4.7. Tracing back lipstick. Glam narratives in popular history

Mara Persello[1]

Abstract

The glam subculture has been around for more than forty years now. The world has changed, politically, economically, technologically. Still, glam rock has managed to survive and spread, developing and adapting to changing times, transforming, but not losing its peculiarity. Its narratives, nonetheless, had to be incessantly reworked in order to maintain a general coherence. Aim of this paper is to give an example of some of the variations glam went through in the past forty years, and propose a textual semiotic analysis, as a way to interpret subcultures in their diachronic development, in order to retrace those narrative connections which helped the genre survive. Basing on the assumption that history, and particularly the oral history of subcultures, is the result of communicative negotiations, I sustain the hypothesis that the task of narrative constructions is to rearrange the oral history of a subculture over and over again, in order to adapt to a changing situation and to maintain a presence, through a cultural strategy which recalls Gramsci's idea of a *war of position*.

Keywords: glam rock, narrative analysis, semiotics, war of position.

1. Looking for traces

Everytime a subcultural phenomenon gets interest from the so called mainstream, the members of the subculture feel somehow in danger: it happens when a collection of memorabilia is shown in an institutional context. It happens also to many underground bands, who have to face the disreputable accusation of having "sell out", as soon as they gain some commercial success (Daschuk, 2011); and it happens when the presence of t-shirts with logos of bands of acknowledged subcultural value in the retail stores of multinational clothing companies causes reactions and discussions (Boeschenstein, infra). The constant threat for a subculture of sinking into the anonymity of the mainstream has a structural reason, because the confrontation with the mainstream marks the birth of subculture, as well as its possible feared death. A subculture develops its own identity dissociating itself from some idea of mainstream, building up its distinctiveness while creating an enemy: it is therefore vital for the boundaries between "us" and "them" to be as clear as possible. Subcultural presence in institutional contexts is a reason for concern, what is feared is a deprivation of identity, history and meaning.

This weakness in the subcultural construction, its conscious subordinate position, and the constant threat of commodification, have been observed by scholars, too: for the members of CCCS, as long as the resistance is expressed only symbolically, it will not bring any remarkable social transformation,

> Sub-cultural strategies cannot match, meet or answer the structuring dimensions emerging in this period for the class as a whole. So, when the post-war sub-cultures address the problematics of their class experience, they often do so in ways which reproduce the gaps and discrepancies between real negotiations and symbolically displaced 'resolutions'. They 'solve', but in an imaginary way, problems which at the concrete material level remain unresolved (Hall, Jefferson, 1976, pp. 47-48).

[1] University of Potsdam, Scuola Normale Pisa, University of Applied Sciences, Hamburg, Italy, Germany. E-mail: mpersello|at|Hotmail|dot|com.

Later, post-subculture scholars stressed the ephemeral and mainly aesthetic and emotional character of the subcultural experience even more, to the point of negating its function in the construction of an identity (Maffesoli, 1988), and proclaiming the death of classical subcultures, dissolving in an abstract, mobile and invisible essence of personal choices (Clark, 2003), or in a range of merely stylistic variations (Polhemus, 1994).

Nonetheless, the theoretical conclusions of scholars pronouncing the death of subculture don't fit the everyday experience, where subcultures still exist. Not only through 50-year-old punks or metalheads, but also through gothic, metal and punk teens, whose number is greater now than in the past. Is it then that subculture is dead, because its authenticity has been silenced by a shallow commercial exploitation of its symbols, or through institutional appropriation, or are there some strategies at stake, that make it possible for new members of subcultures to extract some meaning out of them? Somewhere in punk, in metal, in glam rock, too, there has to be some trace of message left, perceptible enough to permit newcomers to rely to it.

2. Theoretical background

The items on show in any Hard Rock Café around the world are part of a marketing strategy for sure, but they still have the status of symbols. Symbols are signs conveying mythological meaning on a connotative level (Barthes, 1957). A myth is a narrative configuration connecting a series of events in a coherent story, and it is subject to variations in time and space, in order to adapt properly to slightly different situations (Lévi-Strauss, 1977). Summing it up with an example, the importance of Rat Scabies' leather jacket on display at the British Library in London these days is mostly in the letter next to it, signed by its owner, referring to the garment as a "piece of my history". And as long as there is a story to be told, these objects will not lose their meaning.

