FRG coldness, but the experience of a new individuality of consumer success that was detached from a greater social whole. However, the individual as the source of success is absent in objective function (13), since the inherent striving for horizontal differentiation inescapably ties consumerism back into the social whole. Hence, despite the

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32   Veenis 1999.

egoism/altruism obsolescence identified in chapter 5, the objective function (13) brings back into economics a mixture of cold-mannered egoism and warm-hearted collectivism.

To Have or to Be

Erich Fromm criticises Western consumerism as an incorporation fetish: "I am what I possess and what I consume!"[33] He contrasts this "being by having and accumulating" with the secular-religious vision of the *city of being*, in which human aspiration is towards *being* and not towards hoarding and incorporating.

What Fromm criticises is judged as grossly positive in the orthodoxy's argumentation: firstly, all consequences including individual benefit are driven by individual action (methodological individualism); secondly, individual action is focused on accumulation (to reduce restrictions); and thirdly, action serves personal benefit (teleological rationality) – what a person accumulates serves to their benefit. From this, normative orthodoxy concludes that individual accumulation is good: what is good for the individual is good for the whole (utilitarianism). Accumulation thus becomes the principal goal of normative orthodoxy. The goal, though, is relativised again under the heading of externality: what is good for one is not necessarily good for others, for example showing off is not necessarily good for the social whole. Yet, externalities are implicitly treated as exceptions to the rule, so that individual accumulation remains, in principle, good for the greater whole. Per capita GNP thus becomes the criterion, *grosso modo*, for the normative assessment of the greater whole. The average is the critical variable out of the belief that everything that is individually accumulated, is in principle available for the compensation of the losers of individual action (Pareto principle). Under these conditions, individual accumulation retains its basically favourable characteristics.

Fromm's *Having or Being* breaks with this orthodox credo by denying that accumulation is the only option for human action. Consequently, the success of both the individual and the whole does not depend solely on accumulation. Moreover, he adds, accumulation has a negative effect not only on third parties (externality) but damages the soul of the accumulating person itself. According to Fromm, everyone and thus the whole is better off without accumulation.

QTC, with its objective function (13) and the options for action, goes halfway down the road of Fromm: although it stays entirely in the tradition of

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33   Fromm 2005 (1976), p. 43.

methodological individualism, accumulation is not an argument. Hoarding and incorporating more and more of the same is neutral in terms of happiness/utility. Social distance and proximity are independent of quantities. Objective function (13) does not reward individual accumulation of objects. Because it is of no use at all to show a new object in one's individual style if everyone else does so too. A 'gross quality product' (GQP) as a welfare-theoretical counterpart to GNP makes no sense. Individual qualitative austerity is conductive to the objective as is individual qualitative opulence. However, QTC lags behind Fromm in one respect: accumulation of quantities is not harmful to the soul but simply irrelevant for the achievement of the objectives, which is why QTC abstracts completely from quantities and prices.

As a *city of style*, QTC remained a vision like Fromm's *city of being*, if it left no traces in the present day. To the extent that postmodernism has become part of the present day, QTC is turning into a positive theory of *being* in its three experiential dimensions: individuality, in-group and out-groups. In these three dimensions, the two social identities – individual identity and collective identity – are formed. Three dimensions of experience result in just two identities, because identity does not arise from occupying a certain position in stylistic space, but from differences in these positions. Of these, there are only two: the difference of the individual to the in-group and that of the in-group to out-groups. The three-dimensional experience thus enters into objective function (13) with only two arguments.

This multiple identity is not one of *having*, but of *being*. One does not have one's individual style as something one carries along, but one is one's style – "*Le style c'est l'homme même*". One' s own group does not have a common style, but the group is that style. The style system does not have common styles, but it is they who make it up. The individual has nothing to show or not to show, but shows themself, and experiences not what others have, but who they are. There is no *having* of basic conditions, which could be revealed by showing (possession signalling). Social identity is *being* in the style system.

Individual consumption can only collectively produce individual being. Not only is everyone always tied back to the social, but 'you are working on my being as I am on yours; I am through you as you are through me; only together we succeed; your project is my project and mine is yours!' It is in this spirit that everyone is unified.

Happy in Style

Up to this point, I have referred to the result of human striving as happiness/utility. They were not meant to be synonyms. It is now time to clarify what the human being strives for in terms of the objective function (13): happiness or utility? It is happiness!

Of course, happiness and utility can be defined as the same. But the new research on happiness distances itself in its findings from the orthodoxy, in which utility is the familiar term.[34] As empirical science of what is actually good for the human being, happiness research sides with Fromm: accumulation is not the only source of human well-being. It is only one of seven factors (Big Seven): family, finances (accumulation), work, community and friends, health, freedom, and personal values. An intact family, orderly finances, a secure job, integration into a community, good health, personal freedom and something to believe in – all these things together promote human well-being. What the Big Seven bring together, happiness science calls happiness. Obviously, the single factors of happiness interact and there are trade-offs between them: if one only strives for accumulation then family, friends, residential integration and health suffer. And in the end, one even sacrifices one's values for it. As a normative theory, happiness science thus opposes the *grosso modo* beneficial connotation of accumulation. Happiness is the result of a good mix of the Big Seven and thus between external (state) and internal (individual) factors.

However, the most fundamental difference to the orthodoxy is not this extended scope for action, but the recognition that externalities are the rule without exception: whatever one does to promote one's own happiness in the family, in the neighbourhood or at work, influences happiness of others – family members, neighbours or work colleagues. Happiness research reduces this to a simple bottom line: there is no human action without externality. With that it negates the practicability of the analytical core of the orthodox approach: its formulation 'The whole unfolds from the particular' (methodological individualism and utilitarianism) now no longer works. It must be replaced by the formulation 'The particular can only be grasped from the whole'. The (new) happiness and the (old) utility are therefore not synonyms for human well-being, but placeholders for fundamentally different social science doctrines: the old utility (of the individual) flows out of the individual, but its new happiness only flows out of the whole.

QTC is happiness theory. The objective function (13) defines human well-being as the result of a stylistic whole: individuality results from integration into a

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34   Layard 2005.

smaller whole (elective affinity) and social distance from embeddedness in a larger whole (style system). Social distance and proximity thus arise from a collective externality. The individual receives what is good for them from the whole, and their own stylisation is their gift back to the whole. The objective U_i in function (13) is the happiness of the individual.

"Prod any happy person," says happiness science, "and you'll find a project! "[35] In QTC this project is the individual style. It is a social project because it brings the individual style into the stylistic whole as a contribution to the variegation of the world. The Romanticist Joseph von Eichendorff describes this project in the novel *Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts* (From the Life of a Good-for-Nothing): one who has learned nothing (basic conditions), achieves nothing useful (accumulation), but whose pleasant manners and poetry (project) makes him, the useless, popular even with the nobility and the bourgeoisie (mainstream).

To the extent that postmodernism has entered the present day, QTC is also a contribution to so-called romantic economics.[36] It reflects the call of the economist Edmund Phelps for imagination and creativity to replace accumulation as the main object of scientific interest.[37] Imagination and creativity are the only conditions in the agency of QTC. They are the only input into the project of happiness. I will come back to this in the final chapter.

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35   ibid., p. 73.

36   Bronk 2009.

37   Phelps 2015.