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## The Underground Mainstream with Demna Gvsalia

The contemporary world of fashion lives in a constant state of rebellion. There are times where fashion conforms to the established society and times where fashion decides to go against it. For example, The hippie movement of the '70s, the punk movement of the '80s, and the grunge movement of the '90s. These movements of fashion unrest are often defined as anti-fashion and considered a form of Avante-guard. The most recent form of anti-fashion was led by Balenciaga's current Creative Director, Demna Gvsalia. This current form of anti-fashion critiques unethical fast fashion, the established rules of how fast fashion works, and commercial culture. *The Underground Mainstream* by Steven Heller talks about the appropriation of underground culture by the mainstream commercial culture. "*Mass marketers steal ideas from visionaries, alter them slightly if at all, then reissue them to the public as new products*" ( 98, Heller) In order for the mainstream to stay fresh and relevant it appropriates the ideas of innovative creators. Hellen talks about how this relationship also exists in a state where "the underground satirically appropriated from the mainstream" (100, Hellen) The underground uses the mainstream in order to make commentary on it.

Gvsalia uses satire that critiques the mainstream corporate world. Hellen called this form of mainstream appropriation "culture Jamming." Before Gvsalia's work at Balenciaga, he founded a controversial underground streetwear brand named Vetements. His Vetements labels got notoriety for their "culture jamming" designs. Gvsalia used "*multinational conglomerates. Levis jeans DHL Couriers, Heineken beer and Internet Explorer mixed together with political themes and symbols of luxury, making no distinction between high and low culture, kitsch and chic, corporate and cool, mainstream and underground*" (Geczy, Karamina, 2020) He also use other anti-fashion movements for his "culture jamming" work, from punk to goth, and even kink. Gvsalia designs created a stir in the fashion community because they elevated streetwear into high-end spaces. Critiques came from both sides of the fashion spectrum, the elites did not want to consider streetwear as high fashion, and streetwear enthusiasts did not like the high-end prices of Vetements.

Eventually, Gvasalia's rein at Vetements ended and then started again at Balenciaga. *"Three years, in the fashion industry, it turns out, is enough for nostalgia. Is enough to fall so far into fashion that one's vision is depleted of its essential nature. Enough to 'sell-out' that vision"*(Sanchez-Aguilera,2017) Eventually, Gvasalia felt that his goal of disrupting the fashion industry through Vetements was done and he moved on to Balenciaga. This change made some people feel that he had sold out, he had given his back on the underground vision of Vetements to the corporate Balenciaga. *"Fervent avant-gardists created truly unprecedented forms, but when they are commercialized a kind of trickle-down occurs"*(99,Hellen) Hellen talked about the trickling down of the Avante-guarde once the Avante guard is accepted by the mainstream it becomes commercial. What was once a disruptive and controversial brand now became accepted by the mainstream; it was time for Gvasalia to move on.

## SOURCES

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