Moving from a synchronic description to a diachronic perspective, and from a particular semantic object — Rat Scabies' Jacket — to a history behind the piece, it becomes clear that an object is subject to virtually endless interpretations. To maintain its 'punkness', Rat Scabies' jacket needs a story.

Focusing in particular on glam, to distinguish between mainstream and subculture becomes even more complicated, as glam never actually opposed to any kind of mainstream values, it just professed alienation. Still, it did (and does) through a very peculiar mythology. Glam means escape, theatricality, daydreaming, and fun (Hebdige, 1979; Auslander, 2006; Waldrep, 2000; Chapman and Johnson, 2016). It did in the 1970s and it does now. But in order to constantly maintain these same semantic elements in the glam narratives, there have been a great deal of changes in the way the narratives have rearranged them.

We would tend to believe that the cultural memory doesn't change, that those founding historical events that form our identity resist the strain of time. The truth is, says Lotman, that memory generates and reproduces the past for the purposes of the present (Steedman, 2004, p. 84).

The intriguing question, then, is why subcultures have to change, and how they do it.

A subculture generates from some simulacrum of mainstream, from some appointed image of an enemy, it uses its signifiers, gives them new connotative meanings suggesting new interpretations. The subcultural way is another way of telling the story, diverging from the shared truth, and suggesting another truth. After this operation of identification of the other and of the self has been made, a subculture has to operate in order to maintain and reinforce this separation. The mainstream/opponent plays the connotative game, too: mainstream can take the stories told by the subculture and use them to mean something different: they can become a trend, a juvenile expression of fun, they are limited and neutralized. The re-connotation creates another level of truth, basically casting doubts on the honesty of the subject telling the story.

When mainstream exposes subcultural histories, then, it undermines the power of the subcultural subjects, based on their capability to manipulate narratives in order to keep "real" (Fox,

1987). This battle to conquer the status of the trustworthy storyteller takes place inside the text, because "the textual structures are constructed to present themselves as related to the subjects that created them" (Fornäs, 1995, p. 274), so it is the text that needs to be analyzed.

Looking closer at the way a text is arranged, semioticians describe two concurring elements: semantic isotopies, and a plot in which they are arranged. For Greimas (1970), semantic structures are virtually open-ended (and the connotative game can virtually go on forever), it is the story that "locks them up" (*clôture*) in a meaningful construction, some kind of plot, that represents a "powerful means for making sense of life" (Lotman, 1990, p. 170). In the case of subculture, the plot helps select the relevant events in order to maintain a distance and a distinction from its appointed enemies and with the goal of perpetuating a subcultural coherence through times and trends. The connotative re-interpretation of the mainstream/opponent opens up the narration and sets free the semantic elements, practically destroying the subcultural history. The countermove of the subculture must be to rearrange, again, its distinctive semantics in a "closed" story; this new story needs to be slightly different from the original one, in order to re-contextualize those elements that the narration of the counterpart loosened.

The semantic isotopies of a subculture alone, in fact, don't tell much about it: once we identify heavy make up as a characteristic of glam, then we can go as far as including Lady Gaga and her spectacular use of her image in this subculture (Lenig, 2010). Conversely, if we consider the isotopies in the general economy of a closed story, we recognize a stable glam worldview through time and space. Every semantic element is subject to virtually endless connotation. The story has to develop to give them a stable form. It is in the story that the isotopies are rearranged to maintain a coherence in time, and actually, the more things change, the more they stay the same (Greimas, 1970, p. 117).

3. From the starman to the glitter in the gutter

Glam rock has been barely defined as a subculture until the very recent past (Chapman, Johnson, 2016). Given its initial huge success, scholars considered it at first a shallow teens' trend (Taylor, Wall, 1976). Glam started big, in the early 1970s (Auslander, 2006, p. 152; Chapman, Johnson, 2016; Waldrep, 2000). Marc Bolan gained the first position in England in 1971, with the album *Electric Warrior*. David Bowie delivered *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* in 1972. Bolan was singing about cosmic dancers and dandies, Bowie about starmen and homo superior (*Hunky Dory*, 1971); in the US Alice Cooper suggested teenagers to get out and run wild in outer space (*Love it to Death*, 1971). The target of the glam music was a new generation of smarter young people, whose limit was far beyond the sky. This smart generation wanted to have fun, dance, reach the stars. And they started by dressing like that: silver jumpsuits, glitter, high heels, make up and everything shiny they could put hands on. The plan was to celebrate life as an endless party, and if you were not handsome enough to dress up like David Bowie or the New York Dolls, you could still rely on the monstrous variant of the homo superior: Alice Cooper and Kiss (the Demon, the Starchild, the Spaceman, the Catman) contributed the glam imagery with horror movies, theatricality and superheroes.

Glamour was a very egalitarian way of refusing categories: under the makeup, one can be bourgeoisie or working class, boy or girl, rich or poor, straight or gay. The powerful tools of makeup and dress could transform social reality, and the result was not artificial, but the true truth. Dressing up let everybody express themselves for whom they have always wanted to be, for whom they had always been (Dyhouse, 2010).

The theatrical space that glam rock produces through image and performance frees people from their social constrictions (Branch, 2012), and brings them to a place where they can celebrate life and beauty.

This glam interpretation of life is not far from what the consumerist society has been promoting and promising, and in this sense glam is following the path of mod (Hebdige, 1979), and showing

that if resistance goes through a semiotic guerilla (Eco, 1973), the deviant interpretation of the mainstream message can be an hyper-interpretation, as well as a plain opposition.

At the end of the 1970s, punk prefers the plain-opposition strategy: there is no future and there is nothing to be happy about. Punks state that performatively, and Goths confirm it representatively.

Those who prefer a more subtle and joyful way of showing disagreement, move to the disco scene, where Bee Gees warn the *Dancing Queen*s (Abba) that they "should be dancing" in order to "stay alive", and if the Monday to Friday routine is disappointing, Tony Manero can show his true self as king of the dance floor at least on a "Saturday night".

Alice Cooper, Kiss, and popular music stars wearing makeup, keep appearing in the charts, every now and then. There are hints and allusions here and there in the second half of the 1970s, but it is eventually in a peripheral corner of western culture that the elements of 1970s glam are rearranged with the punk and Goth influences that came in the meantime, to a coherent and mature new updated way of doing glam.

Hanoi Rocks are a band from Finland, they formed in 1979 and released four albums between 1981 and 1983. Singer and guitar player, Michael Monroe and Andy McCoy, reinterpret the duo Johansen/Thunders of New York Dolls, who themselves had been a distorted reflection of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (Klypchak, 2016). Hanoi Rocks reinterpret make up and androgyny, mixing it with the nihilism and nostalgia of the late 1970s. They combine the fun of glam with its darker American interpretation — Alice Cooper, New York Dolls and the punk New York scene. And the first reference to the New York punk scene is in the name: Hanoi Rocks refers to the song *Chinese Rocks* written by Dee Dee Ramone and Richard Hell, the song talks about heroin addiction; it has been covered from the Hearbreakers, a band formed by the former New York Dolls guitar player Johnny Thunders.

As about Hanoi Rocks' lyrics, star men or superheroes are nowhere to be found, and even if the plan is still to celebrate the party, now the darkness surrounding the venue is well perceived. Andy McCoy, who writes most of the lyrics, does a fine work in balancing happiness and sadness, anger and desire, in songs like *Tragedy*, *I can't get it*, *Dead by Xmas*.

They describe themselves as strange boys, wrecks, desperados, tramps. This tales of debauchery are designed to get over the artful dandyism of David Bowie and Marc Bolan, and adapt it to post-punk times, mixing it up with the creepy figures of Alice Cooper's nightmares, to get to the estranging experience of the construction of the social self, a funny figure between dreams and nightmares, "a prima ballerina on a Spring afternoon, changing into the wolf man, howlin' at the moon" (New York Dolls). There is still a lot of partying going on, but the glam people is warned that it is hard work: "I wake up in the morning and I feel the pain in my head, if it's rest I need I'd rather be dead". The eternal party, the great escape, has changed location: the enthusiasm for the moon landing has cooled down by now; some other imaginary place has to be found, a far away land where party is the rule, not the exception, a *Mystery City*.

The escape-isotopy of Hanoi Rocks includes fast cars and Raquel Welch, coca cola and beauty magazines, and seems to look west to the promises of the American dream, and its glam scene. The promising career of Hanoi Rocks ends abruptly in the very moment they reach the place they had been longing for in their lyrics, in 1984: Los Angeles.

Alice Cooper and Kiss had functioned as a link from the 1970s glam to the 1980s for Hanoi Rocks, from far away Finland, and for Mötley Crüe, too.

Other than Hanoi Rocks, Mötley Crüe operate at the very centre of the glamour world, in Los Angeles. Their look stresses less on androgyny and tends more to a form of Kiss-related machismo. What Mötley Crüe were offering to their audience in the early 1980s was pure dirty fun, following in the footsteps of Kiss with threatening lyrics and bad attitude, and their work helped build up a new glam scene, somehow mixed with heavy metal, that exploded in the second half of the 1980s.

The last years of the 1980s have been the era of the Los Angeles glam rock scene, with bands like Poison, Mötley Crüe, Guns'n'Roses getting to the top of the charts. Glam got its second chance

and, slightly revisited, with much more feminine looks counterbalanced by much more machismo, became huge again. Los Angeles is the place to be, who needs the Moon, when you can live in *Babylon* (Faster Pussycat).

It seemed like the dreams could come true, bands were gathering from all over the world to Los Angeles with the only simple plan of becoming rock stars.

In the early 1990s, after seeing thousands of bands looking the same, and the streets of Los Angeles invaded by Mötley Crüe wannabes, record companies had had enough. The interest and ears of the music industry moved to Seattle, where a myth was constructed as a perfect opposition to glam joy: the city where it always rains versus sunny California, thrift store stained clothes instead of glittering costumes, greasy and messy hair instead of grand combing, depressive lyrics instead of consumerist dreams: grunge was born. Even when discussing the same topics, the approach couldn't be more opposite: Mötley Crüe's bass player processed his experience of a drug overdose writing lyrics like "Skydive naked from an aeroplane, or a lady with a body from outerspace. My heart, my heart, kick-start my heart. Say I got trouble, trouble in my eyes, I'm just looking for another good time", while influential grunge band Alice in Chains desperately recall the memory of the dead friend Andrew Wood (singer of Mother Love Bone, died of heroin overdose in 1990) in the song *Would?*, and while Ratt titled their fourth album *Reach for the sky*, Alice in Chains again described the feeling of being "down in a hole, feeling so small".

The Seattle bands, the Seattle sound, were addressing the dirtiness, hopelessness and cruelty of this world; grunge was presenting itself as "real" and pointing its finger against the lie glam was telling the world, mocking the *Jesus Christ Pose* (Soundgarden) of the glam wannabe-rock stars onstage.

The glam days were over. Grunge was the real deal, telling truth as it was, and its interpreters were the most authentic poets of desperation the mayors could present. When grunge became mainstream, the problem became serious: it wasn't an intestine war between subcultural worldviews anymore, it was cutting out glam from the peaks of commercial success and mainstream recognition it wanted to reach. For the first time glam lost its love/hate relation with the mainstream ("Those uptown ladies on 5th Avenue, It's like I hate them but I want them too", used to sing Hanoi Rocks) and was confronted with the accusation of being a lie. The accusation of not being "real" affected the very subjects of the glam narrative, and forced them to survive on a new battleground, that of the subcultural ethics of authenticity. The isotopies of glam had to be rearranged to show that they were real, that they truly engaged in what they professed, that fun was a serious thing.

The Zeros, Trash Brats, Guttersluts, and a whole new wave of glam at the beginning of the 1990s were there to show that glam is way of life: these new bands arranged to the lack of success (glam was out, for the first time in twenty years, and the association between fun and success had to be revised), and admitted candidly that being losers is not a reason to stop partying: the Los Angeles based band Mistakes titled their first (and actually obscure for the charts) album, *Dressed for Suckcess*, the cover of the Orphan Punks album *Running with scissors* portrays a boy wearing a blanket like it was the mantle of a superhero, showing that it's not what you have, but what you long for, that makes you big; the Guttersluts suggested to reach the needed amount of money to live the party life through a combination of "beg, borrow and steal". In Europe, the Dogs D'Amour sang ballads to girls that "used to be pretty once", while Michael Monroe (ex-frontman of Hanoi Rocks) protests that he is *Not fakin' it*.

Glam was real, fun was a credo and party a way of life, to the point that glam could present its martyrs, and there is no better way to give a proof of authenticity, to connect texts and subjects, than to tell the story of those who succumbed while fighting for the cause: people who died while trying to reach the perfect party through drugs, like Billy Murcia and Johnny Thunders of New York Dolls, for example.

Maybe the best martyr figure is that of Razzle, the drummer of Hanoi Rocks, who came to Los Angeles to die in a car accident provoked by the singer of the most successful glam metal band of

the USA: Mötley Crüe. In 1984 Hanoi Rocks were touring the United States for the first time, and their dream of being a successful band was about to become true. In December they were hosted by Mötley Crüe in Los Angeles. Vince Neil took a ride in his brand-new car with Razzle, they had an incident and Razzle died.

There are many tragic and violent deaths in the history of music, but this one in particular has gained an enormous meaning in the glam mythology. It consecrated Hanoi Rocks as the pure and real soul of glam, the poor young talented small-town boys with a head full of dreams who were about to make it but succumbed to the cruel laws of fake glamour, the Icarus flying too high, too close to the sun. The event of Razzle's death was known, but it did not become part of the glam mythology until the 1990s. In the 1980s, glam celebrated the sunny side of life and the shadows of tragedy didn't fit in. Razzle, as well as the biography of debauchery of the New York Dolls, were introduced in the glam strategy as a proof of the authenticity of the scene, creating the basis for a new subcultural selfconsciousness. The story of Hanoi Rocks rearranged in a slightly different plot the legend of glam: glam was still presenting the homo superior described by Bowie, but it was now stressed that those special people were at danger in a world of banality and brutality. They came from the suburbs, from the underground, they had pure hearts but dirty faces, and in this sense, they were authentic, and success and fame were only logical conclusions to their superiority.

This approach to the glam story is well represented in the opening scene of the 1998 movie *Velvet Goldmine*. A child, maybe ten years old, is beaten by his classmates, and his mouth bleeds: he uses the blood as if it were red lipstick, while a voiceover identifies him as a future rockstar. This new interpretation of the glam myth exemplifies what Förnas described as authenticity: textual structures relate to the subject, explain and form the glam identity. From here on, glam never recovered the success it had in the 1970s and 1980s. The fact of dealing with a new subcultural status made it smaller, but stronger. The myth of the misunderstood talents applied particularly well to the situation of the Italian glam scene, which was never big, not even in the golden days of the international success of this genre.

In the late 1980s, following the legend of Los Angeles as the place to be, two Italian bands even tried to move to California, Nasty Licks form Turin and Laroxx from Padova, while the Udine-based band Helloween were said to have good contacts with the American glam scene. None actually have been able to record a whole album, but this possible connection with Los Angeles gave them — like to all those glams who just visited the city in those years, actually — some aura of stardom. When Los Angeles lost its power of attraction, later generations of glams adapted their expectations to the new glam authenticity: Hollywood Killerz stated in an interview, that they didn't have any plans for their musical career, they were just trying to have "as much fun as possible,"[2] and Lester Greenowski celebrates his tour van: "All day long stuck in a van / Every night I'll give you everything I can / Plug my guitar and ready to go / No first class hotel, no French Bordeaux / Do you wanna party? Do you wanna dance? / Do you wanna make it? / Here's the time to take your chance! / My life's a party every day! / Let's start a party / And if It's hard to be on top / Come try the bottom, where you couldn't stop!"

The New York singer Jesse Malin, after asking himself in 1994, in the dark days of grunge, if he, being a glam fan, was to be considered "blessed or diseased", titled a solo album *Glitter in the Gutter*. The idea of finding a piece of dream in the windows of glamorous shops, on the streets of Los Angeles, or, at least, in the gutter; of interpreting the fact of being outsiders as a sign of distinction; of celebrating life through debauchery, are all ways of rearranging semantic elements into a story that celebrates fun as the ultimate goal.

New generations of glams build on the narratives rearranged in the near past, so for example Andrea, member of the new Italian glam band Silver Addiction, wears a tattoo of the 1998 Vevet Goldmine version of David Bowie, as interpreted by the actor Jonathan Rhys Meyers. In order to

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[2] Trash'n'Crash 8 (2000, p. 22).

ground their glam identity in a glorious past, Biters in 2015 sing "I wanna be Ziggy Stardust, I want that make-up on my face, I'm so tired of the 9 to 5", well aware of the fact that a *Rock'n'Roll Loser* has no place to go when the party is over.

There are a few members of the glam subculture who are in their late forties now, some of them keep making music, some grounded a label, others run a record store or a concert venue. And they do it for a younger generation, glam people who were born in the early 1990s. The history of culture is fixated on the "new", but there are a lot of old things that still go on, there are people who created a worldview and lived it out, and are passing that over to younger people, negotiating their values in a changing world but keeping a coherent construction to motivate their values and beliefs. Subcultures like glam may be invisible to those looking for the next big thing, but they don't disappear, because, as the Biters sing, dreams don't die.

4. War of position

Subculture is a different point of view on things: a subculture doesn't create meaning from nothing; it takes what is available in the mainstream and attaches new meanings to it. In a way, subculture operates through connotation (Barthes, 1957).

Every subcultural connotative move is followed by a countermove of the mainstream, which reappropriates the connoted meanings through a further connotative move. A synchronic description can't go any further, and has then to pronounce the death of a subculture through its commodification. But a diachronic one can show that subculture is going to do the next move, and the game is not over yet.

Subcultures and mainstream keep fighting for the control of the meanings: between subculture and mainstream takes place a war of position. The notion of war of position is briefly outlined in Gramsci's *Prison's Notebooks*. Gramsci uses it as a metaphorical expression, opposed to the war of movement, to reject the idea that social change is possible in short time. Consistent with the importance he gives in his work to hegemony, Gramsci points out that the distribution of power is more of a cultural, than of a material matter, and that in order to reach hegemony the proletariat has to engage in a war of position which comes before the conquest of politic power (Gramsci, 1975, p. 802. Q.6 (VIII) § 138). Hall goes a step further in the direction showed by Gramsci, and welcomes the construction of a new cultural order:

> if you can only get hold of the economy, you can move the rest of life. The nature of power in the modern world is that it is also constructed in relation to political, moral, intellectual, cultural, ideological, sexual questions. The question of hegemony is always the question of a new cultural order. (…) To construct a new cultural order, you need not to reflect on already-formed collective will, but to fashion a new one, to inaugurate a new historic project. (Hall, 1987, p. 21).

This brings us closer to the subcultural field: the creation of new meanings through connotation operated by subcultures could be a form of handling of some effect in undermining hegemony; for sure, it underlines a particular way of managing conflict, wholly operated on a cultural level. Eco talking about *cultural guerilla* commented that:

> Il Potere non si origina mai da una decisione arbitraria al vertice ma vive di mille forme di consenso minuto o 'molecolare'. Ci vogliono migliaia di padri, mogli e figli che si riconoscano nella struttura della famiglia perche un potere possa reggersi sull'etica dell'istituto familiare; occorre che una miriade di persone trovi un ruolo come medico, infermiere, custode, perche un potere possa reggersi sull'idea di segregazione dei diversi. (…) Le nuove forme di guerriglia contestativa tendono invece a vulnerare il sistema mettendo in crisi la rete sottile di consensi che si regge su alcune regole di convivenza, se si sgretola questa rete, si ha il collasso. Questa e la loro ipotesi strategica. (Eco, 1983, pp. 197-198)

Eco, as a conclusion, states pessimistically that such a multifaceted power is impossible to defeat, but maybe it should be pointed out that the hegemonic social system itself is not a central and static power, but changes slightly while adapting to new interpretations. This can be seen, pessimistically, as a form of neutralization, but it can also be interpreted as the acceptance of new incoming ideas, an improvement in the distribution of power. Ultimately, cultural participation is a form of empowerment anyway (Hall, 1987, p. 21).

With the concept of hegemony, Gramsci expressed the idea that power systems are not relations between a subject and a passive object, but always build on the presence of at least two subjects, the ones who rule and those who accept the rules. So we have to recognize that even if subcultures don't seem to obtain smashing results when it comes to gaining power, at least they find some way to operate on a cultural level, becoming subjects who don't accept the positions they are given. The power systems are too strong and complex to be turned upside down over night, but the awareness of their own capability of making culture enables subcultures to keep fighting a war of position that brings slowly but inevitably, for the better or for the worse, to social change.

5. Conclusions

A diachronic perspective is the only way out from the theorization of the death of a subculture, because it enables the scholars to track the changing structure of the myth. Semiotics have been accused of being essentially structuralism, but the interaction between semantic and syntax in the construction of a myth is an object in incessant development that can be followed using the tools of textual analysis.

Subcultures actively interact with mainstream culture, they need a simulacrum of mainstream to define themselves and while creating different worldviews they contribute to the creation of a new mainstream, too. This short paper suggest to include some tools of the semiotic analysis in order to understand better the cultural aspects of change.

A semiotic understanding of subcultural production can be the beginning of a project to collect the history of subcultures through their own narratives, and help focus on the cultural strategies in use to gain and maintain power in a war of position. This can help understand how hegemony works, what can be done, how it is possible to turn from objects of power to subjects of social responsibility in everyday life.

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